

# Australians at War Film Archive

## John Robbins (Sleepy or Robbo) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1905>

### Tape 1

00:30 **So do you want to introduce yourself and give us the life in a nutshell?**

My name is John Robbins I was born in Brisbane on the 20th of March 1945. Father was in the bank and subsequent years we shifted

01:00 around so I started school in St George in south western Queensland and then went to Goondiwindi and did a few years there and then my father was transferred to Eyre in north Queensland and went to school there, did scholarship there, equivalent to year eight I think .And then did secondary school in Townsville only went to junior, had a couple of goes at junior,

01:30 didn't like school much. Lived in Townsville and enjoyed Townsville and then shortly afterwards in 1962 I applied for a job in the bank and got that position but never started ,someone told me I was probably not suited to the bank and they were probably right. So I went jackarooing [cattle mustering]. I went to a property north west of Julia Creek

02:00 On the Western Line that runs out from Townsville to Mount Isa. Spent a bit of time there nearly three years there and then I worked for a contractor, we did a bit of work all over the place. Longreach through to Cloncurry building tanks and that sort of thing and then I joined Elders in 1964

02:30 in Brisbane I was a clerk in the stock department and worked in the Cameron Hill saleyards. And then it was in 1965 not long after I joined Elders that I received the call up, there had been quite a bit of press about this, Menzies' Marbles and so on. I thought it was a pretty exciting time you know to be going away

03:00 and so we went into the army I think it was May or June in 1965, two years National Service. In that time went to Vietnam came back discharged in 1967, rejoined Elders and worked there. Married in 1968, married Sandra, and we had our first daughter, first child in 1969

03:30 we lived in Verruca in Brisbane and in 72 we were transferred to Dalby. We left there in 81 and came back to Brisbane through promotion. And I stayed with Elders, I had thirty-eight years with them which included the two years national service but finished with

04:00 them in December 2002. Now live at Bribie [Island] and that's about it.

**Okay what your very earliest memory was as a kid?**

Well I can remember swallowing a shilling on the way back from the ice cream van because

04:30 the other kid I was with wanted the change. And I wasn't going to give it to them so I put it in my mouth and I ended up swallowing it. And I can remember going to the doctor in those days and they were tracing it through my system until eventually I deposited. I can remember that clearly. I can remember playing in this tree in Townsville when I would have been around about

05:00 three or something. Playing in this frangipani tree. Running around and being like all kids.

**Are Townsville your main memories?**

I can't remember much before that, I can recall going by train from Townsville to St George when father was transferred and just prior to this I had drunk

05:30 a half a bottle of kerosene, they were all kerosene fridges then and I must have been a bit thirsty and I drunk kerosene. That wasn't the best trip laying on the train and then arriving in St George. I can remember arriving in St George actually, on the bitumen roads and the heat reflection you get off the bitumen and not having seen any of the western heat before, because the train doesn't go to St George it goes to

06:00 I can't think of the name of the place and you have got to drive the short distance which is probably

thirty mile or something from the station up to St George but clearly I can remember the emus and the heat. That's probably my earliest memories.

**What sort of work was your dad doing out there?**

That was his first job as bank

06:30 manager in the National Bank in St George. He had been transferred from Townsville.

**How big was St George, how many banks were there?**

Well I couldn't be positive of that but three or four? And you know there was the Bank of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Bank in most towns, yeah the others were there, but certainly the Commonwealth was there and the Bank of New South Wales which is now Westpac.

07:00 **Do you know whether the accommodation you were in there was bank provided?**

It was, it was attached to the office premises. The house was at the back and it was on the river. It was a very large house and the river used to, they didn't have the dam those days and after a lot of rain there would be torrents of water come down through the river and I think I got into strife there as

07:30 a kid not eating vegetables or whatever it may have been and I took off and hid under one of the tank stands which was very low and I went to sleep there and of course they couldn't find me anywhere and they put a party out and they were going to drag the river, thought I might have gone down there and everyone was busy wondering where I was and I must have woke up

08:00 and come out wondering what all of the commotion was and you might cover this later, my sister was away and I was like an only child because she was away in England so I was pretty special to my parents.

**What other mischief did you used to get up to there?**

08:30 Used to get through a fair few cigarettes, not always lit. But there was a Wendy Whipple on the corner, and he was a Caltex agent or whatever but he always had this big shed full of forty-four gallon drums of fuel and there were cartons of cigarettes there and we used to help ourselves. I am not sure whether I should have mentioned

09:00 Wendy. We played 'mothers and fathers' and all of that sort of, 'doctors and nurses' that was my growing up time and then I started school at St George. It wasn't a very big town St George those days, not the size that it is today even though it is not a big town today, although it is a very wealthy area because of cotton.

**Can you remember how big, the main street of St George was with the shops and everything?**

09:30 They were spread out. Most of the business houses were long the front, there terrace and then you have got the street there the main street which ran adjacent to the river and it was all gravel and dirt roads and if you went on holidays to Brisbane, that was a big trip, dust, particularly if you got behind other vehicles. Dust and gravel and

10:00 corrugated roads and you would get shaken about. If you left early in the morning four o'clock it would take you all day and you would get there late in the night, midnight, so it was a big trip to Brisbane in the 1950s.

**And did dad have a car?**

There was a bank car provided, it was an Austin A.

10:30 Wasn't a small one it was a big one, built like a tank. I can't remember the number of it now, it was an English car and of course I suppose they were in, it was his first job as manager, it was in the middle of the wool boom too and the Korean War was on

11:00 and wool growers were very wealthy and I often think now how did my parents, how were they able to live with and participate with these bank clients who were making so much money. Wool was a pound a pound in those days, living off the sheep's back and whatever and of course there were parties ever weekend and whatever. I would be dragged along, away we would go, sleep

11:30 in the back of the car. It was a pretty social, there was a lot of tennis and my father was very much involved in tennis in St George. And as they were, they were always, both of them mother and father involved in a lot of community activities, church schools, balls, all sorts of things.

**I daresay that status of a bank manager then was totally different to what it is today?**

12:00 Totally different to today I guess they were treated with some respect which is not the case always today. They had some standing in the town and I can recall that's how people treated them.

**What was your dad like?**

He was a very quiet man and

12:30 so far as I know he was very well educated, went to Brisbane Grammar School and but he did very well at school. He had three or four brothers and a sister. His father was a livestock agent, Charlie Robbins and worked for such companies as Fenwicks.

13:00 In later years I heard over a halfpenny, he would spend hours and hours chasing it up to make sure the sale had balanced, simple paperwork was really important to him. And I think he drilled a lot of those practices into my father. I know my father was very popular with other people, his peers and also with clients. He had a pretty good

13:30 sense of humour and they enjoyed a joke. Yeah that's it.

**What about mum, what was she like?**

My mother was born in Ireland and she came out here which was a terrific journey when you think about it when she was thirteen, in 1926 she was born in 1913. 1926 they sailed out.

14:00 There was something like eight or nine of them and they arrived in Brisbane and then got on another ship and went up to Port Douglas and moved in there and then my grandfather on my mother's side and grandmother bought a hotel, so they were in the hotel business in north Queensland and that's where my mother met my father, he was in the bank at Mossman.

14:30 They used to have a lot of cricket matches, that was the social life in those days, centred around sports and I suppose a bit of drinking too. Maybe the hotel came into it there, but that's where they met and they married. But when you think about the trip they made in those days and fortunately I was able to go back in 1996 and see the old farmhouse and it is still known as the Dawson Farm.

15:00 It's in Old McCully in County Clare just outside Innes. It is a beautiful part of the world where they came from. Of course her parents actually came from Scotland and went to Ireland. But it was a big adventure when they did that.

15:30 **So did mum still have a bit of a brogue [accent]?**

Only occasionally.

**And what was it Scottish or Irish?**

More Irish because she grew up in Ireland until the age of thirteen. Her sister never lost it; my mother still had it at times, sometimes with a temper which comes with some of that.

16:00 **And was there any other culture that she brought into the family home that was from there?**

Not that I can recall but maybe I didn't notice it at the time. I haven't thought much about that, no.

**And what sort of food did mum used to cook?**

Always roast on Sunday, Sunday roast. We always had plenty to eat and she

16:30 was well known for, she loved cooking and she was always making cakes or scones all of that type of thing and then we always had vegetables and meat. Meals at night were always meat and not three vegetables but three four or five. So there was always plenty to eat.

**And did you have room being that the house was attached to the office and sort of yard or a garden?**

17:00 In St George it was attached to the office, I think it was attached to the office everywhere we went. Goondiwindi, Eyre we lived above the bank and in Townsville we lived above the bank. In some it varied, in St George there was a huge area at the back, something like half an acre. And there was a big area in Goondiwindi, not so big in Eyre and then very small in Townsville because we lived in the main street,

17:30 Flinders Street. It was very hot there in Townsville right in Flinders Street so very little area to play there, but I was in my teenage years then and we played a bit of cricket in the backyard but mainly went away somewhere else.

**As a kid what is it like growing up practically in the CBD [Central Business District] of these towns?**

Well there is always something happening.

18:00 I guess that probably I am only aware that it became interested in Eyre, I was younger in Goondiwindi and St George and the activity in the mains streets there was not all, things weren't that busy but in Eyre and Townsville they were, and in those days there was very little to do on weekends

18:30 and Saturday nights were the big night, the picture night. And there was two picture theatres, people walked up and down and of course most of the time was spent spotting who was with who and who is taking who out. That was what went on. And then in Townsville of course it was not so much

19:00 because it was a lot bigger city and you didn't know everyone, but there was always something in the main street happening and if you wanted to, I mean there was no chance to get bored if you wanted to go and find someone you would just go for a walk and you would run into some of your mates.

**So school at St George what was that like?**

19:30 I can't remember a hell of a lot about year one, I did have my sister there in first year and then she went away to boarding school. So I think that the first year wasn't too bad and then the second year I can't recall a lot about it but I don't think I was that keen on it.

**And what was the relationship you had with your sister while she was home?**

I didn't really know her, she had her

20:00 own life and she was ready to go away, she went away as a boarder to Brisbane, and she came away for holidays but she didn't come home every holidays. Went probably with some relatives or what have you so you might only see her once a year. So she must have went away for a couple of years to boarding school and then she sailed away to England and went to a ballet school.

20:30 I didn't get to know her all that well.

**It must be odd growing up with a sister you never see?**

Yeah well she is ten years older than me and I know that my mother and father they tried to have more children and my mother had four or five miscarriages. I guess that made me pretty special when I came along and

21:00 I mean I always wanted to be part of a bigger family and I think that was one of the thrills when I went into the army we had the mateship and the living in, there was always someone there.

**Brotherhood?**

Yeah.

**You said that you were fairly special to mum and dad, when you look back what things do you see that made you realise that?**

21:30 I couldn't do a lot wrong, anything I did I didn't get into a hell of a lot of strife. I remember I gave a fellow a clip in the ear one day, he was giving me a bit of lip in the ear and he went home and told his father and he came along and I was in the bath I thought I was going to be in all sorts of strife but I didn't get in much trouble. And there were lots of different things we were doing as young kids that we were getting

22:00 into strife here and there but I didn't get too many kicks up the backside, should have done.

**How long were you in St George for?**

I think we were there from, I was born 1945, we must have gone there when I was about three and a half four so 1948 or something, started school in 1951 so that's I must have been not old enough to start in 1950,

22:30 I was probably about six when I started school there in 1951, and we left there in, I can't remember now maybe 1951 or 2.

**And that was for another promotion for dad?**

Yeah he went just down to gravel corrugated road, Goondiwindi, bigger town, closer to Brisbane, closer to bitumen.

23:00 Closer if you wanted to go somewhere else. They really enjoyed Goondiwindi and so did I, and spent a bit of time, that's where I got my love of the bush really, every school holiday I would go out on a property be out with these people, Hungerfords, learnt to ride a horse and I rode a horse in the show and

23:30 got a ribbon and all of the rest of it. So that was a good part of growing up.

**I imagine the local show must have been a big deal?**

They were, they were really big. They were big once a year events and everyone participated, they had cakes and scones and it would go for two and a half or three days,

24:00 it was part of the culture.

**And did mum and dad have any other involvement with the shows as well?**

I think my father was on the show committee and I can't recall that they did anything else apart from that.

**And so you rode your horse?**

It wasn't my horse, it was a horse that I borrowed and rode in the show and did as well as I could, didn't have all of the gear, I think I got a

24:30 second prize or something, got a red ribbon, but I was pretty thrilled about that.

**And what sort of things would be at the show to entertain the kids?**

Oh there would be merry go rounds and that type of thing. I think Jimmy Sharman [boxing troupe] was there with his drum, bom, bom, bom, a few ex-fighters there and a few has-beens in the crowd which he planted there. It was always a pretty exciting time. When you're a young

25:00 kid it is all good fun.

**And with that learning the love of the bush, did you do any shooting at a young age?**

No shooting that I can remember. Dingoes were pretty bad out there at the time and since they were worth money they used to have dingo drives, shoot outs

25:30 they were losing sheep and they mustered all of the men they could and all of the rifles they could and away they could and they would have different areas to drive out and hopefully drive these dingoes out and whatever. I think I had a toy machine gun that if you wound the thing around it made a clipping noise. That was my weapon for the day.

26:00 Yeah.

**And what sort of chores did you have as a child?**

I used to chop the wood. I used to wash the car at a very early age; I used to wash my father's car. I did different things. I don't think we had any WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls] to collect the eggs or anything.

26:30 My mother was a very fussy woman about keeping things clean and tidy and whatever and so there was always work to do there and I think she supplemented their income because she used to clean the office in the bank and I would get the job of taking the mop and bucket out and changing the water doing whatever, so some of that used to help.

**Was it good or bad knowing that when dad was at work he was ten foot away?**

27:00 Well I was mainly at school then. The banks used to work on Saturday mornings those days. I can't recall that it was a problem.

**And you said that you got away with pretty much murder but if there was a time when you were to be disciplined who would hand it out, mum or dad?**

Dad was the enforcer; Mum would make a lot of threats

27:30 but if there was going to be some strife or I was going to be disciplined properly Dad did the job.

**So when you got to school at Goondiwindi was it bigger than St George?**

Yep.

**What was that like?**

I have got to say I didn't enjoy my school life much anywhere,

28:00 I was always pleased when the bell rang, I was always pleased to get out of there, I wasn't a smart student or anything like that. I haven't got many fond memories of going to school.

**So not liking school were you already thinking about what you could do to get away from it?**

I think I was going to be a policeman or fireman or something. I would have done anything, once

28:30 I got out of school I never thought about it again until the next day. I wasn't that keen to go back either.

**Did you have school mates; was that a good enough reason to go to school to see your mates and much around?**

I was a pretty shy kid I nearly years and I didn't make mates easily.

29:00 I think probably being more or less an only child didn't help I think I was probably a bit selfish in some ways, so I didn't make friends easy. I had friends who weren't at school. That's where I went for holidays etcetera but I can but I can't recall that many good mates that I had there or St George.

29:30 **So how often would the family manage to get away for a holiday?**

Once a year annual holiday and we came down we used to we always came to Brisbane. My mother's mother owned a big private hotel at North Quay in Brisbane. And it was a busy place, a private hotel. And we always stayed

30:00 there and it was just off George Street, on the quay, but there was always activity on the river and it wasn't far from town. City Hall was the tallest building in those days. And my grandmother loved to shop or go to the

30:30 movies or the Theatre Royal or whatever and I went along with her. Even though she preferred girls to boys, but she suffered me.

**It must have been quite an eye opener going from places like St George and Goondiwindi to Brisbane?**

Well once you hit the bitumen and you saw that white lines down the middle of the road

31:00 that commenced about Warwick you would think you were nearly there, getting to the big time when they had painted lines, and those cats' eyes in the middle of the road. It was a big deal to go there. And every morning there was taxis, these big black and white or blue and white cabs would roll up in front and people would come down from Railway Street Railway Station and were walking in. there was a lot of activity, it was a great place to go, we probably only went for three weeks or whatever.

31:30 **Is Brisbane where you got the idea of becoming a fireman or policeman or was it from the small country towns?**

Oh well, every fire that happened in a small country town we went to it you know. The siren would go and we were all volunteer fire fighters or whatever, and the siren would go and Dad would get the car out and we would all pile in and away we would go to the fire to see what happened. Everyone in town did that, they were some of the biggest events that occurred.

32:00 So I was pretty keen to do something like that.

**You were saying Saturday night was the big night of the week?**

Saturday nights were always the big night of the week, I suppose Friday night as well but more so Saturday night and everyone went out .everyone got their best gear on, we didn't because we lived there. Sorry not in Goondiwindi

32:30 or St George but in Eyre that's all they did, they would be six or seven abreast walking up the street, I don't know if eyeing each other off or what the go was. A lot of cane growers or cane cutters lived in Eyre and I suppose they had money and they all had good cars and they always, they would go and park their car

33:00 and walk around it and have it as shiny as they could. And show it off. And some of the fashions of those times, they would be wearing them out to show people how well they were going.

**And was there an actual destination for people going out, like was there a dance or the movies?**

Yeah there was dances every now and then, I didn't get to those I was too young.

33:30 There were dances and two theatres so there was always some love movie on or some warrie [war movie] and that's where they would end up.

**So at home what would be the entertainment at home after the evening meal?**

We listened to the radio a lot. We listened to the radio,

34:00 the Olympics in 1956 were all listened to, every event. We never missed the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] news. Either lunch time or in the evening and that's how you found out what was happening and I guess we used to get the paper every day even at an early age I can remember in Eyre that was one thing I did each day was read the paper.

34:30 As much as I could, only the items or the stories that were interesting to me, a bit of sport.

**So as a kid growing up what sort of sports or movie stars did you follow?**

In Goondiwindi I didn't follow too much sport, I know my parents bought me a pair of football boots but I can't even recall

35:00 having a game there. But when we got to Eyre, Eyre was a mad rugby league town and Eyre and Home Hill the rivalry between those two towns was always high. Eyre played the southern division of the Polar Shield which included Townsville and MacKay. So the Bergen team, that was a big day out when the Bergen played other

35:30 towns, Mackay or Townsville. And the rivalry between, people in Eyre hated people in Townsville and they just didn't like them at all. They were arrogant and they were just disliked immensely.

**And those games would be Saturday afternoon?**

No we played Sunday. Sunday afternoon, so

- 36:00 I used to listen to the league tests and that's where I really started becoming interested in the game, I couldn't play that well. But it was a big thing, Kel O'Shea [Rugby League player], he came from Eyre and he was playing for Australia so when I found this out it was big news. And
- 36:30 everything you could read about him you would read it, and those tests were always played on Saturday afternoon in Sydney or Brisbane so you would tune into the ABC and listen to the game.

**Can you remember going to the pictures?**

Yeah I had my first cuddle there. I can remember clearly going to the, having my first smoke at the pictures I think.

- 37:00 We always sat one or two down from the front and they weren't too bad. Mischievous events went on there, rolling Malteasers [candies] down through the seats and making noise when we shouldn't have.

**So do you remember any films or were you too preoccupied?**

Oh I don't remember, I mean there is, some of the films were pretty ordinary you know,

- 37:30 but they probably had all of the best actors and actresses in them. They always put up the poster for what was on next week and that's how you decided whether it was going to be a good film or not. I mean we didn't go every Saturday night. If you conned your parents into it you were allowed to

- 38:00 go or if you were good enough you were allowed to go. But not every week we went to the movies.

**So did you have even then when you started smoking and playing up did you have mates there in Eyre?**

Oh yeah. I mean I believe my personality might have changed a bit more there I came out of myself a bit

- 38:30 more and I guess I was getting older too, I had plenty of mates at Eyre.

**Did you play any organised sport there?**

No only football for the school, the Eyre State School had a blue team and a red team, the blue team was the A grade side. And I think I played in the red team, tried to keep, you had to the jersey and take it home and get it washed and bring it home the next day and I used to leave it on

- 39:00 as long as I could, looked pretty flash with a number on it and everything. And of course I was in the swimming club there and swimming club was every Friday night I think. And then I went to swimming training and a lot of time spent at the pool in those years by myself and those kids.

**Had you learnt to swim before in St George?**

- 39:30 Well I was self taught in the McIntyre River at Goondiwindi, kids used to go down to the river and I suppose it was lucky there wasn't any drowning but we probably should have all. One day I just went in and started swimming and I couldn't believe it that I stayed afloat, just from watching others.

- 40:00 **So the later interest in swimming and swimming training was that inspired wanting to swim or just to beat the heat?**

A bit of both. I always had a desire to be able to swim. One of those trips to Brisbane on holidays I can't recall why but I was sent to Stafford State School I was there for about two weeks and one afternoon we were coming

- 40:30 back, there must have been a lot of rain and these kids were wet and in this culvert and they said, well it was pretty warm and they said, "Well lets have a swim." And we got in there and I nearly drowned. The torrent of this water dragged everyone, nearly dragged us all through this culvert and I said then, "I have got to learn how to swim." I got in there but I didn't realise the power of the water.

- 41:00 Lost all of the shoes, lost everything you know what I had that day. I arrived home and I thought I would be in strife but I wasn't.

## Tape 2

- 00:30 **So in all of the small towns that you grew up in who were some of the characters around town?**

I guess shearers were, I don't recall their names, but there were shearers everywhere. They came in the weekends from their sheds and I suppose that's where they spent most of their money, so they were.

- 01:00 There were plenty of characters around, there was some of those stock agents were characters. I guess going to some of those parties, there was always someone had that one of the best laughs that you would ever hear or something so he was pretty funny.

**What do you recall about the shearers?**

01:30 Just that they were a pretty rowdy lot. There is probably not in Goondiwindi and St George a lot of, not compared to other western towns, Charleville, Longreach, Wheaton, where there were larger numbers of shearers. I am just talking as a young fellow when you say characters I guess to me they appeared to be the characters around the place.

**02:00 Did you ever get out to see the shearing?**

Yes went out to the sheds whatever. Didn't really understand what they were doing then or whatever, taking the wool off or whatever, but I went to a number of sheds.

**What do you recall about that about the smell and the place?**

Well, the smell of the bush

02:30 has always appealed to me. The smells don't worry me too much, all the sheep droppings and whatever, I like the smell of the bush. And the pace those shearers used to go at, I found it all pretty interesting.

**Did you start high school in Eyre or were you in Townsville by then?**

We left Eyre in 1958 and started high school in 1959.

**03:00 And so you started at Townsville?**

Townsville Grammar I started there and then I had an extra year in 1961 and the Townsville High School.

**You mentioned the rivalry between Eyre and Townsville before was that ever an issue once you moved into Townsville?**

I think in hindsight that, I mean Townsville people were,

03:30 Eyre people considered Townsville people to be arrogant etcetera and they probably were a bit. We were better than them at most things, we beat them at football and, because that's where I became more serious with football in Townsville, I got my breaks there and I got my breaks probably developed a little bit more and represented

04:00 Townsville and played Eyre and all of those other places. So we used to rub it in a bit when we won. Yeah there was, I mean we never spent a lot of time thinking about people in Eyre, but people in Eyre spent a lot of time thinking about people in Townsville. We didn't think much about it.

**Did you ever have to go back and play your old team mates?**

Yeah.

**What happened there?**

04:30 Well I enjoyed it because when I was in Eyre I wasn't considered to be any great footballer, but when I played I Townsville I certainly was playing a lot better so I enjoyed playing against them.

**And did you cop any flak once you arrived in Townville coming form Eyre?**

I don't think it meant much, I can't even recall that I told anyone, I probably did,

05:00 but it wasn't a big issue that I came from Eyre. I found that the kids from school their education was, I mean when I went to Grammar in sub junior first year high school a lot of the kids were aware of things to do with chemistry and what have you. I mean we had never touched on any of that and I think we were possibly a little bit behind in what they had been taught.

05:30 I don't if that's correct but certainly they knew a lot more about it than we did, I did.

**Did you board at Grammar?**

I was a day student; I would have loved to be a boarder because a lot of my best mates were boarders see? Whenever they had the opportunity they got a free weekend or whatever and so I always had one or two of them home for that weekend.

06:00 Gave them the opportunity to get out of the school.

**Did you ever talk to mum and dad about the possibility of becoming a boarder?**

No I don't think it was necessary to be a boarder. I think if I had wanted to be a boarder I probably could have been but I wasn't that keen on school I really

06:30 didn't want to spend any more time there but I would have liked the companionship.

**What was Townsville Grammar like at that stage?**

Well it was all new to what I had been used to. I mean you wore a tie every day and the uniform, I mean



you wore a uniform in Eyre but you didn't wear a tie. It was all a fair bit above

07:00 what I was used to or had grown up with until that time.

**Was it strict?**

Yep the prefects or whatever and they had the sandshoes, and you could get a whack across the backside or whatever, the prefects had the power to do that. I don't think they do that today, but it was a fair bit stricter. And of course I joined the army cadets, that

07:30 was Townsville at the Grammar. That was where you learn a lot of discipline, you did a lot of drill and it was pretty boring stuff. Everyone joined, you either went in the air training corps, we didn't think much of them, the army cadets was the thing to be.

**And how often would you go to army cadets?**

Once a week.

08:00 **Did you have a uniform?**

Had a uniform and a .303 rifle and what have you. They were all under lock and key but when you did drill you would do it with the .303. And when you did drill you would have to go and sign it out and sign it back in and all of the rest of it. The bolts were separate to the rifle, once a week I think we got out a bit early,

08:30 the school got out at about three, I think we usually started about two and it used to go through to about five thirty once a week. And they had some bivouacs. You know a weekend or whatever and then they had an army camp up at Sellheim up near Charters Towers, but I didn't make that, I was crook or something so I didn't make

09:00 that week camp, but I went on other bivouacs they had up at Mount Spec or whatever.

**And where would you go for army cadets?**

On the sports ground they had at Townsville Grammar and it was really just training to do with marching and parade drills. I can't recall that we did much more than that.

09:30 **So the army cadets you were in, was that just for Townsville Grammar Boys?**

Yeah just Townsville Grammar Boys.

**And did most boys join one or the other?**

Most did yeah. Most joined the army cadets; the air training corps from my memory was a very small group.

**And how did you find that extra level of discipline in the army cadets?**

10:00 I didn't mind it; I didn't have any problem with the discipline. I enjoyed it I think. I enjoyed the camps that we went away. It wasn't a hassle.

**How long would those camps go for?**

I think the longest one we did was three or four days, the one I

10:30 missed at Sellheim went for a week or maybe ten days. But the others were three or four days to go away in those big army trucks and camp in tents and sample some of that army tucker. It was good fun.

**And what would they have you doing out on those camps?**

11:00 They would take you out onto a firing range and teach you how to fire a rifle. There was a lot of demonstrations, we didn't throw grenades they threw grenades but they showed us what happened. A seasoned NCO [non commissioned officer] or whatever, regular officer would do that. so there was a lot of observing. And they had a flying

11:30 fox across this river when you all got a chance to go across, some of this was pretty good. But there weren't any exercises where you had an enemy or where you had to search and destroy or anything like that. It was just pretty basic stuff.

**During any of that time were you considering joining the army?**

12:00 No I wasn't, not at all.

**And once you finally were in the army would you say most of the blokes had an army cadet background?**

I don't think they did. A few but it is not a subject that I think arose all that often; did you spend time in the cadets or whatever.

12:30 I don't think the cadets assisted, well maybe it did, maybe you learnt how to clean a bit of brass and keep your boots, we had to do spit polish and all of that sort of thing, possibly did.

**During any of your schooling were you learning about Australia's military history?**

Yeah there was a

13:00 past history there was a teacher we used to call Griselda, Miss Mathews and she used to talk about Indochina and the problems of the world. See back in those days we knew a bit of what happened in the First and Second World War. It was a case of every Anzac Day someone would come along

13:30 and speak to the school. an ex-soldier or whatever they were always on parade I mean they are doing that again now. So we were pretty well aware through history and geography lessons where Australians had fought in the past and the significance of Anzac Day. And in those days Anzac Day was huge, I mean there was a lot of

14:00 Second World War ex-diggers, the rows would go on and on different battalions and in Townsville it was a big day out. The march would go for, it seemed to go for hours but it wouldn't be, there were a lot of people who participated.

**How was the impact of World War II still prevalent or noticeable at that stage?**

14:30 As kids riding around on bikes or whatever it was pretty flat country around Townsville so it was no problem to ride anywhere. There was plenty of igloos, used or unused airstrips, big bitumen strips everywhere and concrete hangers.

15:00 All types of ex-army wartime buildings about which were in a state of falling down or whatever, people were very much aware. In the early 1960s or whatever when we were in Townsville, most older people there were there during the war, so it was a subject spoken about regularly.

15:30 **Were you aware of stories and legends and rumours and what have you of what had been going on during World War II in Townsville?**

No.

**Was there a story going around at that stage about something that the Yanks [Americans] had planned to do with Castle Hill during the war?**

Well that was a rumour but there was certainly a rumour going around that the Yanks when they were there wanted to knock Castle Hill down and use all of the rock to build a road

16:00 across to Magnetic Island. We all thought that would have been a great idea if they had have done it. Whether it was true or not I am not sure, but it was certainly spoken about by many people.

**Did you get out to Magnetic Island much?**

Yeah I used to go there a bit, when I lived in Eyre we went up there quite a few times to National Fitness

16:30 Club camps. They would go for a week or whatever, different bays, Rose Bay or Horseshoe Bay or wherever they were, so you would go across on the ferry or whatever. Yeah we enjoyed it.

**Was it very populated at that stage?**

No there was very little over there. They had a surf club over there

17:00 which a couple of my friends from swim club in Townsville were members. I wasn't a member of the surf club. But they used to go across, Picnic Bay, well one of the bays over there they had a surf club and they would go over there and spend their weekend as junior lifesavers.

**Up at Townsville now there are those big stinger [stingray] nets,**

17:30 **was any thing like that in existence?**

No. They did have an area where you could swim in the water but it wasn't a stinger net it was more an area that was, I think it was all timber that went out into the sea, more for sharks than stingers and stingers weren't spoken about when I was up there. That's something that's new,

18:00 I don't know why. I can't recall anyone ever speaking about being bitten by a stinger or anything.

**The teacher that you mentioned before what did you call her?**

Griselda.

**How did she get that name?**

I can't recall, she had it before we got there. She was a very serious woman.

- 18:30 She always had her hair tied back in a bun, grey hair. We were about twelve or thirteen and she looked like she was about a hundred and seventeen, a very serious woman, she talked about the problems of the world. We were a fair way away from all of that when we were thirteen and she was
- 19:00 trying to instil some sense of what happens outside of Townsville.
- And do you recall what was she saying about Indochina?**
- Oh she used to say it was going to be a trouble spot of the world, she used to talk about the fighting that was going on there, that's all I can recall.
- Do you recall in later years ever thinking she was right?**
- 19:30 I thought about it many times. She knew what she was talking about. I don't know whether I would have listened any more, but she certainly proved to be correct.
- So why did you leave grammar and go to Townsville State?**
- Well I didn't do much good at the junior exam and it is a bit hard to repeat at the same school, you go down with
- 20:00 the ones that are younger so I thought it would be easier to go to the High School and repeat there. I didn't do a hell of a lot better because I became more involved with football and whatever, and I was playing for the school and for the Townsville Secondary Schools and for the club and the
- 20:30 representative side. So I was kept pretty busy, and then swimming, that was the winter sport and then all summer I swam. So that's the reason I went to Townsville High to probably make it easier for myself so I didn't have to fit in with the younger fellows at Townsville Grammar.
- 21:00 **Whose idea was it to repeat, yours or mum and dad's?**
- Probably mine, I realised I was too young to go and do much else at that stage. I had full intentions of trying to do better.
- Being a good footballer and swimmer did that put you in good social standing?**
- Yeah and I had a lot of mates at all different schools and
- 21:30 what have you. I had some very good mates and the Christian Brothers. We were looked up to a bit, and if you played in the first, like in the Townsville High School and I was in junior and most of the other players were in their senior, in their final year and I was in junior playing firsts, that was a bit special.
- 22:00 **Was there much bullying that went on at school in those days?**
- It might have been just starting; I didn't witness a lot of that. If there was I wasn't having any trouble with it, I didn't see much of that. It was probably; the early years of when kids did start to become a bit rebellious in class and what have you. I have to say I was part of that.
- 22:30 Not resenting authority or anything, just part of the 1960s, part of the beginning of I am not sure what we were saying but we played up a bit.
- What sort of things?**
- Oh just distraction, we were
- 23:00 good at it. We would distract the teachers and next thing the session would be over, thank goodness it's over. We can get on with something that really means something and get on and do something else.
- What was the most effective way to distract a teacher?**
- Get them talking about something that they love talking about. I mean our
- 23:30 maths teacher, I think his name was Boris Cressinie, something like that. He loved talking about football; we would get him on to different things. We were like tag teams, take turns and get him distracted and next thing you know the bell would go, it wasn't the bell it was the buzzer or whatever, session is over. Let's go and do something else.
- 24:00 **Apart from that teacher and the teacher with the indomitable nickname of Griselda were there any other teachers that stood out to you?**
- I heard the other day that he died just a few weeks ago. There was a fellow in the army cadets, he was a major and a French and Latin teacher at Townville Grammar. His name was Bush Roberts.
- 24:30 He had a big jaw and he used to talk like this, "Robbins, what you know about French you could write on the back of an aspro with a crowbar." So he didn't think I was much good at French and he was right. He stood out a bit.
- 25:00 I don't think there were too many teachers that come quickly to mind.

**So apart from maths French history what other subjects were you studying in high school?**

Geography, English, how many is that I don't know. I don't know that I studied them, they were there.

**You mentioned the 1960s being that sort of era coming in how was that**

25:30 **becoming noticeable in music and fashion?**

Well it was the start of the 'bodgies' and 'widgies', they were about in the early 60s. I wasn't one of those but they were interesting to watch. And gangs, there was quite a few gangs in Townsville, bit scary some of them when you were only twelve or thirteen.

26:00 In later years I knew some of those fellows in those gangs, and they weren't scary at all really. But they looked the part, the leather jacket and the starched white trousers and the pink socks and the ripple soled shoes, hair all swept back and curled sat the front looking pretty cool. There was those sorts of thing happening. And rock and roll, it was on the go,

26:30 dances, we started to go to dances. School dances and then other dances. It was a good time.

**For the sake of this being a time capsule, can you explain bodgies and widgies for us?**

Well I don't know who actually termed them that

27:00 but I think they started in England. They were a group of people, the widgies were obviously the women and the bodgies were the men and probably they used Brylcream [hair oil] a fair bit and they brushed their hair back. Some had it in a dove tail at the back. And a crew cut on the top. I had one of these in

27:30 the early 1960s, I had the brush back and the crew cut on top. Flat top. I think the barber used to tell me every time I got a haircut, "This doesn't really suit you." Because it never stuck in, it went out that way instead of back and my mother wasn't really that keen on Brylcream. So I was a pretty wild looking character. But bodgies and widgies were people that sort of hung out together and got up to a bit of mischief together

28:00 you would always be reading the paper in Brisbane and those times when they had trams running and some of their entertainment was to put grease or oil on the tram tracks on the hill and all wait for the tram to come up the hill with all of the people on it and the wheels start spinning and slide all of the way back to the bottom that was their fun. And they would be written up the paper, Bodgies and Widgies

28:30 Disrupt Traffic in Brisbane. But I don't think they were bad, there was a bit of internal strife between different gangs in different suburbs and that type of thing., but they were just kids growing up the same as every year has got their, haven't they? Different ways of expressing themselves.

**The gangs that you are talking about how did they compare to gangs of today?**

29:00 See I am not aware of anyone using drugs, and so I think that you know, today the gangs, there are more problems involved, we're talking about gangs peddling drugs

29:30 and that type of thing and owning ground and that type of thing, there was none of that. I am not aware of anything.

**What did the gangs do back then?**

Just mainly hanging around milk bars and motorbikes, motorbikes lined up on the footpath in the gutter. I think it was just a fun thing. If they were involved in other things I wasn't aware of it.

30:00 **You mentioned rock and roll?**

Well rock and roll came in the 1950s didn't it? It might have come earlier but it came for me in the 1950s. and you didn't have radio stations that played music like they do today. They had the Top Ten or whatever and that was on Friday night and the rest of the day they played classical music and then, so

30:30 everyone waited to hear what was number one of that week. There was some good music about. The Beatles didn't come until 1962 or something like that, but the music was good. And the dances were good and everyone did the jive, we looked pretty cool.

31:00 **What was some of your favourite music around that time?**

Chubby Checker, he was doing the Twist [a dance], we all did the Twist, Del Shannon and different ones. There was a group up there, I shouldn't bring this up, but there was a group up there and these fellows were brothers, the Graham Brothers

31:30 and they went to Our Lady of the Mount Christian Brothers school in Townsville. Their father was a barber, I think in Sturt Street Townsville and they lived not far from the shop. And he had the red and white pole outside and in one of those rooms where his barber shop was they formed a band, they were very good.

32:00 Two or three guitarists and a drummer, three brothers and I got the opportunity to join that band and I used to do a bit of singing, not too many but a few that suited, I hope you don't ask what they are because I am not sure I can remember their names now. And we performed at a few weddings and a few outings, that was all pretty exciting.

**Do you recall any of the songs you liked singing?**

32:30 Some Chuck Berry's and a few Jerry Lee Lewis. We were pretty popular up there at the time. I couldn't sing for nuts but the music was good and they must have all been able to cover up because they all wanted to, particularly the boys the Graham

33:00 Brothers ,they were much in demand.

**What did you wear on stage?**

A thin tie, a shirt that you put this bar through and tightened the tie up. Little tab collars and the thinnest tie you could get, a belt with a bit of colour in it and trousers with a bit of fleck through it.

33:30 We were limited, we weren't all that flash, we just delivered, we didn't have the gear.

**And going to the dances you said everyone was doing the jive, how do you learn that?**

Well that's a good question that. Through the swim club there was some older girls there and they could jive and I said to them, "I would like to be able to dance." And they said, "We will teach you."

34:00 And that's what they did. So two or three of them over a period, whenever we got the chance they taught me how to dance.

**Were you a good dancer?**

Oh average. Stood on a few toes, tripped a few.

34:30 **What was etiquette at the school dances, would you go with someone or was it a place where everyone meant?**

Some, it varied, some where the girls from St Anne's would come to the Grammar. Luckily, it was lucky if you knew some of the girls from there, and the girls would sit on one side and the boys would sit on the other and you

35:00 would go across and ask if they wanted to dance and everyone watched who was asking who. Particularly the teachers, it was pretty well supervised. Every now and then there would be a dance somewhere, and then the parents would come and pick us up. Sometimes you took a girl there, a date. And then they would pick you up

35:30 afterwards, that's what happened.

**Was it always a live band at the dances?**

Not always. Sunday night at Oakingdale, a suburb of Townsville, there was an old hall there and it was a mixture of bands and we used to perform there regularly at this hall. As did others .And then in between

36:00 there would be, not so much a disc jockey, I don't know who was doing that but someone would be playing the songs of the day.

**Did you have a girlfriend in high school?**

A couple. Always found them pretty good company.

**How did the whole girlfriend, boyfriends situation work as a teenager in that era?**

36:30 I don't know whether it is much different from any other era. Those times if you took a girl out you had to go and see her parents first unless you did meet somewhere else. Generally you did have to go and meet the parents first, or if you went to a dance they would be there

37:00 to take their daughter home or whatever and most times they would give you a ride home as well or something.

**Was that a daunting thing as a teenager fronting up to meet a girl's parents?**

It would be for some. I didn't find it that way; we were all pretty good mates. More so than boyfriend and girlfriend there was a group, all just good mates so I danced with a lot of them.

37:30 Some you were a bit keener on that others you know.

**At that stage was there any kind of sex education classes in the school system?**

Don't recall. Father gave me a book. He was surprised when I said, "I know all that." and he said, "How do you know all of that?" "Well you find out, you hear people talking."

- 38:00 So no sex education at school, I don't know that the teachers could even spell it.
- Were teenagers sexually active then?**
- Yeah probably teenagers, older teenagers I would think.
- 38:30 **What about when you were at school do you know if many were sexually active in that age bracket?**
- Not many, some.
- Was it spoken about amongst your friends?**
- Yeah. Sometimes it was, I don't know whether it was spoken about at any
- 39:00 great length but there was some fellows that did better than others. And so they would, sometimes you would get to hear some of that. I was the one that heard it.
- Would girls that were sexually active then, was it frowned upon?**
- 39:30 Not really. It wasn't, I mean it wasn't, there weren't a great number of girls that were, but the girls were certainly more mature than we were in many ways. They were the best students, they didn't get into trouble.
- 40:00 They were more grown up than we were, we were larrikins, louts. They were keen on doing well at school and even some of the better students could be included in the ones that were a little bit active.

## Tape 3

- 00:30 **So you're what, sixteen years old, playing footy, chasing girls, what were you starting to think about as far as the future is concerned?**
- Wasn't much. If it would stay like this this would be good enough but I knew that it couldn't.
- 01:00 So I had to get a job, everyone got a job so that's what we had to do.
- So did dad talk you into applying for the bank?**
- He probably suggested he thought I would be okay at it, I don't know why. He could have been a bit concerned about which way I was heading.
- 01:30 So far as my scholastic ability and seriousness about life, I wasn't all that serious so maybe he was getting a bit concerned. He might have had some influence over the fact that I applied for the job and probably some influence over the fact that I got one in the bank, which was not to be in his branch.
- 02:00 But then I was just waiting when I got word that I was accepted. I was more or less waiting for notification when to commence, so it was sometime between, I applied probably January, heard in February, sometime between then the job was okayed.
- 02:30 But then heading into March, new football season coming up. I was in Flinders Street in Townsville I ran into a man I had met through my father and his name was Jack Brabeson. And he was the manager of Queensland Primary Producers in Townsville, the big branch. And he said to me, "What are you doing young Robbins?" and I said, "I am making a start in the bank Mister Brabeson."
- 03:00 And he said, "You won't last there." And I said, "You don't think so?" and he said, "No the bank is not your cup of tea." And I said, "What do you think I should do?" and he said, "Why don't you go jackarooing?" and I said, "I wouldn't mind that either." And he said, "I know a real good place you could go." I said, "Okay where would that be?" and he said, "A place called Bow Park and it is
- 03:30 outside of Julia Creek, I know the owner well. It is a good place to go and learn and he will teach you." I said, "Right oh." That was on the Monday and I said, "I ran into Mister Brabeson and he said why don't I go jackarooing?" And my parents I think must have said, "Well is that what you would like to do?" and I said, "I wouldn't mind a crack at it." so on Tuesday I rang him up and said, "I'll take that."
- 04:00 I went and bought some bush gear for work.
- What sort of gear do you need?**
- Well I didn't really know, just you know, well you need a few work shirts and some trousers you can ride in. they were serge type trousers, you know tough cotton trousers. So I went and got a bit of gear and
- 04:30 we went out on the train and arrived there on my seventeenth birthday on the 20th of March 1962 and I was met at the train by a young stock salesman in the Primary's in Julia Creek and I said to him, "Would there be any chance of getting my driver's licence?"

- 05:00 Because you had to get your driver's licence, I would do anything to get it because that meant a lot of things. He said, "I suppose you could get it here." And so we went around the police station and they said, "Oh no Sergeant Gabriel he is up at the club." they had a Town and Country Club, and we go up there and there is this big burly copper [policeman]. They wore brown
- 05:30 then, khaki, and I said, "Sergeant I was wondering if I could get my driver's licence?" And he said, "What's your name?" and I told him and he said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "I am going out to Bow Park." And he said, "You want a driver's licence, what for, a car?" and I said, "Yeah." And he said, "They have got a truck, you will be driving a truck out there you will need a truck licence too."
- 06:00 And I think Dick Keats he has got a motorbike, you'll need a motorbike license as well." Anyway he said, "I will tell you what else too, the main road goes through Bow Park, if you're crossing that road you will need a tractor licence, because if you have to cross over you could be driving a tractor over there." So he wrote all this in this little notebook he had and said, "I'll send it out to you."
- 06:30 He said, "Can you drive?" I said, "Yeah I can drive." He said, "You'll learn how to do all the rest out there so I will send you your licence." And that's how I got it, no test or anything, I thought this isn't too bad. So out we got, this George Vincent is driving me out there and he is getting cranky because Dick Keats is supposed to meet us half way and he ended up taking me nearly all of the way to Bow Park and he had another job to do, so he was getting a bit dirty about that. Anyway
- 07:00 eventually we met up with a young fellow who was a ringer out there, his name was Dick Lacey and he had been, he had a bit of experience and I had none and on the way back to the house he told me all about what the job was going to be like. So that's where I ended up at Bow Park and I guess Jack Brabeson is not alive today, but he did me a favour.
- 07:30 **Did you gather at the time what your mum and dad really thought about you leaving the bank opportunity to go and be a jackaroo [cowboy]?**
- Not really. I don't think they were disappointed that I was doing that I think they were happy that I was doing something. I had talked to them about being a newspaper reporter, I imagined myself with a pencil over my ear and one of those little hats, they looked pretty cool. I was thinking I could do
- 08:00 sports and everything. I used to think that would be all right, the Townsville Daily Bulletin was up there and one of the jobs I had on a Saturday morning they had young fellows used to deliver to the North Queensland Register, the paper was printed on Friday night and sent out Saturday and it was a big paper in those days, bigger than it is today. The number of pages in it and notes from every centre across the north.
- 08:30 So we had a job there, one day you would be putting the staples in the paper another day you would be doing something else. So we used to start at three o'clock on Saturday morning and finish at about seven, get a couple of quid for it, helped with the smokes, this was while I was still at school. so that's where I had a bit of a thought
- 09:00 for a while in my mind that I wouldn't mind being a reporter. I wouldn't have got there because my English standard wasn't high enough.
- In 1962 a young fellow leaving school and going away to be a jackaroo would have been fairly well considered? As in rounding a young fellow off and giving him a bit of life experience?**
- 09:30 Well a lot of fellows went bush, when you think about it now, seventeen you're pretty green. And luckily where you end up you do get looked after a bit because you are really just kids, even though you think you know a fair bit about life, there is a fair bit in front of you. Yeah it was one of my adventures I suppose.
- So how did you find that first day of jackerooing?**
- Pretty tough. One of the
- 10:00 first things we did, Dick said, he was thirty five I thought he was a hundred and thirty five, you know when you're seventeen, thirty five year old and fit, he could work. Anyway we went around and he gave me a crowbar and I had no idea how to use this and we had to dig this drain and I had blisters all over both hands, but he taught me how to use a crowbar, there is an art in it. And once you know how to use one you don't get the blisters and
- 10:30 the job is a lot easier. He was a very good teacher Dick, tough but good.
- And were you riding horses out there?**
- Well there is a lot of horse work and someone had said to me, "Never tell anyone you can ride." Because even though I had ridden in a show and had a red ribbon, that didn't mean you could ride a horse.
- 11:00 So he said to me, "Can you ride a horse?" and I suppose I thought I could say, "I have got a red ribbon from the Goondiwindi show." But I thought better of it thank goodness and I said, "Mister Keats..." it was Mister Keats then, I said, "Mister Keats, I can probably ride a dead one." He gave me two of the oldest and slowest on the place,

- 11:30 one horse was Jackeroo, that was his name, I suppose every first year jackeroo that went there got this horse. And Jackeroo was a bit smarter than I was, he used to tip me off a bit. They always say that you don't learn to ride until you have been thrown about eleven times and I was well over the eleven and still wasn't hanging in there so there was a fair bit of horse work but you learn to stay on.

**So what would you find yourself doing out there?**

- 12:00 A lot of mustering, really at the tail of the mob. The more experienced men and women, his wife was a very good horsewoman, they would do most of the gathering bringing the stock in and we would be there bringing the tail up. A bit of fencing,
- 12:30 delving bore drains, doing a lot of tractor work. Jack knew what he was doing when he gave me the tractor licence. All sorts of thing, it was a pretty good clean life out there, a little bit remote, but I loved it.

**And how did they look after you as far as food and accommodation went?**

- 13:00 They were great, we had our own quarters and probably you think back in 1962 when I went there there was no hot water, no hot showers or anything and in 1963 he put a solar powered hot water system in so that's early thinking and it was great, we always had hot water then. So
- 13:30 we ate with the family, we ate every night in the big house. We would go up there and they were good cooks. She always had, she had two young children and had some help, like a domestic looked after the kids, not a governess because they weren't school age. Looking after the kids plus helping with the cleaning, cooking
- 14:00 the washing, we did our own washing. Sunday was wash day and we had a tub. They had a washing machine but we weren't allowed to use that, that was for people who knew how to drive it. Jack never gave me one of those licences, he probably didn't know they had a washing machine otherwise I would have got one. But we would boil the big copper up
- 14:30 and shrink everything, hang it out on the line and then get it in that night, didn't iron, just folded it and in the drawer it went. You learnt that some of the gear you went there with didn't last that long, but you learnt what to get, clothes that lasted.

**So was it a seven day a week job?**

No we worked six days, not always the full six days.

- 15:00 If the work was on we worked, if there was seven days work to do, if we were doing cattle work, he had cattle and sheep and if we were doing both we worked, but generally it was more finish Saturday lunch time. And then there wasn't a hell of a lot to do there, I didn't have a vehicle or anything,
- 15:30 you listened to the radio and do your washing. Every night though when we ate with the family and the meals were very good, we used to reckon the more you ate the better you were paid. There was a padre, they had the bush padre came around he used to come twice a year and he would always arrive there
- 16:00 before meal time, stay the night and he couldn't get over us young fellows, how much we could eat. And I have seen young fellows today they can eat just as well as we could. He said, "Gee you can eat." And I said, "Well when you're working on a horse you have got to eat like one at the end of it." And so we could work, he worked us hard, and every night we had two stubbies, two stubbies of XXXX [beer].
- 16:30 And everyone sat around and talked about what happened that day and what was going to happen the next. And they had a party line, a telephone system going and everyone else knew what everyone was doing because some people used to listen in, and that was how they spent their time, finding out what was going on in the district that party night. And they would say, "Isn't that right Mrs Smith?" And she wasn't supposed to be one there and she'd say, "Oh yeah that's right." And they would catch her out.
- 17:00 They were funny days.

**Were there any other social gatherings amongst the stations?**

No, there was a couple of young fellows down the road that got together. And then there was a place down the road from us, Mrs Taylor and her husband, he had been in the Second World War and he was a great old fellow and we were always welcome at their place

- 17:30 and we used to go down there for a change of people to talk to, and she would always have a meal for us and what have you. They liked having young people about. They had a couple of sons themselves I think, a girl away at school somewhere, so we were always welcome down there. Apart from that the only real social events took place at Richmond, which was about a hundred and forty, a hundred and fifty
- 18:00 mile away and Julia Creek and there was probably a race meeting followed by a ball that night. And picnic type race, they didn't have B and S's [bachelor and spinsters dances] those days. If they went we went, because we didn't have transport.



**So how long did you spend out there?**

I started in March 62

18:30 And I left there roughly say March 1964. Every year I would go home for Christmas, get your month off or whatever. And Dick would give you a Christmas bonus; give you a cheque, a hundred pound, like winning the lotto. I was on ten pound a week there

19:00 and the second year I was on twelve pound a week. So a hundred and a kick, "Go away and have a good holiday."

**So when you look back at that time you spent as a jackeroo, how do you look at it?**

It was great experience. Dick Keats, he realised I couldn't ride too well so he sent me with a drover, an old Indian a

19:30 fellow called Padel. And I spent about three months with him and others, he had other people working for him, so that was in the saddle every day and looking for the horses every morning, go and get the horses in, that was my job before daybreak. So at half past four or whatever you would be walking around this paddock and have no idea where you were. And you would hear this bell and the

20:00 horse is over there and so you would go over there and then you would hear it over the other way. So you would spend most of your time walking around probably doing circles. And sleeping in a swag and bush tucker, he was the cook and a lot of curries. Yeah, so

20:30 he got me to siphon some petrol there one day and I had never siphoned petrol before and I got the hose out and suck it through and I swallowed about thee gallons of good fuel. And every time, he had me bluffed, every time I would go to light a cigarette then for about three days he would say, "Put it out! You will blow up!"

**Did you start smoking more in that job?**

21:00 Well I was an adult, at home I wasn't smoking at home but once I went out there I could roll me own, paper hanging out, try and roll one down your leg on the horse, you would see the old fellows doing that so you would practice doing that and all of the tobacco went on the ground. I was a man.

**Did it make you grow up fast doing a job like that?**

21:30 I guess you had to look after yourself a bit because you had some responsibilities, you didn't have your mother there doing your washing and making sure you did this and that, and so I guess you had to grow up somewhat.

**But you had always loved the bush so obviously it was where you were happy?**

Yeah.

22:00 I missed the football a bit, and I read about it. And then they heard that I was out there somehow and the president of the Julia Creek football club rang me up and Dick Keats said, "Oh there is so and so on the phone wants to talk to you." And I said, "Who is he?" and he said, "I don't know what he wants." Anyway I went in and came back out and he wasn't

22:30 that keen on that because you had to go away and there was a chance of getting hurt. So I played three or four games and gave it away. I went down to Huon and played a pretty good game the match before, went down to Huon and there was big fellows out there and they, stronger and older

23:00 everything else. And I thought if I am going to stick at this job, I could see that Dick wasn't that happy with me coming home limping and not being able to use this limb and whatever, he might have second thoughts and I didn't want to ring up home and say, "I have got to find another job I haven't got one here." I didn't want that to happen.

**23:30 So why did you eventually pull the pin on jackerooing?**

I got a bit hungry with money. I bought a ute [utility truck], and you know it is not always greener, there was a German chap who used to do a lot of contract work, very handy man, smart. And I said to you before I was on twelve pound a week and he offered me a job, five pound a day.

24:00 this was like who wants to be a millionaire, five quid a day.

**And this was just being his offsider?**

Yeah and he had another offsider and he wanted to grow his business a bit and he needed another man and so he offered me the job. I guess what he saw was that I could work a bit, I was going to dig all of the holes and all of the labouring, but he was pretty difficult to work with and so it didn't last

24:30 long and we parted and you didn't get the five quid a day if you weren't working .it sounded good but if it was raining and it rained for a week, no money. So I didn't, you have got to check out the five print.

**And that was still being away from home?**

Yeah.

**So what was the accommodation situation there?**

Well mainly because we knew we used to stay on the properties, the shearing sheds and that sort of thing, we weren't necessarily

25:00 fed there, we would have to organise something ourselves. Most of the time we would be working, or we would be down on a property and it rained but we would be there, but because we didn't work we didn't get paid. I suppose it's fair enough, but a week with no money is no good.

**How long did that last?**

It didn't

25:30 last long at all, and Primary's had offered me a job to start with them in Julia Creek, not necessarily to start in Julia Creek but they said they would have a job for us. And we knew most of the young fellows around the place and whatever and knew the staff in these agencies.

26:00 So I decided that I would pull the pin, I think we both decided at the same time. He said, "I want to talk to you." And I said, "I want to talk to you." I said, "Listen, it is not suiting me here." And he said, "Well it is not really working out." And we parted and I thought well what do I do know? My parents had been transferred from Townsville to Redcliffe,

26:30 and I think I rang them and said, "I am finishing up here I am going to join a livestock or wool broking firm and I am coming to Brisbane." Because they couldn't employ me at Julia Creek I had to go down to Brisbane for an interview. So on the way down I thought a lot about it and I decided to go to Elders or Goldsbroughs because my grandfather had been involved in that company

27:00 it was Finlays but it was bought out by one of those Goldsbroughs or Elders, And I thought there might be a bit of tradition to become involved in the same company. And also I had an uncle who was a wool manager with Goldsbroughs. So I thought well before I go to Primary's I will go to Elders first because they were an Australia wide company where Primary's were

27:30 restricted to Queensland. And I thought I am young enough, there are plenty of places to go, I don't mind the bush. I might get to move around Australia. So I went there, had an interview, first fellow said, "No way I don't think you're going to suit our business." And he said, "There is someone else who will interview you, Jack Smart."

28:00 He interviewed me and said, "Can you start next week?" and I said, "I can." and I did.

**Good thing you didn't give up after the first interview?**

Yeah but most of the, they were, back in the 1960s most of the heads of those departments were ex-Second World War and they were all Mister and it was all regimented,

28:30 those companies. I am not saying that's the reason why he said, "I don't think you will suit us." I mean he had his opinion and I had an opinion of him too for many years too. He was supposed to have had a heart attack, I don't think he had a heart attack. Anyway that's by the by.

**So what sort of work were you doing there when you started?**

I would have been in the back, I was

29:00 clerking the sales at Cannon Hill, sheep and lambs and pigs and calves, booking the stock into the book when they sold, over they go, write the price in and the buyer, started doing all of those menial tasks. And then as I progressed over the first few months and learnt everything, you had to do everything by hand

29:30 those days, invoices were handwritten, no computers and account sales were all handwritten and you balance the sale and take it up to central sellerman and if everything balanced they'd write the cheques. So I was doing that, you would have two sales a week, Tuesday and Thursdays, and you would go out early on Tuesdays and Thursdays

30:00 and help there. Having worked on the property before assisted somewhat because I knew my way around a little bit the stock. And I was chasing up credit on other days, people who owed us money and whatever, most of that was done on the telephone.

**Was it hard going from just a knockabout outdoors**

30:30 **sort of physical work to doing that sort of work?**

I enjoyed it because it was a bit of a challenge; I am not saying in the jackerooing, I used to often think where do I go from here? What future is in this, you can't all end up as station manager looking after the place, and how many places need a manager?

31:00 A lot of them are family run businesses and whatever. What's the real future in this? I could see some future in moving from there to Elders, where I think it was limited where I had come from. And I was enjoying it, I didn't mind wearing a shirt and tie to work every day.

**And were you living with mum and dad?**

31:30 Yeah I was driving up each day.

**So from Redcliffe to Cannon Hill would be through the city would it?**

It was the only, you had to cross the Storey Bridge, there was no other way you would have to be pretty early, which didn't worry me because I had been looking for horses in the dark, and getting up in the dark and leaving home at half past four was no problem.

**This was all in the ute?**

In the ute.

32:00 **What sort of car was it?**

Holden VH ute.

**Bought it secondhand?**

No I bought it new, I got some help, I got a loan through the bank.

**Knew a bank manager did you?**

I knew the bank manager and so that's how that happened.

**And can you remember the very first time you heard anything about Vietnam?**

32:30 Not really, I think that probably you started to read a little bit about it. And you know we're going through the period when Kennedy was about. I can recall Kennedy and Cassius Clay were in the same sort of class. Well when they were both mentioned you listened.

33:00 Kennedy had that thing about him; I mean it was all by radio there was no TV. We were down at a place called Shirallea when the shearing was being held and it was on when that Cuban Crisis [Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962] was on. And the place was pretty tense even all of the shearers, some of those shearers I guess were Second World War fellows. And they would be thinking the world is going to be back at war, and the first

33:30 thing they would do at break was turn on the radio and the ABC news would be on. It was pretty tense. That was all that was spoken about. And Kennedy would come on and say something. He was held up here in most peoples eyes, would have been interesting if he had have been alive through the Vietnam War, he might have handled it a lot differently.

34:00 You can't say whether he would have or not. But he had a lot of abilities I believe. I guess it started, you know when you started to hear things and see, when I went to Brisbane they had TV [television]. It was black and white and

34:30 you started to see those monks who were starting to set fire to themselves and kill themselves. You would think this is pretty serious, what is going on here? If they believe in it this much, they are actually killing themselves over this. And I guess that's my first knowledge of something like that. Even though Griselda had told me years before.

**Like you said the**

35:00 **World War II diggers were all interested to know what was going on, would they ever speak to you of their experiences?**

Not much no. I can't even recall ever asking anything. I mean no.

**The fact that they were talking about it and it was starting to become important in the news were you starting to think about what maybe you would have to do one day?**

When I was at Bow Park and Shirallea and those places we moved around different properties,

35:30 there were others we worked at too which were owned by the Keats group, we were a long way from anything and at that articular time while that was occurring, the Cuban thing, I had no thought about working for Elders or anything, we were miles from anywhere. We had waterbags and a bit of tucker wrapped in newspaper. And what went on over there,

36:00 even though it was interesting and people showed concern, why were we so worried about it? We're out here.

**Did you have any family service history at all?**

No. Father,

36:30 he had brothers that went away Second World War. I never really asked him why, he must have been essential services or something I don't know.

**So beside what you learnt at school on Anzac Day there was no real connection with the services??**

No.

**Had Griselda talked about the domino theory?**

37:00 Yes she had arrows, she drew these arrows coming down, the marks of Communism.

**So in a way I guess when the news first started you probably knew more than most of what was going on and what was going to happen?**

Probably a little bit. Out of all of the subjects at school I probably enjoyed history and geography the best.

37:30 And I might have had a bit more of an idea.

**How real was the domino theory for you?**

I thought it was, I believed what they said. Menzies and all the rest of them were all talking about the hordes of the commos [Communists], I had no real reason to challenge them.

38:00 I guess we weren't really taught to challenge things in those days, kids are now, but there was nothing like that. We weren't really taught to debate as they are now.

**Probably kids now wouldn't understand that feeling in Australia towards Communism and that underlying simmering?**

38:30 Well you know, you think back about the Petrov Affair, read all of that and listened to that and saw it on the newsreels. They got them off the plane in Darwin. They made the Russians and the Communists out to be terrible people and they were intent on taking over the world, it was only a matter of time.

**And you mentioned people like JFK [American President John F. Kennedy] and Cassius Clay, you heard their names and you would stop and listen. Was there an Australian equivalent of that?**

39:00 I guess you would have to say people spoke about Menzies a fair bit and he had the ability I think to, I didn't know if what he was talking about was right or wrong but you know he sounded like a statesman and

39:30 he wasn't held in the same regard as JFK. When Cassius Clay said something everyone listened, he was a star, he was a legend at the time. We used to listen to the fights which would come through Radio Australia. If there was someone here in Australia

40:00 at the time I just can't think who it might have been. I remember Arthur Caldwell [Leader of the Opposition] I mean he seemed like a nimrod [idiot]. He came out and anything Menzies would say or whatever Caldwell would say something, to us he seemed like,

40:30 we were probably told by older people "He is a Commo that Caldwell."

## Tape 4

00:30 **So Vietnam was the first time Australia hadn't gone into a war that England wasn't involved in, what was the idea of the mother country at that time?**

At the time when I went into the army, I don't know whether we had that much regard for the mother country.

01:00 I mean every council and every government building had a photo of the Queen up. Even some houses had them; you used to visit in the bush. I guess in the bush there was more resentment; there was very strong resentment still against the Japanese, anyone who had anything to do with them.

01:30 We are talking about the stage when they first started to produce four wheel drives. They wouldn't buy them. They stuck with the English Land Rover which was a nightmare as far as doing repairs go or doing any work on them. But they wouldn't budge, they stuck with the Land Rover for the simple reason they hated the Japs.

02:00 A lot of the fellows in the bush had been involved in New Guinea, the older ones. I can't recall much talk

about England, we seemed to be, I think the fact, it was well known that the Americans assisted us against the Japanese.

02:30 And you could see people leaning that way back then, leaning towards the US [United States] not, England was a fair way away. People laughed about Pommie [English] jackaroos that came out there were the laughing stock and there was a few that came. I think it has always been the case hasn't it? I don't think

03:00 Australians hold any real love for, even though we originated there, they are the enemy aren't they?

**In that post World War II era what was the talk about the Americans?**

Most of the talk you would get here would be about the assistance they gave us.

03:30 I didn't hear about the problems they caused in cities and what have you when they were there in the thousands, but they were there for a reason. And I guess we wouldn't be sitting here today if it wasn't for some help from the Americans.

**I know this is jumping forward a bit, but we were talking about Cassius Clay do you recall it being big news in Australia when he refused to go to Vietnam?**

04:00 Yes, well I don't know whether it was big news, it was news. I didn't quite know all of the reasons why he was against it. I knew that he was, I think he said it was his religious beliefs wasn't it? He changed his name from Cassius to Mohammed Ali.

04:30 I guess that was, I think I just said, "Oh well that's because of his new found religion."

**Was that before or after you were there?**

I don't know, I can't remember.

**Do you recall when National Service came in, in Australia?**

The two years or the three months?

**The two years?**

05:00 Can I recall when it happened? Yeah. I was in the very first intake into National Service, I can recall getting notification, I wish I had kept the letters, your birthday has been drawn. It was shown on TV the drawing of the dates. And then we had to go for medicals in the valley, Fortitude Valley.

05:30 Some blokes were trying to get out of it and whatever giving various reasons, limping, short legs, didn't want to go what have you. I was pretty keen to go.

**Do you recall before it was introduced that there was much talk about it, that it may come in?**

Well if there was I don't recall.

06:00 I am sure it was debated in parliament but I can't remember now.

**So when your birthday got drawn were you watching it on TV?**

No I don't think so, I saw it on a replay somewhere but I wasn't watching it. I wasn't even sure, I mean they didn't show all of the dates, the dates were probably published and we saw that and then received notification officially through the mail.

06:30 **Do you recall what your feelings were when you got that letter in the mail?**

I was pretty happy about it; I was looking forward to it.

**What were you looking forward to?**

A new adventure, I just thought this, I am pleased this has happened I was keen. I thought it would be good.

**What was mum and dad's reaction?**

07:00 I can't recall them ever saying they weren't keen on it or whatever, they were fully supportive. They would have been conservative voters my parents and they would have gone along with the government of the day, if they were Labor voters I never ever picked that up.

**At the time that you got called up did you know for certain that you would be serving overseas?**

07:30 No probably not. I probably didn't spend enough time thinking about well this will lead to that, we started talking about that at Kapooka. But that wasn't a real worry, that wasn't too bad. If you're going to be in it, let's go and do it.

**What was the talk?**

Well while we're here

08:00 they will announce we are going to Vietnam. You must have had some idea that was on the cards, but we weren't bogged down with that. It had to be a bit of a buzz I thought.

**Were any of your mates conscripted at the same time?**

08:30 One fellow I worked with he was. We both worked in the same department at work, well then we both went to Kapooka together, he went into a different company or whatever, we ended up in the same company together in Vietnam in 6 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. But he was more an acquaintance, he wasn't really a mate.

09:00 **So when you got your letter do you remember going to work and telling them?**

I don't recall a lot about it but I know I went to them. I guess I assumed it having been in the press said that, you know, these are the conditions, you will be away for two years. One of the conditions was that your job would be there, the government said, "These companies must hold your job until you get back." And I think

09:30 I might have mentioned that casually, but I didn't really think it was a problem because they were always taking on new staff, people leaving and new people coming in so I really didn't think it would be a problem for them holding a job.

**Given that you said a lot of them were ex-World War II blokes I was curious what their reaction was to it?**

10:00 I was at the bottom of the ladder; I was on the bottom rung in Elders at that stage. I remember when I left I was in the stock department, the manager of the stock department, he wasn't our immediate superior, our immediate superior day to day, he was our boss, the bigger boss he hardly ever spoke to us. He would just walk past, you might get a glance

10:30 or a bit of a nod or whatever. And he took us over for a drink at the Grande Hotel, it is not there anymore, on the day that we finished up. And I have always been a bit of a cheeky bugger; I said to him, "What do you do here?" I had a bit of an idea. And he said, "I am manager of the stock department." and I said, "Well I have never really had much to do with you Mister Moore."

11:00 And I think I caught him a bit by surprise when I said this to him because he didn't talk to us after that. They didn't talk to us, we were down here, it was like the they were the officers and here is the soldiers down here and you just keep

11:30 doing your job. Things have changed since then, but that's the way it was. Everyone was Mister.

**So you got the letter you told work, you went in for the medical what actually happened?**

Oh you have to cough and all of the rest of it, look down your throat, make sure you have one head and not two, two legs and all of the rest of it. It was a pretty

12:00 brief affair I think. We just stripped down to our underpants and they weighed you, you had to read the eye chart and then they said, "Right oh he's fit." And so then you got another letter from them. They continually wrote to us and kept us up to date, I don't think we received many letters but we received a few. Say, "You will report to Kelvin Grove barracks at

12:30 such and such a time on such and such a date. You will be transhipped to Kapooka which is outside Wagga. This is what you will need, bring this with you." That's how it happened.

**When you were saying at the medical there was a couple of blokes trying to get out of it did it work?**

I wouldn't have known that, when we turned up there I didn't know any of them so it could have worked with some of them.

13:00 I wouldn't be aware of it.

**Did you have any kind of farewell before you went to Kapooka?**

No see I didn't know that many people in Brisbane, only those that I worked with. And you know I was at home, I didn't have a lot of friends down there so there was no real send off.

13:30 Not going to school there or anything I didn't know anyone, I think I had just met a few people.

**So you went to Kelvin Grove and then how did they take you to Kapooka?**

Well we went to Kelvin Grove and then I think they put us on Greyhound buses and then I think they took us to Amberley I haven't got a good memory of that, I think it was Amberley, it could have

14:00 been the Eagle Farm airport and we flew to Wagga. Arriving just on dark in the afternoon and put on buses and up into Kapooka training camp. And given all had our photos taken and gear issued

- 14:30 and haircuts, it was a fun afternoon actually. I mean we were the guinea pigs, we were the first intake. Here they were trialling the first system that was all written down. Wouldn't be ISO [International Standards Organisation] 5000 or any of those, you know wouldn't be an accredited system. And all of these fellows were all detailed, "You do this. You go and get a haircut.
- 15:00 This group file through." "How do you want your hair?" "Oh just touched up here." Zzzzht, took the lot off. It was all quite an experience really. I could see that it was really daunting for some of those fellows, those that hadn't been around much, lived at home and were still at home and had never been away.
- 15:30 Some of them were shell shocked that this was what was going on. "Am I going to be treated like this?" every time they talked to you they barked at you, a bit amusing when you think about it the way they carried on.

**What was your first impression of Kapooka?**

It was cold; we went there in late May

- 16:00 or June. Bleak all new faces, it was scary the first few days. Sleeping in those igloo huts, making your bed of a morning as neat as you could and someone coming along and saying, "That's not good enough!" and ripping it apart. And you had a locker and all of your gear, they showed you how to fold things
- 16:30 and everything had to be neat and facing this way and nothing out of place and you think, "Gee, it is spot on I have never had anything look better than that." And then some sergeant comes in and says, "Look at the mess in this place you dickhead!" Throw things about, they just do it to break you.

**Did you ever have the impression that as National Servicemen you were treated any different to just young green recruits who had enlisted in the army?**

- 17:00 I don't know if you could say that we were treated differently. It would be unfair of me to say, probably they didn't at that time understand that there were fellows there that would come in as National Servicemen that did have a bit upstairs.
- 17:30 So the first few days as National Servicemen there was quite a few negative actions, "I am not doing that." There was regular soldier, the fellow that joined, he wanted to be there, there was quite a number of National Servicemen who didn't like it and didn't want to be there, it wasn't their decision. They probably had a job or a girlfriend, a life back where they came from and
- 18:00 it had been thrown out the door and here they are at Kapooka lined up at half past five on a cold morning lined up for inspections, they thought, "What the hell am I doing here?" And there would be some well educated fellows there and
- 18:30 I am not sure that they were ready for that. I am not saying that the people who joined the regular army weren't educated, I am just saying they wanted to be there and there was probably a bit of difference between them.

**Amongst your lot in training was it all National Servicemen?**

- 19:00 All National Servicemen yeah, in the company I was in. I was in D company at Kapooka and I am pretty sure it was all National Servicemen. In the officers that were our NCOs there, our instructors, they came from different corps.
- 19:30 Some from artillery, some from infantry, engineers, they were made up from different groups and they had different badges and whatever. I can't recall there were any regular soldiers in our training group. There would have been some others I would think.

**20:00 Was there much talk amongst the guys about anyone not wanting to be there?**

Oh some of them made it quite clear they didn't want to be there and they talked regularly about it. They weren't outcasts or anything; they had their point of view. We used to sit around a lot talking, mainly about what you did beforehand, what do you think about all this. There were all different types, people from

- 20:30 bank clerks, butchers, panel beaters, Dick Johnson [racing car driver] was there. He used to talk about being a racing car driver, we said, "Oh piss off!" We thought he was having us on. Some made it quite clear they didn't want to be a part of the army.
- 21:00 And told the NCOs or whatever, I mean not that they listened, they didn't yell out, "I don't want to be here." But there was talk, they didn't like it, they didn't enjoy it. Some of them were homesick, first time away from home.
- 21:30 It was a big experience for them.

**How did you handle it?**

On my ear. It was fun. I mean it was real fun. And you know years of jackarooing and that type of thing,

I didn't find it difficult. I found it like living in a hotel. They built all new quarters there and we were some of the fortunate

22:00 ones that moved into this new block. And there were four to a room with a divider, two on one side with a divider and two on the other with a divider so four in there. And it was like what I said before, an opportunity for mateship or whatever, there was always something happening, if it wasn't in your room somewhere else, a lot of laughs, a lot of fun.

22:30 **When you were talking about those first couple of days the fellows back chatting how were they dealt with?**

Oh they would beat you, not physically, they would just cop it.

**Did they get pulled into line?**

Oh yeah. Didn't take long either. They will break you, they're good at it.

23:00 They will belittle, I don't know whether they do that now, but they used to belittle the recruits, those that were causing problems. I got into a bit of strife with them.

**What did you do?**

Different things, didn't get much leave, got a lot of extra duties.

23:30 I was caught asleep on piquet one night. It was about four o'clock in the morning, geeze it was cold. And I thought I will sneak into this building here and they had a fire going, like a furnace, not an open fire. I stood beside it for a while and just dozed off and got caught. Confined to barracks or extra duties. It wasn't confined to barracks because we weren't getting leave anyway. So it was extra duties and

24:00 they had this square of carpet in one of these officers, in his office and a strip of timber around it that was polished. And you get this army polisher, and they put polish on the floor and when you hit it, it had a thing like a motorbike, a throttle thing, hit it and brmm, brmm

24:30 and I let go of the polisher and I lost control and she bounced all across the carpet with all of this polish on it and left all marks across it so I got extra duties for that also. One thing lead to another. I would just say different things to them, some liked it some don't. Some of the instructors were good,

25:00 there was one fellow there who had it in for me, so any bad job or whatever I would cop it. It became evident to everyone that he was just out to get me. I mean I had one of the sergeants, one of the instructors came and said, "Don't let him break you mate." And I said, "Well I am handling it all right at the moment but he does get a bit too much at times."

25:30 We got through all of that.

**A lot of blokes we have spoken to said that part of getting them to work as a team was that, if some guys were falling behind, that whole if one person makes a mistake everyone gets punished so if someone does something wrong the rest of the guys would sort him out, did that go on?**

26:00 Yeah particularly on the twenty mile march, they had a twenty mile march one day and anyone who was having a bit of trouble with that, they would try and keep them together. And build their hopes up, well not build their hopes up you had to do it. Carry a bit of gear for them; make it a bit lighter for them their load. I thought the twenty mile was pretty easy

26:30 but some found it pretty tough. I walked home a .lot of times from the tractor running out of fuel or getting bogged in the bore drain, so it wasn't a problem walking through the bush. So there was certainly a bit of, some blokes had some trouble with some of the physical exercises and we would try and help them. Some blokes couldn't swim

27:00 which is a bit of a hassle when you have got to jump in the water, they are frightened of that. So you would be in there look after them when they get in there.

**They guys who had initially not wanted to be there was that ever a problem for teamwork?**

Some of the fellows who didn't want to be there I guess over time became

27:30 which is a bit of a hassle when you a little bit like outcasts. Some that didn't want to be there were still mates and we just joked about it, they didn't have problems, they didn't have any good times at all about the army they hated, but what could they do. They just said, "We have got to live with it." But some of those others that continually went

28:00 on with it, they formed their own real group. I am not saying that they became into groups but there was us and a few of them and we didn't really associate with them.

**So apart from the marches what else did basic training involve?**

All about getting fit, marching



28:30 saluting, knowing what authority is, taking you from a civilian to understanding what military law is. Know what I mean by military law? These are the people you salute; when you're told to do this you do it.

29:00 There was different other things done, a bit of sport. Just basic training really. Learning to look after your gear this is the way you dress, this is the way you always dress, this is the way you present yourself.

29:30 They get all of these people in there that have had no discipline or very little before, when they come out they had got heaps. That's what it is all about; learn what discipline you had to adhere to.

**You said you enjoyed it overall but was there any times you found particularly tough there?**

30:00 Personally I found the cold hard, I had chilblains on my ears and I found the cold pretty hard to put up with, but personally I didn't have any problems.

**So during that three months basic training what if any weapons training were you doing?**

No firing rifles or anything like that. It was all just

30:30 the one two three, marching with that. Just no, we didn't go to the range and learn how to fire a rifle or anything. I can't recall ever doing that. A week of that was done with mess duties and things like that, I was fortunate they separated me from that, they sent me to

31:00 the shop, you know the shop, it is still part of Kapooka but where the married quarters were? There was a shop down there run by the army or whatever and I went down there and stacked shelves and took boxes out and did all of the things you do as a shopkeeper, didn't serve. And

31:30 that was pretty easy. I had a particular a sergeant that didn't like me; he allocated the duties I think just to keep me away from the others.

**What would have been the highlight for you of that three months at Kapooka?**

Leaving, going to the battalion. I had had enough, not enough that I couldn't stand it,

32:00 I didn't like the area much, it was too cold. It started to warm up in September, but I thought we had done enough there.

**What gear had you been issued with?**

We had been issued with boots and gaiters, didn't have the boots when we went to the regiment,

32:30 boots and gaiters because you had to keep all of the brass on those, you had to spit polish your boots. Greens, slouch hat, we would have had a slouch hat with the rising sun on it. I can't recall anything else apart from that.

**Did your uniform fit?**

33:00 It didn't fit too bad. That night that we arrived there they were handing out gear and anyway I got a pair of boots, and I think you have to put in on the form or something what size are you and I was a ten, and when I got my boots they were tied together and I had a look and one was a ten and one was an eight.

33:30 I went back and I said to this duty NCO, "I have got a pair of boots here one is right and one is wrong. I have got a ten and an eight." And he said, "What do you want, them both the same?" and I said, "Well, it would help a bit wouldn't it?" and he said, "You're a bit of a smart bastard aren't you?" and I said, "Well if you think I am that good, why don't you put me down for the intelligence corps?"

34:00 That was a bit cheeky. So that was a big deal that I had questioned the pair of boots and the size. But apart from that the greens were not too bad, must have been.

34:30 **What were you learning about all of the various corps?**

They showed us different films about what different corps did. They gave us a couple of booklets on different things about the army and whatever, not a hell of a lot but they would have

35:00 they must have told us something, but you did have a choice but you know that not many people achieved what they put in for. Some did. Some got engineers and artillery but the aim was to build up the infantry numbers.

**What had you put down?**

Well we spent a fair bit of time talking about where we would go and of course you were told if you put down infantry you

35:30 would most probably go back to Brisbane, well nearly that all that came from there put down infantry because they had girlfriends and what have you, and I thought well if they're going to infantry I'll go

infantry so that's what I put in.

**To stay with your mates?**

And the infantry fellows the instructors, they used to say to us, "Don't put any of those drop shorts and those other corps, don't put any of those other corps. Stick with the men."

36:00 They had of expressing that infantry was the go, I am pretty sure they all had fun in their own corps.

**When did you find out that you were going to infantry?**

Towards the end of the three months there. We had to go to the theatre one night, prior to this we had had to put in what we wanted, and they called everyone up by name and

36:30 said, "Infantry, infantry engineers artillery, medic." So I think that's when they told us.

**What were you learning of what was happening in Vietnam in the time during basic training?**

Not a lot, there was a bit of news. We weren't, I mean there was a TV

37:00 in the common room, I think they called it a common room up near the bar, but not many fellows spent much time looking at that. As you had been there, towards the end, in the last weeks or whatever some of those instructors were talking about it and we obviously joined in discussion at the time about that. This was happening and

37:30 1 Battalion was going over; there was that sort of talk.

**What did you think of the instructors?**

Some of them were good. Most of them had some experience in Malaya or Korea and they weren't too bad. There was a couple for personal reasons I didn't like but

38:00 most of them weren't too bad. And after some time, after they had broken us in they accepted us and they spoke to us, they didn't bark at us all of the time and the treated us okay.

**When did you first hear the term Nasho [National Servicemen]?**

Who started that term, maybe we did?

38:30 I don't know, people weren't walking around saying, "I am a Nasho." We probably didn't start it. I don't think it started before we went there, I think it started

39:00 no I can't really tell you.

**So you were never referred to by the instructors as Nashos?**

No.

**So what happened at the end of the three months?**

We were allocated to our corps and away we went. And normally allocated infantry soldiers go to Ingleburn

39:30 to the Infantry Training Centre, 6 Battalion had just been formed and broken away from 2 Battalion and they had a certain number of NCOs and a certain number of soldiers but they needed to be built up and that's where we became 6. They had been formed on the same day on the Queen's Birthday, 6th of June, around that day.

40:00 In 1965. They had their first birthday in Vietnam. So we went up there and more or less did our infantry training at Enoggera.

## Tape 5

00:30 **So we had just got up to being sent up to 6 RAR in Brisbane, you were obviously happy about getting back to Brisbane with all of your mates, how did they get you back to Brisbane?**

By train. From Wagga to Sydney then up the coast to Brisbane. Arrived there a Saturday, it was the day of the Brisbane Rugby League Grand Final,

01:00 Redcliffe won. So yeah, we arrived at Enoggera all new. New soldiers, we were put into platoons etcetera so it was a settling in period for those few days, finding our way around. Being used to the way they treated you at

01:30 Kapooka it was a new refreshing change because they treated us like men. And it was really good.

**Did you get any leave in that period at all?**

No straight up there. We had one weekend off at Kapooka, long weekend I think we went Friday and got back in Tuesday morning

02:00 or something. That was the only leave we had and then straight into Enoggera. Being confined to the disciplines of Enoggera was a bit strange when we in Enoggera because a few of us were a bit keen to go out that Saturday night and we didn't have any leave passes or whatever but we spent a lot of time manoeuvring

02:30 our way around through the gates when in actual fact no one was watching us anyhow. So we spent a lot of time escaping from really nothing. I think we went to a pub somewhere and had a few grogs, it was great to be back in Brisbane, and then snuck back in. no one really cared; it was a different world in the battalion.

03:00 **Was there still the three entry/exit points to Enoggera?**

Two major ones, our lines were close to, might be on the southern end of Enoggera. There were a lot of old buildings there in the 1960s, yeah that night we thought we were escaping and doing something dangerous

03:30 but getting out the fence. And when we talked to the sergeant the next day he said, "Did you fellows go out last night?" and for a while we weren't about to tell him, but when we did he said, "Oh I thought you would." We thought that was a bit strange because you weren't allowed to do anything at Kapooka and here we were a sergeant saying, "I thought you would." It was a new world.

**And then come Monday straight into infantry training?**

Yeah

**What was that like?**

It was pretty good really. We were starting to do the real thing,

04:00 it was better than all of the marching and saluting we had done at Kapooka. Here we were starting to learn to use a rifle. It was full on. I think we were more or less going seven days a week and long days, parade at seven and things like that, go through to five or five thirty, breaks in between of course.

**And this is of course the first time you**

04:30 **are mixing in any real numbers with regular troops. How was that mixing going?**

Pretty good, there was no problem. Obviously the regs [regular army] had more experience than we did. There was no new regs come to the battalion in 1965 at the same time as we did, we were all Nashos arrived there and later on some re-enforcements came in and they were regulars. We were all intermingled and

05:00 you couldn't tell the difference. We learnt to use a compass, we had night manoeuvres using a compass and you had to find yourself around Enoggera Hills and what have you. A lot of work learning about an M 60 machine gun or an FN [Fabrique Nationale] or an SLR [Self-Loading Rifle], a lot of drills.

05:30 Tedious drills, learn to do things by numbers etcetera, it went on day after day.

**So Enoggera was the first time you fired a weapon?**

No I had fired a weapon myself but in the army it was the first time I had fired a weapon.

**And that was on the SLR?**

Yep.

**How did you find that?**

Well when I was

06:00 jackarooing I had a .303 and we used to go roo shooting, I probably used to kill a roo every second day for the dogs, and so I had used a rifle there. The SLR was a fair way advanced to that.

**And how did you find your jackaroo skills and even skills you may have learnt in the cadets helping you in the army?**

06:30 Well I think you have some bush skills finding your way around and the compass etcetera, finding your way through to another point, cutting your way through the lantana which there is heaps of on the other side of Enoggera in the hills. Not being worried about walking through the bush has got to be some help to you.

07:00 At night when we did some of those exercises, I think that experience of camping out, sleeping out, sleeping in a swag I don't think that does you any harm.

**What were the instructors like at Enoggera?**

Pretty good, excellent. Some of them were obviously better than other. There was a company sergeant major when we first went there he

07:30 used to squawk and squeak and carry on and then some of the other sergeants and corporals would say, "Oh don't take any notice of him he carries on too much." And so they they treated us like men and so we were equals really.

**The shooting and cross country that was all on the base itself at Enoggera?**

They took us to Greenbank we did some shooting at Greenbank,

08:00 the rifle range we did a lot of moving about, different exercises. Up to Kenilworth State Forest, every exercise you learnt something new. I guess for the first two or three months it was mainly at Enoggera full on all of the time. And then they started to take us to Tin Can Bay, Levers Plateau

08:30 you know where ever they could. You would be away for a week whatever. Some just as a company exercises, others two companies or three and then full battalion exercises.

**And was there any particular thing in the infantry training that you really enjoyed?**

I enjoyed doing things like learning to throw grenades.

09:00 I always liked the firing part of it, the M 60 getting onto the range and putting a belt of ammo through it. That was about it, it was a fun time actually. Living in barracks there and training and something new. There was a lot of repetition but every day they would introduce you to some

09:30 new part of army life.

**And how often would you get home to see mum and dad?**

When I needed the washing done or whatever. No I would, we would probably train for seven days for ,maybe six weeks or so and then they would give you some days off, two or three days and then you would go home and I wouldn't do much other than probably sleep

10:00 and have a bit of a talk.

**And if the blokes had all got through Kapooka was it fair to assume they were going to get through infantry training as well?**

I suppose so yeah. Some obviously went to other corps but that that came to infantry I don't think there was any hassle that they weren't going to get through.

**Had you started to click more so with one bloke in particular going through that training or?**

10:30 Yeah a couple really two or three we clicked a bit as people do in life, for want of a reason you click with a few, but generally we were a pretty close knit lot the whole platoon.

**What were the accommodations like at Enoggera?**

Well they weren't as goods as Kapooka after the new block of motel type units we had at Kapooka they were

11:00 pretty well updated but they were old lines at Enoggera but that didn't worry us. We came back there in summer and they were pretty open airy, it wasn't a hassle.

**How about food?**

Well I never had a real problem with army food, I mean if you live with it, if you went with that drover for three months anything wasn't too bad. Curries were a regular thing

11:30 so I never had a real problem with the tucker, it was all okay.

**Did you get any new issue of new gear at Enoggera?**

I think we all went into new greens and whatever and then we progressed into the new style of army boot without the gaiters and or course we had a lanyard to show you what battalion you're from.

12:00 And you got to wear the regiment badge on your hat. I was trying to think before about what we wore at Kapooka it wasn't the greens but the old type battle dress they used to wear, which had a fair bit of wool in it, not suited for Queensland conditions.

**But probably just as well for Kapooka given when you were there. So when were you warned you were going to Vietnam?**

12:30 I don't know how we were told about it, but I know that we were told that there would be an announcement coming from the government probably on the ABC or whatever and I think most of us tuned into that, we were on an exercise when that happened. And this is not normal where you are

allowed to listen, but for whatever reason we were and

13:00 it was announced that 6th Battalion better prepare themselves to head to Vietnam. This was of course 1966, after we had done a lot of training, so we are talking another eight or nine months after we arrived at Enoggera.

**What was the assumption,**

13:30 **I mean you guys must have had a pretty good idea anyway didn't you that that's where you?**

Pretty fair idea yeah. I mean why were we doing all of this training? There would be a few can I have a break?

**Yeah just get an idea of the general feeling amongst the blokes already assuming you were going?**

Some were a bit nervous about it.

14:00 They gave us some leave at Christmas time in 1965 and when I returned from leave I had a little bit more responsibility given to me, I was lance Jack [lance corporal] and I was pretty serious about all this and some fellows weren't. They took training a little bit light heartedly.

14:30 And I kept saying, "You have got to learn how to do this because it could mean your life one day." Some thought I had lost all of my marbles. But anyway the training did become more serious and we were probably fortunate enough that we had a company commander, Major Harry Smith

15:00 who was ex-SAS [Special Air Service] or whatever and a fitness fanatic. He had a superb fitness level and he had us doing nine miles runs with full gear. He was 'Harry the Rat', wherever he got his name from, Malaya or whatever. He just had us full on all of the time training, he was very proud of his unit, he wanted us to be the

15:30 best and I am sure when he had the opportunity he would have volunteered us to do whatever job was required. But he had us pretty fit when we went to Canungra to do the course there, the Jungle Training Centre, most of us found it pretty easy because he had us at that level of fitness. So it wasn't as hard as people made out, when you go to Canungra

16:00 phwoar that's a tough place but we didn't find it that way.

**Beside the level of fitness and going to the JTC [Jungle Training Centre] were there other things in your training that made it clear that you going to Vietnam before the announcement was made?**

Probably not but I mean I think we were all well aware that that was why we were doing it. There was a period there in

16:30 Rhodesia with the Aswan Dam, there was a problem there with the leader of that country Smith or whatever his name was and the United Nations was talking about putting a force into there. Now they did form a number of us into this group to on stand by, we were on twenty-four hours notice to go to Rhodesia and we had all of the measles and the rest of it and we were all standing by waiting

17:00 and the government was going to announce that we were heading that way. That didn't happen obviously, but I mean we knew we were there for some reason, if we weren't going to Rhodesia we would certainly be going to Vietnam because 1 Battalion was over there, you wouldn't have to be too smart to work out who was going to replace them. We didn't actually know it was going to be 6 and we didn't actually know there was going to be two battalions sent. We though there'd

17:30 be one and then they increased the numbers and made it two, but we knew that we would be going. It was generally consensus was that we would be heading that way, when we didn't know.

**So you had no idea what sort of time frame they were talking about?**

No except we knew 1 Battalion was there for twelve months so we thought as that as a bit of a time frame.

**Can you tell us a bit about what you did at the Jungle Training Centre?**

18:00 It was a lot of going through and pop out targets and each one had to do this individually and someone would pull this string and out would pop a target and you would shoot it and these NCOs that ran Canungra would judge you and work out, "Well you just got shot you're too slow. "So there was a lot of that

18:30 type of thing. A bit more active coming under actual fire, crawling under wire, going through the obstruction course they have got there where live ammunition is used so the noise and what have you will make you more accustomed to what you might encounter in actual combat. But it was more to do with fitness, well I thought it was, fitness

19:00 and whether you're capable of handling yourself over a period of time with limited rations and so forth.

We went down to this Worongary State Forest which is part of Canungra and we spent a week down in there with our ration packs and with an enemy against us, which were made up of men from Canungra, soldiers from Canungra. And we had

19:30 warries down there for a week. That's what that was taken up with.

**At that time did they have the mock Vietnamese village set up at Canungra?**

I think they had a more in later times, but they had a type of village, we spent a lot of time clearing a village there on a patrol that I had only to find out later it was the referees village we had.

20:00 cleaned up. Made a bit of a mess of that too, they didn't appreciate that at all, kicked a few things over.

**Are you a lance jack at this time?**

Yeah.

**So can you explain for people who don't know the responsibilities you had in the section?**

2IC [second in command] of the section, section is made up of ten men, corporal, lance jack and eight other privates and so you have got three sections to a platoon and

20:30 you have got the platoon commander and platoon sergeant and radio operator and batman. And so roughly, a platoon is somewhere between thirty-six and forty men. Three sections of ten plus the radio operators etcetera.

21:00 And as a lance corporal your responsibilities are to do as you're told from your corporal. Mainly you're attached to the M60, so the M60 his offside and you would be trained more or less to act as a, that's the way we were trained to act as a group within the section.

21:30 **Were you first earmarked for possible promotion at Kapooka or?**

No I was earmarked at Kapooka never to be promoted, that's that fellow I was telling you about before, I don't know whether he is still alive, I would like to run into him and he said, "I want you to read this." The day that we left there, and he showed me the record and it said, 'Never to be promoted.' Now why he

22:00 thought I shouldn't be promoted I couldn't tell you. He set out to try and beat me and I don't think he did., it was very early days to be a nasho and they promoted about three of us, as I said when we returned in January 1966, quite a surprise really, I parked my ute and I was walking across the lines and the sergeant

22:30 yelled out, "Corporal Robbins I want you down here." I thought he wasn't talking to me and he said, "Yes you get down here." And he said, "You have now been promoted you are now a lance corporal." And he gave me the stripes and said, "Get your mother or someone to sew those on your shirt." So that's how it happened.,

**What do you think it was that put your head above all of the rest of the blokes?**

23:00 The other fellows probably reckoned I was crawling or something I don't know what but I wasn't it was just that I think I was not a bad soldier. I liked to think I was probably the experience of jackarooing and bush craft gave me a bit of an advantage over the others and I think I was probably a bit of a leader.

**Did you enjoy the extra responsibilities of that?**

23:30 Yeah I did. It gave you a little bit more information at times, not too much but it did give you a bit more information, which you were able to share, which you were able to do with others.

**And a lot of blokes tell us that corporals probably do more work than anybody else in the army?**

24:00 **They are the real guts of the work that has to be done?**

It can also get you out of some jobs too, you can relax and say, "You do this and you do that." Not that that's done very often but half a joke you can use it.

**And I forget to ask earlier on the march out parade from Kapooka what was it like?**

Yeah well it was like any normal

24:30 parade I guess. It was one we had looked forward to because it was the last one and we had put a lot pf practice into it. Yeah everyone was pretty well over the moon after that. And it was a bit embarrassing I got back to the lines and there was a cake sent there, my mother had organised a cake.

25:00 very good of her really, I don't know how she did it, she must have got somebody from the bank in Wagga probably, but here is this big cream cake. She must have thought it was something special, anyway we had this big cake and this fellow that I was telling you about giving me a hard time he came in and he leant across to, and he said, "Nice chocolate cake I will have a bit of that." Anyway I took his

hand and said, "No you won't.

- 25:30 You're not welcome in here." I think we ended up square at the end of the day. This was after he told me never to be promoted too. He wasn't getting any cake.

**At that time were there any parents that came to the parade?**

Yeah some ones in New South Wales, most of the group where I was in at Kapooka were Queenslanders and northern

- 26:00 New South Welshmen, but there were a few parents there.

**And would you like your parents to have gone?**

I knew they wouldn't come down I didn't think it was any real big deal.

**So when were you actually given a date that you were departing for Vietnam?**

When we were at Levers Plateau when we heard that night that

- 26:30 6 Battalion and 5 Battalion would be, and they would be setting up a task force base in Vietnam, this was [Prime Minister] Harold Holt I think might have announced this. I might have to be corrected there. They told us it would be occurring shortly and I suppose it was over the next few weeks we were told it was going to be June and there

- 27:00 was an advance party went over and as it got closer to the date they told us this is the times that we will be moving and be prepared. When we went to Shoal Water bay we more or less had a fair idea of when we were going.

**I think you were telling me that was one of the first times they had used Shoalwater Bay was it?**

It had been purchased by the government as a training centre and when we went in there it was all

- 27:30 just [UNCLEAR] country. Very dry, Queensland was in the grip of a huge drought in 1965 and 1966. When we went there it was just a dust bowl, all the foliage had dust all over it. it was dry, they must have bought the country cheap because it wasn't much good. Real coastal type belt they had there.

- 28:00 We went up by train to Rockhampton and I read somewhere that it was the first time since the Second World War, at that time it was the first troop train to leave Brisbane and go north. So they had this big train we leave Roma Street on up to Rockhampton, carriage after carriage. All 6 Battalion plus others and a good

- 28:30 night on the train, had a game of Crown And Anchor. Got a few bob together. Had to go and see the platoon commander the next morning, I said, "I have got to go into town if I could just get twenty minutes or something I will grab a taxi or something I will go in." He said, "What do you want to go for?" I said, "I have got that much money I just can't carry it around." Something like sixteen hundred dollars you know which was big money and so I went and got rid of it.

- 29:00 Then we went out to the airport at Rockhampton and they got Caribou aircraft transport and took us into Shoal Water bay and as you got off the plane there were fellows running around putting stickers on you that you had snake bite or you had been shot by a sniper whatever, and they had all of these casualties and which was part of the training to get rid of them and get back into Rockhampton. I was trying to get something stuck on me but they wouldn't come near me so I was pretty unlucky that day.

- 29:30 **Where had you learnt to play Crown and Anchor?**

in the army I'd played cards and whatever, but never Crown and Anchor and when it was Easter in 1966 we were up on the Lamington national Park

- 30:00 waiting for trucks to come and pick us up and it was the Wednesday or Thursday, probably the Wednesday before Easter. And someone started a game of Two Up and I had never been involved in Two Up and I didn't actually become involved on that day except betting on the side, I would have a bet with somebody, not big money, dollars, and I went back,

- 30:30 we got on the trucks and went back to Enoggera and they gave us the Easter off and I had thirty-five dollars I had won on this Two Up and I thought God how long has this been going on, this is easy money, I am getting about twenty-one dollars a week in the army, now I have thirty-five. This is going to be a big weekend. And it was not long after that, mates of mine we bought a Crown and Anchor

- 31:00 set, a couple of us I am talking about blokes that get together a bit. So we bought a sheet, we had the Crown And Anchor and from there it was pretty easy.

**How was it easy to win?**

Well you just make the bank and the way you make it is that you let them win every now and then but the bank doesn't lose too often. Have you played it?

31:30 **No I have heard plenty of Crown and Anchor stories but I have never played it.**

I haven't played it since.

**So unless you're running it, it's not much chop ay?**

Oh you have got to run it. Not go and play it, you have got to run the game you can't win.

**You think blokes would learn after a while wouldn't you?**

Oh well they were winning see? You let them win every now and again and then you have got to be fair, let them win a bit. They were winning on the two up and that was in another carriage

32:00 and they were also playing Unders and Overs and they were winning there. They cleaned them out; they won all of the money up there so those fellows couldn't keep going. Now when you have got a fair few players all you have got to do is cover yourself. Like talking lollies off kids.

**So having such a big win does that create any animosity?**

32:30 That's why I took the money in; I thought they would roll me. no they knew what they were in for I mean most of the fellows that were there betting the big money they weren't from our platoon a big game going on down here and they came down and we took it off them.

**So it is a good idea not to burn your own blokes?**

Yeah.

33:00 **So was the exercise at Shoal Water the last exercise before you?**

That was a big one yeah. That was the first time we actually became very much involved with APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] we had been on them before but not to the extent we were in Shoalwater Bay.

**And what were you learning as far as co-operation with the APCs?**

Just as escorts, run into an ambush or whatever learning drills. It wasn't much learning we were putting into practice what we had learnt.

33:30 you know fanning out protecting APCs in the likelihood of an ambush and so on.

**And was that sort of work making life for infantry soldiers easier or harder?**

Oh we loved the APCs, made life easier, you could get a bit of a lift every now and then, little bit less walking particularly if it is hot and dry.

**What about, are you doings stuff with helicopters as well?**

34:00 We did some helicopter work out of Enoggera over Brisbane and I don't think they were involved at Shoal Water Bay, they were there but not at our level. Probably commanders were flying around and what have you.

**So between the Shoalwater Bay exercise and leaving for Vietnam what sort of admin did you have to do before you left?**

34:30 We had to make a will which was new to everyone. I don't think anyone had one up until then.

**Was that confronting?**

Yeah it wasn't that hard all it was was a bit of paper and we didn't own that much, left it all to Mum and Dad and

35:00 that was what happened. There wasn't much, split this three ways, it was all pretty straight forward.

**And was there anything else, did you have to have shots?**

Yeah, I will have to have another drink of water. What else did we have to do?

**Can you remember what sort of needles you would have got for that?**

I have got my health book here somewhere, yellow fever and cholera,

35:30 they might be the same things are they? Different,

**Were you put on any sort of anti-malarial drug?**

We were on them, Paludrine I think they were called.

**And was that started in Australia?**

Yeah we started on that here a daily tablet. We had tablets to put in our water and sleeves down. Always



shirt sleeves rolled down.

36:00 Wouldn't have been too much admin [administration], we had to get things in order, pay any parking fines etcetera before we left.

**What about briefings of what to expect when you got there? Cultural briefings and things like that?**

There was, again there was another booklet about Vietnamese people

36:30 some useful phrases, there was some short films about the Viet Cong etcetera, there was some film shown of American soldiers that had been captured by the Viet Cong, telling us that that's what would happen to us if you get caught, or indicating that's what they wanted us to know.

37:00 There were what else was there? Talks from they wouldn't have been soldiers that had been there but talks on their strategies, the Viet Cong methods of fighting. Not in any great detail, just usually groups of five and six and then they would hit and run.

37:30 strike and take off .there was all of that sort of, some of the talks were given by people who had been in Malaya and it was expected that this would be similar to actions that occurred over there. Not a lot. Maybe the COs [Commanding Officers] and platoon commanders got more training on that than we did.

38:00 **At that early stage when you are starting to think about the enemy you are going to face what were you thinking of them?**

Well we were sort of, we were told that they had limited equipment, that they always had an advantage, we were told they had an advantage because they lived there and they knew the country. They operated a lot at night

38:30 and they worked doing other things during the day they were always in black, that they had some of their weaponry was handed down through the times and it wasn't up to date. We shouldn't have too much trouble handling them because we had got all of the right gear and

39:00 we should be able to handle these. We learnt a little bit down at JTC about some of the traps, not a lot but there was some training there not on dismantling anything but what you could encounter etcetera.

**And at JTC were they firing AK47s and such, so that blokes would know the report of those weapons?**

I am pretty sure they did.

39:30 I am not sure that that sunk in a lot with a lot of people.

**And a lot of blokes told us you got the obligatory talk about VD [Venereal Disease] as well?**

Yeah.

**What did that involve a film?**

I think it was a film. They had a lot of films.

40:00 Back at Kapooka about toilet training and things like that. pretty basic stuff. I will never forget one of the first ones they ever showed us, they had this bloke walked out of a building somewhere and he went down to the dunny down the back yard and the bloke looked at his watch and he went in there and changed the time. Obviously he was regular.

40:30 That was on the film. Subtle way of saying that you should be very regular and eat the right food etcetera.

## Tape 6

00:30 **I will just get that on tape, Crown and Anchor for people who don't know what it is can you just explain? Is it dice?**

It is dice and a board and I think there could be six different, there is a Crown and Anchor, I can't recall now what they are. But I have got the dice here somewhere, the lucky dice. And people just bet on the

01:00 there is three dice, what comes up and if it comes up three of the one motif well then they win the money, but then have got it covered elsewhere and you might bet crown three to one, so whatever it is, say they put a dollar on it and we pay them three to one they get three bucks back

01:30 plus their dollars, that's basically what it is.

**So did you get to come back and have leave with the family before you left for Vietnam?**

I had a short time after Shoalwater Bay we had pre-embarkation leave, a few of us went to Sydney and had a week down there, played up a bit. Stayed at a pretty good pub and

02:00 most of went down there, Gordon Sharp he knew his way around and he was a cameraman with Channel Seven and he knew everywhere to go and we hired a Ford Galaxy the biggest car we could get, that was pretty cheap we had all of this money and we used it to get around in. You could put about twenty people in the back seat, it was that wide.

02:30 We went up to Channel Seven and Sharpy was interviewed on some 'Good Morning' Show or whatever he was one that really wasn't that keen to go to Vietnam, he was our platoon commander and although he didn't publicly talk about it and protocol would have said that he shouldn't have been a good mate of ours, he was a Nasho he was Scheyville

03:00 came out of Scheyville a second lieutenant but he was a fellow that didn't drink, Sharpy, but if we had six beers he would have six lemonades and be sillier than all of us and enjoyed it as much as anyone else at parties. So we had a good time, looked around and spent the money.

03:30 **When you said the protocol was that he shouldn't have been mates with you was that just because he was highly ranked?**

Well he was an officer and we were the other ranks and I don't think it would have been looked on favourably that an officer would be having drinks and time out with his soldiers, it is not done.

**Do you recall where you stayed in Sydney?**

04:00 Not really, not a bad pub, red carpet and everything, pretty flash. It was somewhere between the CBD [Central Business District] and the Cross [Kings Cross] but what the name of it was I wouldn't know.

**And how long were you down there for?**

About a week.

**And what else did you get up to down there?**

Went to a few parties, went to the movies, went on the harbour.

04:30 Just had a bit of a time, ate good tucker, played poker machines, drank beer, ate, played poker machines, all sorts of things.

**I have spoken to a few fellows that got up to a fair bit of mischief before they left and managed to get out of it by telling people they were going to Vietnam did anything like that go on?**

Not really no. We did

05:00 not get into any, with the law or whatever? No I am not aware of any of that we were pretty well trained.

**So from there you came back to Brisbane?**

Yeah I actually got pretty crook I got food poisoning and I had to, my father was going to pick me up anyway at the airport because he had taken me down to Brisbane from Redcliffe to catch the plane down. And I rang him up and said I would be on such and such a flight, I

05:30 had a hell of a job with this food poisoning. It was a long flight home. And when I got there he said, "Jesus you must have had a big week down there by the look of you." I was crook [ill], copped a bait [ate some bad food].

**And so did you have a send off from the family?**

We did because I was a

06:00 I was twenty-one at Canungra so we weren't able to celebrate. Most Nashos were twenty-one in the first part of 1966. All of them I would say and so not many of them were able to, the traditional twenty-first birthday wasn't held. Now we didn't have a traditional birthday party but I know that my mother and father put

06:30 on a party at their Margate home, suburb of Redcliffe, had a couple of kegs [of beer], so yeah we most of the blokes from the platoon were invited. Again I didn't know too many locals, I think a few of my friends' parents came and we had a big barbecue or something like that, big send off.

07:00 **It is well known that later on in the war sending Nashos over became a dividing point amongst the public, what was the public reaction to it at the time you were going over?**

I don't believe there was too many problems about that in the early stages. There was certainly no press about it. on the day that I left Margate to go to Vietnam, now this would be something that my mother would have organised that I didn't

07:30 enjoy, but she invited a lot of our friends around and they had more or less a party. That might have been to settle them down, I didn't enjoy one bit of it. I was a bit on edge I guess about going, they had all of these people there their age and I just really wanted a quiet time, maybe she thought this was the better thing, could have been too.

**Did you have a girlfriend?**

08:00 I had acquaintances; I didn't have a steady girlfriend. But I did have a girlfriend there that afternoon, only a short romance, wasn't a special occasion, special girl.

**Nonetheless was it difficult to say goodbye?**

Oh I don't know whether I would say it was difficult.

08:30 Guts might have been twisted a bit.

**So leaving Margate that day did you go to Brisbane or out to Archerfield?**

My parents drove me out to Enoggera and I think we went to Amberley and somewhere,

09:00 either Enoggera or Amberley they had a lot of parents there and there was a tent there and they said they were taking us away, some official reason and we would get a chance to say goodbye later, but that didn't occur and so we went on to load, some of us were upset about that. And quite rightly so I guess. Maybe they thought that was the best way to

09:30 do it. So some of the parents I think were upset about that but they didn't get the opportunity to say, particularly the parents that ended up losing their sons over there. They didn't like it at all.

**Did you ever speak to your mum and dad about what that was like for them?**

No I didn't really, I mean there is a lot of things you should do but that's not one of them that I did.

10:00 I guess when I came home a lot of that thought about what happened when we left was left behind.

**So you got separated from your parents onto a plane, what sort of a plane was it?**

QANTAS [Airways] flight. I don't know what size plane, bigger than a Tiger Moth and smaller than one that is flying around now.

10:30 It was an international flight; we flew from Sydney to Darwin. I know we refuelled there, weren't allowed off the aircraft but we refuelled and from there that was at night so the next morning we awoke and we were over the sea and next thing we're in Manila, and landed there and as we were taxiing up to the airport, airport in Manila I thought

11:00 would be something special, you know a big airport, but it wasn't. It was a low building a little bit like the old days of Eagle Farm. It was still the 1960s but for some reason I thought this would be a big airport. Anyway there were guards driving around and driving vehicles and they all carried rifles. And I thought well this is a bit different to most airports, there is a lot of security here and whatever.

11:30 So for some reason we were delayed at that airport and spent some time there and drank an amount of beer and anything they had. And then we were put back on the plane from there to Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City. And everyone was wide awake on the trip from Manila to Saigon and everyone, if you didn't have a window seat

12:00 you were peering over to try and get a glimpse of the country side, see whatever you may see. Don't know what we were looking for but you know this is where we were headed.

**How long had the flight been from Australia to Manila?**

12:30 My recollection now was that we left at night which might have been nine or ten o'clock at night from Amberley, now that flight to Darwin I would guess was three hours or something then, so that would be midnight and we could have been there for a couple of hours by the time they refuelled, how long I am not sure. But it was the next morning, more or less eight or nine o'clock the next day when we,

13:00 I am not talking about time differences, there is not much time difference there I don't think. Probably eight or nine o'clock the next morning we were in Manila.

**And what had the mood been like on that leg of the trip?**

Everyone slept, the odd fellow was a bit cranky about the way it had happened back at Amberley, but most people slept.

13:30 **Were they serving any alcohol on the flight?**

No.

**And so then how long were you in Manila for?**

Seemed like a good bit of time but I am not sure why but it seemed to be a good while. You couldn't go anywhere, you just stayed there. There had to be more than one flight because they were flying a battalion over so

14:00 there wasn't aircraft everywhere., maybe the others were behind or in front of us wherever they were, and maybe because of the hold up getting into Saigon or something we waited. But I know that they were allowed to drink beer there, it wasn't much good but we drank it because I know that I sent a postcard home from there. We could have been there two or three hours.

14:30 **Do you know when your mum and dad got that postcard?**

Yeah after I got home in September it was June or something when I posted it and it arrived I think some time I nearly October, pretty good service.

**And what was wrong with the beer in Manila?**

It was hot. I mean there was so many of us

15:00 and they had cold beer to start with but they probably only had a small fridge and they weren't catering for the three hundred thirsty people who wanted to try the local beer so they were giving it to you hot.

**And so when you said everyone was wide awake coming into Saigon, were people talking and speculating about what might happen when you got there?**

There wasn't a lot of talk but there was certainly

15:30 a lot of looking and apprehension I guess. Or you know looking out, gazing out through the porthole in the plane, I mean the place wasn't amok with any laughter or talk it was pretty quiet really.

**When you got off the plane what struck you about Vietnam?**

The heat. I thought I knew heat,

16:00 it was very hot. The buses had arrived to take us to wherever they were taking us and all of the weld mesh over the windows, that was new. I hadn't seen that before.

**Did you know immediately what that was for?**

We were talking amongst ourselves, "That must be to stop them throwing grenades in."

16:30 Whether that was right or not, that was us putting two and two together and said, "That's what that's for." Yanks walking around with two holsters, six guns hanging out, pearl handles. The activity of the place astounded me, you know okay we have been to Shoal Water Bay and done all of this training

17:00 but the activity was unbelievable, planes coming and in and taking off. It was go, go, go all of the time trucks running here and petrol tankers, it was a busy place. I don't believe that there was any busier airports than Saigon in those days and here we were this was our first taste of it. It just blew me away really.

**Did it look like a war zone?**

17:30 I guess you would have to say it did with the number of planes and choppers sitting on the tarmac and taking off going this way and that way. They all seemed to have some reason to be going where they did, what they were I wouldn't have a clue. But it did look like a war zone, there was a lot of barbed wire, you could see around the boundary of the airport and

18:00 but there was no gunfire or anything like that in Saigon.

**For a young Aussie guy who spent most of his growing up in rural areas how overwhelming was it to land somewhere like that?**

I think everyone stood there and took it in.

18:30 You know I mean we didn't know the size and the power of the United States before going there. I mean you can read what you like; until you see it you can't believe it. And when you see just the amount of gear they have got and how they do it. They have just got it. I think most people whilst you're

19:00 standing with your gear and waiting to get your next orders, what is going to happen you just take it in. You just looking about, you see all of this activity; it is unbelievable, all new.

**So then it was on the buses?**

Yeah we didn't go far on the busses. I think they took us, they must have

19:30 stamped something the Vietnamese authorities. I think that was just a formality that we went through and but we had to get something stamped or whatever and I new went. That was after we got on the buses and I think we got back on the buses and they took us to these American Hercules and told us just to get on and sit wherever you can hang on, we will be taking off in a minute. And that struck me

20:00 that our training going anywhere in Australia with Australian Air Force or in choppers whatever was very, there was a lot of discipline, you sat there, you probably had a number you were numbered off and climb in there and get your seat belts on, this was all pretty casual. They just said, "Get on there and hang onto anything you can don't worry about belting up."

20:30 And we went, just as many as they could on and away we went flew to Vung Tau, probably only took about fifteen minutes and down we went.

**How big was the Hercules compared with the plane you flew over on?**

Oh it would be smaller. The plane we flew over in it was a I wouldn't know whether it was a prop jet or a jet whatever but it was a fairly big plane.

21:00 I mean they were QANTAS. They had been flying overseas for a long time, they had been doing long flights but and the Hercules was more or less to carry more equipment around than people, but that's how they shipped us.

**So that flight on the Hercules would you say it was more dumbfounding or exhilarating?**

21:30 Well it didn't take long, you couldn't see anything because it was just it was crowded; it was just, it was only about fifteen minutes on there so it was take off and next thing you were there. It was just a way of getting there. I don't think I could describe it

22:00 any other way. The only thing that struck me was how they were a little bit more casual than our air force.

**What happened once you arrived in Vung Tau?**

Well they loaded us on trucks; we didn't know where we are going. I have got one stripe but I didn't know. You just do as you are told. People did know what was happening

22:30 though. And they took us from where, I suppose it would have been at the 32nd Evac Hospital where we landed and they took us on trucks and away we went to this area called Back Beach and it was there that we drive through town and we were all peering over the side of this truck and see what the locals looked like, and how they lived, their houses.

23:00 It was an eye opener really, living in slabs of iron and things put together, stuck together and it was pretty dirty. Smelly, and hot and they are all staring back at us the same wondering what we looked like, round eyes or whatever. Saw some thing there on the way in. Saw someone doing a number two on the street and I thought that's

23:30 a lot different to what we're used to. And we got off the trucks at this Back Beach area and camped in the sand there for about a week or something. It was the worst place I have ever been. Sand, you know, you have got to keep your rifle oiled and whatever and sand was always on it and they would check if it was clean. That's all we did there all of the time apart from

24:00 a few exercises it was try and adjust to the heat, rain wasn't a problem then. It was really intense but the rain hadn't come, and it was very hot. And the water I couldn't get over how warm the water was. You didn't have to walk far to swim, no surf, South China Sea and very warm. A few blokes thought if you just kept swimming where would you end up?

24:30 Where could you go. Didn't like the country. At night we heard a lot of gunfire, heard a lot of artillery. Fire fights in the hills, you could see them and yeah it was all this was becoming reality.

25:00 This is why we're here. And so it was a bit of an experience. Smokers cough.

**And so from Back Beach then it was on to?**

Nui Dat. We did a couple of exercises, we went right up the

25:30 beach. We had to walk back one day the chopper got called somewhere else, they were going to come and pick us up and we had to walk back and it was a hell of a long way to walk. Most of us were bugged when we got back, we thought we were fit and we were but we, it takes a while to really adjust to the heat up there humidity, close to the water. In the end

26:00 we flew in. From my understanding of what happened prior, they had selected this area obviously that was to become Nui Dat and they shelled it and cleared the area and next thing we were all put on choppers and away we went, and that was to become the task force base. And we went in and secured this area in the rubber plantation and

26:30 the work commenced. Putting up wire, digging fox holes and trenches, not only did the work commence but the rained commenced and it rained every day. Wet. And after the rain had finished it would rain for another couple of hours through the rubber.

27:00 And I think you have really got to see some of that rain that occurs in the South East Asian countries the torrential rain that comes every afternoon and then the heat following that. You're in your gear and I

mean if we did it today I am sure we would all die. So you're in your gear, soaking wet, you don't wear any under gear really, you don't do that.

- 27:30 You just wear your greens, trousers and shirt, no underpants nothing and just choose your boots and your socks and your socks get wet and you have got to be careful of tinea and what have you so, I mean these things happen in other wars too, it is not new just that you have got to learn with it and live with it and beat it. And then after the rain has gone then the humidity comes and within
- 28:00 a very short time you're dry again, you just dry out and then it happens the next day. So you have got to put up all of the wire out the front, man the machine gun. You have got to try and do some patrolling out the front to secure that. And that becomes a daily task apart from
- 28:30 putting the wire up, very hard to sleep, in tents Second World War tents with holes and rips in them and whatever so when it rains all of the water comes in, mosquitoes. Things start to get a bit tense with some people, living in these conditions,
- 29:00 living out of ration packs because there is no kitchen having been set up. Water everywhere, red mud everywhere and it starts to test a few people; people start to do their block a bit. And nothing to no time to get yourself together a bit, you're on edge, you are in a new area and things are happening at night
- 29:30 you can hear them and they have got the artillery there firing out at unknown targets, harassing the enemy. And so you have got this going on at night, you have got, as I said you have got no real time to think I just need a bit of time to get myself together. You have got someone up you about
- 30:00 getting the wire up and out and then we need a patrol out, and we need a listening post out there, someone has got to do that and then you have got two men out there doing that and they have got to be relieved every two hours. And it just goes on and on, it is very, in a country that we didn't know. And I guess we're thinking that the enemy are watching us all of the time, we don't know that we can't see them. We assume they are, they knew we're there and they
- 30:30 owned that country before we got there and someone was going to have a crack at us, you're on edge a bit about this. And so you do all of this and then they start the night ambushes, the platoon goes out or half a platoon goes out and will set a night ambush up on the track somewhere, you do all of that and we're still eating out of cans and whatever. The Australian tucker runs out so they start to
- 31:00 give us the American ration pack. Not as good, different type of food, lima beans and turkey and stuff. Not our type of tucker, all got a packet of smokes in them and this sort of thing. Anyway as I say tension starts building. Once the wire goes up a bit and the wire has been depleted and the patrols are
- 31:30 out every day patrolling became more the norm than anything else. So you're on a regular every day. Someone is going out on patrol, not necessarily search and destroy but securing the areas out the front, you can't say that you own them when you leave there because they can just move in. You just try to establish contact, we had a job down there to do at Long Phuoc the village one of the first operations, they called
- 32:00 it Operation Enoggera or Brisbane, well we had to go down there and destroy that village. Which didn't really mean anything to me about that. I mean I could see that it was inhabited, a lot of people were there because there were homes but obviously they were told because they dropped the pamphlets in and told them gave them time to get out and after that anyone found there would be considered enemy.
- 32:30 So having done all of this and I have sliced all of that into as short as I can you find that after your initial tensions and so much happening so much has to be done when you get down to the mundane day to day job of patrolling it becomes pretty boring. Day after day and you
- 33:00 don't see anyone. And so then you get lulled into this false sense of security, I don't know if they are even there. You hear them at night and you hear what's happening and you see plenty of aircraft activity overhead and whatever, but you don't see them and it is pretty hard to keep everyone's mind on the job. It is hard as an NCO, it is hard as an NCO to keep those fellows focussed on what they're doing there.
- 33:30 You know and it would be even harder if you have more authority than that. Then I guess when they start to get a few cans of beer and people start to relax a bit more. American beer, terrible Millers Pale Ale, two cans of beer was worth one can of coke.
- 34:00 Coke was more popular than beer, but we started to get a couple of cans a night and when you have got to, you have got to have something to build the morale up, whatever, keep it going because I think the morale there in those early stages got to be very low with the rain and so much to do,
- 34:30 no sleep and no chance to get your act together you know.

**Was anyone having contacts on those initial patrols?**

Yeah other companies were but we weren't. See Charlie Company had some contact and I think they had a couple of kills and we were pretty envious of that, why the hell can't we have one?

- 35:00 We were there, we wanted a run at these four or five fellows they told us about you know, they will have a hit at us and run. We thought we will give them a bit of a test and see how good they are, we had a fair bit of confidence. The other fellows in other companies mightn't want us to say this but Harry Smith had us believing we were the best, I am not saying we were, but he thought we were.
- 35:30 We were keen to have a go and Charlie company had a go and B company or someone else, why can't we? So it just, we go out day after day on patrol and come back and think God I wish we had run into someone, something of a contact. I mean we didn't something out there one day which we shouldn't have done and we never did it again, thought I won't get an opportunity. We were out there and we came across a grave and
- 36:00 a freshly dug grave and we said called back to our OC [Officer Commanding], "We found this grave." and he radioed back to battalion headquarters that we had found a grave and they gave us orders to dig it up, so we did. It was terrible, shocking, the smell and the
- 36:30 bones and the rib cage and everything came up through the dirt and it was established that this was a Viet Cong that had been hit by artillery probably two or three nights earlier and they had buried him . But we said there and then and we actually got to the stage where we refused to dig anymore. And Sharpy said, "You have got to." And I said, "You
- 37:00 can have a go but we're not doing anymore." So we made an agreement then that if we found anymore we won't report it. Because it's not the nicest job to dig one up. I guess that's we did have on contact down at Long Phuoc, but the company was spread out that far that those that did have it, we didn't
- 37:30 for that day, we were must have been the rear platoon so we didn't become involved, for those that did someone got shot up there. She was, they didn't know it was a lady but she was told to stop and she didn't and they fired over her head and she kept going and they shot her, found out she was a middle aged woman, in black or
- 38:00 whatever. But that was the closest we got to a contact. So leading up to Long Tan with all of the night ambushes that we did, and we did a lot of them, I guess we were only there from June, July, August, in terms of months it is not a long time but in terms of days and hours it is a bit of time.
- 38:30 Particularly if you're doing it every day and there is no such thing as a weekend. You know you have got this weekend off and you can go and do something else, it is just day in and day out. And very little contact the boredom started to set in a bit and yeah it was a bit hard to handle that side of it.
- 39:00 **That anticipation of waiting for something to happen and wanting something to happen I have heard likened to being the football team that trains and never gets a game?**
- I guess it would be I mean here we are, we're had all of this training and been there all of this time and nothing happens, where are they? We go different ways every day and we even camp, we go out for four and five days, take our gear, camp out there, we didn't see anyone, where are they?
- 39:30 It is RS [rat shit], here we are waiting to have a crack at them where is this war that is going on? So I would say it would be very similar to the analogy that you put up.
- How different is it sleeping when you're out on patrol for a couple of days?**
- 40:00 Well sometimes you have trouble but I don't have any. The problem I had when I was out on patrol sleeping was the snoring. I am a bit of a snorer, they reckon I am the world champion, I have heard better ones since, but I was always getting in, there were times I would take an all night ambush out, very difficult when you
- 40:30 put it in about six o'clock in the afternoon, the ambush set it all up, to stay on your stomach all night without your eyes closing. Staring into the darkness without them closing and having a bit of a snooze. Some fellows didn't sleep at all but I did. We had cords between us and
- 41:00 give them a bit of a tug to keep people awake and all of that sort of thing. I never had any trouble sleeping on the ground, I never used a tent or a hoochie [small cover used as a tent] or anything or, we didn't have sleeping bags or anything like that, just put it down on the ground. I didn't think it was too bad.

## Tape 7

- 00:30 **I mean you're talking about the routine and it was mind numbing, can you tell us about things like stand to?**
- Yeah well we had stand to in the evening and dawn every day which is not uncommon in an infantry battalion. It is the time every day when you expect that there could be some kind of attack or
- 01:00 after a while we thought the stand to was a bit of a rehearsed bit of history or something because no

one ever came near us. Yet I found out since that someone they captured or something, reckoned he crawled in there one night through the barbed wire and came in right into the camp and parked where the artillery guns were and everything else, I mean that wasn't stand to

01:30 but there would have been a piquet on he came in through the night., I guess what you didn't see, you thought well they're not here.

**How was the local defence in Nui Dat who was to the left and right of you?**

Charlie Company was to the left of us and I think Support Company was to the right of us. We went out and helped

02:00 out Charlie Company once and we went to A Company lines but we didn't go the other way.

**What were the engineers doing at Nui Dat when you got there?**

I couldn't say, I mean once we got there they must have been building an airfield or something, you could hear equipment going but we never really saw them.

02:30 We weren't taken on guided tours around the place to say this is how we're developing this place, this is what is happening. I mean they must have had a master plan somewhere but we didn't look at it. It might have been out; you know they put them up now in the shopping centres this is what we're going to build? I didn't see it.

**Down at Ba Bia. Because a lot of blokes have said it was a big base but you quite often wouldn't know what was anywhere else other than your area of responsibility?**

03:00 Had no idea. If someone had said to me, "Could you take me over to where the artillery is?" I would have to start kicking stones because I wouldn't have a clue where they were, I could hear them coming from somewhere but I wouldn't have any idea.

**And you had to do clearing patrols every night as well ?and morning?**

Yeah. Regularly clearing patrols, we had listening posts out and all of that kind of thing.

03:30 We did a lot of all night ambushes, every second night, eight of them'.

**How far out from the wire would they be?**

Oh I would be guessing probably might be a mile or something, eight hundred metres or, not that far out, on the track somewhere close to the

04:00 camp and we would be more or less told where to go and we would go out from there.

**At that stage had they established the Alpha line I think it was called around Nui Dat it was within the artillery range?**

Well if they had they hadn't told us about it.

**What sort of information were you getting?**

Very little I mean

04:30 Major Harry Smith could have been getting it, but we weren't getting much., we were told so-and-so had a contact last night with so-and-so enemy and whatever, and we would have a talk and then go back and tell the rest of the section or whatever what we had been told., but we weren't told much.

05:00 **I think clearing out that Long Phuoc village was part that Alpha line business moving the villages out, what was involved in that operation?**

It was just really smashing everything and cleaning the place out and making sure there was no one there, making sure every house had been abandoned, they had gone. I mean I think there were others there more involved than we were, we were only there for two or three days if it was that long.

**Do you know where the villages were moved to?**

05:30 We just knew they were taken and relocated. Somewhere, might have gone to Yamba.

**Did it upset the blokes to have to destroy a local village?**

Did it upset the fellows, we were just told that there was a lot of enemy in this area and they were really regarded as a

06:00 Viet Cong village and they had told them to move on or relocate or whatever and it was considered a dangerous situation to have them so close to the base camp so we just did as we were told.

**Can you remember the first time you went out on patrol and you have got live rounds and this is the grand final sort of thing how does your thinking change**

06:30 **from all of the previous times training?**



The first two or three hundred metres was a long way. It took us a long time to get there it took us a long time to move, we were all so careful there were fellows there thinking they are going to walk on and set something off, fall into a hole or there was going to be a booby trap here. That

07:00 initial patrol was everyone was pretty well keyed up. I guess that when we went out and put the live round into the breech and then away you go. At that stage there was no boredom, it was full on. We thought this is for real.

07:30 Much the same as training I would say, more intense than training because this was fair dinkum.

**Was it good in a way to get that first patrol under your belt?**

Oh yeah I mean we didn't go far on our first patrol. I mean it took us most of the day to do it to go probably three or four hundred metres,

08:00 wasn't far at all. But it was all new ground to us and probably just done to break the ice a bit I guess.

**Once like you said contacts were few and far between how did that change with the blokes when you're doing patrols that you start to think?**

Look we're not going out there. "Where are we going? We're going out where we went last week. There is no bugger out there

08:30 don't they know there, what are they doing? Why don't they send us somewhere where they are?" I said, "Well how do we know where they are? Let's go, let's do something." There were a lot of blokes starting to get pretty toey about nothing happening, I don't say all of them but some.

**Had you done any co-operative stuff with the Americans at this stage?**

09:00 No I mean in the early stages?

**Yeah.**

No not really, we only had one real exercise, I am talking our platoon, our company, where they were going to bring all of this equipment in up this road and they wanted us to cordon that road off and secure the road. So we went

09:30 in the night before and camped on this cliff sort of rough terrain it was. We roped ourselves to the side of it to trees and slept on the side of this hill, because it was all going to happen at daylight so it had to happen the night before we went in. Rain that night was unbelievable. One of the worst days you could ever put in trying to keep your grip there.

10:00 And we're all tied up with ton ropes to stay so you won't slip down and the rain is belting down on you and the next morning it was all gone. Clear, beautiful morning and look over there and there is a few monkeys in the trees. They are fascinating to watch in the wild, they are

10:30 fascinating to watch in the zoo, but you know this is really the first time we had seen monkeys. So anyway this patrol this big convoy was to come through and we had it secured and after that we went somewhere, we were told to go somewhere maybe it was some zone where they were going to lift us out or something and we came and we heard this laughter and cheering, clapping and what have you. We thought what the hell is going on?

11:00 Anyway here are these Yanks there having a game of volleyball in the bush you know. And they had some sort of a net thing hung up and all of these boys there having a game and here we were playing the, doing the serious stuff. That was probably our first encounter with them, out in the donger [the bush] and we noticed that they were a fair bit different to,

11:30 well their discipline was less than ours.

**That first way of meeting the Americans probably didn't put the blokes in a very good mindset did it?**

No, well I mean I don't think much was said except you know that I mean it had been said that they did things differently to us and you know that they

12:00 chew gum and we weren't allowed to. They make noise and carry their rifle over their shoulder and all of the rest of it. All that's hearsay until you actually see it, so I guess there was a bit of; well they're a bit different to us. Here they are playing volleyball out there and we have just secured the road, how important is it what we are doing?

**You talking about seeing all of the**

12:30 **military might in Saigon when you arrived what about in Nui Dat did you see much of the American military machine there?**

With helicopters I did, they were obviously some big operations Yanks and there were hundreds, I mean just choppers unbelievable the numbers. You could hear them coming and you think God there must be

something big happening somewhere and next thing wave after wave of these choppers would go over.

13:00 And you would think it was the end but they would just keep coming. And the size of what they do, I was an escort on a truck down to Ba Ria one day and they were building a new road and the gear they had on this new road, all of these big yellow Caterpillars they had more than all of the councils of Australia put together and they were putting down so many mile a day.

13:30 Bitumen road, they just do things in a big way and get it done. So those sorts of things, when you see them putting that highway down from Brisbane to the Gold Coast it took them some years, they did a good job but the amount of gear they had there, astounding.

**How did you feel about the gear you guys had, was it adequate?**

14:00 It appeared to be. We would have preferred just talking about rations, before we had a cooked meal we preferred our own rations to theirs but and unfortunately we didn't have those for some time. Our rifles seemed to be okay, any number of those M16s, Armalites.

14:30 M16s aren't they? We had any number of those. When you took an all night ambush out, if you took say twenty or thirty of you went out, most of them would be Armalites and M60s so you might have three or four M60s and the rest were all Armalites.

**And was that personal choice or?**

15:00 You had the choice whether you took your own but to build up fire power we insisted that we take more Armalites than SLRs. Mainly for the fire power I think more rapid. Lighter too you know.

**So you could take more ammo [ammunition] out for those too?**

More ammo and lighter.

**So what would be patrol order what would you be wearing from top to tail?**

15:30 Full gear, backpack depending on how many days out you are with your ration packs etcetera. I just forget how many rounds we took out , but it wasn't many, it wasn't enough as it turned out to be. Most of the training and requirements prior to Long Tan related to what happened in Malaya and the understanding

16:00 that we would only run into half a dozen and shoot and scoot. So we probably had a magazine in the rifle and I think we had another three, we might have had a hundred rounds. Probably four magazines and one in the rifle.

16:30 I think we used to take five hundred rounds for the M60. And so your gear and you try and pack it as light as you could. The weight would kill you.

**How bad was the humidity up there?**

Pretty bad, very

17:00 very hot. You eventually adapt to it but it takes a while. The rain that comes every day you look forward to that see, to kill some off that heat. But I didn't like all of the gear, personally, there was a fair bit of gear on your back and it

17:30 takes a bit of lugging about.

**Is that why you ditched your hoochie?**

Well I ditched those things that I didn't think were necessary, you didn't really need them.

**And as far as ration packs go would you just get your ration pack and go through and just take what you needed and ditch the rest?**

I would try and travel as light as I could yeah.

**How many water bottles would you have?**

I think I had one.

18:00 there was no problem getting water in those times, I think I carried one water, I mean I am not a big water drinker but I learnt that as a jackaroo under workplace health and safety, well if I got caught drinking water while I was in the bush by Dick Keats he would give me a kick up the backside. I am talking when we're out.

18:30 You would have a drink at lunch time and that sort of thing, and he said, "If you get lost or whatever you have got to learn to be able to go without and handle the heat." So I wasn't always swigging at the water.

**We have heard some stories about some of the training blokes had before they went where they were trying to teach blokes not to drink so much water, did you ever experience any of**

**that?**

19:00 No.

**Was it a rule of thumb with water consumption?**

I think they would say to you, hang onto your water, don't go wasting it. I mean I carried water mostly to make a brew. Not to, I mean if you wanted to, I am talking about the months I was there wasn't in the dry times, I was there when it was wet. Fast flowing

19:30 flooded streams couldn't be poisonous you know, you wouldn't drink still water but fast flowing you could get all the water you wanted. So all I did was have one water bottle for brew.

**On nights where it just poured rain all night was it cold?**

No not really,

20:00 it is pretty warm, humid.

**So you could be totally wet and it wouldn't bother you too much?**

No that's what I am saying you would dry out pretty quickly. No it wasn't as though you would get the shivers or anything like that, uncomfortable but not I mean you learnt to live with it.

**Did that wetness or humidity affect clothing or weapons or anything like that?**

Well clothing

20:30 the main problem was really your feet and keeping your feet dry. Very important part of foot slogging your feet. So keeping them dry and shirts, our quartermaster sergeant, gee he was tight wouldn't give you anything.

21:00 He wouldn't give you any new gear or what have you until it was ripped. After mud and slush and what have you they get grubby and so it wasn't hard to get them ripped, just go along the wire. And just take it up to him,, "How did you do that?" "Going out through the wire." So he would give you a new one. So he wasn't tight that way

21:30 but it had to be badly damaged before you got it.

**And did you do some escort work with the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carrier] ?**

Yeah we did a few days with them, that was a like a holiday actually because everywhere you went I think most platoons got a few days down there and that was part of the training,

22:00 part of the getting used to working with them.

**Where was that?**

At Nui Dat. Where it was in Nui Dat I couldn't tell you but it was fairly close to the base but it was in the confines of Nui Dat base, they were based there, and we went down as escorts and we went down to Vung Tau and we went down as escorts

22:30 and every morning we would go and clear the dump. There was a dump for the base and all of the town dogs from the village just down the road would come up to the dump and they had mines just placed outside the wire and whatever and the dogs would come up and set a mine off or whatever, and that was a waste so we had to clear the dump of the dogs and every morning there would be a dog killed.

23:00 And they would get up there on those fifty cal's [.50 calibre] and boom, boom, boom. Blow dogs around the place, yeah.

**So on escort duty with the APCs what would happen if you got bumped with the APCs?**

If we got hit? Well there was one that was hit while we were there I wasn't on it, it must have hit some sort of a, it wasn't a large mine but a mine and it went over

23:30 in the air a bit and a couple of fellows sitting on the top got thrown off and one got a hurt back and spent a bit of time in hospital before he was brought back. And then of course everyone went to ground and formed a sort of a perimeter and in case there was any attack on them and they had these fifty cal machine guns

24:00 up there but that wasn't the case at the time. I wasn't with them, when they were.

**Was the drill for them to go into a harbour position?**

Yeah.

**And then you would be outside that harbour position?**

Yeah.

**So how many blokes would go out with the APCs?**

Well I think when we were there only the platoon went down as, how many APCs

24:30 were there I am not sure, probably thirty of us or something down there, at any one time you're never at full strength there is always someone away doing a language course or someone crook, or people sick, or doing some course away, so you never ever have your full strength. So maybe there is thirty of us down there, I don't know how many APCs in

25:00 the troop there are, might have been three or four to each one or something like that.

**And it was always riding on top?**

Most of it yeah.

**Never inside?**

Sometimes inside.

**It must get pretty hot in those things I would imagine?**

I don't remember ever going, we were only there for a few days but I don't remember ever going any distance inside, we did here.

25:30 in training in Australia.

**Did you feel safer with the APCs?**

A fair bit. They had a bit of fire power and there was a fair bit of metal around them wasn't there? Steel and they can manoeuvre in and around and about; they can get through that slush.

26:00 I would take ride in an APC better than walking any day.

**Being 2IC of the section would you ever be forward scout?**

Myself ? Occasionally. Well you have got to keep your eyes and ears open. I prefer not to be.

26:30 **Think it would be the worst spot in the patrol?**

Well that or the last, Tailend Charlie, that's nearly as bad isn't it? Walking around watching behind. I think that's one of the worst spots.

**When you weren't there you would be closer to the M60?**

Yeah.

**Did you ever consider that that could be a nasty spot because they draw fire as well?**

Yeah but Australians are taught to

27:00 spread out fairly well so it is not as if you are on top of each other, there is always a few metres between each soldier. They don't you know hug each other, there is a bit of room. The, I forget now how long it was but I became a section commander there before probably the beginning of August so they

27:30 changed things a bit again.

**Before Long Tan had you had any contacts?**

No. No contacts.

**Had you found evidence of enemy in the areas you were patrolling?**

We found rice and we found a tunnel one day, we didn't find it somebody else did

28:00 but then the engineers came and they went down and came back up and they wanted someone else to go down they came to a junction in this tunnel and they wanted someone to come and wait at the tunnel. I went down in that. That was pretty scary that, I didn't go in a great distance but only that the junction would have been

28:30 fifteen feet from where this thing was, but it was dark, black as the inside of a dog, it was dark. And I was pleased to get out of that. They didn't find anything and there was a lot of strange noises and what have you, maybe rats running inside the tunnel.

**How confined is it inside the tunnel?**

There was a bit of room where I was but it gradually, according to these other fellows, got smaller where you had to crouch and go through.

29:00 Where I was you couldn't stand up but bend over and you were right.

**Did you have to take a pistol with you or anything?**

Yeah.

**Torch?**

Yeah, no we didn't carry torches they had torches. I just went down and they said, "You wait here."

**How hairy was that?**

It wasn't much fun. I could see the torches coming back, it was them, it was pretty scary stuff.

**And do you have to back out or is there enough room to turn around?**

29:30 No there is enough room to turn around. So I was hopeful to never having to go down one of those again. We found tracks and things where they had been and I mean we weren't back trackers but we knew that there had been there, and one patrol we came across where there had

30:00 been a fire not long ago. The ashes weren't hot, but they weren't there from the prior day because the rain had come, they were there from obviously there that morning because if it had have rained the ash would have obviously been a lot different to what it was. We knew they were there but we didn't see them.

30:30 **In retrospect when you look back and the days or months before Long Tan does it surprise you that the guys were itching for a fight?**

No it doesn't surprise me at all; I was one of them I wanted to have a go. We had come all of this way over here and wouldn't it be terrible if you spent the twelve months there and you came back, "What was it like?" "I didn't see anyone." That would be shocking.

31:00 Be like going on tour wouldn't it and not playing a game? I don't think if you were in infantry you want to come back and say well I read about it.

**So blokes are going out of their mind preparing the defences at Nui Dat patrolling and that sort of business was there any reprieve from that at all?**

31:30 Very little. We had a couple of concerts in the company; put a tent up, big night on the grog, Kiwis came over, a few of them. Few blokes got up and did a few things, told a few yarns; I did a bit of that.

**What did you do?**

I told a few jokes and I used to take people off you know?

32:00 I don't do it these days but I used to study people their different actions, and the way they spoke and held their mouth and different things they did. It was just little things and if you added them all up everyone has got their different personalities, you can make a good story out of some of them.

32:30 Jack Kirby he was one of them he was a big fellow he used to blunder around all over the place and I would take him off and him and the CO would just bust themselves because it was just him to a tee and just different ones. Sometimes they wouldn't wake up until who you were doing and then suddenly it would strike them so it might have taken them just a few minutes

33:00 and then you would only have to say a couple of words, they would use one particular word all of the time and you would throw that in. Throw it in six or seven times where it didn't matter but it sort of added to that, that's how we had our fun and that's about it really.

**Did you notice humour being used as a bandaid for blokes who were having a tough time?**

Yeah I reckon

33:30 Australians are pretty good at it. It is what gets you through. I think it is one of our strongest points. I think it is something that we have got that is the envy of a lot of countries. We can make something light-hearted when it is really bloody tough you know.

**How similar or different were we to the Kiwis?**

34:00 Funny thing that the other day on Anzac Day someone said there is a very close alliance between the Kiwis and Australians, they get on so well, I don't think they do. They used the word Anzac and that's fine but Australians don't like Kiwis and Kiwis don't like Australians. They hate each other and that night when they came over

34:30 for a beer it wasn't long before there was a big blue [fight] there, you know bang, bang and a few go over. Party is over, go home finished. There is no real love there, they don't like us and we don't like them I don't see that changing. Does that answer your question?

**Pretty much. Was there a general beer ration for?**

Yeah two cans a night.

35:00 When you're in base, in Nui Dat you can't take them out on all night patrols. Would have been good

wouldn't it? Could have slept a bit better. But there are beer rations and then we started to get Fosters and Queenslanders they drink XXXX you know, but then after the Fosters we got the Swan which is not a bad beer. Everyone was happy.

35:30 I mean they did have a few nights when you got more than two, not very often though. They realised, these blokes are getting pretty toey we have got to ease them down a bit you know.

**Did you ever see any blokes go troppo [crazy]?**

I don't know whether I noticed them going troppo, I think some of them were full time troppo.

36:00 They were, I don't know if I saw any go troppo, some used to get really aggro [aggressive] about little things. But I suppose, mail was very important. I saw fellows there getting pretty anxious there if they weren't getting letters. When they talked about putting

36:30 that, what's happening in Australia and we're over there and started to talk about Save our Sons [a protest movement] started to gather speed and the post office talked about holding over mail to the troops and that, that didn't go over too well. And so there was a thing going around when we go back punch a postie, that was the motto, punch a postie and fix them all up you know.

37:00 And so because when you got mail that was your only real contact with home. We had radio there, Radio Australia, we had that other mad bugger from the states that they did that film on, Good Morning Vietnam. And so we kept in contact like that and my parents I used to get papers over, they might be a couple of weeks old but at least you kept in touch.

37:30 with what was happening. So you would write to as many people as you could particularly the girls, you would write to as many girls as you could you tell them all that you love them and they would all write back hopefully, can't wait to get home and see you. And it was a bit of a competition, how many letters? "How many did you get today?" "I got eight. How many did you get?"

38:00 and you would tell him you got ten but you only had about four. You would write to people you hadn't spoken to for years just to see if they would write back. You might only write a few lines, every now and then you would get a bit of time to write a note and post off a letter. Mail times, bit like in the bush, mail comes once a week in the bush and the mail truck arrived Sunday night and this is how you keep in

38:30 contact with what's going on. Can I tell you a funny story about listening to the radio, we were listening to the radio and there was a chap there that owned a couple of blocks on Bribie Island and he had never owned anything in his life. And he put a deposit on them before he went to Vietnam and this bloke wouldn't have one civilian shirt, he had been in the army all of

39:00 his life, he didn't own anything and he loved beer and a good fellow. Really was a good bloke, but he put the deposits on these two blocks of land over here. Bribie is unknown in 1966. So he told a fellow, I he said, "I don't want anyone to know this, I am paying it off while I am over here, I am getting all of my pay to go there, I don't want anyone to know this but

39:30 I have bought two blocks of land on Bribie Island I have never owned anything in my life. I am going to make a killing out of this. Don't tell it to any of these buggers here." So this fellow comes back and he told us see? So we set him up. We were able by this stage to get a little mess going, we got the dioxies out and having a cooked breakfast and teed up two or three of us and said,

40:00 "Anyone listen to Radio Australia this morning?" and a fellow said, "Yeah I did." "What happened?" and he said, "Oh not much." "There must have been something happened." "Oh yeah", he said, "There was an earthquake down the eastern seaboard of Australia." "Jesus. Never heard of earthquakes in that part of Australia, any damage?" "Oh yeah, there was some damage." "Whereabouts?" He said, "You know Bribie Island?" "Yeah." And this Laurie sat up and stopped eating, he said, "Yeah."

40:30 "Apparently it has just disappeared. It has gone underwater with the earthquake. Must be a terrible lot of damage." And people said, "What do you know people there Laurie?" "No I don't know anyone." He still wouldn't let on that he owned these two blocks, we had him for three days, couldn't eat, all of this money he was paying off and it was all underwater, shocking.

## Tape 8

00:30 **So we have spoken a fair bit about the guys being itchy for a contact, immediately before Long Tan, like in the couple of days beforehand were there any indication that something big was going to happen?**

Yeah there was. Long Tan happened on the 18th of August 1966 a Thursday.

01:00 On the Tuesday night we were over in A Company lines and they were out on a patrol, our platoon was over there securing that whilst they were away. And that was the night the task force got mortared, and we heard the mortars coming in

- 01:30 we didn't have any idea where they were landing. We heard some explosions etcetera. It wasn't until midday the next day that we found out that they had hit the artillery and some were wounded, I am not sure someone might have been killed that night. And all sorts of rumours occur in those sort of things, one or two became twenty or thirty.
- 02:00 So we knew that something was on, that was the first time that they had actually started to hit us. We were taken out of there the next morning and went back to our D Company lines. And of course everyone is
- 02:30 getting excited with Col Joye and Little Pattie coming [to entertain the Australian troops], that is going to be on the Thursday, something to look forward to and that will be good, break the rhythm of this boredom, we can go to the concert. And we were told on the Thursday morning about seven thirty or something that we would be going out to
- 03:00 replace B company. I think they found the base plates of the mortars and A company was returning to base and B company was out looking for these base plates and found them and we were going to go out and take over from them. That just pissed everyone off; they didn't like that at all. I mean I don't think it was who was coming, it could
- 03:30 have been any entertainer, just the fact that it was going to be something different from what we were doing. So there was a fair bit of groans and what have you going on that morning when we were told to get our gear together, rations for a couple of days and this is what we were doing, we would be the ones to miss out
- 04:00 and so everyone had the shits. That's how we left the base camp, everyone with the shits. Not thinking about haven't had a contact, but thinking why us?

**With the base being so large and being basically somewhat confined to your little area did you ever get to**

- 04:30 **see the damage of the base being mortared?**

No. No opportunity at all. We were pretty busy the next morning; we had some new reinforcements come in that morning. And when the word comes that you are going out you don't have much time you have got to get your gear ready. You may have had a letter that you just want to finish off and get out in the mail. All of the little things, it is not like going on holidays

- 05:00 but you have got to get things prepared and think about what your job is. Who is going? Have you got a couple crook? So and so went to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and he has come back, is he right? Who is taking the gun this time; he might have been the machine gunner who is not there so you take the machine gun. You're thinking about all of these different things.

- 05:30 Even if we weren't going away we wouldn't have been able to go away and see the damage.

**What briefing were you given in terms of the mortar bases being found?**

Major Smith probably had a better briefing. We were just told that they had come across the base plates and we would be going out and doing patrols

- 06:00 from there. Whether at that time they had other information or not I wasn't aware. We don't get told those things so I couldn't say.

**So heading out that day you were thinking at the very most you would run into half a dozen of them?**

Not thinking any more. Thinking more about,

- 06:30 I had eight men that day in the section, two away and a new soldier, Private Frank Top just marched in that morning. So you stick a little bit with him, this is his first patrol; we have done heaps and find it all pretty boring. Frank is new and he is pretty tense, so you're trying to calm him down,

- 07:00 and make him feel a bit at ease, part of the team. I mean you're not going along to give him a cuddle but you say a few things to him, "How you going Frank? Keep an eye on this area out here." Give a bit of guidance to him. So that's what, but most of them were probably thinking why us?

- 07:30 Why are we missing out? I mean I wasn't worried about missing out on Little Pattie, have you heard her sing? Col Joye God strike it wouldn't matter, Lucky Grills or someone might have been better entertainment, but they were selling records and we weren't. It was

- 08:00 this concert see? After what had occurred and the monotony.

**And so can you walk us through what happened once you went out on patrol?**

Well it wasn't it took us a little while to get to B company and we didn't get there until, we replaced them at twelve thirty, thirteen hundred hours and

08:30 they more or less filed past us on the way back to the base. We all knew different ones, didn't know them all and sometimes it was a wink, and sometimes, "How are you mate?" They told us to brew up and what have you we would be patrolling after this. And so obviously

09:00 Harry Smith and the CO of B Company had some type of a meeting there and whilst they did that we had a brew up and I sat down with Frank and had lunch. "Where do you come from?" "Laystone Creek." Which I had never heard of really, near Gatton and he is from a large family, just get to know him and make it easier, that's part of the job isn't it? And that's what we did.

09:30 So after lunch we said, "We're going to head up here and the company is going to have a patrol through here and 11 Platoon is going to lead." Which is the platoon I am in and I was section commander of 6 Section. I know it wasn't us, but there was another section in the lead and probably not long

10:00 after, only fifteen minutes or so after we headed out, probably thirteen forty or fifty or something roughly. And there was gunfire at the front and they yelled out, "Contact." And they made contact and everyone went to ground facing

10:30 out different ways. And the platoon commander went up and talked to the sergeant, he was up early in the lead. They said there was three or four enemy and they thought that they had shot one. And the message was all radioed back to company headquarters. And they said there was, they

11:00 looked around and saw that there was some blood trails and so artillery was called into a certain area to try and cut those three or four running away. And that would take place, we were told there would be an artillery barrage coming in and following that we would break into extend the line and go through and search.

11:30 So that happened and following that we were put out in an extended line and 6 Section was on the extreme left of 11 Platoon. And so you have got 11 Platoon on the right flank, and I think 10 on the left, company headquarters in the middle and 12 behind. So we head through this young rubber, not all that

12:00 thick. I don't know how to tell the age of rubber, but it was fairly young. And a fair bit of undergrowth so it has not been tended and we head through and my section is on the left and we have probably only gone a hundred metres and we came under just unbelievable fire. Rifle fire, machine gun

12:30 everything. And the noise just broke open. And we went to ground. We had obviously hit them first; my section on the left and I don't believe it was an ambush. My own personal belief is that they saw us, they were there, and they set up very

13:00 quickly. It was instantaneous what they did, they weren't there waiting to draw us into the trap. That's my belief. We all went to ground and returned fire. A lot of noise, yelling, confusion. And I mean it is hard to describe noise, but it is pretty hard to speak when all of this is happening,

13:30 and you try and return fire. So we go to ground and I thought this has got to be more than three or four blokes and I look up and I am taking aim firing and there is a line of them coming towards us. And I thought God! What's happening? This is not in the book? I haven't been told about this, there looks to be hundreds of them.

14:00 And I said, "I have got to get these blokes back in, they can't be spread out like we are." There is a lot of room between us, there is metres between us we were well spread out, so of the eight of us and I am back near the gun, although I had a 2 IC but the way we were leading, the guns on the right and I am more or less in the middle I have got to get these fellows out, so I ran

14:30 out that way and took a couple of dives and what have you and got out and I yelled out, "Where's Doug Sulveron?" was on the far left. And they yelled out, "He is dead." I said, "Where's Shorty Thomas?" and they said, "He is killed also." They said, "We saw it." It must have been when they walked into it; they must have got shot immediately. So I said, "Well where's Kenny Gant?" And they said, "He's dead too." So I couldn't bring them back, it just happened like that.

15:00 So I crawled back to where the gun was and the gunner got killed and I saw him get killed, bullet go bang, straight through there. And then Warren Mitchell, he is his 2 IC on the gun he takes the gun over and I am going across towards the gun and he is firing and I am going across to help keep the belt going through. And I am going across and that's when I got hit. And Warren gets hit; he gets shot and killed at the same time.

15:30 That's my best recollection. I mean this didn't all happen within a couple of minutes, it happened over a period of time so then I got hit and felt funny. Never been shot before so is that what it feels like? I look down and there is blood through the shirt and then it started to pour rain

16:00 and all of a sudden there is all of this rain occurring. Heavy rain. And these fellows are still coming towards us and someone yelled out that Sharpy was dead and next thing Bob Buick takes over the platoon, he was the sergeant. He yelled out

16:30 that artillery was coming in and the artillery started and it just never let up. You could hear it coming through the trees and next you would see a tree just lift up and bodies. Round after round it just went on. I mean it was hard to hear before the artillery but now you have got machine gun rattling and sniper



firing tracers, I mean tracer fire

- 17:00 racing through the air everywhere. I thought we were dead set gone then. I thought there was no way we were going to get out of this. You don't think a lot about that but it does cross your mind, so I started to say the Lord's Prayer, I thought I am buggered here. And every time I would get a few lines out I couldn't think of the next one and so I would have to start again.
- 17:30 I would try and get through it and then something would interrupt you, I don't think I ever got through it. I might have started a hundred times and I never got through it. And I thought isn't it funny how when you get really in strife, I am not a religious bloke. I only know the Lord's Prayer, I went to Sunday school, mother insisted on it, and I am trying to remember the Lord's Prayer from years ago, when you're in strife you grab some of those things.
- 18:00 So all around us was just unbelievable what's going on. So I played dead for a while. I looked out and there was probably half a dozen or ten of them this tree had been blown up and was lying on its side and I saw them behind this tree and that's when I got the grenade out, I thought I am not going to
- 18:30 go with them. The first thing I thought of was that thing they showed us where they had those American soldiers and what they did to them; I thought I am not going to go with them. I took the pin out and I just lay with it under my stomach put it under with this hand. And I thought well if I get some of them to go with me would be better, but I am not going with them. I am the only one I think in my section alive.
- 19:00 There is no one else, there is no one here alive, they're all dead out there. I didn't find out until two or three days later but Jimmy Richmond had been hit but he was found the next day, he was alive. So what do you do? You can't hear anyone. Not much point, I have got this arm I don't know how bad it is, I am not even game to look at it, it's sort of down at the side throbbing a bit.
- 19:30 What do we do? So the next thing they yell out, "Everyone for yourself. "And I see fellows taking off, I thought Christ, there is this big heavy pack which I have lightened as much as I could to get up get up with this grenade and I took off and I threw the grenade, threw it away and I went across and I had this back
- 20:00 pack on and I went to ground and Alec Grant crawled over and he said, "Do you want a hand with that mate?" I said, "I can't get it off." And he was getting it off and he got shot while he was doing it. Straight through here and what do you do? So he helped me you know got the pack off. Blokes were running, where do you run? Which way do you go? Absolute mayhem you know.
- 20:30 All of the training we had and not this, they didn't teach you everything. So you just get up and bloody run and next thing you fall down and then get up and run and then fall down. Hopefully when I was running away that's when I got hit in the hand with a bit of shrapnel or something, probably from the artillery they were using mortars too. And it actually felt worse than the elbow.
- 21:00 So I put my hand away and I didn't want to look at that, I thought all of my fingers were gone, it just felt as though they had. They were there, but I mean I couldn't feel them just across there, so I didn't want to look at that, I would rather look away. And then I got into this bit of a gully and there was a medic there and I said, "Have you got something for this? Morphine whatever?" And he said, he was pretty low.
- 21:30 He gave me a shot and while he was giving me a shot he got hit. Then he was screaming he wanted some. I said, "You reckon you didn't have enough before and now you want it for your bloody self!" Anyway that's just how things happen, supposed to be some of the humour of the day. Following that, all of the
- 22:00 artillery is still going on, all of these shells still coming in, it hasn't slackened off at all. Don't know where anyone else is. Probably because we were together at least we were alive we thought we were a better show now of getting out of here. And not looking back really from where we had come but looking more to where we were going and hopeful we were going the right way.
- 22:30 And next thing a smoke grenade went off and we were hopeful that was the right way to go, that was 12 Platoon letting a smoke grenade go. And they must have seen some coming back and so they let a smoke grenade go and that's the way we went like Carl Lewis [Olympic sprinter], straight through. And we got into the base which was a company headquarters in this rubber and
- 23:00 dodge and just run and get in there and I felt as though I was secure then. I had that immense feeling of we have made it. we are out of that bloody terrible thing we have been through and we're there and really the dangers were all still there it wasn't over, but when there is more of you it makes you feel safe I think.
- 23:30 So that's the way we were wandering around in a daze pretty happy to be back in here, Kirby came over and knocked me arse over head, big Jack Kirby, more or less lay on me and said, "Get down you stupid bugger!" I said, "Get off me, if they don't kill me you will!" The weight of him. And he was running around organising things, and anyway he got all of the wounded up on this one bit of a
- 24:00 knoll in the rubber, all of the wounded were assembled there and they re-enforced the perimeter as much as they could. That's when they had the ammunition drop, I didn't know we were out of ammo, I

didn't know all of that, you don't know what's going on. You don't know what's going on in the base, you have got no idea what's going on elsewhere. I didn't really know what went on in other areas until I read a book on it.

- 24:30 Years later, in the 1980s, I mean we didn't talk about it much afterwards, that's another story I guess, when you come home and go different ways. In fact I came home early too, the other fellows didn't come home until the end of the three sixty five days or whatever, so when they got home they were discharged the next day and we didn't get a chance and we
- 25:00 didn't really get together for twenty odd years, so there was a lot we didn't know. Often used to think about it, what did they do? Where were they? What happened? So anyway we're back in this base and they drop this ammo in and Jack Kirby is running around distributing it everywhere, they learnt a lot of lessons out of this. Because they dropped it in and everything was still packed, done up and they had the break the seals,
- 25:30 they had five hundred rounds for the M 60 when we went out there, they never ever did that again. They learnt a lot from Long Tan about what they would need in the future. And I guess I was sitting there, I was sitting there with a mate, he crawled over to see how I was going and he said, "Have you got any cigarettes?" and I said, "You don't smoke." And he said, "I am going to now." And he lit up a
- 26:00 it was a Salem, in these US ration packs they had these Salem cigarettes so I gave him a packet and he didn't think it was too bad. Anyway a little bit later the firing is still going on and it is still raining, getting black and it is probably about five o'clock or something six o'clock. Four o'clock,
- 26:30 three to four was really the height of the, when all of this happening. Five o'clock it is starting to ease off a bit and then the APC got there you could see the lights coming and the roar of the engines. They came in and unbeknownst to us they were formed up ready for a final assault on us and they came in and because of the rain and the artillery and everything they didn't hear them come up behind them and they just mowed them down.
- 27:00 And come through I mean without the artillery and the APCs that day there was no way in the world we would have got out of there that day. I mean you get a bit of luck now and then, might have had a bit of luck with the Crown and Anchor but nothing as much as what I had that day getting out of there should never have got out.
- 27:30 Luck, fate.

#### **So what happened once the APCs arrived?**

Well they of course brought A company back out with them and we must have all realised then that we were

- 28:00 pretty right then because the enemy, the firing artillery was still going in the direction they were supposedly heading the enemy, but the APCs and A company cleaned up a lot of those fellows. But the rifle fire had ceased and so I guess we felt well you're not thinking all that straight.
- 28:30 I am talking about myself, I am probably lapsing in and out, it has been a pretty horrendous set up for a while, so you have got a feeling of relief that you're there and disbelief at what's just happened. So I guess that you think that it is all over and there is spasmodic rifle fire and
- 29:00 intermittent rifle fire every now and then. But really you could say that the guts of the fighting was over. So there is medics going around and tending the wounded that are the worst and whatever, and the APCs they come in and set them up as more or less emergency hospitals. Open the trap door, the back down so they have got
- 29:30 the worst in there working on them. Obviously they are thinking what are we going to do? How are we going to get them out of here? In choppers or? I think the rain started to ease a bit then. Probably the heaviest rain we have seen or experienced ever that afternoon.
- 30:00 And we have got to find an area to medivac these people out, I am not thinking of this but someone has to be. And time meant nothing to me, I don't know how long it took, I think I had a nap, I was probably asleep for a while. I know that someone told us that they were out
- 30:30 chopping an area and they were going to bring the choppers in. They were out chopping timber; I don't think they wanted to move us too far from where we were, night and security reasons with the enemy and all of the rest of it. And so they went out and all I can remember is the choppers coming in and they moved us to the edge of that area and the APCs came into
- 31:00 in the corners and shined the lights in so that they knew where the area was to land on and in they came. They took the worst first and I went on a chopper I don't know who went to Vung Tau with me. But it was a pretty good trip. One of the best rides of the war. I guess you're thinking about how lucky you are.
- 31:30 But it is just a sense of relief that you're in the air and away you go. So I get down to 36 Evac [evacuation Hospital], by this time it is probably midnight. So we get out of the chopper and each

person had a team and they more or less put you on a stretcher and more or less whisked you into a

32:00 room, here was this room just inside the doorway of this hospital and all of these tables and things and they put you in there and big scissors this long and she just got up this nurse and cut all of the clothing off you and cut down your boots and brought around a trolley and threw the clothes and everything into there

32:30 and then they started to clean you up, get the mud and stuff off you. That's about as much as I can remember. I can remember them giving me a needle and half dozey you go into the operating theatre and it is like MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] here they are all of these doctors and things hanging out everywhere, operating on any number of people at one time, teams of doctors working and fixing people up, all American doctors.

33:00 Young fellows, our age and whatever. And so you're there and next thing you're put to it and wake up the next day and here you are in plaster or whatever and you really only know what you have done or where you have been and you don't know much else. And then it starts to sink in, you start to talk to others

33:30 about how did so and so get on. You don't know about his section or whatever, who did you lose? And he doesn't necessarily know so there is a lot of anxiety about who made it and who didn't. What's happened since? Did they come back the next morning? You just don't know. Well I

34:00 knew that I was going home. And that was a relief. Here we were wanting to bump into them and have a bit of a crack at them, but I didn't want to have another go, I thought that's enough. But also when they came down the company came down to see us a couple of days later, they were given leave

34:30 and they came down to the hospital and we found out, it was a pretty sad time actually we found out who, and that was when it was confirmed who had been killed, a lot of it we didn't know, tried to find out but it was all unconfirmed. And those fellows there to look at you, they were mates and you were going home and you could see the look in their eye

35:00 they had to stay on and they had just been through this bloody terrible experience and they were looking at me, gee you're a lucky bugger, you're going home and I could see that look in their eyes. Yeah so there was a bit of sadness about leaving them, but also there was excitement, well not excitement so much but relief that I at least was home bound.

35:30 **At what point you were saying that you were running along not wanting to look at your injuries, at what point had you had a look to see?**

I got the medic to when he came across in that gully, I said, "I have been hit in the hand, how bad is it?" And he said, "Doesn't look too bad at all." I said, "Well I can't feel my fingers?" And he said, "No they are all still there."

**When you first went out**

36:00 **and the lead section had the contact with the three or four enemy at that point when you were thinking that was all that was going to eventuate, do you remember wishing that you had been up there?**

I was I recall that I wished we could have a crack at them before they brought the artillery in, let's go and have a go. Don't muck around waiting for the artillery, let's spread out now and have a crack at it.

36:30 **And when you were talking about when you realised there was enemy en masse and your section was spread out and you wanted to get them all in, what sort of distance are we talking that you were spread out?**

I would say at least five to six metres between each man,

37:00 about eighteen foot or something I think, yeah about that far. So there is a fair spread on them, some of them might have been further because there is no line to march on there is some ideas of being spread out are different to others, so there could have been a fair gap between some of the fellows.

**You listed off some names before for us, what had happened to Frank Top?**

37:30 Frank Top I didn't realise, I said about Dougie Sulveron and Kenny Gant and Warren Mitchell and those but I found out I mean he was obviously dead, I neglected to say his name before, someone yelled out, "They're all dead out there."

38:00 I mean you just had to take it. When they said that they were all dead I thought Jimmy Richmond was dead too. And you know that was unbelievable when we found out he wasn't. I will tell you a story a bit later when he was getting a little bit better in hospital, I just couldn't believe how lucky we were,

38:30 at least one of them had been found the next day still alive.

**Do you want to tell us that story now?**

Well it is just a humorous story. Jim he had half of his lung blown away and he lay in the mud and he

copped artillery all through his back and lost half of his lung and he stooped the bleeding by rubbing his back into the mud and lay there all night and

- 39:00 it would have been a terrifying night out there, they found two out there the next day, Jim was one of them, he never had anything through his mouth for probably twelve fourteen months, he was fed through a drip and he had all of these tubes and they allowed us to go up and see him, he was in intensive care at
- 39:30 36 Evac Hospital. We went up there and he couldn't talk to us really. Terrible. Later on he was shipped back. Years after when I was talking to him about it and he said there was an American general doing a tour of the hospital going around cheering up the troops
- 40:00 handing out a few Purple Hearts [American medal] and he came across Jim and he said, "Don't worry guy you're looking fine. These doctors tell me it won't be long before they will have all of these tubes out of you and you can go back and have another crack at them." Jim thought, 'I wonder if he is real? Another crack? I don't feel that good.
- 40:30 So I thought the doctor was saying I might come good and I could go back and I wanted to go home like you did. So I was trying to make out I was worse every day.' He didn't have to make up a story that there was anything wrong with him, he was no show. Just a bit of, you know how they think.

## Tape 9

- 00:30 **From things I have read I have heard stories about how you would hear the concert when you were on the edge of the rubber plantation was that true?**
- On the way out we could hear it. We could hear some of the music and whatever. You could hear it drifting across the paddock
- 01:00 but that was. I thought the concert was in the afternoon but sometimes they do have those warm-ups that take a while don't they? Could have been just part of that, the tuning in and test, test, tuning in.
- That must have almost been like a second wound again to the blokes who were pissed off about leaving?**
- Yeah.
- During the actual battle what was the visibility like?**
- Difficult with the rain
- 01:30 but that was to our advantage really as it turned out. When they first started to attack us in the line, when I first saw them that was probably a hundred metres away, the visibility would have got down to only twenty or thirty
- 02:00 feet when you're in the heavy rain. And I mean not only have you got rain you have got smoke from all of the artillery, there is a lot of smoke attached and tracer bullets, visibility is pretty ordinary. And you had the rubber and everything else,
- 02:30 the foliage is high it is pretty high.
- And your greens pretty much turn black when they get wet I imagine?**
- Well they are a very dark green aren't they? Never really noticed that but they would be pretty black.
- In that sort of chaos is it easy to tell enemy from friend and that sort of thing?**
- 03:00 Well it was fairly easy for us because they weren't wearing black which surprised us. They were wearing khaki. And I mean we had never been told about this, they were the North Vietnamese soldiers, the black pyjama clad crew they were there too, not in front of us, I heard after they were somewhere else. But we ran into the regular soldiers
- 03:30 and they were in uniform. In khaki so it was a bit strange.
- Through your normal day to day patrolling what sort of enemy lines had you expected to come across?**
- Black pyjama clad, thongs made out of old tyres and I mean rough equipment. And here we are we saw this and
- 04:00 I just couldn't believe it? Who are they and where are they coming from? Bugles blowing, well equipped.
- What sort of impact? I mean you have got all of the sounds of the battle but the bugle does**

**that send a shiver?**

It's pretty scary a bugle, you don't really know what they mean, I don't recall anyone telling us

04:30 about bugles. That's how they direct their troops. Bugle calls and all of the rest of it. I don't remember receiving any training on that, whether we had had training or not, whether that would have assisted I don't know but it would have clarified, made it easier if we knew what was happening. It was pretty scary the bugle.

**Had you ever done any training with the artillery? I mean at such a close range?**

05:00 No never. And I mean to see it come in so close, Bob Buick did a magnificent job bringing the artillery in that day, you know he walked it in and yeah he really more or less called it in nearly on top of us, without it we were a no show.

**Did you expect that it would come in as close as it did?**

Not really

05:30 because I didn't know that he was doing that, he wasn't saying, "I will give it a go over here." He was busy enough on the radio, he lost his radio operator he was shot, he would have been busy enough to get them to come in, in the right areas. Because as they charged, wave after wave, the artillery was picking them up. Some of that would be a bit arsy too but there is a fair bit of skill in it.

06:00 **Prior to that what was the feeling towards the artillery guys from the infantry guys?**

No ill feeling, I think there was in other times, particularly in February 1967 there was a few problems, but no real hassles with artillery guys when I was there. I can't ever recall anyone saying anything about them.

06:30 I can only praise them for the job they did there. There was a few mistakes made in early 1967 and cost a few blokes their lives, but that's part of war, that happens.

**After the initial contact was it actually thought that you were receiving fire from within the trees as well?**

07:00 I was one of the first to think that that we were copping it out of the trees and that they were strapped in there because I am pretty sure we shot some of them in the trees and they didn't drop out. That's one of the hardest things when you're shooting someone is knowing that you actually hit them. When you go to the gallery at the show, bang and you hear the bells,

07:30 or if you go roo shooting or pig shooting and you hit a pig or a roo and the pig or the roo drops, but if you shoot someone you don't know whether they went down or went down intentionally and they are going to get up again, so you can't actually say well I have got that covered because they can come at you again. So whether they were shot or in the trees I don't know but we certainly believe that they were in the trees.

08:00 **From the very first contact did the training just automatically take over?**

I would say so, I mean unfortunately our section got hit pretty quick so there wasn't a lot of time to put in place the things that we had trained for months to do. It wasn't an ambush but left

08:30 handed section 11 Platoon copped it first and bang unawares, I mean you're going through looking for these three or four blokes and all hell opened up. So you know there wasn't a lot of opportunity to display any real training skills or whatever there. Okay the gun, you can keep putting the bullets through or whatever and if they jam

09:00 or whatever you can clear that but unfortunately most of my section was wiped out pretty quick.

**Did you have any problems with your weapon at that time?**

No.

**And seeing that number of enemy were you instantly concerned about the amount of ammunition you had?**

I was concerned that I couldn't get the shots away quick or often enough.

09:30 We mightn't have the firepower that was required. I don't know whether I said to myself, "We haven't got enough." Even though I saw a line here and they were coming towards us, I wasn't aware that they were out there too, you know? I wasn't aware they were coming that way, I thought well maybe we'll just get them here, you don't know,

10:00 you have got your own little patch here, you can hear things going on but you don't really know what it is, there is a fair bit of confusion you know? They had the element of surprise really. They had the upper hand, when they opened up on us they had everything going for them, if they had only realised the force that we were,

10:30 they had no idea, couldn't have, we were only a hundred, hundred and twenty or something and they were a force of two and a half thousand. If they had have known that early they could have got in there and wiped us out. The fact of the rain, the artillery and the spread out we had, not just in 11 platoon but between 11, 10 and 12 they didn't seize the opportunity, they missed it.

11:00 And I guess the artillery coming in sort of blew them away a bit.

**Do you think the discipline of the Australian soldier and the way we conducted ourselves in a situation like that also was a factor in fooling them into thinking we had a larger force?**

Well I don't think they understood our tactics. I mean they were a well drilled army the North Vietnamese, they would have had

11:30 good knowledge of how the Americans soldiered, close together. I am not knocking the Americans, that's the way they do it. They had very limited, I mean that's the first time that they had taken any you know, taken on any Australians in any number and they I mean the main

12:00 Vietnamese force there, so the North Vietnamese Force they would have limited knowledge about how the Australian soldier had been taught so that would have been a disadvantage for them. Things started to go the wrong way for them, although they would know that rain came every day but they didn't plan this. They didn't plan that we, it was

12:30 something that happened. They weren't dug in waiting for us; they could have got one of the other companies. There has been argument, people say it was an ambush and it wasn't. It was a bit of an ambush how it happened, but it was an on the spur thing it wasn't something planned and set. An ambush has all sorts of things that go with it. They had the element of surprise that's what they did have.

13:00 We thought there was three or four and obviously they were gathered there to do something more. I can't work them out how they blundered into taking us on, I mean if it was an ambush they wouldn't take us on within range of the artillery, they would have gone outside or done it differently.

13:30 They probably learnt a lot out of that two. Both sides probably learnt a lot from that.

**What could you use for cover in the situation you were in?**

Well those rubber trees were not that wide but they were looking good when you're trying to get behind one. There is not much there but it is all you have got.

**What size rounds does an AK47 fire?**

14:00 You would probably know that, I wouldn't know for sure.

**I would guess it would rip straight through a rubber tree would it?**

A lot of trees were ripped in half, but I mean one tree is better than none isn't it? I don't know.

**What goes through your mind when you have to get up and run towards the smoke and get out of there? How do you even make your body get up to run through a hail of fire like that?**

14:30 Not wanting to stay behind.

**Did you almost feel an overwhelming desire just to stay down?**

Well I wasn't staying there on my own. An overwhelming desire to get out of there, the others are running, you will find some way of getting there. Even if you have to crawl to do it, you

15:00 wouldn't stay there, couldn't. Not at that particular time it looked like we were going to be overrun all together. If you're going to go you may as well have a go at getting out anyway.

**Could you describe the emotion of what you were feeling at that particular time?**

Disbelief at what had happened to us. We felt a bit invincible you know. I just really

15:30 couldn't believe that this was happening. I didn't keep slapping my face to see if it was a bad dream, but I just could not believe what was happening. We never expected anything like that and we were the ones going to give them the touch up and at that stage they were giving us a mighty nice touch up, they were in front.

16:00 I couldn't believe it.

**Did it feel surreal?**

I don't think I can describe how it felt, it felt pretty bad actually. They were, I mean when they started running that's pretty scary stuff too you know. We will be the ones,

16:30 here we are waiting all of this time. What's gone wrong? They are keener than we are; we are probably in a state of panic with all that's happened. It is hard to describe. I mean I can, in my mind now I can

visualise clearly on

17:00 a number of occasion that little bit of an opening, that clearance in the rubber with these fellows running through it. I see that many times, whether they were screaming or what they were doing, but they were very keen to have a crack at us and win it. So it is, I don't know

17:30 whether I can describe it any better than that.

**Could you actually hear the artillery rounds coming in?**

Whistling.

**It must be incredible**

We could hear jets over the top too, we could hear all of these jets, couldn't see anything but could hear them but they weren't able to use them because of the weather. So it just went on.

18:00 There was no lack of noise there, all the noise you wanted, artillery, mortars and the jets, I didn't actually hear the choppers for resupply but, and their machine guns and bugles, I don't know whether you can actually

18:30 describe it in any detail to give a vivid feeling of what it was like. I mean it was all pretty scary stuff. Scary is no the word, part scary, bloody frightening stuff.

**Could you even hear, having to shout out to blokes could you hear other orders that were being shouted out around the place, could you even hear that over the din?**

You would hear some of it.

19:00 I mean they weren't probably a lot of things being yelled out. I could hear clearly let's make a run for it. But I might have been waiting to hear that too I don't know.

19:30 But there weren't I mean what orders could you give? Couldn't say, "Do this and skirt around there." Or anything else. You just had to really, whatever there was plenty to take a shot at but what could you do with what you had?

**It sounds corny, but heroes, did you see things that you just couldn't believe these guys were doing what they were doing?**

20:00 I thought Jack Kirby was a hero he was organising men when they got back in there, running around a big target, he was a big man. Running around and carrying on, yelling out orders as he always did. I thought he was pretty good.

20:30 Some of them, Harry Smith must have done a tremendous job and you know, what he did. And I don't think you can give those fellows enough credit for what they did. I can give Bob Buick a lot of credit for some of the things he did but you know, it's

21:00 I don't know whether it is an appropriate thing to put on this camera, but I have quoted and I am not a big fan of Bob Buick these days, but it is the things that he said since then that I took exception to. I had a lot of admiration for the job that he did that day, calling the artillery in, I admire the man for that. Some of the things that happened since then I don't agree with and that's where we fell out so

21:30 that's it.

**Afterwards when the South Vietnamese wanted to decorate you blokes and did and the Australian Government refused what was the feeling amongst the blokes?**

Well they did that back at the base didn't they? They gave them dolls and what have you? Now there is two sides of that story, most of those fellows said, "Look they are going to come out and give us some dolls in recognition of our efforts at Long Tan

22:00 so we need twenty blokes, who is available?" Now that's what these fellows say, others will tell you different. Bob and Terry Smith will say, "That didn't happen those blokes were selected." I happen to believe the story of those blokes who were involved. They came and said, even one platoon commander said, "That's all crap, we had to get so many blokes, we didn't know it was going to be

22:30 in lieu of a medal just going to present these dolls. So we got twenty men or whatever." I mean they gave some dolls in the hospital, they came, supposedly there is a film down there in the War Memorial of them doing that and I am receiving one, I can't recall this. I remember getting the doll but I think I might have had some bad words to say on that. Someone told me they had seen it.

23:00 I didn't want the doll, but it might have been the wrong time. So that was his Vietnamese way apparently of saying that this is what we did. Now Harry is talking about that medal, I don't think it will ever happen. If it is true and they

23:30 wanted to award something or whatever because the Australian Government at the time didn't believe them or whatever I think that's a bit wrong too.

**Did you know at the time that the doll was in lieu of a medal?**

No I didn't. No idea.

**How desperate were you in the time you were recovering to find out exactly what had happened that day?**

24:00 Keener to know how others had got on. It was a pretty sad time, I knew I had lost fellows in my section, but I didn't know the others had been killed. You find that out later and that's not the best time. So far as knowing everything about the battle, I mean I didn't know that, I

24:30 mightn't have known that until twenty odd years later. I never went to anything, I lived in Dalby and the, I had no one to ask out there. I came to Brisbane occasionally. I spoke to other mates, kept in contact with them but they didn't know about it either, they just knew their own little section of what happened that day. Anyway

25:00 I guess we found out more after different authors put together books and you read it and you hoped that this was the truth about what had happened and so that's how you started to gather the information about what others did that day. It wasn't until really books started coming out and that was the late 1980s.

**Even today are you finding out things that you didn't know?**

25:30 Yeah probably you don't intentionally set out to make enquiry but someone will say something and you will say, "Oh I didn't know about that." And a bit of a discussion will occur about that. I mean there is five or six live on the island here and they're at various areas, so it is not as though we get together but we see each other, some more often than others.

26:00 We get together at different times and we talk and something will come up and that fits or, "Ah so that's what happened there." Our memories are not as good as they should be. Some things you want to remember and some you don't.

**As a section leader was it harder, harder than being a regular digger, to lose men?**

26:30 I would say a bit harder yeah, I think a bit harder but I don't know what more I could have done. I felt; see I got to know some of the parents quite well and still talk to them. Unfortunately there is only a couple left, but I got to know them

27:00 and I found that a bit hard, talking to the parents a bit. Frank Top's parents came down regularly to see me and they struck up a friendship with my parents and they were only young people, I am twenty one or two and they are in their forties or whatever they wanted to talk about it all of the time, but I

27:30 didn't want to. I can understand it now as a father, I can understand where they came from, but they would want to know if there was just one little thing, probably because I talked to him last, but they wanted to get some comfort from that or whatever but I apologise

28:00 if Mrs Top ever sees this tape, but I have got to say that I was pleased when they stop asking me questions about it. There wasn't that much I could tell them about it, I wasn't beside him when he was killed or anything. I was pleased I had that lunch time chat with him but there wasn't much more I could say, I didn't really know him.

28:30 We hadn't done any training together or anything but they were reaching out all of the time. They were coming down to see me once a month and sit down there and Mum would try and settle things down we would have a cup of tea or coffee or whatever. I mean it wasn't as though they came out and started to ask all of these questions but they were just groping it.

29:00 I didn't know what I could have done or said.

**In the time immediately following the battle when you were at 36 Evac [Hospital] were you questioned at all by Australian Army blokes?**

Colonel Townsend came and saw us and Harry Smith and they talked to us a little bit about our, very briefly though I don't think they took any notes or anything.

29:30 I don't really care about it, but I thought they would have had a few more questions about what may have happened that day, but maybe they had all of the answers. They came and talked to us.

**When was the first time you spoke at any length about your part in the battle to anyone?**

30:00 The first time? I talked a little bit about it when the University of Southern Queensland did that video on Long Tan, 'To Long Tan' it was called. Doctor Bruce Horsefield, I talked to him a little bit about it, not in any detail as I have today. Probably the most I have ever talked about it is today.

30:30 There was a little bit on the Australians at War back in 1992 or 3 it might have been when they opened the War memorial the Vietnam section of it in Canberra. There was a show on the ABC which they did, it



was very brief but a little bit in there, but not to the extent that I have today. I don't talk about it much.

31:00 **Did you find that was a common thing with the blokes you have kept in contact with?**

Well everyone has been to Long Tan, everyone was at Long Tan you know you nearly feel and there was some people I wouldn't say they were jealous over that, we received a presidential citation or something, but there was some, "Oh yeah they're the Long Tan heroes." Or whatever

31:30 I mean we didn't write the bloody thing, we were there, and fortunate enough to get out. But there is often, "You would know so and so he was at Long Tan." I don't know but he could have been there too because he could have come in with A company or the next day, I mean photographers came in two days later. A lot of fellows went there but they weren't actually there.

32:00 They were all at Long Tan then if you mentioned, I was in Railer pub one night and there was an army group of fellows there and they were on their way to Quilpie they were having these big exercises, back in the early 1980s they were having operations out there. And we were having a beer and talking and asking about army life and how it was today and all of the rest of it. And he said, "Were you in the army?" and I said, "Oh yeah."

32:30 "What were you in?" I said, "6 RAR." And he said, "I bet you were in D Company." And I said, "As a matter of fact I was." And he said, "Oh yeah everyone is in D Company, everyone." And I said, "Well, I was there ask me a couple of questions." And he said, "Who was your platoon commander? Who was your OC? What platoon were you in?" All of this and he said to his mate, "I think this fellow might have been there."

33:00 I mean it is just, something that happens. I was there and I am not, I am very proud that I was there but I mean I you know you note different things in paper, fellows send things in and just the way they are worded, he was at Long Tan and Long Tan Day comes up and Vietnam Veterans' Day comes up and they say they have got so and so who will be speaking or so and so attending

33:30 who was at Long Tan. We don't know them but they could have been there. We are not an elitist group, we are just ordinary fellows.

**How does it feel then that Long Tan has become so iconic for Australians involvement in Vietnam?**

I am pretty glad that they take the day, the 19th of August, the only problem I have is that

34:00 there is a lot of confusion with people who don't understand. And I don't try to explain it anymore people at work used to say, "I suppose you marched yesterday, they marched across the Victoria Bridge." And I would say, "No I didn't march." They said, "I thought you would have, it is Long Tan Day." And I said, "Well we have our own service at St Johns Cathedral and they said, "Well there was a lot of fellows who marched yesterday all at Long Tan." And I said, "Well that's all right."

34:30 People don't understand though do they? I am not going to set out to teach them it is not my place.

**So you said yourself you haven't spoken about it much here, do you understand peoples thirst to find out what happened, the fact that it has become so iconic?**

It surprises me the number of people who go back to Vietnam and wish to visit the site.

35:00 And I have read different accounts of those that have gone back and the different experiences they had felt when they go there. They have found it very emotional. That's one of the reasons why I wonder if I should go back because it could be very emotional and I am not sure if I want to put myself through that. In one way I have a real desire

35:30 to go back and have a look but on the other I wonder what I will feel like when I am there. So it doesn't surprise me that people have a lot of enquiry or thirst for knowledge about what happened there, and it does surprise me somewhat the way they describe their feelings when they go there. I am not envious of that I am just saying

36:00 obviously they feel, I mean a lot of people when they go there I would like to go one day, when they go to Gallipoli don't they? You read about it. Now I am not comparing Long Tan and Gallipoli I am just saying they go there and they get this feeling and the same sort of thing applies to Long Tan in some ways I am told. I read.

36:30 I haven't experienced it myself.

**We have also heard stories that once the Americans learned what happened there they were very, they put Australians in a higher pedestal than even what they had us on, did you experience that at all being in the 36 Evac?**

Well what I experienced in the, I mean they were treating people all day every day and you know, I saw the

37:00 trailers go out to be loaded up with all of the coffins on, not Australians, Americans. Every day, out they go trailer after trailer, load them up and take them home .the American nurses most of them male, they

couldn't have done anything more for us,

37:30 they were tremendous. They found us quite different. They used to come with tape recorders and tape talking to us and ask us all about kangaroos and all of this type of thing to send home to their. They were a bit more advanced than we were, we were handwriting and they were tape recording and sending tapes home to their families. Interesting I see a photo of a soldier wounded

38:00 in Iraq the other day a US soldier and strapped onto his gear was a mobile phone. I wonder how it would have been at Long Tan if we had have had that technology? "God strike you should be here look what's going on." Here they are in a battle zone there probably talking to whoever regularly.

38:30 I am not sure if I answered your question.

**What was the process of getting you all fixed up before you were sent home?**

Well I guess it was all about, I guess was it all about getting us strong enough to travel, I used to get sick regularly in the mornings. There wasn't a plane left, I didn't miss one

39:00 they didn't say, "You have missed that one you have got to stay." But they gave us some indication that it would be three or four weeks before there was a plane going back and they would try and take as many as they could. We learnt things from the Americans, no one was telling us from the Australian side, they were just like great mates, we had a great time with them. I was on the drip most of the time I was there.

39:30 So the intravenous drip and on a trolley, after a week or so I was in bed and then I got stronger and I was wheeled down and had a shower and then you start to get a bit stronger and they start taking you to the beach, a bus goes every day to the beach you go and sit in the sun and sneak a beer here and there and whatever.

**Is there a story bout you going into town wearing your jimmy jams [pyjamas]?**

40:00 Went into town, two or three of us went in, with those nice blue pyjamas and those slippers they give you. Rained that afternoon again. Had to go inside, went into the pub and had a few grogs that afternoon, had no money, the Yanks were buying all of the drinks. They loved us. I mean we might have a little money but not much, and we didn't need money they were buying. And

40:30 anyway we had to get back to the air force base back to 36 Evac. So here we are out on the bitumen pissing down rain and holding onto the trolley with what diesel we have got up in the bag left. Thumb out and we got a lift back. Got in a bit of strife but who cares?

## Tape 10

00:30 **Obviously when the history books are written different things go into it, can you clarify I have read conflicting things about whether or not there was a napalm strike on that night as well?**

I am not aware of one, on the night of the 18th? I wouldn't have been aware of anything like that.

01:00 **Once you were back in the 36 Evac did you get messages in hospital from [Prime Minister] Holt and [General] Westmoreland?**

The first message I got was a telegram from my parents saying they were sorry to hear the news etcetera. But I can't recall that we got anything from Holt or Westmoreland, if we had have I think I would have kept it.

01:30 **Do you know what the communication process was with your family around that?**

Probably on the Friday the 19th of August about eight pm I think there was a knock on the door and there was an army chap which I think was a fair bit of a shock to them.

02:00 He told them that I had been wounded but I was okay and I think he was able to tell them that there had been a few killed. So I think there was a lot of anxiety on their side because they knew a lot of my mates and what have you. So from there on in, they received after the initial visit, they received quite a few telegrams, and that was confirmed. It was confirmed

02:30 that Lance Corporal John Robbins was wounded on the 18th of August and is based in 36 Evac hospital in Vung Tau condition is satisfactory, this type of thing. It went on there was a number of communiqués that his health was okay and there will be no further correspondence on this. And then there was one about how he will be returning to Australia on such and such a date.

03:00 I don't think they gave them all of the flight details, they couldn't. But I think they told them that I would be back and at Urunga Hospital on this date and time or whatever, maybe they did this by then.

**So they were able to send a telegram direct to you but were you able to send them anything?**

03:30 I can't remember whether I did or didn't, if I did it would have probably been a letter; there was no reason to send a telegram. Telegrams were like urgent; I didn't have any urgent information for them. I think my recollection is that I typed some letters left handed and I sent the letter home as well as I could type.

04:00 I probably only did one or two while I was there.

**You showed us earlier today some press clippings that your parents had kept for you, which obviously shows that it hit the news quickly here in Australia, it was front page news, what level of awareness of that did you have when you were still in Vietnam?**

None at all. I mean I didn't read

04:30 any of those until I came home. I had no awareness at all about what press had been about. Really mail had been so important to us at Nui Dat but at 36 Evac mail sort of dried up, we didn't get it. It was probably still going up there and then I don't know what happened, whether we got it or didn't get it or they threw it in the bin, I don't know what happened.

05:00 I don't remember getting mail once we went to hospital, maybe it was sent back or I got it later on I can't remember.

**You were saying through the next couple of days you went through the process of finding out the extent of the casualties, at what point were you made aware of the exact numbers of enemy you had been facing and what their casualties were?**

05:30 Probably when the company came down to visit us. They told us, there was different things starting to circulate then, a couple of thousand or whatever a twenty five hundred, varying numbers but it was probably then. We didn't know much but I am sure it was then that they started to indicate the size of the force we had encountered.

06:00 And they told us stories about Hanoi Hannah [Communist propaganda radio host] and all of that, what she was saying, how we had been annihilated. But you don't hear much in hospital. That would have been, they didn't come down to tell us that they came down to see us and whatever, so I don't think,

06:30 it would be some time around then anyway and probably more so than when we got home.

**So what was it like when they finally said, "It is time for you to go."?**

It was pretty good. It was a slow trip home because they put as many as they could on, and the

07:00 ones that weren't walking, stretcher cases, we all came back together. We came back in a Hercules and they are not the fastest plane in Australia, or the world. So we came back in a Herc and the first part was a short leg to Penang. Went into an air force hospital there overnight, the next day was to Cocos Island where

07:30 they refuelled and then onto Perth and onto Pearce Air Force base. They were very good to us there, we arrived late and they brought in a carton of Swan beer and said, "You fellows enjoy that." so that was good and then the next day was from Pearce to Richmond

08:00 air force base outside Sydney. Long day and overnight there and then the next day up to Amberley, so we got back, I can't remember the date. Arrived at Amberley, my sister was there and her three kids and then we were put in ambulances

08:30 and taken to 1 Camp Military Hospital in Urunga in Brisbane. My parents were there and fortunately enough they let us out, gave us some leave. I was right to go. That was something like the Thursday or Friday and they said they didn't want to see me until next Tuesday so I could go home and we went into the

09:00 city and Lennons [Hotel] was the place to go then, and we went in and had a big steak, a big T-bone, it was pretty good too. And then home I guess they wanted to know all about it and I was tired and whatever, I think I went to sleep that afternoon and probably slept until midday the next day. Over time we talked a bit about it.

09:30 **How emotional was the initial meeting with your sister and your parents?**

I think it was probably more emotional for my parents than myself, I was just so grateful to be alive and back. I could see some emotion with them. They probably didn't know how I would be or what state I would be in.

10:00 So I think they were probably relieved to see that I wasn't too bad. But yeah I don't know, it's an emotional thing any time you talk about it, that's probably why we don't talk about it too much.

10:30 **What were the extent of your injuries when you got back?**

My arm was in plaster, I had the bullet wound through the elbow and it came out this side, so it smashed all of the bone in there, there wasn't any real problems with my fingers here where the

shrapnel had gone in and came out.

11:00 I had, that was all bandaged up and whatever, so it wasn't too bad. But when I went back to Urunga on the Tuesday they told me that they wanted to take the plaster off and inspect what had happened. And they decided to break the arm again, put me under and break the arm again and see if they could

11:30 change the angle or whatever that they had tried to mend it at. What do you say? "No don't do that." you just go along with them and that's what happened, so we started again. I mean I wasn't in hospital for long and I had to go there every day for physio [therapy] and all of that but I wasn't a bed case or anything like that, I was okay.

12:00 **Having such a strong physical reminder of what had happened do you think that made it more difficult emotionally?**

Sometimes yeah, sometimes I guess that there is hardly a day, different things remind you of a lot of things.

12:30 Weather affects it a lot. It brings back, gives a bit of a I am not sure what the word is, I don't know if it brings back or assists with any emotion but it certainly brings back memories about certain things.

13:00 **You mentioned the vision that you get of them running at you through the clearing are there other things that come back as visual reminders in your head?**

Sometimes of the run out. I was guilty for a long bit of time for leaving Jim there, I felt guilt. I have sorted it out with him but I felt guilt. I felt as though I shouldn't have left him there as a section commander, I should have checked, but we didn't have

13:30 time and we thought he was dead so it was a great relief to find out he was alive, but I have got to say I felt as though I might have been a bit neglectful in finding out that he had been wounded and hadn't been attended to.

**What happened when you finally spoke to him about that?**

He understood, he thought he was dead too, he was passed out

14:00 probably, he doesn't remember a hell of a lot about the night, he knows that he was just unconscious. He doesn't have a real problem with it but I did.

**When you got back and they re-broke your arm and you were having to go in every day for physio where had they posted you?**

They posted us to Northern Command Personnel depot which is all the

14:30 Queensland wounded that lived in Brisbane were more or less sent there. It was just a place to put them out of the way you know; you had to attend a parade there in the morning. We spent most of our time trying to con them and dodge them. Do all sorts of things. They had us on ration trucks, all of these meaningful jobs, really

15:00 it was a probably just a waste of time. Apart from that we were going to the doctor. We would go to the physio in the morning and probably go to the RSL [Returned and Services League] in the afternoon, not so much the RSL but go somewhere, see in later times there were more came back out of D company, the following year more wounded came and so

15:30 more mates came and we just rode it out until the end of the year when they discharged us. And of course you have got Jimmy Richmond, he is getting better every day and they decided he would be one of the few people in hospital, they used to give him two tallies of beer every day to try and put some weight on. And so he would be sitting up in bed with these tubes and a funnel, not going through

16:00 his mouth, a funnel into his stomach and they would pour these two large bottles of beer into him. And so when he became stronger and put more weight on they allowed him out and we took him out. And so we went into the British Empire Hotel in Brisbane, sat him up on the bar he got his tube out in the funnel and we got free drinks most of the day Jim did we didn't always get free ones. But there it was and he would end up

16:30 as silly as we were just pouring them in. there was some fun times there at NCPD [Northern Command Personnel Depot] but really we were up to no good.

**When you mentioned before that you met a lot of the parents, was there a period of going to funerals when you got back?**

No most of them, my parents went to all of them which was very good really.

17:00 They were all really completed by the time I got back. I went to others, afterwards when others like Jack Kirby when he was killed; when they came back I went to those. It was probably later years when I was involved as president of the Long Tan Veterans that I got to know the parents better.

17:30 That didn't occur until about 1986 I think, I became president and I was president for about ten years

so over that period I got to know the parents quite well.

**At what point did the Long Tan vets form their own association?**

I was away and it was commenced by three or four fellows who met for a drink in a pub in Brisbane somewhere.

18:00 And someone said why don't we get together, we're losing track of where everyone is, why don't we get some sort of get together maybe annually, we will get everyone's ideas on what they want to do so we can keep some track of where everyone is headed you know. It is called the Long Tan Association but it was open to anyone who served in

18:30 D company who served in tour 1966 to 1967. So you didn't necessarily have to be at Long Tan, if you're in D Company any time on that tour you were eligible to be a member and it is not political or anything. There is not too many rules, very few rules but it is just a vehicle of

19:00 getting people together and I suppose every five years we meet in Brisbane, they come from everywhere. We have a dinner and of course have a Long Tan service which is associated with whatever 6 Battalion do on the day. And that's how it all occurred.

19:30 But that meeting in the pub was sometime late in the 1970s. But it didn't get going as an association until the early 1980s.

**So coming home and seeing out your service and getting discharged, how settling or unsettling was it going back to work?**

20:00 Well it wasn't that hard to go back to work; I wanted to get back to work. We had a pretty good break at NCPD we hadn't been doing much there, so I just rang them up and said, "When can I come back?" and they said, "When are you ready?" and I said, "Well I get discharged next week." And I didn't need any more time off. I said, "Well as soon as I am finished I am right to start." I went in and luckily my boss the stock department manager then was a fellow called Bill Cornell

20:30 and had been in Changi and he was of assistance to me. He understood probably himself coming back into the workforce and I found him pretty good really, Bill. He helped me and I went on from there.

**Did you join the RSL?**

No didn't join the RSL. Didn't have any really good experiences with the RSL.

21:00 Went to I wouldn't say all clubs were like this, but we did go to one and it was Saturday, there was probably half a dozen of us and why we went to the RSL I don't know but we did and whilst we were in there some fellow said, "Are you blokes members here?" and we said, "No." And he said, "Well why are you here?"

21:30 And we said, "We're in the army." We were in the army at the time. And said, "What have you done?" And we said, "Well we have been to Vietnam." And they said, "Well that was never a declared war." They were pretty ignorant those fellows, I can't believe they did this. They more or less hunted us so we more or less told them to stick it up their arse and walked out. So I didn't have any real involvement with the RSL, I am a member now

22:00 I have only been to two Anzac Day marches, one in Brisbane and I went last Sunday I feel it is necessary to go these days, we have got to keep the tradition up a bit, I think they need all of the support they can get. I know they have changed their attitude, but they had to. Most of those fellows were Second World War fellows, why they did it I just can't believe it.

22:30 Why they hunted us? Was it the press or getting all of those noises? Why they did it fails me.

**What effect did when the tide of public opinion change against our presence in Vietnam how did that affect you?**

I didn't like it at all. I couldn't believe it when they threw that tin of

23:00 paint over the soldiers in Sydney. I thought it was absolutely disgraceful. Some I mean at the time I just hated the protestors, I didn't do anything about it, but I didn't like it. I just went on to work. We got discharged in 1967 back to work and we didn't talk about it anymore and that

23:30 was it. You read a bit in the papers and you watched it on TV and it went on for too long. I can understand a little bit where they were coming from now, as you mature a bit and you see it, if there was some conscription today and I would have a bit to say about it. You have got to have some sort of, whether it is all worthwhile and

24:00 and the commitment that the country makes with young fellows. people will say, we didn't win over there and you wonder whether we were ever going to win in Vietnam Whether it was unwinnable or whether someone else such as JFK would have won it, you will never know, unanswered questions.

**Did you have any negative experiences yourself interacting with people?**

24:30 I can't recall that I did. Do you know of any?

**Of you personally no.**

That's good.

**Looking back how has your experience as a National Serviceman affected you?**

25:00 I am greatly appreciative of the time I did, it made a man out of me, gave me, I think I gained compassion and understanding of how people react under different circumstances. I think it helped me greatly in later life in management roles and whatever.

25:30 I think discipline is an important part of being successful and I think that probably I can only, although I was fairly structured before I went in there, whether that's the word, but I think it

26:00 added to any attributes that I may have had. It certainly built on them and made me a better person.

**Have you suffered PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]?**

Yeah I have, I had it for some time but kept it to myself and I put up with it. I had all of the symptoms and whatever and

26:30 I used to drink too much grog [alcohol] and I am trying to deal with that. for various reasons I found later in my working life it got to the stage where it was probably beating me a bit with flashbacks and also the drinking and thinking about it a lot.

27:00 Mind wandering off, lack of concentration thinking about things that had happened. When I shouldn't have been thinking about them.

**What sort of things did you think about?**

Oh I would think about things that happened over there I am sure that I used to be worried a lot about and think

27:30 about why, how did I get out? Why didn't they? I used to think a lot about it, see I resigned from, I am still a member of the Long Tan association but I don't think that was helping much at all talking to the parents and whatever and seeing the sadness there, particularly when there was only one child, that shouldn't have happened to them, where a couple had one child and lost him.

28:00 I just don't think that should have happened and I used to wonder why? How come I got out and they didn't. I used to think about things like that.

**And have you found a way that works for you to lessen the affects of PTSD?**

I go to a psych [psychiatrist] on a regular basis

28:30 and talk about it. He is in some ways got, I used to have a lot of trouble sleeping and I used them occasionally, I don't use him all of the time now, but I was using them more regularly when I was working to assist with sleep. Lie awake or for whatever reason, wake up during the night thinking about different things, army related things, Vietnam related things.

29:00 And I think that we're working towards getting through that controlling alcohol and my step towards not smoking is helping a bit. I have become involved in this DVA [Department of Veteran's Affairs] assisted plan

29:30 that they have with the 'heart smart' thing, where we're going to the gym and whatever. So yeah I am trying to deal with it all. A lot of people used to think that I was successful at work and I rose to a fairly prominent position within the company, how could I do that and have these other things that are

30:00 worrying? The psych said to me that I used to cover some, I thought I was covering it up but not necessarily all of the time. I am short tempered sometimes, I am enjoying myself and my life a lot better since I have given work away and worked on getting myself together a bit.

30:30 Probably talked more about it today than I have ever.

**Have you spoken to your family about it in any great detail?**

Not really.

**Have your children ever asked questions?**

They have become very interested lately. They have read the books and things like that but I suppose I haven't allowed that too much, it's not that they are not interested but that I haven't volunteered it.

31:00 after today I don't know that I want to talk about for a while either, it is not something that you talk about a lot. It is, yeah.

**We spoke earlier about Long Tan being the iconic battle in a lot of ways from the Vietnam conflict and it seems to be getting significantly more attention**

31:30 **as time goes on how do you feel about that?**

Well there are other battles that were significant in Vietnam, others that went for a lot longer and were a lot bigger. But I suppose it was significant and probably the most significant battle in one period. I mean Coral those battles went for; I couldn't tell you the number of days.

32:00 But I don't have a real hassle about it all, what can I do about it anyway? I don't know whether there is that much said about it these days, it may be by soldiers that were in Vietnam or there are more people going back,

32:30 I am really unaware that it is growing, do you think it is?

**Just from things that I hear amongst my generation I don't know if it is the age that I have hit now but people seem to be more aware of what's going on and asking questions.**

I am unaware of that.

33:00 **So when you got home and you're recuperating here and back at work what was it like to see Saigon falling?**

Pretty devastating to see that tank crash through those gates and pushing choppers off buildings and people were clambering onto try to get onto the choppers to get out of the country. It was a bit

33:30 I just can't think of the right word. It was not disillusioned, I mean I said to a fellow the other day, "You know we didn't win it." they were talking about we should do this, Long Tan crosses, the government's talking about getting it back and putting it in Australia. And I said,

34:00 "We didn't win it; we didn't win that turn out so we can't dictate what we want." They dictate what happens with the cross and if anything the Long Tan Association can't have a say where the cross is put, it was put up over there and okay it is not there now, it is in a museum in Ba Ria, but if that's where they want it they can put it there.

34:30 We can't really instruct them what to do. We didn't win. He said, "We were winning when we left."

**With their being Long Tan Day, Vietnam Vets' Day and Anzac Day how do those three days differ for you?**

Long Tan Day is a day that is solely for our group I believe. I know Vietnam Veterans' Day and that's a day

35:00 they have taken but as I said earlier, I have only been to a couple of Anzac Day marches and I am only doing that now because I think as World War II numbers fade off that we need to keep this going, we need to keep Anzac Day going.

35:30 So they have done their bit, I think it's about time we all do ours. So I will probably go again next year, but the 18th of August is always a time to think about the mates that we lost, which is on a separate deal and all of those other fellows that went to Vietnam and died for whatever reason.

36:00 I just wish there wasn't a confusion between Vietnam Veterans' Day and Long Tan Day. And people rightly don't understand it all.

**What do you think, what are your thoughts about the level of understanding that people have now about what went on in Vietnam?**

36:30 Well I think it is a lot greater now than what they did have. Vietnam veterans are no longer held in, they are the crims, but it was certainly the case when they came back wasn't it? You know through all of those years, they I can't believe that it happened really. Australians have always supported their troops why, I mean it was that strong of an issue over conscription and

37:00 whatever that it really divided the whole. It is a shame that happened.

**Did you go to the welcome home parade when it finally happened?**

I did, but I wasn't going to. The reason I did because some of the next of kin asked me to carry their sons' flags. I was delighted to do that so I

37:30 couldn't let them down over that. Really I thought about it because of our past experiences with RSL etcetera and they were very nice to us down there at the welcome home parade, the RSL. Again I say that they had to be because they are on the way out. But I went down to carry the

38:00 flags from the fellows, we took about six or eight down with us and gave them to different mates who carried them through. And brought the flags home and returned each to their parents.

**Thinking about the mates that you lost and everything that happened to you in Vietnam do**

**the thoughts get any easier for you as you get older?**

38:30 Yeah you're probably right, they probably do. Time does fix a lot of things, doesn't it? The Ode [of Remembrance] is quite correct, I can only remember those fellows as they were and they are a lot younger than we are when we lost them.

39:00 I would have to say that time does fix a bit.

**I am curious because some men actually say that it comes back to them stronger, the older they get?**

Yeah? Maybe they have got more time to think about it, that could be a thing. I am still getting

39:30 into this retired mode, and I have kept myself busy, I do different things. But if you have more time on your hands you might have time to think about it. I try to keep busy.

**So when you look back on your service what's the thing that you're most proud of?**

40:00 I was proud to be a member of 6 Battalion, most proud of that's a difficult one. I don't think I have any one memory of really being proud, I am proud that I done my time. I think it's a great thing, if you played football and you put a green and gold jersey on

40:30 play for Australia, union or league or whatever I think that's a great thing and I think it's a little bit similar, pulling the army uniform on and serving your country.

**Do you have any final thoughts or messages?**

I probably will have later on but I just can't think of it right now.

41:00 I appreciate the opportunity to do this. And hopefully somewhere down the track grandkids and future generations might view it with some interest, I hope so.

**Thanks for your time.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**