Australians at War Film Archive

Graham Searl (Doc) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1914

Tape 1

00:40 **Thank you for joining us and sharing your story with the Archives. First of all I would just like to start with a summary to your career. Firstly, where were you born?**

In London.

And when was that?

1943.

And then you migrated to

01:00 **Australia?**

Yes.

And when was that?

In 1967.

And once you migrated, you enlisted in the army, when did you enlist?

I got here Christmas ’67, and I was in the army in March, ’68.

And where did you do your rookie training?

At Kapooka, New South Wales.

01:30 **Yes? And how long after enlisting did you start rookie training?**

Basically straight away.

And once you finished rookie training, where did you go from there?

Corps training, that was in Healesville in Victoria.

And what was the corps that you were with?

The medical corps, Royal Australian Army Medical Corps.

And about what time were you doing

02:00 **corps training?**

Sorry?

The date of when you started corps training?

July, August, ’68.

And once you completed corps training – how long was corps training?

Ten weeks.

And once that was completed, where did you go from there?

To One Mil [One Military Hospital] in Brisbane.

Sorry, which military hospital?

One, One

02:30 Military.

And what – how long were you posted at One Military Hospital in Brisbane?

About six months.

And after that six months?

I was posted to an infantry battalion.

Which one?

3rd Battalion, up at Woodside.

And is this – what time –

03:00 **what's the date of this approximate ...?**

That would have been in early '69.

And how long were you at Woodside?

I'd been there on and off for about 10 years, but the first time was '69 to '72,

03:30 so it was nearly four years I was up there first.

And sorry, did you say '72?

'72 yes, but in between I went to Vietnam, in between that.

Okay. And when did you first go to Vietnam?

February 14th, 1971.

And can you

04:00 **remember where you were posted in Vietnam?**

Nui Dat.

That was your base, in Nui Dat?

Nui Dat, yes.

And from Dat, can you recall the areas that you covered on operations?

Yes, Phuoc Tuy Province and Long Khanh Province.

04:30 **And how long was this tour of Vietnam?**

Three months, supposed to be 12 but they – the government decided to cut back to two battalions and we came back early.

And when you came back from Vietnam, where were you posted?

Back to Woodside again.

So when did you return? Was that late

05:00 **'72?**

No, '71, we came back from Vietnam. That would have been around about the 14th of October, because I'd been there exactly 18 months.

And after – how long were you at Woodside for this posting?

Till about February, March, '72.

05:30 **And then where were you posted?**

Townsville, 4th Battalion, RAR [Royal Australian Regiment].

And how long were you actually in Townsville?

I went to a cav unit [cavalry unit, armoured corps] up there, I got posted from – they amalgamated the battalions, it became 2/4th Battalion, and I had the option of staying with them or going to another unit, and so I went to another unit, a cavalry unit,

06:00 which is APCs [armoured personnel carriers].

So how long were you in Townsville before you went to the carrier unit?

The cavalry unit was in Townsville as well.

Oh okay, right.

I was up there for a total of about just over two years, my wife lost a baby so we came back to South Australia, this is where her family was, my first wife, and I came back

06:30 to 3rd Battalion again.

And where were 3rd Battalion posted?

They were still at Woodside.

And how long were you with 3rd Battalion?

Until 1980.

And in that time, were you posted outside of South Australia?

Malaysia.

Yep? And what year were you in Malaysia?

1977

And then after Malaysia?

07:00 No, just exercises around Australia, all within Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory, West Australia.

And so in 1980 you finished at …?

At Woodside, and I got transferred to 11th Field Ambulance in Brisbane.

And how long were you with the 11th Field Ambulance?

I'd already signed up

07:30 to join the air force, but they'd posted me to the 11th Field Ambulance anyway, so I was up there for about three months, until I went into the air force in 1980, which was September.

So September 1980, joined RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], and where were you posted with RAAF?

I had to go to recruit training again, down at Edinburgh [RAAF Base, South Australia].

08:00 **And how long did rookie training take?**

Ten weeks.

Ten weeks, yep. And then where was your first posting after …?

Canberra, I did five years in Canberra.

Great. And then?

Richmond, just outside Sydney, for 12 months.

08:30 And then Sale in Victoria, I was there about 12 months, then posted to Melbourne, recruiting for three years,

09:00 and then a place called Tottenham RAAF Base, it's in Melbourne, it's closed down now, I was there for 12 months.

So that's 1990 by now, isn't it?

Yes. Then I did two years I think it was in Sixth RAAF Hospital at Laverton.

09:30 **Sorry, was that two years at Laverton?**

Yes. That bring me to about '94.

Yes, '93, '94, and then?

I came back to South Australia, I resigned from the air force.

And then once you left the air force?

Came back to South Australia, and the air force asked me to

10:00 come back, as a civilian doing the same job. I did that for two years, working with the recruits, instructing them at Edinburgh.

And you completed that in '96?

’96, yes. That’s when I became TPI [totally and permanently incapicitated], through the DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs].

10:30 And I’ve been that ever since.

Great. Thanks very much for that, Graham. We’ll now go back to the beginning, and talk about your life in England before you even emigrated to Australia. So you were born in London? Whereabouts in London did you grow up?

A place called Tulse Hill was where I was

11:00 born, and I was brought up in a place called Brixton, there are a lot of race riots there later, I don’t know if you know, there’s a very big West Indian community there. Yes, I spent most of my time there, until I emigrated to Australia.

So Graham, as you just said then, Brixton is a very multicultural area, but when you were growing up, it

11:30 **was really post-World War II. How severe were the bombings around the Brixton area?**

Well, I was evacuated out of London up until the age of two to a place up in Herefordshire, Ross-on-Wye, which is up near the Welsh border, for two years, I had three sisters, they were all evacuated too, because my mother got bombed out twice, so they had to move.

12:00 **When you say your mother got bombed out, what do you mean?**

The house was bombed, so we had to move. We weren’t home at the time, or she wasn’t home, so we had to move. I was born under a table actually, in the Blitz [German bombing of London], there was an air raid on at the time I was born.

In Tulse Hill?

Yes.

So whose house was that in Tulse Hill?

I think that might have been my aunt’s house, she was there, she’s still alive today actually.

12:30 She was there when I was born. And yes, I guess mum had us evacuated, whereas my older sister didn’t last very long, she kept on running away, so she had to go back to mum, but the others stayed away.

So when you were evacuated as children, did you all go together or were you split up?

Split up.

So where did your other three sisters go?

No, sorry, one wasn’t even born then, she wasn’t born until after, but one

13:00 went down the south coast of England, and one went up to Wiltshire, the one that went to Wiltshire ended up being adopted by the people that she went to live with, they fostered her at the time, because they couldn’t have children, and mum had three or four of us at the time. Because her first husband, that’s my older sister’s father, he died during the

13:30 war, and then she met my father who was in the Canadian Army, and he was serving in England, and they got married, and they found out he was married back in Canada, and so he went back to Canada and then mum married again, my step father, and they had three girls. There’s only one of them still

14:00 alive.

So you have an older sister and three younger …?

Two older sisters.

Two older sisters?

Yes, one’s been adopted out, but we keep in touch with her now, whereas when her adopted parents were alive, they wouldn’t let her have anything to do with Doreen, my older sister, even though they were real sisters and they were my half sisters, but once they’d gone, especially the mother, the

14:30 sisters got really close again. And I got closer to them as well.

So your elder sister, the first born of the mother, was adopted out?

No, it was the second one.

Oh, the second one, sorry.

The second one, yes.

And so you grew up with Doreen, who is the first born?

Yes, she's the oldest, yes.

And the other girls that came after, did they stay with your mother?

Well Pat

15:00 died, I think was a SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome] baby, she was very young. Kathy died, Kathy was 16, she was Downs Syndrome, and so I've got my young sister Jess, she's still alive.

So sorry, the sister that passed away when she had SIDS …?

Well they say it was SIDS, that was Patricia, Pat.

Do you remember

15:30 **her at all?**

Only as a baby, she was about six months when she died. I remember Kathy more so, because she was 16 when she died.

And do you remember when Kathy passed, you said you remember Kathy a bit more, did you take care of Kathy at all, or help your mum taking care of her?

Yes, yes, because we living at home in

16:00 Brixton then, but the life expectancy wasn't very long for Downs Syndrome kids in those days, her heart was twice as big as normal when they did the autopsy, and there was a big strain on her, we used to live in a council flat, and up on the fourth floor, and going up and down those stairs didn't do any good.

I've seen those council flats in Brixton,

16:30 **they're quite small. How big was yours?**

Ours block was only four storeys, it was a very small one, I don't know if you know Brixton Road, it's on the main road, it's a place called the White Horse, there's a pub between – going from the oval up to Brixton, halfway up Brixton Road there's a pub, it's just that block of flats next to there.

And how many flats would be in the four storeys?

17:00 About 64 flats, presumably they had different stairwells, and there were eight in ours, two each floor. They were three bedroom places.

But still 64 flats, is quite a lot. And where would you go to play?

I think actually there was a place in

17:30 between there, because I used to – a place in Camberwell, that's when I was a kid growing up, went to school in Camberwell, and that was probably where I was playing around there in the old bombed houses and things like that. We were told not to go there, but of course kids, you know, old bomb sites, churches half blown, you know, you go and play in them, type of thing. And go to the movies, things like that.

So when –

18:00 **you were quite young when the war was over, but how long after the war were you still playing in bomb sites?**

Well I was evacuated – sorry, I went to boarding school for four years as well, to a place called Purley, which is near Croydon, I was there for four years, then when I came back I went to primary school, junior school, and

18:30 yes, I went to primary school at Camberwell, sorry, near The Oval cricket ground, I can't remember the area, Lambeth I think it's called, and then I went to junior and high up in Camberwell. Yes, that was my first experience of death then, too.

At …?

Somebody dying. Do you want me to tell you the story?

Yes, absolutely.

19:00 We went to the movies, about seven or eight of us kids, the oldest would have been 12, I think. And we were crossing a road and a truck came along and his brakes failed, and he hit three of them, killed one outright, and he was just messed all over the road, I had bits of him all over me, that's what I remember about that. And the other two had broken legs, broken arms, myself and two of the

19:30 girls and somebody else, we weren't touched. But of course they had to take us to hospital for shock and all that sort of stuff.

Was this a friend of yours that was killed?

Yes, he was a couple of years younger than me, he was only seven, so I must have been about nine then. That was my first experience.

Wow, and how did you respond to it? You said that you were treated for shock.

20:00 They took me to a hospital called Kings College, I think it's called. They couldn't find an ambulance, they took me up in a Black Maria, you know those police cars – vans? They took me up in that to a hospital, then they had to let my mum and dad know, because they were both at work, my step father I should say, and they had me in hospital for a few hours, just

20:30 treating me for shock. And, well that's it.

Wow, you experienced stuff at quite a young age on a few occasions.

Yes, that little fellow that was killed, his brother was killed too, not long after, in a road accident as well. They were poor people, when I say poor people, they lived in some of the old houses that were wrecked round the back of us, an Irish family I think they were, and he got

21:00 killed too.

So where – do you remember anything, or know anything about your father?

All I know he was French Canadian, his name's Laurie Lonray, and he lives in Montreal, because I've been there a few times, and I look in the phone book, and nothing – I try, you know, and I never do, I chicken out so I don't do anything about it.

21:30 All I know he was a medic in the Canadian army.

And that's all you know about his war experience?

Yes, yes.

What about your stepfather, did he fight in World War II?

He did, yes, he served in D-Day landings and he was in Holland and Germany, and he was infantry.

And did he ever share any of his

22:00 **experiences of World War II with you?**

No, no. I've got his medals here and some photos, but that's about it.

And what about your mother? She sounds like she's had a bit of a battle so far?

Married three times, yes. Yes, she's been dead now for 10 years I guess, and I still miss her, I guess you all do, don't you?

22:30 I think I was closer to mum than I was to my dad, I think she was a bit upset when I decided to come to Australia.

What kind of character was she? What kind of a woman was she?

Typical London girl, I think, she liked dances and parties and things like that. So knees-up – you know what the knees-up is, don't you? A dance

23:00 type of thing. Yes, she liked a drink, she was a fun person. But you know, she had six, seven children all together, lost two, three of them, it was pretty hard.

So did she work at all to supplement income?

Yes, yes, she was, what do you call them, cha lady [tea lady]? She was a cleaner, she used to scrub floors

23:30 and things like that for the local mayor, clean up the place. Yes, she was a cleaner. Dad was in the – my stepfather was in the post office, that's how I got into the post office, because he was in there.

Well before we talk about your job, your first job, you mentioned quite a bit of movement with your schooling, you started off at Croydon

24:00 **in …**

At Purley, in boarding school, and they used to send me out to a school outside of there, I used to come home at night time, back to the home, whatever you want to call it. Yes, then I went to St Marks, St Johns and St Michaels, that was the order of schools, Church of England.

So for the first four years you stayed in a home, and then you would commute to

24:30 **school every day at St Marks, is that …?**

No, no, it was called Roke School in Purley, Roke, something like that [either Roke Primary School, Kenley or Purley Oaks School, South Croydon]. I used to go back to the home each night, and then I'd go back to London for holidays, things like that.

So where was Purley?

Purley.

Purley, sorry.

Purley, P-u-r-l-e-y. It's on the way down to Brighton, it's on the

25:00 main road there, between Croydon and Brighton.

So that's a – about how long on the train from London?

I used to get the bus, I remember that, No. 109, it's probably an hour, an hour and a half on the bus. It wasn't all that far away.

And why were you at boarding school?

Well, mum had just got married again

25:30 and the flat we were living in was pretty small, it only had two bedrooms, and I was sharing a bed with my two sisters, and I guess things were a bit hard then money-wise and stuff, so – I was the only boy, I drew the short straw.

What do you remember about the home in Purley?

I remember it was run by – I know the lady's name, Mrs Hicks, and I remember her mother

26:00 used to run it, her and her mother, and most of them were orphans there, there was probably 10 to 20 kids there, it was a big old house. I remember I got a few of these scars there, down there fighting and falling over walls and a kid threw a coat hanger and the hook got caught in my eye, things like that, silly things kids do. I had pepper thrown in my

26:30 eyes by one of the kids. I remember going to the movies, in – it must have been 1953, because I remember seeing the Coronation [Queen Elizabeth II coronation, 2 June 1953]. Yes, that was 1953, it must have been just after that I went back to London.

You said it was a big old house in Purley,

27:00 **how were all the kids accommodated?**

In dormitories, yes, boys in there and boys and girls type of thing, I'm sure there was girls there, I just remember a load of boys there.

How many per room?

Probably about four or five, six, something like that. I mean it doesn't have bad memories, it was okay I suppose, we didn't get the cane or

27:30 anything like that for that, that was at the local school you got that.

So what was the food like at the boarding school?

I honestly don't remember. I guess it was okay.

And so you went to Roke School, and how did you get to school?

Walk, it was only a 10 minute walk.

And what do you remember of Roke School?

28:00 It's still there. Not much about it actually, I remember doing sports and stuff like that, I got a prize there for religious instruction.

What denomination was Roke School?

I think it was C of E [Church of England]. The thing I remember about that home though, was religion, they used to push religion into us, we went to Quaker

28:30 churches, we went to Methodist, we used to go on street corners and sing like Evangelists, type of thing. So I wasn't too sure what religion was. And we used to do the sign of the cross, so I guess that was the High Church of England. Salvation Army, I think they were just trying us out on different religions to see if one of them suited us. I remember that. And we joined the

29:00 Boys' Brigade, that's like little navy kids, they wear sort of a navy hat with navy blue jumpers, I was in that. That's about all I can remember about the place.

Do you remember what you did with the Navy Brigade?

Oh, marching on Sunday mornings, in the streets type of thing, it was grizzly out there.

And then

29:30 **from Roke School you went to St Marks, is that right?**

Yes, I went back to London, then I went to St Marks.

And where was St Marks in London?

I don't know if you follow cricket at all, at The Oval cricket ground, there's a couple of big gasometers there they always show in the background, the school was at the base of one of those. And there's a big Marmite factory there, I can still smell the Marmite [breakfast spread like Vegemite]. I guess that got rid of the gas smell.

And what denomination

30:00 **was St Marks?**

That was C of E.

And you were living in Brixton still?

No, Camberwell then, yes.

So how did you get from Camberwell to The Oval?

To The Oval?

To St Marks?

I guess we walked, I guess we must have walked, yes, because we didn't have a car.

And did your sisters go to St Marks with you?

30:30 **you?**

No they didn't, they went to one not far from me actually. No, a different school.

So what brought about the change from leaving Roke School to going to St Marks?

What do you mean what changed?

Why did you move? What was the …?

Well Roke was too far, that was down in Purley, whereas St Marks, when we moved back to London, that was the local school.

So how old were you when you went to St Marks?

31:00 You're making me think now. I must have been under 11, because I think – I can't remember how the education thing goes over there now. I think it's 11 to 15 is high school, so it must be, maybe eight to 11 or something like that must be primary, and then

31:30 junior – it's confusing now.

So what do you recall of St Marks?

The only thing I remember there is all putting these things on our head, and then we had to bend them forward and it had the Union Jack, that's the only thing I can remember. You know you see it sometimes at the Commonwealth Games or something, everyone has hats on and

32:00 they all put their heads down and a flag comes up or something, I remember doing that, it was probably Empire Day or something like that, I'm not too sure what it was for. I don't remember any of the teachers there, whereas I do remember the teachers from high school. Yes, I can't remember much about St Marks.

Well then you moved to St Johns?

St Johns, yes I was only

32:30 there about a year before I went to high school, that was in Camberwell as well, just around the corner from the other one.

And why did you move from St Marks to St Johns?

Because you have to, it's the next year up, you see? They only handle the junior – the primary kids, and then you go to junior and then high. It just means a progression, you go up one.

So that was junior school there?

Yes.

At St Johns?

Yes.

Right.

33:00 And St Johns, they changed the name, it became St Michaels, so I stayed there, but just went to a different building. It became St Michael and All Angels, and now it's called St Michael and All Souls, they keep on changing the names.

So you're now at high school at St Michaels? What were your ambitions at this stage, what did you want to be when you left high school?

I cannot remember, to tell you the truth. At one time I was thinking about

33:30 being a priest, but I don't know where along the line that changed. Maybe that's because I was good at religious instruction. My grandfather always wanted me to go into printing, because in England, to get into printing you had to know somebody, like family connections, and it was a very good paid job that was. But my stepfather got me into the post office, and so I went and worked there.

34:00 **So how – you said that you remembered some of your teachers from high school?**

Yes.

Which ones do you recall?

Sister Bates, she was a nun, nobody liked to sit in the front row because she used to spit when she talked. And there was Brother Joseph, he was just funny, a monk, and

34:30 Miss Sadler was the headmistress, no, Mr Williams was the headmistress, Miss Sadler was our maths teacher, there was a Mr Atkinson, Mr Morley was our PT [physical training] teacher, he was the one who gave me the slipper a few times, and I got the cane off the woodwork teacher, but I can't think of his name now. No, I didn't get the cane, that's right, he told if anyone was caught

35:00 messing round with the tools, there'd be the cane, and I threw a chisel up in the air, and it came down and got embedded in my leg, and he said, "No, that's enough punishment". I've still got a big scar there where it went in.

And what did you cop the slipper for?

I was probably talking or something in class, I can't remember.

What were your favourite subjects?

History and geography,

35:30 and I guess religious instruction, but I liked history and geography. I was no good with the English or maths.

And what was post-World War II London like?

Rationing was still on for quite a while, I'm not too sure when rationing stopped, but you'd have to go down with your little ration ticket, little books, and I always remember, mum used to send me round to get her some cigarettes, and they weren't packets,

36:00 you'd get individual cigarettes, they were Woodbines, and they'd put them in a little envelope for you, and I'd take them back for mum. I remember – yes, rationing must have finished in the '50s I think, it went on for quite a while. I just remember lots of houses around, they still hadn't been demolished, they were half blown up, type of thing.

36:30 I remember – going back a bit – I remember as a kid, and growing up before I got evacuated, I remember aircraft, and I remember sirens, you know that horrible sound of sirens? And I remember searchlights, and I remember the guns, we used to have guns near us and I remember them, even though I was only two years old.

Yes, so can you remember where the guns were?

Only just down the

37:00 street from us, yes

Do you remember any blacking out or anything?

Yes, yes, well everybody had to do that, black out the curtains and things like that. So you don't think about those things until somebody asks you.

Yes. Can you recall anything of the mood at the time?

I think everybody was just plodding along,

37:30 there were – I guess war is war, and they were putting up with it, type of thing, and putting up a bit of a struggle there, and just carrying on with life as much as they could, while most of the men were away fighting.

So when the war was over, because those raids and the war left quite a bit impact on the psyche of England, especially on London because it was

38:00 **hit so severely, do you recall much of the mood after the war?**

I remember mum telling me stories about her experiences, like there was a guy came down with a parachute under his arm, wanting to know directions, he was a German who got shot down, and he was trying to find his way to the police station, he wanted to hand himself in. Another guy jumped down and everybody

38:30 went round there with pitchforks and brooms and things, but he was dead, he was caught up in the power lines or telephone lines or whatever it was. And she told me about the Balham, I think it is, Balham underground [railway station], where it got a direct hit and there was hundreds killed there, it got a direct hit and of course they just died in there, and there was a couple of hundred people killed near us where the air raid shelter got a direct hit, all the people down in the air raid shelter, and

39:00 they didn't even pull them out, they just filled it in, and they had like a memorial type thing. Just different stories like that.

Where did your mother go during the air raids?

They had a little air raid shelter at the back, just like corrugated iron type thing, I think most people had them, or cellars, they had a cellar they used to go down. I'm not too sure where she went,

39:30 yes, I don't know, I'll have to ask my aunt.

No, that's amazing, the stories of the deaths.

Yes. It was an experience, I mean I've got friends who are a bit older, they remember it more, my sister Doreen who stayed in London, she was about nine, so she'd remember a lot more than I did.

And what kind of

40:00 **impact did the raids leave on your mother, and your sister?**

Honestly, I don't know. I mean they weren't nervous wrecks or anything like that. My sister's a bit neurotic sometimes, but I don't think it really affected them, no.

We have to – we've come to the end of our first tape, so- -

okay.

- -we'll do a

40:30 **quick change and we'll keep …**

Can I go to the loo then?

Yes, yes, you can, and …

I'll find out what she's grizzling about.

Tape 2

00:32 **Just talking about growing up in London, what did you do for recreation? How did you like to spend your spare time?**

I played soccer, football, movies, running away from the law, the guys were only – well, I was a teenager,

01:00 and a lot of them were sort of on the borderline crims, type of thing, and some of them ended up in prison. I don't know if you know much about the Kray twins? They were big-time London mobsters, well some of the guys I knocked around with were in the circles of these sort of guys, would carry shotguns and things like that, little sawn-off shot guns. [Reggie and Ronnie Kray, infamous East End criminals, 1950s and 1960s]

01:30 Into armed robberies, my cousin ended up in Dartmoor Prison. But I mean the only thing I used to do was go to nightclubs and that with them and try to avoid fights and things.

Well before we start talking about your young adult years- -

Oh, sorry.

- -what soccer team or football team did you follow?

Well, Arsenal in those days, I've

02:00 been to Millwall as well, I didn't mind Millwall, and I liked Chelsea.

And who were the players that you admired?

Gee, I can't even remember the players, to tell you the truth.

Can you remember any of the songs that you'd sing at the games?

No, to tell you the truth, no. Millwall was a bit violent there, there as always knifings and things like that there, a pretty bad

02:30 place.

Arsenal Football Club's in North London?

Yes.

And you were in South London, that's where you were living?

Yes. There wasn't many – I guess Chelsea would have been closest, but that was across the river as well. We had Crystal Palace and teams like that, but I don't think they were in the top division in those days. I went and watched some of the smaller grade, the lower grades in the Vauxhall League and things like that.

03:00 Yes, I used to like watching the soccer, I liked watching the cricket too.

Well, I mean the football stadiums today are quite flash and quite big, what were they like back when you were going to the games as a child?

Like some of the grounds you see over here, in the Hills League [Adelaide], my boys play up in the hills, the old-fashioned type of

03:30 terrace, what do you call them, stands type of thing, and most people used to stand if I remember rightly, yeah, there wasn't many people sitting. But I think most of them are sitting nowadays. I always remember sitting on my uncle's shoulder to watch Arsenal. To tell you the truth I can't remember much else

04:00 what I used to do.

Well where did you watch the cricket?

That was at The Oval, sorry, on television, to tell you the truth I never once went inside that cricket ground, even though I lived there, but I used to watch it on TV.

So you never went to The Oval?

Yes, I used to get off at The Oval underground station I remember that.

And what were the undergrounds like then?

They weren't very clean, if I

04:30 remember rightly, graffiti and stuff like that, and I guess it's the same nowadays, you didn't really travel much on your own, at night time anyway, especially on the trains. I think they're a bit cleaner now, they've got some new stations around, they've got new trains and things, but I guess they still have problems. But a great way of getting around. A few times I've been over there there've been

05:00 bomb scares and we've had to get off, they evacuate everybody and you get out of the station.

Well at the time that you were growing up in the 50s and 60s, were there any bomb scares?

No, I don't think so, I think it was later on when we had problems with the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and stuff, and I was over here by then.

And what age were you when you left school?

Fifteen.

And you went to the job in the post office?

05:30 The post office, yes.

What were your duties there?

I was a telegram boy, used to ride a pushbike, and have a little – they used to call us moppers, used to

have a thingo here with a little pouch and telegrams, and I used to work around Clapham Common. You'd probably know that, near Tooting. And I used to work around there, you'd do that for about three years, from 15

06:00 to 17 or 18 I think, and then you become a postman, working in the sorting office, we were actually sorting the mail, delivering the mail or whatever, picking up the mail and delivering the money to the post offices, like armoured-type post office vans.

So delivering telegrams, where would you collect them from?

We worked in a little office, so this would be the office, and you'd have a couple of girls that work on those machines where the tape

06:30 used to come out, and then they'd stick them onto a piece of paper, which was the telegram, and then they'd fold them up, put them in an envelope and give them to this guy who was our boss, and he'd work out, if there was half a dozen of them, those two would go on that particular area, and they'd send a couple of us out to deliver these telegrams.

And would you be there when people opened there telegrams?

Sometimes, because it used to

07:00 be a thing with there being a reply, because we could take replies back, and it used to be nice if they'd won money or something like that, but it wasn't very nice if so-and-so their son had got killed in Germany or something like that, which happened, you know, British army guys around the world or somewhere, something had happened. But normally the girls who did use the machine would tell you if it was a good news one or a bad news telegram, so you wouldn't ask them.

07:30 **So what would you do if it was a bad news telegram?**

Well you wouldn't say anything to them, you'd just give it to them, and hopefully you're not there when they break down or something. But when it's good news you'd ask them sometimes to give you a tip.

Well you're starting to

08:00 **grow up as a young adult in London, and how are you seeing the changes from post-World War II when you were quite young, to now becoming a teenager?**

It was good because I got my driver's licence, and I got a car, I could go out to more places, didn't worry about drink driving in those days.

And what kind of car did you have?

A Zephyr, a

08:30 Ford Zephyr, used to have two little tails pointing out of the back of it, I've seen a few of them around over here, they came out in the 50s I think. Dad had a little Mini, I remember that.

And what places did you go to?

Dance halls like Lakarno in Streatham, which was a big massive place it was, upstairs

09:00 and downstairs, and had like a band playing on the stage and there used to be dancing. Used to do that quite a bit, and then Wimbledon Palais was another one I used to go to, the Lyceum in The Strand, that was in central London, used to go to those places. Nightclubs and pubs.

What were the nightclubs like?

Pretty good, yes. Good place to meet girls,

09:30 of course drugs came in around then too, you know, you used to get the purple hearts and black bombers to help you stay awake all night basically, they're very easy to get hold of, LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide, a hallucinogen] was coming out then too. And of course marijuana and stuff. I didn't hear about any of the heavy stuff, you know, coke [cocaine] and all that sort of stuff. But I never

10:00 dabbled with it, I took one or two purple hearts, but I didn't smoke anything then. A lot of my mates did. One of the guys, one of my mates disappeared for a couple of months, and they found him and had to pump him out, he'd overdosed or he'd taken too much of something or other. But I think I managed to control it pretty well. I used to smoke heavy

10:30 in those days too, from about 17 onwards.

Well there was some radical change in fashion and music around this time.

Oh yes, it was all the mods and rockers, I was a sort of mid, because I used to know guys in the bikies, the rockers, and guys on the scooters and cars, the mods, used to wear all the suits and things. I did go through a Teddy boy stage too, which was another one where they used to have the long coats down

11:00 to here, with a velvet collar, and shoes with the shoelaces things, and studs on the collar and the hair was all swept back and grow down here, like Tony Curtis haircuts, we used to call them. I went through that stage. Then I went through the college boy stage, where it's all short, and very – you know, very short hair and wear suits all the time,

11:30 I went through that stage. And there was all the mods and rockers riots going on then too, big fights down at the seaside places, Brighton and all that, they'd wreck the place. But I used to try and stay away from that if I could.

Well Brixton was also changing around this time?

Yes, because the 50s, the West Indians started moving in there, one of my best mates

12:00 came out from Jamaica, he was West Indian, I worked in the post office with him, but after about 10 years he used to think of himself as a white fella, the funny way he used to talk about those blacks there, and he was black himself. And he was always getting in fights with other black guys, sticking up for us fellas.

12:30 He went back to Jamaica eventually, and he got deported or something, they found drugs in his stuff.

So how were the West Indians received in Brixton when they first arrived?

Well my father, stepfather, he was very racially prejudiced, and I mean I used to have black girlfriends, they didn't worry me, and it wore off on my mum eventually, she

13:00 started – she didn't like the 'darkies', as she called them, they reckoned it was the downfall of Britain and all this sort of stuff, you know, and if there was any problem anywhere, blame it on them, blame it on – you know, they were really bad. Whereas I was very neutral. And now my sister, she lives next door to West Indians, and she's getting a bit that way, even though she works with them.

13:30 Yes, so I got on pretty well with them.

And they also brought quite a strong influence in food.

Food yes, and music.

What do you recall of the different smells that were starting to appear?

I used to go round and have meals with a mate, and ginger in their cooking which I'd never had before, and spices of course,

14:00 cooked bananas, I remember that, I'd never had that before, there was something on them, I can't remember what it was, but it was very nice. And then we got a lot of Indian people came in and we started getting the curries, and – I like the old curries.

What different music did you start to hear?

Music called blue beat, it's like reggae, yes, I think it

14:30 was out before reggae, but it's the same sort of thing, the same beat. And you'd go to nightclubs and stuff like that, because I remember, I must have been 18, 19 when I left home, and I moved into a flat with some friends whose parents had migrated to New Zealand, but they didn't tell the council, so they kept the flat on and they were getting like cheap rent,

15:00 and about four of us guys were living there and the band used to come and practice there, and they were called Carl Douglas, they had a big stampede, and they went on pretty well, they made two songs, Mohammad Ali and Kung Fu Fighting, if you ever hear them on the radio at all, and they used to rehearse in our place. But we'd always find marijuana around the place, it's a good thing the police never raided the place.

15:30 But they were sort of reggae type big band music. Because The Beatles type music had started coming out, Elvis Presley of course.

What did you think of The Beatles when they came out?

I didn't mind them, actually, yes, they were all right. I don't have many – I've got a couple of CDs of them, but yes, I liked their music.

16:00 **And the fact that they were from the north, did that mean anything?**

No, there was lots of other bands that came out, there was band called The Searchers, one called The Drifters, not the American Drifters, this was an English Drifters, and they used to play all sort of Shadows type music, you know, Cliff Richard and the Shadows type music. Yes, I used to love music.

16:30 Because my sister had died, she was the Downs Syndrome kid, they loved music, and Kathy wasn't an exception, she loved music, she was dancing all the time. Yes, I always loved music, that's probably why I've got so much, a big collection.

Well just going back to the West Indians, and in your area and becoming a part of your

community, can you remember some of the racist terms that

17:00 **were used to describe them when they first came?**

Wogs, coons, darkies, rock apes, there was always different expressions, yes, I guess different times, and their names changed, I don't know what they call them now.

And over the years Brixton became quite famous for race riots.

17:30 **At that time what kind of tension was there in the area?**

There was no race riots when I was there, because I left in the 60s. I think the 70s they had, and they wrecked the place, big stores, they smashed the windows, fires and things. I think there was still a lot of white people wouldn't accept them. I remember a guy went into –

18:00 when you get your dole money, and he went in there and he was arguing about something, and the police came in and just grabbed him and threw him in the police car. Another black guy came up and protested against it, and they picked him up and threw him in there as well. They beat them both up, these guys. And yes, I think there was a lot of problems there, at Brixton police station for instance there's – I think it's more controlled now because they've got black policemen there now as

18:30 well, but I suppose there's still going to be problems. Like the flats I live in now, a lot of black people moved in there, there wasn't any in there when I lived there. There was some in the houses around us.

Well going back to your first job in the post office, how long were you there for?

Well after I finished as telegram boy, I went on to postman, did nine years all together. Most of the time was driving the mail van,

19:00 I did that for nine years, just around the Brixton area, whereas as the telegram boy I was in Clapham, and when I was a postman it was right opposite where I lived, so I'd just walk across the road to work. I used to do the six o'clock start, I didn't like that very much, but at least I had the afternoons off. Yes, I didn't mind it, I've still got some friends I keep in contact with now, who I

19:30 worked with in the post office.

And when you were delivering mail, what areas were you covering?

Brixton, yes. Mine was actually, my main one when I was actually on my feet, when I was walking, was Brixton Road up to Town Hall, and up on the top in Brixton, used to have big mail bags on your back, and we had bikes

20:00 too, pushbikes, but sometimes it'd get a bit lopsided, with a heavy bag on your back. I didn't mind it, as I said, about nine years. And when I reach 65 I get a pension from them, of one pound twenty-six a week, that'll keep me going.

And

20:30 **you migrated to Australia in the late 60s, but what led to that, what was happening in your life to lead to that?**

I used to go down to Newquay in Cornwall, I used to love surfing, and a mate of mine said, where was it, Six Bells in Chelsea, it's a pub there, a famous pub, and we were there one day and he said, "Let's go to Australia". This was in October.

21:00 So we both went over and applied, and I was over in December. He didn't get here till early in the new year. He said, "Well do lots of surfing when we get over there", and it only cost 10 pound in those days, but you had to stay here for two years. So I moved to – when I first got here I went to Manly, in Sydney.

Well how did your mother react to your decision to up and

21:30 **leave?**

I don't think she was very happy about it, but she didn't stop me, being the only boy, I suppose. She never really said much about it.

So where did you apply to emigrate?

Australia House, it's a big place in The Strand, London I think they're still there. Another

22:00 guy I met up with here, he migrated at the same time, he gave me his address and said, "If you get to Perth, look me up", and I never went to Perth, but I used to put him down as my next of kin in Australia so I could get extra leave, and get paid to drive to Perth. I never drove to Perth, this is from Brisbane, mind you. And when I went to Vietnam we got a couple of guys killed and we got some

22:30 reinforcements, and one of them was this guy, he'd joined up too. And I'd lost contact with him all together.

Just be mindful that you're wearing a microphone.

Oh yes, sorry.

No, that's fine. So you went to Australia House and applied, and what was the application process?

It was pretty easy, birth certificate and pay 10 pound basically. They did a bit of a check on you, a security check I think,

23:00 yes, and I came out here with 50 pound in my pocket. Yes, I don't think it was all that strict, not like it is nowadays.

Well how did you come over here?

I flew over. I had the option to come here by train – sorry, not train, boat, yeah boat or plane, but I thought if I come by boat I'm going to need plenty of money, spending money on the boat, so I flew out, just before Christmas.

23:30 **So what kind of farewell did you have from home?**

I had a big party, a big farewell party, yes, about 50 or 60 people came, a lot of my mates. I've still got photos of that.

And how did your mates react to your decision to leave?

Well one of them came out after, I've lost contact with him, he's in Sydney somewhere. I

24:00 think they thought it was a good idea, they told me they wished they'd done it too, because a lot of them are not working now, some have retired.

Can I just take a step back and ask how did you get involved in surfing? How did you get interested in surfing?

Well down in Newquay in Cornwell there's a big surfing place, it's on the world circuit, and you get a lot of Australians down there, and

24:30 we used to go down there every year surfing, and I used to love it.

But where did the sudden interest for surfing come from? There's no surf in London.

No, no. I guess when I was younger still, I probably saw photos of it, and if you go down to Cornwall you can do it down there, so I bought a surfboard and went down there.

So the Australian surfers that you ran into in

25:00 **Newquay, were they professional surfers or just …?**

No, they were just touring around, going around the world finding good surf spots, I think. But I don't think I've done any surfing since I came here.

And what did they say about Newquay?

They loved Newquay, because it comes off the Atlantic Ocean and it gets some pretty big waves down there. It's a bit cool, but …

And where did you stay in Newquay?

25:30 Caravans, hire a caravan or bed and breakfast or something, yes. I don't think there were tents down there, no.

And what time of the year would you go and surf there?

Summer, not winter, summer.

So where did you fly out of London?

Just Gatwick, sorry, not Gatwick, Heathrow, and arrived

26:00 in Sydney.

And how long was that flight?

About 36 hours I think, I can't even remember where we stopped on the way, actually.

I was going to ask you that, that's not one continuous flight, especially at that time.

No, no. It was an old Boeing 707, I remember that, probably Singapore or somewhere like that, we probably stopped.

And were you on your own when you left?

Yes. There was nobody here to meet me, they're supposed to have immigration people to meet you, but there wasn't,

26:30 so I had to find a place to stay, which was the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] in Pitt Street.

So do you remember your feelings over that flight over?

Yes. What am I going to? People saying, "You'll get called up for National Service, the Vietnam War's on", and I'd say, "No, I'm too old for National Service". No, I guess, thinking will I do any surfing, what will I do in the two years

27:00 I'm here.

Well what did you know about Australia's participation in Vietnam before you arrived?

Nothing really, I knew they were there, but we didn't hear of any particular battles or anything like that, or if anybody got killed or anything like that, they didn't make the papers over there as much as they did here. They were recruiting a lot of people over there to come to Australia to join the army, or they were in the

27:30 British army and they came straight over here.

So sorry ...

Yes, and people said I should have done that, and just joined the army from London, but I wasn't really sure about it then.

Well politically did you have any opinion about Vietnam?

No, I didn't know much about it, it was just a war, north against south,

28:00 yeah, I didn't know whether it was right, wrong or what, never even thought about it.

But you did know that there was National Service here?

Yes, I knew that, yes. But I knew it was 19 or 20, I think it was, and your name had to be pulled out of the barrel, type of thing. I knew I was pretty safe there, being 24.

So you landed in Sydney, do you remember the date that you landed?

Yes, 15th December.

And what was the weather like?

110 degrees,

28:30 coming out from England and yes, it was so hot, and the pubs all closed at six o'clock, I remember that, and just didn't know anybody, the place seemed to be so unfriendly, and you know, yes, it was a bit of a culture shock. I got a job though, on the Sydney Harbour Bridge for six weeks, before I joined the army,

29:00 labouring, using the jack-hammer, we were doing the Cahill Expressway and I peeled three times in one week, my skin had never peeled before, it was so hot working up there, and I did that for six weeks.

And you first stayed at the YMCA, but how long were you there?

I was only there probably a week, two weeks and I got a flat with two New Zealand

29:30 guys up at Kings Cross, I was there for probably a month, two months, a month it must have been, then I went over to Queenscliff, which is next to Manly, for a couple of months when my mate came out from England, the other guy. And yes, I joined the army.

So what was your motivation to join the army?

30:00 It would sound all glorious, I thought to myself, I might make a man of myself, and I was never going to serve in Australia or anything like that, I think I just went over there to try and prove something to myself. I put down I wanted to go into infantry, but a few weeks at Kapooka and I thought no, this is not the job for me, infantry, because that's what you do in infantry training,

30:30 so I wanted to go into the armoured corps so I'd get carried everywhere, in a tank or something.

Well where did you – before we go too much into your rookie training, where did you actually enlist, or enrol?

In Sydney, I think Georges Street I think it was, in Sydney, a recruiting office there.

And did they comment on your age?

No, no, because being a regular army guy, I think you can get in up to about 30 or something. They just wanted

31:00 people to go in the army.

And it's early '68, and Australia's participation's increasing in Vietnam, once you were here, what knowledge did you have of Vietnam?

I knew where it was, I knew it would be tropical and I knew the Communists were up there and

31:30 that's about it, didn't think much else more about it.

And how real was the Communist threat to you?

It wasn't, I mean they were talking about this domino theory where if Vietnam fell then the Communists were going to spread to Indonesia, down to Australia, but I thought, it won't ever happen.

So after you

32:00 **enlisted you went to Kapooka for rookie training, and how did you find rookie training?**

Very tough, it was the biggest shock of my life, running everywhere and carrying a pack on my back, and living under the stars, parade round all day type of thing, stuff like that. It was a real big shock, it was.

And where was

32:30 **your sleeping accommodation in Kapooka? How was the camp laid out?**

They're just split up into companies, you know, like a rifle company, there was about 100 guys, so I guess it must be the same there, they had company and then they had platoons, we had six guys in a room,

33:00 and so many rooms, a corporal down the end.

And who were you sharing – were you in barracks?

Barracks, yes.

And who were you sharing your barracks with?

I remember some of their names, but I haven't seen them since. I don't even know if any of them went to Vietnam, I don't think they did.

33:30 I think only two out of our platoon went to Vietnam.

What kind of characters were they?

Pretty funny, there was probably about half a dozen of us from England, and one from South Africa, I think the rest of them were Australians. There were some pretty funny guys, some guys you'd keep away from. One guy was – never washed in his

34:00 life, and we had to put him in a shower and scrub him down, you know, he'd have a singlet on and you could see where the dirt was, but I think that might have taught him something. It was different, very different. You'd get charged for different things, silly things, but I guess they've got to sort of set an example and teach you the rights and wrongs. And you'd come in and find your bed all

34:30 stripped because it wasn't made right. But I didn't mind that too much, once it was over with, it was good.

Well how did you adjust to this discipline, I mean you'd been fairly independent and doing your own thing for quite a while?

Well I'm not the type of person that back-answers, so I guess I thought, well that's pretty good, I suppose, it might have helped. Yes, I got used to it.

35:00 **Were you with a National Servicemen?**

No, we were all regulars, where we were, the National Servicemen went to Singleton and Puckapunyal I think, and Portsea, just the regulars went to Kapooka.

So what else was a part of your rookie training? You said there was some infantry training.

Most of it was, basically, bivouacs, you know, camping out over night, digging

35:30 trenches, rifle drill, lots of shooting, obstacle courses, you know, tell you you're charging the enemy type of thing, lots of PT, they tried to get you fit, I always had problems climbing ropes.

36:00 I think just basically you see even what the police go through with their training and things, just parades and gym.

Well the bivouacs that you went out on would have been the first taste of the Australian environment, what did you think?

Bull ants, I used to think wow,

36:30 the size of those things, and just some of the insects you see around the place, snakes, and I'd get lots of blisters on my hands digging holes, you know, sweating all the time, dirty, yes, it was definitely different.

37:00 **And when you came to the end of your rookie training at Kapooka you had to decide on a corps. What were your choices?**

You could pick any corps you wanted, whether you got it was another thing.

Yes, and what were your personal choices?

As I said, I put down infantry to start with, but then I changed my mind and put armoured corps and medical corps, and I got my second choice, medical corps. There's only one guy who got armoured corps, and that was a

37:30 family thing, his father was in armoured corps, or something like that, and the rest went to infantry. Or two of us went to medical corps, and we were both from England too, and had no first aid experience at all, whereas some of the guys were former St Johns Ambulance people, and they put them in infantry. One guy was a psychologist and they put him in infantry.

Well why did you want armoured corps? Why was that your first choice?

Well I thought, you know, being in a tank, an armoured personnel carrier,

38:00 you're sort of carried around everywhere, driving or whatever, a crew commander. I thought that I might be safer, you know, if you get shot at or something.

And then your second choice was medical corps, why did you choose medical corps?

I don't really know, to tell you the truth, because I had no first aid experience before that. I just put medical

38:30 corps and I got it.

Your father was in the medical corps, wasn't he?

Yes, I didn't know that at the time.

So how did you feel about getting called into the medical corps?

A bit different, and when I got there they already had me earmarked for something, as a batman. Do you know what a batman does? He looks after the officers. And I thought, I'm not going to be a batman, I don't want to have to

39:00 clean their boots and shoes and things like that. So I really studied when I was there, so I'd pass all the tests and that, and I did, and they posted me to a hospital as a batman. But I went and saw the matron and I said, "Look, I want to be a medic, not a batman", and she got me in the wards, working in the medical ward, which is all the people who had the PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and shell shock, whatever you want to call it, and

39:30 I thought, I'm not learning much here either, so I went and asked to go in the surgical ward, where we'd get all the guys sent back from Vietnam.

Well before we go too far into your actual posting, we need to look at your medical corps training. What – where were you posted for medical corps?

That was Healesville.

And where were you accommodated at Healesville?

In tents, up in the mountains. Well, it was near the mountains, it was very

40:00 cold, we were in tents.

And what kind of training did you do?

First aid, anatomy, physiology, field craft, how to make stretchers, improvising things, medical evacuation, how to treat gunshot

40:30 wounds, explosive wounds, that sort of stuff.

Well the academic side to your training, how were you doing that out in a camp?

Sorry?

Like you said you were camped out in Healesville …?

Yes, the actual camp itself, had a couple of buildings but the rest were tents, and we were actually

sleeping in tents, four to a tent, and we had a big parade ground and stuff like that, and then we used to go out onto bivouacs from there,

41:00 up in the mountains, the snow and that, and the worst thing I found there was trying to study, it was so cold, we used to go into the drying room in the laundry, it had heaters on all the time in there, and study down there.

Well, we might leave it there as we've come to the end of another tape.

okay, how do you know when you've run out of tape? Can you hear it?

No, we get tapped

Tape 3

00:31 **Well, I'll just take up the story Graham, about Healesville when you were doing medic training, who were your instructors?**

We were divided into platoons and we used to have a sergeant and an officer for each platoon, and a corporal, different from like a

01:00 battalion, but there was – I think there was three platoons went through with about 30-odd guys, so you've got about 90 on each course, there'd be some other courses going through before you, and divided into three platoons.

Well as you said, you hadn't had a single ounce of medical training whatsoever,

01:30 **until you arrived there, how did you find your way, or how did you react at first to this new training that you were receiving?**

I adapted pretty quick actually, injecting oranges and suturing up things, resuscitation dolls, doing lots and lots of resuscitation, a lot of classroom

02:00 type stuff, anatomy and physiology, learning about the body, the workings of the heart, and that sort of stuff. Different types of fractures you can get, and every bone in the body, 206 of them.

And was some of it a bit of a laugh to begin with when you were injecting all these oranges and resuscitating dolls?

Yes, I enjoyed that there because the –

02:30 the atmosphere of that camp was so much different from Kapooka, it was more of a family, it was, we got on very well with the sergeants, they were very nice, we had to have drill and stuff, the same as everybody else, but I enjoyed that, I was there for 16 weeks because we got there too early for a course, so we had just hang around doing things, cleaning up the

03:00 place for a couple of weeks before we actually started the course. But I enjoyed it, and it's been handed back to the Aboriginals, that camp. I don't know what they're doing with it, but there are no army people there. It was really nice.

But when you were there, there were patients there, or …?

No, no, it was just a school, what they call a School of Army Health. They had dental training there too, dental people used to be there. And

03:30 they'd have the SAS [Special Air Service] coming in doing first aid courses. Yes, I enjoyed it there.

And how much of the local environment did you get to …?

Well we used to go into town, I had a car, bought myself a little car then, and we used to go up to Melbourne on weekends and stay at the White Ensign Club, which

04:00 is a navy club, it's part of the Exhibition Building there, I don't know if it's still there. They used to have dances on there, and you can get cheap accommodation there, and I used to do that. Or go into Healesville to the pubs, or the dances, old barn dances out at Yarra Glen and places like that, yes it was good.

Well those kind of dances would have been very different to the kind of social life that you had back in England …

04:30 Oh yes.

What were those dances like?

Well you weren't allowed to have alcohol, so what we used to do, go to the pub next door, and wham

them down, then go in, and if you've had a few drinks in there, you sort of throw them around doing the Pride of Erin, and it used to be really funny, it was great fun.

And was it a live band, or …?

Yes. I don't mind sort of folk music, barn dance type of

05:00 music. Yes, it was good.

And what was the routine for approaching a girl to dance?

Well you'd just ask them for a dance, or just jump in, whatever. Depends on how much you've had to drink, and what the people were like there, and

05:30 yes, I used to be really shy at one time, but I guess when you've had a few drinks it really helps you.

And I mean you've mentioned quite a range of things you were learning, I was interested particularly in the evacuations. What did you learn specifically about

06:00 **evacuations?**

Well if they're down – for instances, you've got someone who's got a gunshot wound, they're in the gully, you've got to improvise, cut a couple of logs down, and we've got a sleeping bag type thing, a groundsheet we could use, just put the poles through there, or we'd have to improvise by getting two logs and just taking our belts off and weaving the belts across that, type of thing, and then get them to a real clear area where

06:30 the vehicle could come or the helicopter could come and pick them up.

And did you practice that environment in the grounds or …?

Yes, in the grounds, they had like training areas there, helicopters used to come in, and we'd do a lot of winching and stuff, we'd be winched up and down, taking the patients with us, that type of stuff. Yes, it was all right.

And were there any accidents or anything that went wrong in training?

No, not when I was there,

07:00 no, it was pretty safe.

Because sometimes, particularly in training you're not quite sure what you're doing, so that's the time when things can start to go wrong.

No, we had broken legs and arms, things like that, but it was nothing ever more serious, nobody got killed, there were no chopper crashes or anything like that. They came later.

And you mentioned that you had a car, so you

07:30 **did get down to Melbourne a bit. When you went into Melbourne, did you see any signs of I guess the anti-Vietnam movement that was starting to develop at that stage?**

No, I didn't see any of that, no.

And how easy was it for you, you mentioned you were a bit shy to begin with, but how easy was it for you by now

08:00 **to I guess form some friendships and …?**

Yes, I made some pretty good friends there. It's funny, I don't keep in touch with anybody there, it's more after, when I went to the hospital in the battalion I started making friends. One guy who came out from England the same time as me, we both went through Kapooka together, and we both went through the School of Army Health together, he went to Brisbane and I went 3RAR – sorry, I went

08:30 to Brisbane and he went to 3RAR and he was supposed to go to Vietnam and they wouldn't take him, because he had acne real bad, his skin – so they posted him out and posted me in his spot, so we crossed each other again.

And was there anything strange about this new land that you were in, that you found a bit odd to begin with in those early days?

No, just so big, dusty, dry,

09:00 hot. Australians were pretty good, once you got to know them, and invited back to their houses, I used to go – that's one of the places I went to when I was at Kapooka was Orange, it was one of the guys came from there, and he took me back and I stayed the weekend with him and his family, and some of the guys I was with at Healesville I came home to Adelaide with, and

09:30 stayed with them over here, because I didn't have any family in Australia so they used to feel sorry for me and take me back to their families. But yes, I was just starting to get used to it then.

And apart from the weather was there anything else that you sort of didn't like, to begin with?

I was getting a bit homesick I guess, then. No.

10:00 **Well after you finished that 10 week medic training at Healesville, where did you go?**

One Military Hospital in Brisbane.

And was that right in the city of Brisbane, or was that in the outer …?

It's a place called Yeronga, it's –

10:30 you've got a place called – you go through Ipswich and then you go through to Wacol, and then sort of Yeronga, which is an area before you actually get into Brisbane, it's right on the banks of the Brisbane River, a beautiful setting, the hospital by the river there, typical Queensland, everything's built off the ground, for floods and stuff like that. But I enjoyed it there too.

11:00 **And what were your duties?**

When I first got there I worked in the officers' mess cleaning shoes and making beds for the officers and things like that. And then I went and working in the swimming pool for a while, because we used to have a lot of guys needed rehabilitation and that, and my job was to look after the pool, so I enjoyed that, cleaning it and keeping an eye on the patients and stuff. Then I went

11:30 into the ward after that and started working as a medical assistant in the ward, or a medical orderly they called them in those days.

So is this where you were batman to begin with?

Yes, my posting was as the batman.

And who were you a batman to?

All the young officers, the lieutenants, captains and that. I wasn't any one particular officer's batman, like some guys were, I just had various –

12:00 there was a few of us worked in the officers' mess, black stewards and that, they call them. Yes, it wasn't too bad. But I wouldn't like to do it full time, I don't want to clean peoples' boots, bad enough cleaning my own.

So after – you requested a transfer, or just a change?

12:30 Yes, I saw the matron and I said, "I want to learn something, I want to go to Vietnam, I want to know a bit what's going on". And that's when I went up into the ward.

And did you need to present a case, like a reason …?

No, no, she knew I was interested and she got me up in the ward. We used to wear this white boiler suit, and one size fits all, sometimes they'd be screwing up here and you

13:00 could hardly talk, and other times they'd be so big and baggy, they were terrible. But that was our uniform. We looked so funny, so would come up here, and we were all on parade before we'd go into the ward, and then we'd get allocated our duties what we were doing, and so on.

So you would have an inspection at the beginning of the day?

Yes. There were nurses with us too, girls, and they'd

13:30 say, "You're going to such-and-such a ward", or "You're doing such-and-such duty today", and things like that. And sometimes if you were lucky, you might do a nice shift, or a weekend you get away from all that sort of stuff, but during the week it was parades and things, just to make sure your hair was short and your fingernails were clean, that sort of stuff. And then go and do your job in the ward.

And was

14:00 **there a matron there conducting that parade?**

No, she didn't do that, the matron did the once a month one, I think, and the CO [commanding officer]of the hospital, the colonel, I think the RSM [regimental sergeant major] used to run the parades, I still know – I know him, I still keep – not keep in touch with him but I still keeps tabs on him, he lives over in Perth, this guy.

And was he a

14:30 **strict RSM?**

Yes, well all RSMs are, they have to be sort of brave face, which I found out myself when I became that sort of rank. Yes, I guess they're all strict.

And when you first started doing those parades, did you ever get out of line or …?

I guess the odd time, "Get a haircut", or something like that, or "Those shoes are not good enough, make sure you get them cleaned better".

15:00 But most of the time it was all right. They could never pick us for our uniforms because it wasn't our choice what we wore.

And what were the punishments for not having or having hair too long?

Well you just had to make sure you had it cut, if he picked you up again then you'd get probably charged and just get seven days CB [confined to barracks] and a fine or something, nothing real serious.

And under the boiler suit, were you

15:30 **wearing army uniform or …?**

No, no, just a singlet and underdaks [underpants] or something.

Well what sort of a hospital, or what sort of patients were in the One Military Hospital?

Well as I said, the ward I went into first was the medical ward and these were all the guys, the crazies as they call them, they weren't – I mean they were PTSD guys and – you know what PTSD is?

16:00 Yes, I guess you would. There was one guy there been court-martialled by the warrant officer for stealing food or something, things like that, there were some very bad cases there. But in the surgical ward was the one I liked, because you got to actually treat the guys when they used to fly in from Vietnam to Amberley RAAF Base, which is just outside of Brisbane, and they'd bring them out to One Mil, and

16:30 you've got the gunshot wound guys and the blown up guys, funny rashes and funny diseases they pick up over there. There were two guys, I still remember their names and I still keep a tab of two of the patients. One of them died, no, another guy died, he had plastic anaemia, which is like a leukaemia type thing, and I remember him pretty well. Another guy was an

17:00 artillery guy, he was paralysed, he was a paraplegic, he got overrun by the enemy in Vietnam and they thought he was dead, and they left him, and he's in a wheelchair even now, he lives up in Cairns. And the other guy I know very well, he got shot in the hip, and I had to keep on packing the dressing every day until it closed over completely, and they were wondering why he couldn't walk. They decided to re-x-ray

17:30 him and they found out the bullet had gone through his hip, and so they had to open him up again. And he's a real trouble maker now, he goes and – he's always in trouble in Brisbane, if there's any demonstrations against this or that, he's there. So you get to remember some of the patients, because I remember most of the staff, I still keep in touch with some of them.

18:00 It wasn't a bad place. But then I asked the matron, I said to her, "I want to go to Vietnam".

Well, we'd just like to hear a bit more about One Mil Hospital first. Obviously that's your first contact with wounded returning to Australia from Vietnam, how much did they tell you about their experiences? Or did you chat to them?

You do, you chat to them and they tell you

18:30 how it happened and things like that, and it's interesting listening to some of the stories.

And packing a gun wound, or doing the dressing for a gun wound is not necessarily an easy job, were you squeamish, or how did you take to that?

I guess I wasn't, otherwise I wouldn't have been doing it. The only time I get squeamish is when I see brain matter, terrible

19:00 thing to say, but blood and that doesn't worry me.

Well when you were first on the ward, were you supervised by somebody?

Yes, we had a ward master, and he lives in Adelaide here, I still see him, he's in his 70s now. We had a ward master who made sure we did our jobs, and allocated, told us what we had to do.

19:30 **And what sort of character was the ward master?**

Pretty strict, he was a Korean War veteran as well. Things I didn't like doing was putting people on pans, they're holding themselves up and you've got to clean them, or if somebody vomited or something like that, I didn't like that too much.

And the ward master you've just mentioned, was he a doctor or …?

No, no, he was the same as me, he just

20:00 worked his way up, he'd been in the army longer than I had. Sammy Witches, he lives in town.

Well what was your relationship to the nurses? How would you work with them in the ward?

Well some of them were the same rank as us, we had a lot of sisters there, which were the officers, you know, the two-pippers and the captains, they were what they called like RNs, registered nurses, whereas we were

20:30 classified as ENs, enrolled nurses. The nurses, we got on pretty well with, I don't think they went to Vietnam though. The nurses did, the RNs went over there, but I don't think there were any females went, or nurses. Well I never saw any over there anyway.

And what was the delineation I guess in duties between what you were doing and what the nurses were doing?

There wasn't any, we'd do the same,

21:00 yes, picking up patients, transferring them back to bed or whatever, cleaning, dressing them, we'd all have a turn, so it was all the same, all the same pay level as well.

And what about the doctors that you were working with on the surgical ward you've just mentioned?

Yes, they'd come round and do their rounds every morning and tell you what they want done with so-and-so, and so-and-so,

21:30 and they were pretty good, most of them had been to Vietnam themselves, so they know what it's like over there, yes.

And do you remember the matron? You mentioned the matron.

Matron Mills, yes.

What was she like?

She's gone now. Very strict, typical matron. The other one we had there, Espri, she's in charge of the medical corps now, you see her in

22:00 marches like that in Canberra, and she always leads the medical people. She'd be in her 70s or 80s now.

Well the first one that you mentioned ...

Matron Mills, yes?

Why was she a bit of a character?

Well, I think she was your typical matron, very strict and firm, never been married, I think that was a prerequisite I think, for the matrons not to have been married and had families, in those days. I think it's different now, because you get

22:30 male matrons now, or they call them nurse administrators now, I don't think they call them matrons any more.

And what was she most strict about?

Her priority was the patients, we had to look after those patients, which is fair enough, that is the number one responsibility, isn't it?

I'm just wondering if she was strict at turning down sheets or turning down beds the right way?

23:00 Oh yes, that way too, yes, sorry. When there was a matron's rounds in the morning, we'd have to stand by the bed, and the patient would have to lay there straight as they could, and make sure those corners were hospital corners, and everything was clean, she'd go through all the urinals, the pans, and all the things there and make sure that everything was – all the sterilized stuff was up to date, and been sterilized lately type of thing. Yes, very strict in that way.

23:30 But if you did the job you were right.

And did she have favourites?

To tell you the truth, I don't know. I wasn't anyway, but I don't know, to tell you the truth. I remember some of the nurses there, the officers, the sisters, some of them were very nice.

24:00 Trish Ferguson who lives in Brisbane, she was very nice, and there was another one called Mary O-something or other, she was a real bitch, she was a redhead, and she went to Vietnam and she had a terrible reputation over there, and she came to One Mil, she had a terrible reputation at One Mil, she loved the men, didn't matter what rank they were, but I never got on with her.

24:30 But most of them I got on pretty good with. I mean some were a bit snobbish, "I'm an officer", type of

thing, and wouldn't have anything to do with you, and the other ones you'd go to parties and they'd come along as well, they'd mix with you.

And you've mentioned that now things like the name of matron has changed to I guess reflect less gender

25:00 **roles, was there any stigma for you in those early days, working with women nurses and being a male in the ward? Did you find …?**

No, they treated us the same, because I think there was more of us than there were them, and the officers there had the power, the responsibility of running that ward.

25:30 **And what sort of shifts, how many hours were in a shift that you were working?**

Just eight hour shifts, I think, eight to four or something like that, or nine to five, you'd have an evening shift and you'd have a night shift. Night shifts used to be good.

Why was that?

Well you get a bit of privacy and you can talk to the patients and

26:00 there's no brass around you know, there's no bosses around basically. There was a nurse there, one nursing officer, but she might have two wards to look after or something, and you were sort of left to your own devices in a way, which was good.

And could you sleep at all on the overnight shift, or …?

No, you're not supposed to, no. That was only when I went into the air force I did that.

26:30 No, you weren't allowed to do that.

Can you tell us a bit about – you mentioned sort of in passing that you had crazies, or post traumatic stress disorder patients, why were they called crazy, do you think?

I never called them that myself, it's just an expression that I heard some people call them. But until they found out what post traumatic stress disorder was,

27:00 you know, being under gunfire for quite a while, or nearly blown up, seeing your mates killed and stuff like that, and they were there and being sedated most of the time, until they decide what to do with them, send them out to one of the civvy [civilian] hospitals or discharge them to go home. I think most of them ended up being discharged from the army, to start with.

27:30 I didn't like that ward, because – that's why I liked the surgical ward, a bit happier place, more pain I think, but happier.

From an emotional kind of point of view?

Yes, yes, because at least you see the guys smile and laugh, whereas the other one, the medical ward, most of them were very depressed people.

28:00 **And were there any activities put in place to kind of help, like lighten the mood in the wards or – I mean these days there's various things that – activities …?**

Probably was, going down the pool and things like that, and playing outdoor sports and stuff, the ones that could and the ones that would,

28:30 take them on bus trips and things like that. I think generally they stayed there, I'm not too sure how long they stayed there for, I know some of the surgical patients were there for months and months.

And when patients are in hospital for a long time, the staff do develop quite strong relationships?

29:00 Friendships, yes. You start to get to know their families as well, and all their ins and outs, you do, you get some favourites. Like this guy who was paralysed, Mick Page, I still hear reports about him, how he's going in Cairns, I never caught up with him mind you, but one day I probably will. He was on the, what-do-you-call-it, Canberra, when I was there, and I didn't know

29:30 it. If I'd known I would have probably tried to find him, that was when we had a big parade in Canberra, I heard he was there. And I've seen pictures of him since then, at different reunions, artillery reunions and stuff.

And what was it about his character that you struck up a bit of a bond with?

Well the problem he had, and you know, his outlook on life, that's it, "I'm here, there's not much I can do, you're helping me and

30:00 I'm very thankful for it basically, and if it hadn't happened to me it would have happened to somebody else, probably". It's a very hard one.

Do you mean his story was hard, or …?

Yes, telling me about how his gun got overrun and the enemy thought he was dead and left him there, and they turned the gun around and started trying to use it on

30:30 their own guys, things like that he was telling me. But I think they managed to spike the gun before they could use it, that means they couldn't – they had to do something to the gun itself so they can't use it, anyone can use it, I think they did that before they got overrun, or something.

And who would use the pool? Which patients would use the pool?

All of them, yes, the medical and the surgical

31:00 ones that their dressings had healed, and things like that, they could come and lay in the sun or something, and if there was a definite wound, you just didn't get it wet or something, they could come down. It was quite a nice pool, too. I was always falling in, just to cool off, not supposed to go in there, but whoops.

Accidentally, with your

31:30 **clothes on?**

Yes. Oh no, I used to have shorts I think, just shorts.

Well, you have gone from living in England, doing medical training in snow country, and now you've landed in Brisbane which is really quite tropical. How did you take to the weather in Brisbane?

I didn't mind it but we didn't used to have screens on the windows where we

32:00 slept, and there was three of us in a room there, there was myself, an Italian fellow, and a Polish guy, three of us in there, and the mozzies would come in there and they'd go for me. They'd leave the other two guys alone, I'd come out with bites all over me. Mosquitoes love me, my rich blood. I don't know why. But that was my first contact with Aboriginals too, because we had a couple of guys in the

32:30 army, Aboriginal fellows. And one I still keep in contact with in West Australia. But I got used to the heat, not the floods mind you, because we used to get floods up there occasionally, and lots of rain. So it was certainly nice weather up there.

And

33:00 **where were your rooms or huts in relation to the main hospital?**

Well they sort of had the main hospital up there, and we were down the bottom by the river. We were closer to the water, the main hospital buildings were sort of higher up, I don't know it that's because of any flooding or not, or whatever, or what reason.

And did the flooding affect your accommodation?

No, not while I was there, not –

33:30 we had floods in Brisbane but not – the Brisbane River came up but it never really came over our buildings, but there was some localised flooding around the place, and it has flooded a few times since I left there, when I happened to be visiting there but I wasn't posted there, and the water came streaming through your car or something, you daren't take your foot off the accelerator otherwise you'd never get it started again, that sort of thing. It was interesting.

34:00 **And you were sharing your room with a Polish man and an Italian?**

An Italian. Well they're Australians but you know, they were of Italian descent and Polish descent and myself.

And was this your first contact with mosquitoes?

Yes. We did have mosquitoes in England but I don't remember much about them. But yes, the sort of tropical ones that you associate with the tropics, mosquitoes.

34:30 **And what did you do to relieve the itchiness?**

I think we got something from the medical aid post, RAP [regimental aid post] or whatever it was.

And you mentioned it was also, the One Mil Hospital was your first contact with some Aboriginal men that were in the army?

Yes.

What stories did they tell you?

Well some were patients, and some were medics.

35:00 One had gunshot wounds, and he was in a battalion before I went, 3rd Battalion, he must have been in 3RAR the first tour or something. And he was very nice, and the other one we called Nugget, or Midnight, the names they give them. And I got a postcard from him, because he went to Vietnam before I did,

35:30 and he got posted to the hospital over there, and I got a postcard from him, I've still got that postcard in there, actually.

So he was a medic?

He was a medic and went to Vietnam about six months before I went over. I saw him in Tasmania, five years ago I caught up with him, he was visiting over there.

So he was working on – doing rounds …?

He was a medic, the same as me.

At One Mil?

Yes.

36:00 Would not touch alcohol, this guy, he'd drink Coke, bottles and bottles of Coke, he'd be out here somewhere but he wouldn't drink alcohol. I don't know if he's changed any now, but …

And how was he treated in the hospital?

Very good, he was one of the boys, yes. Same as the Aboriginal fellows that we had in the army as well, you know, the patients were just the same as the white

36:30 fellas.

So he wasn't called names by anybody, or …?

No, well they called him Midnight and Nugget, but I don't – he accepted that I guess, I guess he had to, I don't know but I never really asked him whether he liked it. But everybody knew him as that, when you were talking about somebody, they'd say, "Oh yeah, Nugget". The other guys, I don't think, had nicknames.

37:00 Not that I can remember.

And so you were at One Mil Hospital for about six months, what sort of leave did you get into Brisbane in that six months?

Well most weekends if you weren't on shift you could go in, and I had a car,

37:30 just go to dances and pubs and parties and things like that.

Is this the same car that you had in Healesville, or …?

Yes.

What sort of car was it?

It was a Vauxhall Viva, but one of the guys smashed it up on me, this was when I was in Healesville, he asked me if he could lend my car because his girl – borrow my car from me because his girlfriend in Melbourne was pregnant, and I felt sorry for him. And he went up there, smashed it

38:00 up, went AWL [absent without leave]. Nobody knew where he was or anything. The police rang up and said, "We've found your car", so we had to get a Land Rover out there and tow it back to Healesville and get it fixed up. So I wouldn't lend it to him again, he turned up eventually and said sorry, but he didn't pay for it. I took it to Brisbane with me, even brought it down to South Australia and sold it, just before I went to Vietnam. A little Vauxhall Viva, a little square thing.

38:30 I wanted to get a Volkswagen but a bit more expensive.

So how much was the Vauxhall?

How much money?

Did you buy it for?

It was only a few hundred dollars, but I guess it was a lot of money then, in the 60s.

Well was it a good little car to start off with?

Yes it was, I went to a party one night and had a few drinks, came inside, got in the car, about to start up and I thought, I don't have a wood grain panel on the

39:00 front, I'd got in the wrong one. But the keys fitted exactly the same, just that mine – in Victoria, for some reason the same key fitted the ignition of this one in Queensland. I quickly got out of there and

jumped in my own car, it was just parked behind it. I don't think you could do that nowadays, everything's got to be different, keys have got to be different.

And what colour was it?

The same colour, blue, light blue.

Okay, well our tape's just about to run out,

39:30 **so we'll just stop there.**

Tape 4

00:33 **So, I mean we were just talking about your partying in Surfers Paradise, but I guess for you in your mid-20s and you're still finding your way in Australia, was there kind of a peer group pressure do you think to – well what sort of peer group pressure was there to go out drinking and go partying? Was that – it was the late 60s after all.**

I think I just inherited that from England, I think it was just

01:00 the same, just a different climate and atmosphere, because I used to like going to parties and things, gatecrashing and – it was the thing to do, you'd get to meet the local girls and that sort of thing.

And gatecrashing? Whose parties would you gatecrash?

Civilians, parties and things like that, if we'd hear of a party – most of the time I'd get in, but there were some times they wouldn't let us in.

Would you be – you wouldn't be in uniform

01:30 **though, would you?**

Oh no, no, no, civvies, not like school, when I was in Kapooka where we had to wear uniforms, or even when we went into town, so everyone knew you were army.

And what was the knack of gatecrashing a party? How would you …?

We'd just take some bottles under your arm and just walk in as though you own the place, type of thing, and someone says, "Did we invite you"?

02:00 Used to do a lot of that in London too. But as I say most time you get in okay, but sometimes you might get in a bit of trouble.

And was there any trouble in your time at One Mil?

I don't remember any. No.

No going AWL or …?

No, I didn't go, no, a few of the guys did, I never even got a

02:30 charge there no, I was a good boy.

And what about turning up to work with a bit of a hangover?

It was part and parcel of being young and being in the army, I suppose, I tried not to if I could help it, but it did happen and it made for a very funny day, all hung over. Sometimes they could tell you are, and sometimes they couldn't, as long as you did your

03:00 job, I suppose.

And what was your little trick, did you have a routine for when you were a bit hung over?

I'd take a couple of Teloxine, I don't know if they're still around or not, they're pretty strong pain killers, and vitamin B, and just different things like that, you experiment with these different things, and the old headache would go pretty quick.

And did the patients ever give you a bit of a hard time?

03:30 **Did they spot you?**

No, not that I can remember.

It is very interesting hearing about this time, but I guess going back to your story then, after that six months posting came to an end, how did it come to an end, what …?

I just went up and asked the matron, I said, "I want to go to Vietnam I think, there's nothing else I can learn here basically,

04:00 and thinking I might go to the hospital or something like that over there, but I got posted to an infantry battalion as a medic.

And why did you feel like there was not much more you could learn there?

I was impatient, I wanted to get to Vietnam, I thought, if I'm in the army, but what you're in the army for really is to go to a war zone, and as it

04:30 was I did go eventually.

Well after you put in that first request, what was the …?

Oh, it was only a couple of months and they posted me to 3RAR because they wanted a medic down there and at One Mil hospital they used to grab a lot of people to post to different units, for a holding unit, do a bit of training there, some guys were lucky enough to get posted straight to battalions from Healesville, but I had to go through

05:00 One Mil to get there.

But – so you went from One Mil to Woodside to join …?

3rd Battalion.

Yes, 3rd Battalion. So what were your first impressions when you first got to Woodside?

It's a bit cooler there, I think it was winter when I got there. Yes, it was cold, but at least we were living in buildings, they were wooden they were, and

05:30 I was all right after a while because I got promoted to corporal, so I had my own little room, but for a little while I was with the rest of the diggers, but when you get promoted you get your own room, and you could watch TV in there, you could play your stereo, whatever, and drink in there, as long as you don't caught. It was a lot better. But

06:00 battalions are not as strict as when you go through Healesville, or Kapooka, the recruit training. We had lots of parades and lots of marching, lots of shooting, and you're away a lot, but I guess if you've gone through those, you're used to it. And they were just forming the battalion then, because they'd just got back from Vietnam on their first trip, and I think

06:30 they only had one company and … do you want me to go into exercise?

Yes, well what did you do when you first got there?

Well, I was only there a few weeks and I went on the first exercise to Puckapunyal in Victoria, working with the tanks and I remember walking all night, in pouring rain, to a place and we had to dig in, make a fire support base, and

07:00 we had tanks with us, and they were using live ammunition, firing out, and throwing these little whiz bangs around inside, to make it look like we were getting hit as well, and of course it frightened the life out of me, I thought they were using the real stuff on us as well, and I'm lying in the pit, and there's all stuff falling in on top of me. And it was pretty cold there too, I mean at Puckapunyal, but it

07:30 was – I didn't mind it. They called the exercise the Iron Maiden I think it was. And it was just an exercise between infantry and armoured units, working together. You'd give them the phone at the back of the tank and you could direct fire to a tank firer, where to fire his thing, and the whole tank would move back and you'd be going back like this with the back-blast, shift 50 metres to the left, 50 metres right, and you'd direct fire for them.

So now you're

08:00 **training, even though you were fully trained as a medic, now you're doing just straight infantry training?**

Yes, yes. I was a medic, I had about 100 guys to look after, and sometimes I'd have stretcher bearers with me, with infantry guys who were trained in first aid, and you'd have one per platoon, but it wasn't always like that, because they were made up of the bandsmen, you know, the guys who played in the pipe band, and most of the time they were on –

08:30 doing concerts and things like that, so I might have one or two infantry guys who don't play in the band with me. But …

Just mind your microphone.

Oh yes. When you do a lot of walking, you get people with blisters and twisted ankles, and you've got to get them evacuated back, and all this sort of stuff. Great fun.

09:00 Yes. We were there for about three weeks I think, the first exercise, then you go back to Woodside for a couple of weeks, then you go off somewhere else, up north or something. They tried to get you different types of training, up to Shoalwater Bay up near Rockhampton, we went up there for six weeks, enemy

for the battalion that went overseas, went to Vietnam, and then when we went up there we did six weeks up there and

09:30 another battalion would come to be our enemy, was training for us. Go through Canungra, which is just outside Brisbane, between the Gold Coast and Brisbane, it's a jungle training school, everybody has to go through there before they go to Vietnam. We did that.

And how did you find Canungra? I've heard it described as a bit of a hell hole.

Yes, it was. They're really pushy, you're crawling along and they've got machine guns firing over your head, and live

10:00 bullets, so you've got to keep your head down. I don't think anyone got hit, I think it's probably further than what you think it is, but it sounds like you can hear the bullets whizzing over your head, through barbed wire, jumping off this – getting into these pits, dirty, grotty water, and lots of rope climbing, lots of exercise. There was a hill there called Heartbreak Hill, and you'd get up the top and you can see Surfers Paradises in the

10:30 distance, all the lights, and you think, "Oh, I wish I was there".

And the emphasis at Canungra was really on physical fitness?

Just to make sure, yes, you knew what you were doing before you go to Vietnam, it's just – everybody had to do it, cooks, everybody.

And were there things at Canungra that you found really difficult?

I always found rope climbing pretty hard, I mean I could after a while if I persist with it, but

11:00 my shoulders weren't strong enough, or my legs weren't strong enough to hold onto the ropes or something. But I did a bit of everything I think, that everybody else did, but being a medic you've got to be there to keep an eye on them as well see, so some things you got away with, in case any of them get hurt, or fall or something.

So as a corporal you mentioned you had about, was it 100 …?

About 100 guys. Yes, in Vietnam I

11:30 think we had about 120, because you get a lot of people attached to you, engineers and things like that, and Vietnamese scouts and interpreters and things.

But doing all this jungle preparation training at different places like Canungra you would be looking after men as they went through their paces, or …?

Yes, and you might have a couple of stretcher bearers with you then, depending. People come up to you with tick bites and

12:00 leeches stuck on them and things like that, twisted ankles, heat stroke, heat exhaustion, and then you'd have to evacuate them out.

And how was somebody evacuated out of a place like Canungra when …?

Well Canungra wasn't too bad, because you're pretty close to the tracks, and they'd send vehicles in or something like that, don't think we ever used a helicopter there. Whereas Shoalwater Bay and some of those other training areas, we had to use

12:30 helicopters, especially for snake bites and things like that. Yes, that's about it.

And were there any – in these different places that you went to, I think you mentioned Rockhampton as well, did you find any men that were – I mean it is a kind of a weeding out process, these training schools, so were there any men that didn't make it or …?

A lot of guys didn't want to

13:00 go. One guy came up to me one day with his finger in his hand, he'd chopped it off. He put a tourniquet around it, chopped his trigger finger off, like that, there's nothing you can do with it, they charged him and medically discharged him on psychiatric grounds. Another guy shot himself in the toe. Just things like that, trying to get out of going.

He chopped it off on purpose?

Yes, with a machete, put it on a rock and used his machete.

This is a very

13:30 **extreme action to take.**

Yes. Another guy shot himself in the toe, of course he couldn't go without a big toe, because it affects his balance. Some guys had mental breakdowns, things like that, they didn't want to go.

And these blokes, the one that chopped his finger off and the one that shot himself in the toe, were they regular army or were they conscripts of …?

I don't know, I can't remember what they were actually. I think it didn't

14:00 matter if they were regs or national servicemen, it could happen to anybody. I mean – I'm trying to think of the word, it could have been either, yes. Some could hack it, some couldn't hack it.

What did you do when somebody – when that man came to you with his finger in his hand?

Just put a dressing on and stop the bleeding, get the doctor to stitch him up or whatever.

14:30 **And could you …?**

Could do anything with his finger, in those days, they put them on ice now and you can reattach them, but I think it'd gone past that, he made such a mess of it.

But I'm also wondering if you talked to him at all about how it happened and why he did it?

Well he didn't want to go to Vietnam, it was obvious, that was.

But did he tell you that up front, or …?

Yes, yes,

15:00 yes. The guy with the gunshot, I don't know what reasons he did it, because a lot of us used to rest our rifles on our toes, to keep it out of the mud, the barrel out of the mud. But I think he did it on purpose. A lot of guys would go on leave and not come back, AWL.

Were you surprised? How did you react when these incidents happened?

15:30 I guess at the time, shocked. Thinking about it now I can laugh about it, but I guess it wasn't funny at the time. Yes, different schemes, different ways people try to get out of going to Vietnam, especially national servicemen in that respect because they were called up, whereas regular guys, I mean as I say, it does happen to regular guys because they don't realise what it's really like until they're basically

16:00 nearly there, all the training, they're thinking, what have I let myself in for. And I think the percentage would be pretty high of people who didn't want to go. But they said that national servicemen had a choice, I don't know. I mean most of the guys I know, they went. I said, "Were you asked if you wanted to go"? And they said "No". But from what you read nowadays,

16:30 they seem to have a choice, but I don't think they did. Some of them didn't want to go so …

And were there any other ways that you came across – I mean those two examples that you've given us are very extreme, what were the other ways?

A lot of guys had breakdowns and ended up at Glenside [Psychiatric Hospital Adelaide], we had to take them down there, that was a big place at that time for the guys who had the breakdowns.

17:00 They seemed to be the main things, shoot yourself, or – I only saw that once, and I only saw the finger once, but I have heard of other cases in other units.

Of other men cutting …?

Yes, I have heard of it, I mean I don't know if it's true, but I have heard of it. And as I say a lot of people did have breakdowns,

17:30 unless they were just putting it on or whatever.

And you're now in a position of responsibility as a corporal. What was the change for you?

Well I boss of that company medical-wise, I was the advisor to the company commander, I had to advise him and say, "Well that guy's got to go out", if he took

18:00 notice of me, that's his prerogative. But I was the doctors' representative out in the field, what I say goes normally. I mean you say, "Look, he's not going to last very long, he needs to be medevac'd out [medical evacuation], the OC [officer commanding] would be going, "Oh …", but most of the time he'd come round and say, "What are we doing"? Because he knew if anything happened to that bloke, he'd be held responsible. So we pretty held in

18:30 high esteem I think, is the word. The boys used to look after me, and I used to look after them, advise, as I said, advise the company commander about different things, about these guys not drinking enough water, having been taken their anti-malarial tablets and things like that, and you'd have to do something about it. As I say, my boss was

19:00 the doctor.

And how strict was he?

He was good, he was the national serviceman doctor. I still keep in touch with him, he's in Tasmania, he's a gastroenterologist now. He's very nice, very good.

And did he have a particular criteria that he would discuss with you about how you could and couldn't – well what was the criteria

19:30 **for assessing blokes in those …?**

Well there was a doctor, and you'd have a sergeant, then you'd have five or six medics, I think we were all corporals bar one, and each one to a company, and now and again he'd get us all together and he'd just tell us what our responsibilities are, and what we're supposed to do. Most of it was common sense,

20:00 I think he just after a while – because we were supposed to go to Vietnam in 1970 and the Liberal Government or whoever it was at the time decided to cut the battalions back, and so we didn't go, so we had another year of training. So I reckon we must have been the most highly training battalion to go to Vietnam, because I was never – I was always away somewhere on exercise and training. And maybe that helped us why our death rate was down so low,

20:30 we only had four blokes killed there. But the doctor used to lay guidelines down about different things.

And on what – just one or two examples of what those guidelines or criteria might have been?

Well if you assess somebody and you say, "He's not going to last", or "He's got something different to heat exhaustion, heat stroke", heat stroke it means you're

21:00 going to die very shortly, if they don't get treated, and you tell the OC, that's it, something's got to happen, if they can get him out, get him into the water and cool him down somehow. Different things like that, otherwise he's going to be dead before you know it.

And were there any blokes that kind of slipped through, that maybe you think in hindsight shouldn't have been passed or …?

No –

21:30 what do you mean, sorry?

Well, like assessed incorrectly or got through the course but then …

I did hear, one of my stretcher bearers, I wasn't with him at the time, they were 1000 metres away from us, one of the guys had heatstroke and they threw him in the river, and – now I wouldn't have done that, because they submerge, and he could swallow a lot of water, you end up with pneumonia. Now I would have put him in the water to cool him down, but make sure his head was above

22:00 water, basically. But they threw him in and he went under and got submerged. And he ended up pretty crook. Another guy, another one of my stretcher bearers put – at night time, and one of the guys had something in his eye, and he used eardrops to put in this bloke's eye, which is a no-no, he couldn't see the label, the label had come off. But I would have recognised the bottle for instance,

22:30 it was a different shaped bottle. And we had to syringe his eye out. Lucky he didn't do any damage to it. If we think a guy needed suturing and stuff like that, or needed morphine, we didn't have to ask permission, we just did it, or you'd put a drip in. If we think they need it, they get it.

Another thing that I was thinking of is if you

23:00 **found during these training and pre-Vietnam preparation days, were there any blokes that I guess tried to hide things that maybe they shouldn't have, like got through the courses but then didn't follow through later on?**

You mean they wanted to go to Vietnam, that kind of thing?

Because they really wanted to go.

Oh yes, we had one guy, his name was Crow, and he had crow feet, I'm not joking, his feet were like that, sort of

23:30 flat like that, his toes were like that, and he wouldn't have lasted five minutes with boots on, so I had to report him, they ended up discharging him. Guys with chronic skin conditions, we couldn't take them with us, if I saw somebody I'd have to tell the doctor because of things erupting and ulcers and things, and boils and things like that, or if they've got some funny rashes or something. So I used to do a –

24:00 they called it a full fitness inspection on them once a week, and check all their feet, between their toes, and check with their hair, make sure they've got no rashes, and that sort of stuff, and report them if they had, or go and get treatment.

And as you've said, that is a very powerful position for you to be in, in many respects, but you did mention that the boys looked after you and you looked after them, but were there any cases

24:30 **where it came back on you, that maybe you assessed somebody and they were a bit antsy about your assessment?**

Guys come up to me now and say, “Look, you did that, you could have done a better job”, you know, I’d sutured their hand up or something like that, and I’d just laugh at it really. And one guy who’s a captain, or major, he lives in Adelaide actually, he said, “Look, you couldn’t even get that right”, he says things like that to this day, you know, only stirring, but I think it would have been the same

25:00 whatever happened, even if somebody else had done it.

But I’m particularly thinking about those blokes, like the man with the crow feet, who might have really wanted to go to Vietnam.

He did yes, but I didn’t hear what happened about it after. I think it happened to quite a few people, with different problems and they just couldn’t take them. We had one guy who kept on shooting all night, you know, you’d just hear the noise, and

25:30 open up, thinking there was enemy out there or something, and it just might be animals or something. They had to send him back, he had a nickname, Jumpy, Jumpy Clark.

And those full inspections that you did, what, once a week?

FFIs [“free from infection” parades], whenever the company commander or platoon commanders used to call us up. They used to do them themselves, but we used to do more exact ones, you know,

26:00 the proper one, and I think it was about once a week, when they came back from the exercises and go on exercises to make sure they’re not hiding anything before they go and not hiding anything when they get back.

Were they naked inspections or …?

Yes, or just in their jocks, I think.

I can imagine the back chat that would be going on.

Yes. But I guess it had to be done.

26:30 I mean if there was anything wrong with someone I’m sure one of the other guys would have seen it anyway, and might mention it to you, if they saw a rash on them or something like that, and I didn’t see it.

And who inspected you?

No-one, they just had to rely on my own honesty.

And were there times that you might have pushed yourself a bit harder than you should have?

A couple of times I nearly came down with

27:00 heatstroke, yes.

During training?

And in Vietnam too, you just think, I can’t go on, I can’t go on. You get yourself – control yourself, a few drinks of water and …

The heat stroke that you encountered in training, where was that?

That was mostly up in Queensland, yes, and in the Northern Territory. Even here in the sun down here,

27:30 Murray Bridge, places like that. But I think most of them were heat exhaustion which is not so bad, you just put them in the cool and cool them down. But the heat stroke ones were very severe. We never lost anyone, but I believe some guys have died through heat stroke.

And how would you know the …?

The difference between heat exhaustion? Well there’s no

28:00 sweating in heat stroke, you temperature really shoots up, because there’s no fluid in your body, you’re just so dry. Whereas with heat exhaustion you’re sweating quite a bit and you’ve got a reasonably high temperature. But it’s the lack of sweat I think is the biggest thing, and usually it goes into unconsciousness and shock, then unconsciousness, that type of thing.

And you mentioned a couple of the exercises that you were out on,

28:30 **like with enemy, simulating field exercises, and what other field exercises were you doing?**

Shooting, sometimes we’d just go shooting different weapons, I’d go as a medic, where they’re firing the mortars or any tank weapons, grenades, and the different types of ranges, there’s one at Port Adelaide and there’s one at Murray Bridge, where you go through, and

29:00 targets pop up all the time. Very dangerous actually, and the ones where you're lying down on the range and they come up 50 metres underneath, 200 metres, and they score them.

And was that all with live …?

Live ammunition, yes. I mean on the exercises themselves, where we had enemy, that was all, blank ammunition, you had a little attachment on the end of your rifle, but when you're out in the ranges it's all live ammunition, live ammo.

29:30 **And what sort of weapons were you being trained on?**

Mostly SLR [M60 self-loading rifle], that's a 7.62mm machinegun, but we did fire the M16, M60 and powerheads and the F1. But when I went to Vietnam I had an M16. Actually in Australia I think most of the time was an M16, it's a lot lighter, and it's automatic.

And

30:00 **what sort of shot were you?**

I was pretty good actually, I was a marksman with a pistol, and a first class with the SLR and the M16 and M60. Of course it's a funny thing, a lot of the medics are really good shots, I don't know why, we were probably in the wrong corps, all that practice with the needles maybe or something, I don't know what reason, but a lot of the medics were very good. And at one time they used to give them a cross rifle, and you get extra pay for it,

30:30 but they stopped doing it when I got my cross rifles for pistols, and didn't get any extra money out of it.

Perhaps it's about having a steady hand?

Could be. Used to have a good eye, too. I'm pretty good now actually, but it's hard when you're wearing glasses, because I have to wear glasses now and it's hard to shoot a rifle. So I don't do any shooting now.

And so

31:00 **you – I think the firing range down at Port Adelaide is the Deane Range?**

Deane Range, yes. It's still there actually, because one of my boys goes down there shooting. But most of our shooting was at Murray Bridge, we'd go there for a couple of weeks and stay there and just shoot. Had a little village out there too, we used to do mock attacks on it, you know, make it like a Vietnamese village, which was quite interesting.

How would you do that?

Well you just cordon the search, they'd call it, you'd cordon off the

31:30 whole place and then you'd sweep through and do a search, building by building. We did a few of those in Australia, we never did it in Vietnam, but a few of the other units did.

And these were complete sort of buildings?

Buildings yes, maintenance work, you know, they're made of straw or anything like that, you'd have to go through and make sure there were no tunnels and things underneath that sort of stuff, check the food out, make sure nothing's booby trapped and all that sort of thing. It's pretty

32:00 realistic, but I guess nothing like the real thing, slightly different.

And Murray Bridge is not jungle?

No, no, but they've got – every now and again there's lots of trees, if I remember rightly it was amongst the trees somewhere, and they've got big obstacles courses out there too, you used to be able to use, I don't think you can still do it, you know, big high walls and ropes and things.

Those ropes again.

Yes,

32:30 yes.

Well that's interesting, I didn't know that you would actually set up a little like simulated – a village or a …

Yes, that's where we went all the time, I don't know if it's still there. And there's one up at Canungra, and I think there's one at Wyangala, which is northern New South Wales, a village there that we used to do mock attacks on.

So when you did that mock attack, would there be simulated enemy inside?

Yes,

33:00 most of the time, yes, maybe dressed up in black and they'd have Russian weapons, you know, AK47s

and stuff like that. None of them could be used, I mean they'd all been fixed so they can't use them again, but they were there, and make it look like the real thing.

And in those training exercises, those mock attacks, what was the aim? Like what were you being trained – was it shoot on sight or was it – what was …?

33:30 No, it was just training to make sure that you did what you were taught about searching buildings properly, villages properly, make sure that you treat the public – the peasants whatever they call them, properly, don't mistreat them, make sure you know the difference, which is very hard, between enemy and us and that.

34:00 We used to take prisoners and bind them up and stuff like that, but you'd have to make sure with the Geneva Convention that you did the right thing with them.

So in a sense this is learning the rules – or being taught the rules of engagement?

Rules of engagement, yes, the rules of war.

And were there other particularity or specifics about the local population or the enemy that you were being

34:30 **taught?**

No, not really. Some of our guys might have had a basic kind of Vietnamese, but when we actually got to Vietnam we had interpreters and bush scouts with us, Vietnamese people, but in Australia we didn't, and the guys who were acting the enemy made it pretty good realistic, you know what I mean? The way they were dressed, the way they would act, made them look like they were really Vietnamese. Some of them

35:00 probably had been to Vietnam before, so they had a bit of experience, plus a lot of our corporals and sergeants and officers were veterans who'd already been to Vietnam on one tour, and this was their second tour.

Well what would the rules have been, if you encountered civilians? What were you being taught?

Well if it was in a – I guess if it was in a village which was suspected of being

35:30 a VC [Viet Cong] hideout, you'd treat them all as VC, but you'd have to just be gentle with them I guess and you know, interrogate them, which wasn't my job, but somebody would have interrogated them, and find out if they were enemy and just look around and see if there was anything that makes them suspicious, if there was anything hidden somewhere in their building, or that sort of thing.

36:00 **Well, I was sort of wondering how they really prepared you for this new enemy before you went to Vietnam? What did they tell you what to expect of this new enemy?**

They all look the same, and it's very hard to tell who's your enemy, who's your friend.

36:30 There could be a peasant one minute and then VC the next minute, be on your guard at all times, don't fraternise, just be careful, be streetwise I guess is the expression. Know your enemy.

37:00 **And so that's quite a long period of training that you had, about 18 months or so?**

Yes, all of '70, and a month of '71, probably three months of '69, yes. A lot of the guys, by the time we got to Vietnam their time was up, national servicemen, their

37:30 two years were up, so they never came so they had to bring new guys in.

And do you remember getting that news that your posting to Vietnam was imminent?

Yes, we were supposed to go some time in 1970, they said October, '71, and '70, and that was cancelled, and they said, "Right, it's

38:00 February the 14th you're sailing", and you got two weeks, three weeks leave and get everything sorted out, your will and all that sort of stuff. So I went over to England, a quick trip over there, made sure it was done.

That's a very quick trip.

Yes, three weeks, three or four weeks in all.

38:30 Because you don't know if it's your last time or not, so then you go back to see your parents and that.

Was that a good thing for you to do?

I think so, yes. I went back there when I came back as well, to show them I was all right, nothing's changed.

And did you make our your own will?

Yes. Well, we had to go and see somebody about it, I think the army did it for you and they kept a copy of it, they supplied the lawyer to fill it out for you and all that.

39:00 And just to make sure you got all your banking stuff done, insurances and everything sorted out, if you had housing and cats, wives or whatever, make sure everything can survive without you.

And did you have a girl at this point, a steady girl?

No I didn't, no. I was one of the lucky ones. A lot of the guys had wives and things like that, so I used to read their letters, they used to show me their

39:30 mail and that.

Okay, well our tape's just about to run out, so we'll take a moment to change it.

Tape 5

00:30 **We were just talking about the preparation for Vietnam. How did you feel about putting these processes in place for the prospect of never coming back?**

I think you just accept it, thinking that's the normal thing to do, make sure you've got everything in order, in case you don't come back. I guess you don't

01:00 think it's going to happen to you, but it happens to somebody so there's always that chance. So you go ahead and do it.

And you didn't have a relationship at that time?

No.

Aside from the will, what other things do you have to – what other loose ends did you have to tie up so to speak?

I had to sell the car, which I took down to Stillwell Ford and part exchanged it

01:30 for a new one, I told them I'd get a new one which I get back to Australia, which I never did, I got one through the American PX [base canteen] actually. Just your banking details, your allotment, you know, where your money goes to, and storing your stuff, I think we had to pack everything up and store it. I didn't have luckily because I had no family, and

02:00 what I had was just my uniforms plus the two suitcases that I came out with, basically. So I didn't have too much stuff to store, but the rest of the stuff we took with us.

And what was your farewell like in London?

Oh, it was pretty good, yes, typical what do you call it, an English party I guess, there was

02:30 just drinks and dancing and saying goodbye and stuff like that. All the family came, and as I say, friends came as well.

So how soon after getting back from London did you then embark for Vietnam?

Probably in about a week, two weeks, because we had a big farewell here too.

03:00 Yes, probably have been a week, two weeks before we went.

And where did you fly out of Australia?

I went to Outer Harbour, I went on the HMAS Sydney, the old aircraft carrier which was used as a troop ship, I went on that.

And what was the departure like from Sydney Harbour?

Outer Harbour.

Outer Harbour, sorry.

Outer Harbour, yes. It was good because a lot of

03:30 mates had their families there to see them off, I didn't have anyone to see me off, but little did I realise at the time, but there was a girl there seeing a guy off, was the one I ended up marrying. She was there going out with some guy that sent over. But it was good, it was sad I guess because I had nobody there to see me off, because there were people with big signs and things like that, and lots of

04:00 tears everywhere, we were all up on the – got some pictures actually, all lined up on the side of the ship,

saying goodbyes, basically.

And were there any protests or anything at Outer Harbour?

No, we had protests before that, moratorium protests [seeking a moratorium on conscription of soldiers], down in Adelaide, I'm sure that's before we went to Vietnam we had moratoriums,

04:30 yes, because there were big brawls, and the army guys were fighting the uni students and that down there. That'd be right wouldn't it, before Vietnam? Because I mean it'd be silly I think, if we'd come back there wouldn't have been any need to have a moratorium. Yes, it must have been before we went over, but there was no demonstrations down at Outer Harbour.

Did you go down to the moratoriums?

Yes, two I went to, down to

05:00 Rundle Street, or The Mall now. There used to a pub called the Rundle Hotel down there, and it used to be our local hang out, and it had an upstairs, and it overlooked Rundle Street, and we'd throw things down at the people and stuff like that. I remember one of them I got too drunk, because I went back to some girl's place, but I watched it on TV and that's when that big brawl started, and the MPs [Military police] rounded up all the army

05:30 guys they could find, took them back to Woodside and closed the camp and nobody was allowed to leave. And yes, there was big trouble over that, and they were going to fine them, but all these doctors and lawyers offered to pay their fines for them, so it was all dropped and it was kept quiet. They were supporting the army guys. But a few of our guys got arrested, they were burning the Viet

06:00 Cong flag, which some of the students had, just things like that. I think there were a few fights, all the army guys had – what I saw on TV, one particular one, they all had their arms linked to stop the moratorium people getting through.

And so when the moratoriums were coming up, what was the feeling amongst you blokes?

They're entitled to their –

06:30 what they think, but we were doing our job and we were going, there's nothing they could do to stop us, and I guess their thing was to try and stop us from going, somehow. Don't know how.

So with the – with your response, or you and your mates, when you heard the moratoriums were coming up

07:00 **and you went down there to make your peace known, what was your argument for going to Vietnam?**

Well we'd done all our training and we were helping the fight for freedom I suppose, that's what we were in the army for, that's what a soldier's for, isn't it, basically, defending his country or going off to fight somewhere else, and just doing our

07:30 job.

And what was the general opinion of the protests?

You mean the public or …?

No, your opinion, how did you feel about the protests and the protestors?

I thought it was silly actually, I thought "there but for for the grace of God…", they could have been called up for national service, but I think they were exempt, I think students were.

08:00 No, I just thought they were entitled to do it, it's up to them, as long as it doesn't interfere with me, and it didn't interfere with us, we went. They got a bit of publicity out of it and a few of the MPs [members of parliament] were there with them. Jim Cairns [James Ford Cairns, Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer, 1974-75] I think was with them, be like the same as in America where that, what's her name, Jane

08:30 Fonda [American actress], Hanoi Jane they called her, she's not forgiven to this day, for demonstrating against the Vietnam War and all that stuff. No, I just thought they did what they thought was right, and we did what we thought was right.

That's an interesting atmosphere to be leaving Australia in.

Yes.

How did that affect the mood

09:00 **of the guys going over?**

I don't think it affected them in any way. We did notice when we came back that there wasn't many people to welcome us back, you know, on the streets and stuff, which was a bit disappointing after you

see the ones with other wars and things like that. But I think people just took it – the guys just took it in their stride. I don't think it upset them one way or

09:30 another.

So what – how long was the journey over? Where did you land in Vietnam?

In Vung Tau.

And how long was the journey from Outer Harbour to Vung Tau?

Ten days,

And was there any further training on the ship?

Yes, just PT stuff, and shooting and games, crossing the equator and all those funny things,

10:00 playing bingo, they call it snowball, but …

How was the crossing of the equator marked?

You had King Neptune come on board, one of the navy guys dressed up, and you have funny things happen, you had a 44-gallon drum, and somehow it's revolving and they put soapy water and you've got to walk across it. I didn't have to do that luckily, but one of our guys did and one leg went one way and one leg went the other

10:30 way, and he went right on you-know-what, and he had to – they had to bleed him and everything because they swelled up so much, and he ended up losing one testicle. Anyway. Just funny things like that, and drinking, you were allowed two cans per person per day, but that was the big 26-ounce cans of Fosters. But it was good, we hit a bit of a

11:00 storm going up, and they were going to dump all the trucks, because we had trucks on the deck, and if it listed another five degrees they were going to dump them all over the side, and the boys were all seasick, and I was myself too. Trying to give them pills to stop them, and the boat's like this, not used to it. A lot of the guys slept in hammocks, I was lucky enough to get a bed, but it was like a bunk bed. I didn't like the smell, I

11:30 didn't like the smell of the ship, because you know, the diesel oil they used, the fuel they used, hot and sticky down below deck. The food wasn't bad. Yes, it went pretty quick actually. Saw some interesting places, went past Krakatoa, which is a big volcano in Indonesia,

12:00 went passed a lot of islands and dolphins, different things we saw up there. It was all right. I lay on the back of the ship, shooting balloons on the waves, to keep your eye in.

Was that part of your target practice?

Yes, just letting these balloons off and then shooting from the ship, and the navy guys would be practising with their Bofors guns, they're bigger, from the sides.

12:30 Played volleyball down there too, volleyball or basketball? Might have been basketball, where the planes used to go up and down, you'd play downstairs or down below deck. But it wasn't too bad.

How did you get along with the navy blokes?

Pretty good, actually. I don't think they liked me because I won the snowball twice, that was their jackpot in their bingo thing. They said,

13:00 "You can go home". But it wasn't too bad. I never used to drink much, because I'd think two beers wasn't worth while, so I used to give my ration away to somebody else, or sell it to somebody else. You can have a few beers if you make it worthwhile.

Did you think of storing them?

Yes, but I mean I might have got caught or something, I don't know. Actually no, I didn't think of it, storing them.

13:30 I think they opened them, so yes, I'm sure that they opened the cans so you couldn't really store them.

And what were your first impressions of Vung Tau?

Vung Tau.

Vung Tau, sorry.

Like an Asian port. The smell, you know, like the foods and the heat, humidity.

14:00 **What were the smells like?**

Just reminded me of when I go to Thailand or somewhere, food smells, and sewerage smells, just sort of tropical smells and also you could smell flowers and stuff like that. Yes, a bit of everything combined, I

think.

And what activity was going on

14:30 **in the port?**

Just ships unloading and loading fishing boats, stuff like that. And they came and picked us on in helicopters. Some went by boat I think, but the majority of us went off in those big Chinook helicopters, they came and picked us up. I saw those sort of Chinese-looking boats, they don't

15:00 call them sampans, I don't know what they call them in Vietnam, but seeing the local boats where they are, just like sort of an Asian country.

Were there signs that this was a country at war?

No, no, you wouldn't think so, no, not till you actually – when the helicopters picked us up and took us back to Nui Dat, that's when you knew you were in a war zone.

15:30 **You described some of the smells, but what about the sounds, what sounds would you hear in the port?**

Just the hustle and bustle of ports, boats, the noises they make, hooter noises type of thing, just unloading ship noises, there's no gunfire or anything like that, bombs or anything we could hear,

16:00 just the hustle and bustle of dock-type areas, you get around the world.

Was the water clean around the port?

No, I didn't see any clean water over there. Wasn't sewerage, but just dark water, a like the Yarra River in Melbourne, something like that.

And then you were flown into Nui Dat?

16:30 Yes.

And that was your base?

Yes.

And how was the base laid out?

I can't remember to tell you the truth, I know they had a strip, like a small airstrip there for I think Hercules and Caribous [planes] and things like that, plus they've got the pads where the choppers land. I think there was something like – I think there was two

17:00 battalions doing the guard and artillery and all these other units in there, and we were given our spot, which was on SAS Hill which – the SAS they're normally up there, but they'd go out quite a bit so we were doing a lot of their area. And we were allocated our tents, everybody had a tent, with sandbags up on the sides,

17:30 and boards, floorboards and sandbags, and corrugated iron in between, or with sandbags in between, that's right. And you had a couple of desks in there, lockers, one locker each, and a bed, an army bed. Yes, I think I shared mine with a driver, my tent, some of the tents

18:00 had four to a tent, but I was lucky because mine was used as an RAP as well, which is the regimental air post, so I had all my medical stuff there as well. Did notice a lot of ammunition and stuff under the floorboards, people had just discarded their grenades, they'd just thrown them under there from past companies and things, battalions. Yes, we just got settled in

18:30 to – the first one or two days, settled into the building, going down and getting the cooks to cook our dinner for us, go down to the mess hall, each company had three or four cooks, who just used to cook for those people. And we'd play a bit of volleyball or something or basketball, for one or two days

19:00 before we went out.

And you said that when you got into Vung Tau you couldn't tell you were in a war zone. What was the feeling when you got to Nui Dat?

Oh no, you could definitely see that was a war zone, I mean there wasn't any firing going on or anything like that, but just by the buildings, the sandbags, all the choppers lined up, the artillery guns all facing different ways, or whatever, which way they're supposed to be facing,

19:30 a lot of activity, soldiers coming in, soldiers going, coming in, going out, that's about it, yes. Choppers going out, taking people out, gunships going out, maybe they'd just come back from an operation or something. That's about it.

And how did you feel about being in a war zone now?

20:00 Thinking, well we're finally here, we might get to see some action soon, type of thing. It is an eye-

opener just to look around and see why I'm here, but that's the way it is, I guess.

And how long was it before you went out on your first operation?

I think it was two days, we

20:30 left on the 14th of February, 14 days, 28, probably about the 30th yes, about two days I think, three days we went out to do some shotting, they'd arranged it up there that we'd do some shooting, then we went on a low firing exercise to watch our guys' tanks and things firing artillery, to get us used to the noise again and

21:00 having support and all that sort of stuff. Then we went out on our first operation to an area that was supposed to be safe, it's in-country training they call it area, where there's not supposed to be any enemy or – it's supposed to be a good area, and get you used to the country and all that sort of stuff. And we went out there.

And how did you get used to the country?

Well I just guess moving every night, digging in, digging your pits and eating your

21:30 ration packs and going and doing patrols, sentries and clearing patrols, just generally harbouring up and making your firing – do your firing positions and all that sort of stuff.

Sorry, you said something about clearing patrols, so you were in operations now?

Yes, but it was supposed to be a safe area, but you still sent out clearing patrols and

22:00 having sentries out and stuff like that, because I mean you never know.

Sorry, what was that? Handing sentries out?

No, sending sentries out, sentries going out and doing their thing, setting up a couple of hundred yards in front of you type of thing, so they're the first people that see anything, changing them over. Stand to, stand down each night and mornings, having people manning the machine gun all night and radios all night, that

22:30 type of stuff. That happened for a couple of days till we had our first contact.

Well before we talk about the first contact, how were the men in your company coping with the new environment, the new climate?

Pretty good, I think, yes. All very wary, waiting for the first gunfire basically, to go. And that's what happened.

Well let's talk about what happened on your first contact.

23:00 We were still part of that in-country training, it was supposed to be a safe area, and I think the whole company might have been harboured up, and one of our guys, Joe, was out on sentry and he saw three guys, and he challenged them, you know, you say, "Halt, who goes there", type of thing. And they turned around and started shooting at him. So he shot back, killed one, and the other two ran off. And of course everybody stood to then, we all

23:30 wondered what was happened, and I got a call to say that we've got one wounded enemy. As I went over there I heard a shot and he was dead when I got there, he had 14 rounds through him, and everything was hanging out. He probably would have been about 19, 20, this guy, but he had an AK47 with him and he had all his Vietnamese –

24:00 he looked like a VC, I don't think he was regular North Vietnamese Army, I think he was a local VC. Because they said, when I went up to him, the sergeant says, "There's nothing you can do for him now he's dead", so they just took the stuff off him, his belt, his sandals and any maps he had on him, and his rifle and we pulled him up on the

24:30 riverbank and caved the bank in on top of him, that's how we left him there, buried under there. Then we moved out.

Why did you take his belt and sandals?

Well I didn't myself, but I guess some of the guys wanted souvenirs I suppose, yes. Because they were Ho Chi Minh sandals they called them, the ones that Ho Chi Minh brought in [Ho Chi Minh, President of North Vietnam]. And the rifle I think, all their stuff – actually the sandals and that might have even been sent back, I don't know

25:00 if anyone actually confiscated them because I know one of the guys had one of those cone hats too, I don't know where that ended up either. But we just moved off I think, it might have been the next day we might have moved off. And that's when we had further problems.

Well before we move on to the further problems, the VC were quite known for taking their dead and wounded away from flash points,

25:30 **why did you bury him?**

Well they didn't have – well, couldn't just leave him out in the open, it wasn't my decision anyway, but someone said, "Just bury him there", and we buried him there. And I don't even know if they recorded where they buried him or not. They got all the useful stuff off him, as I said the other two ran off,

26:00 and the poor guy that shot him, is suffering to this day, the guy that killed him, he's a very emotional fellow, and he still remembers all that.

Was that his first contact?

Yes. It was all our first contact, but he was the one who actually killed him.

You said that there were 14 – I don't want to labour this point, but I'm just curious. There were 14 rounds in this guy …

That's what we were told, yes.

And he was shot by one of …

26:30 A guy with an SLR.

So he was shot, wounded, you went out to assess him …?

Well I was called out, they always call out medic, so you go out there. But then the shot and they said not to worry about it, he was dead. He was very bad, he wouldn't have survived that anyway.

Well what was the policy for wounded enemy, or injured enemy?

Well if they weren't too bad I guess they would have

27:00 taken them in and sent them back for interrogation or treat them there, then interrogation. But this guy would have been way past it.

And what comfort did you give Joe?

Well nothing, none then. That was his job, he was the sentry, but he – in the last 10, 15 years he's had a lot of problems, psychological problems.

27:30 He comes from Mauritius this guy, he's a French guy, and whenever I go and see him – he lives in Perth – he gets very teary-eyed and all that sort of stuff. And he's getting a lot of counselling and that, but, one of those things.

So from that contact you moved on? Were you still in this fairly safe area, or …?

Yes, we were, yes,

28:00 I think it was the next day or the day after, the whole company was together and all hell broke loose, somebody started opening up with the M16 rifle and the claymores [mines] went off, and I got called up, the stretcher bearers got called up. I got called to one of the guys, one of the machine gunners, but there was nothing I could do for

28:30 him, he was dead, he got shot in the head, there was no exit wound so the old bullet must have ricocheted inside him. So I pulled him back and the other guy took over with the machine gun, shooting out, and I think somebody must have joined him, had to go and help him, because he needed somebody to help supply the ammunition and that. And one of my stretcher bearers went looking for the platoon commander, and he'd been blown up, he

29:00 was a mess, he was all over the place. And we had a few guys shot up, one guy got shot in the shoulder, the bullet went through, knocked the eye out, so we had to medivac him. Another guy got a bit of a bullet in his eye, there was a few other guys we had to evacuate out. And we got the bodies out that night, we got a

29:30 helicopter in to bring us in extra ammunition, because we were running out of ammunition, because it went on for about eight hours, this contact. And we had to get a chopper in to take these two out, I can't remember if that was before the contact finished or what, but they say that that night was very – it cost $5 million in monetary

30:00 terms just to keep the illumination, you know, that the artillery were putting up, with shells, to make it light so you could see what you're doing, and they said it cost $5 million just in artillery stuff. And we got resupplied with ammunition I think, and – I'm trying to think what else happened after that – yes it went on for eight hours and I just went round and checked guys and stuff like that to see if they were all right. And in the

30:30 morning we had to go out and check around and we found bits more of the boss who'd – his leg and a few other things, we just buried them. The two bodies had gone out and all the guys were evacuated, the ones who were wounded, like one had to go up on one of those jungle penetrators, you know those – that come through – the clearing's not too good they have to come through the jungle, and you sit them

on it and strap them on and they just get winched up,

31:00 and the first thing he said to me, and I said to him, I said, “Give my your cigarettes, you won’t need them”, because he was going back to hospital, so he gave me his cigarettes. I saw the guy 25 years later and the first thing he said to me, he says, “Where’s those cigarettes you owe me”? But he lost his eye, and he’s got a glass eye now, but I took his cigarettes off him and he was winched out, and they brought out fresh food for us, because we’d been living on ration packs for a few days,

31:30 they thought it might help cheer us up, seeing it was our first contact, and we’d had two killed and about three or four wounded. And I guess there was an investigation into that, what happened there. We didn’t find one dead enemy out there, they must have all been taken, I guess. Yes, we moved out and the next night we had the tanks with us,

32:00 and they were better protection. And one of our guys was half asleep, walked the wrong way, he was finished his sentry duty and walked down in front of the tank, and a tank opened up on him with 30 calibre bullets, they’re big bullets, and he got two in the leg, he lost his leg from the knee down, and the other one was just a flesh wound. So we had the first contact in-country out of our battalion, the first killed,

32:30 the first accidental kill – accidental injuries. Yes. And then the rest of the tour was pretty quiet after that.

I was going to say, it was a very busy first couple of days.

Yes.

Can I just go back to the battle before that, the contact you had before the guy was shot through the tank? Where were you – as the patrol moves through, how do you move through? Where are you?

When the actual – that second contact – no, we were harboured up, we were all dug in, we were in our

33:00 little pits with our hoochies [makeshift tents or shelters] up, because I’ll always remember when the chopper came in to take one of the boys out, my hoochy went flying and I had – because I’d taken my bush hat off and I put all my stuff in my bush hat, and it went flying, there was money flying and … But yes, we were actually on the ground, so to say, we weren’t actually on patrol when that happened, even when

33:30 the first enemy was killed we were on the ground.

So you were dug in. What time was it when the contact began?

The big one where the guys were killed, it was night time, whereas the one that the sentry shot the other guys, that was day time.

okay, so the night time …

That was seven, eight o’clock at night, it was dark, and it went on into the early hours of the morning.

So what are you doing during this whole time that the contact is – while this action’s happening?

Well

34:00 I go where I’m required, you know, if – like the guy with the bullet in the shoulder and this other guy that was wounded, plus the guy who pulled back and got killed, and one of the stretcher bearers was doing the guy, the other guy that was killed, the other two stretcher bearers were round the other side, so they couldn’t really do much round there, they were making sure their guys were okay because they were firing as well.

34:30 **So when the guys were wounded, where do you pull them back to? You pulled them out of the front line …**

Well you try to just get them off that line and then somebody takes their place, try and get them to the centre if you can, if not you treat them there on the spot, give them morphine or whatever, put dressings on them, try to stop the bleeding, write the card out to say what time you’ve given them morphine, if any, if

35:00 they need a tourniquet, what time you put the tourniquet on and then just wait with them until the chopper picks them up. Or somebody stays with them while you go and see somebody else.

And when you pull them off the front line and a replacement comes in, do you call out for that replacement, that you’re actually moving someone?

No, it’s usually one of the corporals or one of the section commanders or something, the sergeant will say, “Go and help so-and-so out”, or whatever.

35:30 But I think Willy was there by himself, that’s the guy, Willy, he was by himself for a while, on the gun, so I don’t know who went up there and took over. But it wouldn’t have been very long, because you know,

you've got a long way between guns, a couple of rifles there and a couple of rifles down there and a machine gun there, you've got to have two people on there.

And while you were with – two guys were flown out,

36:00 **what comfort are you giving them? What reassurance were you giving them?**

Well I'd say, "At least you're getting back to have a warm meal with a warm bed", and stuff like that, you know? As it was Snow was taken to an American hospital, ended up in Japan I think. And the others probably would have just gone down to One Ausfield, which is the Australian Army Hospital. The two bodies would have been taken back to the morgue

36:30 down at One Ausfield as well.

So how – at what stage did the shock kick in?

I think everyone gets shock straight away, I think, you know, it's happened, you're very numb but you have to get out of it pretty quick because – I guess that's one thing, when they knew they'd been killed and shooting was still going on, it probably plays in the back of their minds, but

37:00 I guess you just carry on doing your job.

And how do you treat shock in the field?

Well there's not much you can do, I mean just get them out of it, I mean usually shock, if it's associated with a wound or anything, you've got to really treat them because that can kill you. But just shock, maybe that's a bit of a harsher word, the surprise that it's happened

37:30 that somebody died type of thing, you just go numb, I guess. It's very hard to explain. Could have been me, could have been anyone.

And the two men that died, how do you deal with the bodies? I know was in quite a bad state, but the other guy?

The other guy was pretty,

38:00 I mean he just had a hole in the head. The funny thing about him, we were both sharing the same girlfriend back in Australia before we went over. I didn't know until after. We just put them in a body bag and put them on a litter, a Stokes litter I think it was, and just put them on the chopper.

And who carries the body bags?

We have to.

The men?

Yes, well if – I mean you

38:30 can't carry it yourself so you just get anyone who's around to just give us a hand, take it up to where the chopper's going to come down, or whatever.

I meant the actual bags.

Bags? I think these ones were brought in. I used to carry one, a plasticky one with me, but that wouldn't have been any good, I think these were dropped by chopper I think, these ones. They were proper ones. They look like big duffle bags, I remember that.

39:00 But I have seen other ones, plastic ones, with zips on them, but these were definitely not plastic, they were more of a duffle-type thing, they might have had plastic inside or something.

And would you put the body in yourself?

Yes, yes, and then you zip it up and send it away.

So how would the – the zip runs from the top to the bottom of the bag?

Yes, yes.

And how would you get the body out of the bag?

You have to undo the bag first and then get them in,

39:30 and then zip it up and …

And the other guy who was blown up quite badly, were body parts collected and put into a …?

Yes, and we swear that we put two legs in there but we found this other one the next day, we don't know what happened, whether it was an enemy leg or what, but anyway … See my mate who's just come back from Thailand, he's been living over there for years, he's married to a Thai girl, he's still in the army,

40:00 reserve, and he's finally got out in the last month. He was the other medic with me, he used to do

stretcher work, he was my stretcher bearer, he swears there was another leg there too.

Well, we've just run out of tape, we'll take a break now.

Okay. What's the time? One o'clock.

Tape 6

00:32 **Graham, we're just having a look at a couple of your photographs, and there's a couple of fantastic photographs of you kipping down [sleeping] in the jungle. Take us through how you would harbour after a day's day in the jungle.**

That was my favourite position by the way, lying down sleeping, we'd grab it whenever we could.

01:00 Well – do you want me to go from when we start at night to the morning, type of thing? We'd get into a place on dark, and we tried to before dark, an hour or so before dark, gives us time to quickly dig a hole and have something to eat, and put our positions out, defensive positions out, claymore mines and stuff like that, and get radio communications properly, machine guns in place

01:30 and then they work out a roster who's going to be on the machine gun and what time, who they have to wake up next, same in the middle, and then radios, who's going to wake up so-and-so, so they know exactly where they are, because it gets so dark over there sometimes you have a little bit of perimeter cord around you with a little knot, so you feel around, when you find a knot you know there's somebody sleeping down near there, so you just go fiddling around and say, "You, you", type of thing. So you make sure you know who you wake up

02:00 next, and they know who they're going to wake up, and the person who's waking you up knows where you are. You usually did a couple of hours during the night, you might get to bed at 10 o'clock or something like that, and then you'd have a couple of hours sleep, and then you'd go and do your picket, gun picket, not sentry, gun picket or whatever, and you're up at five, you've got to get up an hour before it gets

02:30 light, it's usually about an hour, so going back in the old days, that was the best time for the enemy to attack, is just on light, and the same the night before, just on dark, so you stop doing everything a certain amount of time before it gets too dark, and in the morning before it gets too light. And everyone just stands there and waits to see what's going on. Do that, and then you stand down, everybody stands down

03:00 and you put sentries out, you have people manning the gun, the rest of the guys, 50 per cent stand to or something like that, the rest of the guys might start making up a brew and shaving if they have to, pulling the hoochies down, sorry, the hoochies should have been down before stand to so they're not silhouetted against the skyline type of thing, and they're put down while it's still dark.

03:30 And you boil up your brew, have something to eat, shave, wash, if you have enough water, and pack up your gear ready to move, and fill your pit in and you move on. You walk all day, stop every couple of hours for a smoko, you know, a cigarette, and stop for lunch, have a cup of tea or coffee or whatever.

And how deep would those kips be …?

04:00 The pits?

No, your sleep.

Oh sleep, you only sleep for an hour, two hours at a time, because of the noises, and you might have contacts, you might hear people walking through the scrub, it's just your own guys changing over sentries, plus I always found if I went to sleep first, then woke up and did my sentry, those

04:30 last couple of hours always seemed to be the best, so I guess you really get tired because you've got to really stay awake, because you've really got to concentrate, you see, bushes moving, trees moving and you think they're enemy out there. Sometimes we had those starlight scopes, they're things that you can see in the dark, you see them on TV now, but they're all modern ones they wrap around their head. But these were big cumbersome things you look out of.

And this might seem like a silly question, but

05:00 **did you ever sleep in past the time you were supposed to, or …?**

No. No, some guys fell asleep while they were on picket, and it was very dangerous and very stupid, they'd get charged for it if they got caught. I used to do machine gun with a certain guy, a machine gun picket, he'd always fall asleep on me, and one has to sleep next to you and the other one stays awake, but something woke me up and he was fast asleep too, and it was my turn to

05:30 sleep, not him. And I used to get really mad, but lucky nothing ever happened. And it was a real severe – knocked about really badly if you did fall asleep while you were on picket. At least if you did radio

picket, the radio might wake you up, you can hear someone trying to get through to you, or have it right next to your ear when you're sleeping, you'd hear something.

06:00 **And why was that, kipping down like that, why was that your favourite position?**

Well you make the most of it, like we'd stop somewhere for an hour or two hours and on your back if you're not doing anything, no pickets, and the guys don't need to be checked over or anything like that, and boom, straight away, you grab every five minutes you can, basically.

And what would you use for pillows?

Your pack, normally, just sleep on the ground and just have your pack as a pillow, or a medical kit or whatever,

06:30 whatever was handy.

And you mentioned boiling up, what would you use to – for fire or …?

One of those little Hexies [hexamine stoves, solid fuel burning stoves], they're a little flat thing that folds out like that, you put your little beads in there and hexie things, match them, and rest your mug across the top, or your dixie, whatever, and just boil the water or whatever, whatever you need to do, cook your food or whatever.

And your hoochie,

07:00 **can you describe what your hoochie was like?**

It was just a piece of waterproof material, probably – I've got to lose weight, probably seven foot long, something like that, six foot high, it's quite a big thing, and you get in the middle of it and you just tie it up. You can connect them to other hoochies as well, so you can make a big long one, but in Vietnam we used to have our own, put

07:30 some string each side, so you've got it like that, and you had to get it as low as you could, so it doesn't silhouette, and you put sticks in each of the corners, or tie the corners if you can, if there's trees around, if not you find some twigs and bang them into the ground. Use your trenching tool, as a corner thing and throw a

08:00 mosquito net up. But some nights you didn't have time to do that, just sleep in your hole. I think we slept in our hole most of the time, and just put the hoochie across the top, so you could slide down, and that was your fighting pit and your sleeping pit. But I used to have find – most time I had to have the mosquito net because they love me, as long as my face was covered, I didn't mind the rest because I could put my hands in my pocket, anything like that.

08:30 But they have lots of little things crawling around over there, mites that get through the seams of your trousers, so you had to put all this stuff down, this insect repellent stuff, to stop them getting in there. Of course you've got your ticks, they seem to come from everywhere, and during the wet there's always the leeches, and they're horrible things. And you'd be laying down and you hear the chomper ants, they'd be underground, thousands of them,

09:00 and you could see them, like you see in the movies in Africa, these ants, they go on trails, going across the ground like that. I don't think they eat everything in their path, like you see those ones in Africa, but they've got nice little hooks on the front of them. I was told that the Vietnamese used to use them for suturing, if a guy needed suturing you'd get one of these ants and they clamp them on like that, and then they cut the head off, and leave them sutured. I don't know how true that is. Lots of poisonous

09:30 snakes there, little ones called carpet – krate snakes, about that big, and bamboo snakes, they're the only ones I saw, there was supposed to be some bigger ones like cobras or something, but I never saw them, and never saw any python-type snakes. Saw lots of lizards and geckos, and elephant tracks, wild pigs,

10:00 deer, things like that we saw over there, never saw elephant or buffalo. Lots of birds, you know, different colours, lots of forests, yes. It wasn't too bad if it wasn't for some of the bad side of things.

And how dense was the bush

10:30 **or the forest, the jungle you were in?**

In places it was really thick, you'd have your forward scout, used to go out with a machete and he'd have to try and clear a bit of a track for you, but he wasn't always successful because he's got to keep his eye open too and make sure there's nobody out there, so most of us had secateurs and we all had machetes, because you get bamboo over there, and a

11:00 thing like – there's something like it over here called wait-a-while [spiky tropical vine] or something, it's a thing that clings to you, a prickly thing, and you'd have to cut them back. It was pretty thick in places, but other places it was – down by the beach seemed to be very open, and across the paddy fields, I mean it was just rice paddies, and I lost so many pairs of

11:30 secateurs, because I used to put them in a tree so I knew where they were, and then forget about them

and in the morning we'd go off, and then when put our order in on the radio for the next resupply, "Can you send some more secateurs out", there'd be half a dozen of mine in trees around Vietnam I think. I'd just completely forget about them. They're handy little things.

Well what else was in your pack? First of all, how heavy was it?

I did

12:00 jump on the scales once, with them on when we back in Nui Dat before we went out, and I was 96 pound heavier than what I am, so it was made up of quite a bit of stuff. Do you want me to tell you what was in it?

Yes, what was in it?

Well you have sometimes up to seven days ration packs, about that big, sometimes you break them down and just take what you want to eat, type of thing.

12:30 You had your sleeping gear, which was a mosquito net, your hoochie, a silk, it's called a silk but it's like a sleeping bag, but it's so thin, but it's good for the tropics I suppose, some people had blow-ups, you know those things, there's three of them and you slip them in this mattress type thing, but our boss didn't like them because they made so much

13:00 noise when you turn over, when you're blowing them, or you're letting them down, and you'd let people know we are around, so he didn't like us using them. And we'd have our shaving gear, writing gear and any personal gear, spare socks, sometimes we might have a spare set of greens, uniform, carry a spare battery for the radio, that's a big

13:30 long battery, not our radio but saves the sig [signal operator] carrying them all. Claymore mines, grenades, an extra hundred rounds of ammunition we used to keep for the machine guns because they could carry all the bullets, plus your own ammunition. I used to carry eight water bottles, that was four on my belt and two on my bum

14:00 pack and two on my big pack, plus I had to carry a water bag with water in it.

So that 96 pounds that you weighed would have been minus the water?

That's including the water.

That's including the water?

Including the water, the ration packs, and sometimes if they knew we weren't going to get back for resupply, we'd have to carry extra ration packs, but we'd just pile them on top of our packs, because we knew we were going to be out longer, and it wouldn't all fit in there.

14:30 **And what sort – I mean as a medic, can you tell us …?**

Sorry, yes, I've got a medical- -

Can you take us through what was in your …?

I had a medical kit, I've still got one outside actually, plus I had a lot of medical stuff in my pack as well, drips and IV [intravenous fluid] bottles and stuff, but in my medical kit itself I'd have a strap down here and have about half a dozen shell

15:00 dressings, they're big dressings, you just slop them on and wrap them around, field dressing, shell dressing …

So they wouldn't be inside your packs, they were external?

I had a bandolier which the magazines – which the M16 ammunition used to go in, I used to put them in there, plus I'd have some round on the strap and I'd have them on my rifle, one on my rifle as well. I'd probably have about a dozen shell dressings, I had other types of dressings, just Bandaids, I had to carry stuff for the eyes,

15:30 stuff for the ears, a bottle of antibiotics, five, I think it was ampoules of morphine, all ready with a syringe just to give.

Already loaded syringe?

Yes, yes. Slides, glass slides, in case any of the boys have been playing up and you've got to take a swab, and then send that back in the chopper and I'd have to start them straight on antibiotics, and they might

16:00 send me some propane penicillin, so I'd have to give them a shot of penicillin up the backside, but you couldn't carry the penicillin with you, only the tablets, but you'd have to get the chopper to bring some out for you. What else would I have in there? All the IV equipment, intravenous …

So where would you stash the drip stuff, was that in your pack?

That was in my pack, yes. And

16:30 I'd have all the bandages, crepe bandages for strapping up knees and ankles and things, and sometimes you carry splints too, air splints, you know the ones you blow up, you can blow up and put them round the ankle or round the neck? But most of the time we had to improvise for that, just a couple of sticks and wrap around type of thing for broken limbs. I'd

17:00 carry sulphur tablets and Panadol and Aspirin of course, anti-diarrhoeal type things, Stemetil for vomiting and plus your normal sterilizing tablets and de-tasting tablets to try and get the taste of the water out. I think that was mostly for the

17:30 medical – oh, and the instruments as well, you know, scissors and tweezers and things, to try and get the ticks out, a tongue depressor, and …

A tongue depressor?

Yes, just a bit of wood to have a look down the throat, and a torch, you had to carry a torch.

Thermometer?

Sometimes, not all the time, yes I did, yes I did sorry,

18:00 because that's the only way you can tell if a guy's got a real excessive, high temperature. Always breaking those out, you know, you're diving for cover or something, it's very hard to protect those things you've got in your bag, same with the morphine too, you'd be right out of things and lost it and you haven't taken it yourself or something.

And was that a known fact, that sometimes medics would actually

18:30 **take the morph themselves, or …?**

Not that I know of, no. I mean guys were smoking pot and stuff like that, but I didn't know any – I didn't see any guys taking drugs in the bush. When we were back on R&C [rest and care] I did, but that was only marijuana and stuff, not like you see in the moves, the Americans high all the time in the scrub, and I must admit, as far as I know, none of our guys took drugs out in the

19:00 bush.

Well that's quite an extensive medical kit that you've got, and was it in a – did you have a separate medical bag or a box or …?

Remind me when you pack up, I'll show you what it looks like here, it's just a green bag, with three sections, three zips, and one overall thing that holds them together. And you put your different things in each one.

19:30 **And was that attached to the outside of your pack, or …?**

Well it just had a strap on it, just straight over your shoulder.

Right. Well, just going through the – when you were out on ops [operations] and there were wounded, what was the routine of who got treated first?

The triage and myself, you'd work out the most important ones, the dead ones you just leave them,

20:00 the ones that looked life threatening, bleeding to death or something like that, you're going to naturally start of them first, and if there's anyone else around get them to hold – stop the bleeding, while you can do something else. It just comes to you instinctively, who you think needs to be treated first. Because you find most army guys have been taught basic first aid, they know how to stop bleeding, just direct them

20:30 to them, and they're okay. I must admit I never had to do any resuscitation on anybody in Vietnam, I did when I came back in Australia, but not over there.

And what sort of records or …?

Well we didn't really keep records, which is the bad thing about it because people putting claims in nowadays, they've got to take your word for it at the DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs],

21:00 that you know, that's what happened to them, they've got to get people to verify it and all that. So many people have asked me, do you remember me doing such and such? And I'll say, "Yes", and sometimes I don't remember. Because we didn't keep any records, but we used to have like a field medical card that we used to pin on, and write on there, if we had time, and most of the time you're in such a hurry, you're dirty and stuff like that, we used to put, "We gave them morphine, a tourniquet", you can write that on their

21:30 forehead as well in charcoal or something if you can find some kind of pen, so the chopper guy knows, the medic in the chopper knows, and when he gets back to hospital, they know. And sometimes you can put a few words in there, "Gunshot wound to right leg", something like that, you write that down and send that out with the guy. But as far as medical records, no. I used to have a little roll book that I used

to tick off every

22:00 morning with the guys I gave the Paladin to, the anti-malarials, but that was the only record.

And why was it important to keep that record?

So you make sure that people have taken it. But they'd put it in there and you'd turn away and they'd spit it out, because it was a vile tasting thing. I took mine all the time, but some of the guys have got malaria now because they didn't take it. You'd swallow it quickly and take something after it.

22:30 **And did – was malaria a problem while you were there?**

I believe so, we had a couple of guys come down with it. I think they were medivac'd back to Australia, the severe ones, yes. But I can't pinpoint anyone in particular in my company.

23:00 **And how quickly did the choppers respond, if you had a contact, you had wounded you would go through your treatment and assessment and …?**

Very quickly, depending on the situation too, I mean if you were in inaccessible places, choppers couldn't get in, it would take a lot longer, you've got to keep those people alive till they get there somehow. Some evacuations could be done

23:30 by road, an armoured personnel carrier might come through, but if the jungle is so thick, it might take a lot longer, you've got to look around for a good place and you've got to clear the chopper pad yourselves, you've got the guys out with these choppers, and their machetes and that, making a good clearing for the choppers to come in, or even just enough for them to drop the jungle penetrator down or the Stokes litter.

24:00 But they were very quick, they said they could have them in there within a couple of hours on the operating table, and I can well believe that too. I mean I never really asked anyone how long it took them to get there, but just what I've read myself, a lot quicker than say the Second World War and the First World War, that's probably why so many lives were saved over there.

And were you ever in a situation where you

24:30 **were having to keep somebody alive while you were waiting for a chopper, or …?**

Not here, not in Vietnam, no, they were either dead or they were okay, I guess I was lucky in that respect.

And when you were in the bush, I've heard stories of

25:00 **mines being put into trees and things like that, did you come across that?**

Yes, we saw them, we had engineers with us, and if we saw any we'd just get them to go and get rid of them, blow them up or disarm them, whatever. None of our guys stepped on mines or anything, I guess we were lucky, some of the other battalions, eighth battalion, they had nothing but mines up in the Long Hai Hills, but I think we were lucky, we

25:30 found a lot, but good luck or something, I don't know what it was, but we found some.

And what was the routine when you found them?

We just – I think there was a sign issued, everybody stay still, and call the engineers up and they'd come up there with their bangers and then go round the ground looking – feeling to make sure there were no trip wires and stuff like that, and that type of thing, and they put a little mark

26:00 over it, so they know exactly where it is, and everyone goes round and they'd blow it sometime, I guess.

And how did you communicate with each other when you were on the track in the jungle?

It was mostly hand signals, yes. The enemy, the friendlies, type of thing, and that was an obstacle, you're looking for somebody, reconnaissance or something, you want the officer to come up, or you

26:30 want the corporal to come up, you've seen something, hurry up, step on it, you've pushed us down. They were the main ones I think. Oh, arrow formation I think's another one, where they get you to go out like that.

And what was the stop and go sign?

It's stop, hand up, and – you've got to be pretty quiet and do everything by hand, I mean

27:00 we had radios and that, but I mean they make a sound, and so mostly hand signals, when you were actually moving.

And how tuned do you think you became to listening to the sounds?

Yes, fairly good, I was always round the middle, being the medic, with the company commander and the sergeant major and all the radio guys, and

27:30 the guys out the front and the back were the ones that would pick up any weird noises or funny tracks, marks on the ground or anything like that, or lack of noise or something, they'd probably pick all that sort of stuff up and just warn the rest of us.

And how jumpy do you think people were when they were out on an op?

You can get very jumpy,

28:00 yes, there might be a wild pig out there or something and you think the enemy's running towards you. But a wild pig ran behind me one day and I'm wondering what to do, but they pushed my scout behind me, he was a Vietnamese guy, he had his rifle up ready to shoot, and I was still thinking about it. He was used to that sort of thing I guess, he was actually – he said he changed sides, but yes, I guess some people are quicker than other people in that

28:30 respect.

Well that's a really interesting point, he was local, and in one sense had a probably better knowledge of the area?

Yes, we had about – each platoon had one, and we had one in company headquarters and we used to have a sergeant interpreter, he turned out to be VC, he was too inquisitive, he kept asking questions, so

29:00 I reported him and he disappeared, the South Vietnamese Army took him off.

How did you become suspicious?

Well he kept on asking, "Where are we going, how long are we going to be there"? and all this sort of stuff, and it's not normal for a person to ask that, I told the CSM [company sergeant major], the CSM reported him, and he took him off and shot him or something, I don't know what they did to him but – the sergeant – the bushman's scout we had with us was ex-VC – Singh, he was a nice guy, he was married, brought his wife into camp one day and introduced

29:30 us to her, back in Nui Dat, I often wonder what happened to those guys, probably all re-educated or shot or something.

And what did you respect the bushman, the Vietnamese for?

Well they can tell their own – they can tell tracks, very good trackers and once we found an enemy site, they could say who was there, they might even know what the unit was, D445 [NVA battalion of the 33rd Army] or North Vietnamese Regulars, or

30:00 just local VC guard, tell which way they've gone, how long they've been gone, how many of them there were, all that sort of stuff, probably tell you where a water hole was, where you can find water, just general things like that, just good trackers, I guess.

And did you ever get lost yourself?

Yes I did. We were just going single

30:30 file and the what do you call it, section of infantry guys who always worked with company headquarters, they were sort of protecting us, about 10 of them, and this guy in front of me, all of a sudden he started walking off, so I followed him, and my boss behind, the major, he knew where he was going because he had a map, he just carried on, he didn't yell at us to come back or anything,

31:00 he went on, and us two are way out, and it must have been an hour or so, we were out on our own – we're going, "Where we were supposed to be"? and we just kept on going, and we joined up with them, way up here somewhere, it's a wonder these guys didn't shoot us thinking we were the enemy coming in from the side. But I thought, just the two of us, and we're going to get lost out here. But we were lucky, we found them. But the company commander didn't say anything, which surprised me. "What are you

31:30 two doing out there"? And why he didn't call us back, I don't know. Maybe he wanted to lose us.

Well, once that realisation had hit that you were separated and lost …

You're pretty scared, yes. Because you don't know how far away they are now and what's around there, where we are, could be anyone out there.

Did you have any idea?

32:00 I've got no idea, I could not read a map, they teach us map reading and everything, but I never had to use it because it's the other guys' job basically. The only thing I did was count the steps we did, we used to have a little thing, we'd count every 120 clicks was 100 metres, so it'd give an idea of how long you walked that day, and that type of thing, gives you a rough idea on the map where you are, in case you need to call any

32:30 artillery or gunships in or something, or choppers in, give them a pretty accurate good reference. Now

they've got these GPSs [global positioning systems] where they can just shoot up the satellite and it comes back down and it tells them exactly where they are. In those days we had to just walk, and just – you got a few guys doing this pacing, add them all together, work out an average and it were pretty close on. And I used to be one of the pacers.

33:00 So I knew we were quite a way out.

And who made the decision about which way to go?

Well then I just followed him, he was in front of me, and we got back into the rest of the group.

And how much do you think it was pure luck?

I think 100 per cent, it was luck, yes. Well if we'd planned it we'd never have done it, it's just that we'd

33:30 keep on walking, turned up there.

And how long were you out, what was the average kind of length of operations?

Well the first one I told you about, we were in country training, it was only supposed to be a week, we ended up 46 days, we had a wash and shower, we stunk. Because it kept on extending, we'd find enemy or sight – enemy sighting or

34:00 something, and they kept on extending, extending so it was 46 days before we had a shower, and that's quite a long time in the field actually, living on ration packs. I think they might have brought us some fresh rations once or twice, which probably would have come out of resupplies, bring us some hot food, but most of the time in ration packs, American or Australian.

And how did you maintain

34:30 **weight and – during that …?**

I was 15 stone when I went over there, I was 15 stone when I came to Australia, I was 15 stone when I went to Vietnam, 15 stone when I came home, the only time I ever lost weight in Australia was up in Townsville, I went down to 12 and a half stone, and now I'm still 15 stone. It's just moved around a bit, it's gone from up here in the shoulders down to the stomach, so I'm still 15

35:00 stone.

Well because 46 days on a ration pack is quite a long time, so …

And you're burning a lot off and sweating a lot off – yeah, I think they're all judged to what's in that food that's supposed to be good for you. We had a lot of dehydrated stuff where you had to add water, but in the dry season it's pretty hard, if you don't get much water. But some of it was pretty good, some of the

35:30 food wasn't very nice. My favourite was the – they called it chocolate – the Wagon Wheels, the chocolate thing, they come in – they're American I think, you have a couple of biscuits and a chocolate wagon wheel in the middle, and a couple more biscuits, they were nice. And these cereal blocks, they were as hard as anything to chew on, but you leave them soaking overnight, you add some sweetened condensed milk, it's like porridge

36:00 in the morning, cook it up, and that was nice. Some of the tinned stuff was nice. Everybody hated lima beans, the big American beans. Baked beans were okay, and Spam and stuff like that was all right. That's how I got onto black tea and black coffee, because I was always running out of milk, and to this day I still don't have milk in my tea or

36:30 coffee. Because I used to like sucking the old cadet's milk out of the tube.

So the main course, the evening meal would be baked beans or …?

Yes, it might be ham and beans in a tin, you just throw it in your dixie and mix it up, or if you were lazy, just under the top of the tin and hold that over it and try and stir it over and heat the tin up, or bang the tin

37:00 so it's got dents in it and throw it on the fire and then put it out quickly, undo the top or burn your hands, and wash it off and watch it doesn't explode.

So when you were out on ops, it was your own individual responsibility to feed yourself?

Yes, yes. I mean they had 10-man ration packs too, but we never had those out bush, they were only when you were in a static position, you know, if you're going to be there for a few days.

37:30 Then you can cook for 10 men but you'd have the proper dixie and things to cook them with too, proper little stoves. But we'd cook for ourselves. I mean some of us, there might be a pair of you in your hoochie, you might boil up enough water for the two of you to have a coffee, or enough for both of you to have a shave, and you might whip in your food together, depending, but that'd be about it.

38:00 **And how did you manage with the rain when you were out on ops? Did it rain very much?**

Oh yes, and the worst thing was you were always wet. Didn't take long to dry out though, that's why people have so many skin conditions because of that. Tropical rain is nice, it's just after it stops you get the humidity. It was nice collecting the rain water too, so you used to put your hoochies up

38:30 and collect the rain in your mugs and fill your bottles up, it's a lot better than the water we were getting back from the base.

And what did you wear on your head?

Just bush hats, not helmets. Some of the guys had helmets, but I think they were like mortar men and things like that, anti-tank guys, but everyday infantry men, when I got there, were just wearing their gill hats, or bush hats they call

39:00 them. I've still got a couple now.

And one of the other iconic images I guess of Vietnam is the bandana around the forehead.

Yes, a lot of them wore them, yes, just like a sweat band type thing. I never did myself, but a few of them did. We had one guy used to wear a red and white polka dot scarf, he would have made a very good target, he was one of our officers, like a

39:30 cravat, he wore. And some guys didn't even have to shave, depending on who their company commander was, and they'd have beards, and big long moustaches and things, but we had to shave every day.

So you just wore your regular bush hat?

Bush hat, yes. And cam your face up, put all your camouflage stuff on.

Okay. All right, well our tape is just about to run out again.

Tape 7

00:32 **Graham, if I can I'd like to take you back to when we last spoke, we were talking about action that you had seen and you were treating men there. I just wanted to ask, with the men that were killed out in the field, who took care of their personal possessions?**

The platoon, I think they – if I remember rightly we just sent everything back with them

01:00 on the litter, the Stokes litter or something, we can get their rifle and their pack and send that back with them. And people go through them back there, back at the hospital or whatever.

So when you're getting ready to move the bag out …?

Yes, I think all their possessions go with them, if not it might be the next day, if we're stuck there for a day or so cleaning up, so they might have taken the rest of the stuff the next day, I'm not too sure.

And you

01:30 **also described how a chopper would come in and take both the dead and injured out. What other ways would you transport men out of the field?**

Well if you were near a track, you might get an armoured personnel carrier can come through, or a Land Rover, but it wasn't very feasible in Vietnam I don't think, I think most of our evacuations were by chopper, because it was too far, too

02:00 dense, and – because you had to get them back in a hurry. Whereas a vehicle is too bouncy and stuff like that, might have killed a person. So I think 99 per cent of them were choppers, or what I did anyway.

And your stretcher bearers, how far would they carry someone?

That's only a name, it's not a job really, they're

02:30 medics. I think during the First World War that was basically what they were, they used to go backwards and forwards picking up the bodies and the wounded, whereas in Vietnam they were actually assigned to a platoon of guys, of 30 guys, and they carried a medical kit, not as much as I had but one ampoule of morphine or something like that. And they weren't as trained as I was, but they were basically first-

03:00 aiders, they had to stop the bleeding and preserve life, and that type of thing. And make up stretchers if the need arises, type of thing. But whoever's around carries stretchers, it doesn't have to be a stretcher bearer, the infantry guys would carry them if they were there.

And field ambulances, were they relevant

03:30 **at all?**

Yes, a few of our guys went back to field ambulances. I think some of the medics on the choppers belonged to the field ambulances, because I know this one MIA [missing in action] guy from field ambulances, one of our sixth MIAs, I think he went through training the same time as me, I think they did the dust offs or medivacs or whatever you want to call them? The field ambulance is where a lot of people go where they're not critical,

04:00 and if the need be they can go from the field ambulance to the hospital where they really need – or something, but if they know a person is critical they'll probably take them straight to the hospital, whereas the other ones will be to the field ambulance. But in the field ambulance they do have doctors there and they can do life saving procedures I guess, but they wouldn't do operations and things like that, amputations, not that I can

04:30 think of, they might have but I'm not aware of it.

And how was the field ambulance set up?

Well, it used to be – I think the hospital was back in Nui Dat, sorry, Vung Tau, I think there was a hospital back in – I'm lost now where the hospital was, I only ever went there once just to see one of my

05:00 mates who was on staff there. I can't remember if it was in Vung Tau or Nui Dat, I think the hospital was at Vung Tau and the field ambulances were in Nui Dat, so Nui Dat was just tents, there were wards set up and things like that. I think it was probably where heat stroke and heat exhaustion people might go, and stuff like that, they'd have different tents set up as wards,

05:30 and you'd have doctors and male nurses, I don't think you had any females there, I think the female sisters were back at the hospital. But I could be wrong, there might have been some there, I never went to a field ambulance there, but I worked in a field ambulance here in Australia and we didn't have any females here. Yes, it's like a casualty, we used to have a casualty clearing station too, was another thing where the patients used to be where

06:00 they'd go to as well. That explains itself I suppose, casualty clearing. I think they might have been taken from the bush to the field ambulance, to where … because I've never been in a casualty clearing station I can't remember what their role was.

What was the role of the field ambulance?

It was a back up for the battalions and stuff, yes, that was our first

06:30 point of call if it wasn't too urgent, I think that's what it was. That's where the choppers used to land, by the field ambulance, and you've ever seen MASH [American TV show about the Korean War], I think MASH is like a field ambulance, but I think in MASH they had females there, and they used to do operations as well, which I don't know if the field ambulance ever did. They've got the capabilities to do it though, I'm sure they've got operating theatres and stuff like that, but

07:00 whether they were using that role in Vietnam I'm not too sure.

Well you had to – as part of your role in medic a part of your training was improvised operations out in the field, what did you do in Vietnam? How was that put into practice?

What do you mean?

What improvised operations did you have to do out in the field in Vietnam?

You mean like do a trachy [tracheotomy] or something like that? I never had to do that.

07:30 Just splinting, making up splints from bits of wood and suturing, that's minor surgery, I guess that's what you call that, depending how they've cut it or what the sort of wound was. Treating for snake bite,

08:00 we didn't have to do really all that much in that respect. Breaking boils, you know, bursting boils or carbuncles or whatever, no, not carbuncles, boils, that type of thing, wasn't very nice.

Well when you were say suturing for example, how would you sterilise your instruments?

Well the actual needle and

08:30 the suture stuff is all sterile, little packets, but the tools, the instruments themselves, you could probably wash them down with alcohol or something, because we used to carry metho with us, or you'd put them over a flame, but I think it just – but I just used to wipe and swab them down, and hope for the best. Maybe if you think there's going to be any kind of infection, start them on some

09:00 antibiotics and get them out and the doctor would have a look at them. The most severe what I've done was a head where you can see the skull, but I sutured it up and just sent him back. But I thought I might have done the wrong thing there but no, they said I did the right thing.

Well what happened there? How did …?

Just he banged his head on a tree and just opened his head up.

09:30 Another one opened up the shin, I could see his bone, it's just – try and pack it in, if there's anything outside and suture it up and dress it up. Depends, I mean some people fall on stakes and fall down river banks, hit their head on a tree or something, depends, they cut themselves on the bayonet,

10:00 depends what it is.

And you said with that head injury you were a bit concerned about what you had done, what happened there? What was that incident?

To tell you the truth I can't remember what happened, I just remember suturing him up and we got him out, sent him straight back, just in case there was any underlying problems, head injury or concussion or whatever. But he was okay. I've got lots of guys come up to me and show me parts of

10:30 their body, I don't even remember doing it. I've only got so much I can remember.

And then there was that doubt that you hadn't done the right thing. How do you touch base and find out whether that was the course of action?

Well you just check it out with the doctor when you see him next, and he'd tell you if you did the wrong thing or the right thing, most of the time you'd done the right thing, considering the circumstances and stuff.

11:00 **And did you on any occasion do the wrong thing?**

No, not that I can remember, no. Pretty lucky I suppose. I did – sorry, I gave morphine to a guy with a head injury, we was always told never to do that. Yeah, morphine, and they'd say, "You're not to give it to a head injury or a scalp wound because they might

11:30 need immediate surgery". But this guy was in so much agony, he'd lost his eye and I had to give him something for the pain, and I was told it was okay, so … But I thought about it afterwards, I shouldn't have done it, but he was screaming so I had to do something.

How quickly do you administer morphine for pain?

Pretty quick, you just ask them how much pain they're in, and if they look like they're definitely in it and making a noise or you

12:00 know, then you just get there and give it to them.

I mean there's a certain amount of bravery that's expected out in the field, did you ever come across an incident where men were being brave but you knew that the pain was a lot worse than what it was?

Yes, I suppose so, I don't recollect anything like that. If they were in pain they'd let you know, most of the time. Some guys I mean

12:30 might have something wrong with them and they don't want to go back because they feel like they're deserting their mates, but you got to know who they were and you'd know they were pretty genuine if they were – ever did get sick or anything, you know? Some people are pretty good at hiding things. But I guess you worked that out yourself at the time.

That sense of desertion is quite strong.

Yes.

13:00 **How do you deal with that when there's someone who doesn't want to leave, but really must?**

Well you just have to order them, yes, and they don't take any notice of you, just get one of those senior NCOs [non commissioned officers], and if that doesn't work go right up to the company commander. But most of the time they do as you tell them.

And mateship is also a really big thing, that reliance on each

13:30 **other. When someone has been wounded or is having medical problems, what kind of reactions would you see from their mates?**

Depending what it is, if they're in a pretty bad way they get upset, but there's nothing they can do about it. You might see a tear in their eyes, I mean I've had a tear in my eyes over there myself,

14:00 but you don't see anybody physically break down or anything, well I haven't. Yes, I think they were a pretty tough lot of guys I suppose.

And what were the injuries or problems that you had to deal with out

14:30 **there that really made you squirm?**

I think more things back in Australia here have made me squirm more than over there, the chopper crashes and things like that, but at the time you don't think about it, you honestly don't. If you get somebody

15:00 hurt you go straight in and do your job, and you don't even think about it, bits and pieces lying around or all the blood and stuff. The time I used to get scared was when I knew we were going into something, all lined up and they'd say, "Right, there's a bunker system there, we're going to go in there", and you'd look at each other and you all start thinking. That's when you'd get scared. I went in a couple of times. But if something hits you, you don't have time to think, you just go straight in and do your job.

15:30 **And how do you let yourself – how do you go in, how do you psych yourself up?**

Well you just find out where the problem is and what's happened, and is there any bleeding, how profusely, are there any holes or whatever, and just get stuck straight into it, plugging up,

16:00 plenty of shell dressings and whatever you have to do. No, you don't have time to think really, you know what – you do think, you know what you've got to do, but you don't think, "Ooh, am I going to panic, I'm not going to panic, what am I supposed to do in this situation"? It just comes to you

16:30 naturally. Like for me it did, anyway.

We'd also talked earlier about treating the enemy, or treating VC. How would you describe them as an enemy?

17:00 Well, from words I've heard from other people, you know, from stories from other people they were pretty good. The only ones I ever saw were dead ones, so I don't really know, what they were like to talk to, not that I'd be able to talk to them anyway, but I never saw any of them, the only ones I saw were dead, but they were supposed to have been pretty good,

17:30 so pretty good soldiers, they knew what they were fighting for, knew what they were doing and knew where we were all the time, basically, yes, weren't too bad I guess.

Sorry, I missed that, did you …?

They weren't too bad I guess.

Did you treat wounded enemy?

No, no, I never saw a wounded one there, I saw about three dead I think was about it, the rest they carted off, before we even got to them.

18:00 **And what kind of intelligence would be picked up off the dead VC?**

They could find out what units they were from, some people, some guys had personal stuff on them, you know, photos and maybe addresses or something like that, they might have had some kind of insignia on them to say what unit they were from, then our intelligence guys could work out what they were doing there in that area,

18:30 whether they were regulars or – regular army guys or just local villagers, they can work out a lot of the stuff, especially if they've got maps on them as well. I think they found maps on one of the guys we had, it all goes back to intelligence and they work it out who they are, where they're from.

And did you come across any tunnel systems?

19:00 No, came across bunker systems, but not tunnels. I believe there were tunnels around, now, you hear about them nowadays, and some of the signs that we saw around then, we find out now could have been tunnels, but we thought they might be bunker systems but they could have been tunnels too.

Well, what's the difference between

19:30 **the bunkers and the tunnel system?**

The tunnels you don't see them, they're right underground, they might have like a trapdoor and it's all covered over and you can't see them, whereas a bunker system they might have just that much showing for instance, and that's where they have the …

Graham, we were just talking about the difference between bunkers and tunnels, how – you were just describing a bunker system.

Usually bunker systems, there's loads of them, they've just –

20:00 they've dug holes and they put overhead protection on them, they put maybe logs and dirt and stuff and then bushes over them, so you can't really see them until you're on top of them, and they might just have a slit like that where the guns are pointing out, and there are usually quite a few of them, the most we saw was 36 of them and they can see you, they've got good

20:30 fire trails and look at you and they could shoot at you. Whereas the scissors tunnels, you don't even know they're there, it's only since the war we've since found out that they used to have hospitals and everything underground and I think they went right under where we were too. But we didn't know they were there.

Well the bunkers were unnerving for you, but how do you think you would have felt

21:00 **knowing that the tunnels were under there too?**

I guess it would have been scary. It was the bunkers most of the time, you came across them and they'd start shooting, not like it happened to me, but they'd start firing and you'd just go to ground and shoot back and call in planes or choppers or something, gun ships, to blast them up a bit. But

21:30 one of the companies got hit and the destroyed 36 bunkers and we found another 36 which they didn't even find, so it must have been a pretty big unit, and it was dug in. But I've seen some of the pretty elaborate conditions, you know, however they'd done them, takes a lot of work to do those things. Normally you can tell sometimes if there's a bunker system around you'll find trees

22:00 have been chopped off, they're trying to disguise them so it doesn't look like they've actually cut anything off, by putting green grass on them and dirt over them. But if you do find that you know normally that there's a bunker system around somewhere. But that's what our trackers – that's what they – it was their job to do that, find those sort of things.

Did you have dog handlers with you?

Occasionally but

22:30 we did have a couple of dog guys with us, but it wasn't all that often, only if we were looking for something in particular. We used to have mostly engineers and mines guys, and artillery guys with us as well.

Just going back to the bunkers, what were they like inside, inside the bunkers?

The ones I saw they were just two-

23:00 man bunkers, you'd have two men down there, they'd probably sleep down there, eat down there, you can get out both ways, the front or the back, they can climb out of the back a lot easier, the front one wasn't as big to get out. I think there's all different types, depending how long it took them to do it, and how many there are, how long they intend to stay there, I don't think there was any prerequisite

23:30 how big they had to be. It's like our pits, we used to dig our pits, some would be that deep, some would be that deep, depending how long you're going to be there.

And with the bunkers, once you actually come across a bunker system, how often when you came across one were there actually VC in them?

We never came across a bunker system ourselves. Another one of our

24:00 companies did, and we had to go and help them, but they hit the bunker system. What you normally do is you pull back, see if you can count how many there are there and call in the air strikes if you can, to destroy them. Because there's not much you can do with them on the ground, fire rockets at them, I suppose, things like that, but the air things was the best thing to – choppers or something, to try and get rid of them.

And how far would the bunker system cover, like

24:30 **have you got a measurement?**

They'd be over a kilometre sometimes, they're quite a big area some of them. Depending how big the unit is that's dug in, if it's only a company or a squad or a section I should say, up to a regiment, depends how big it is. The biggest I've seen was that 70-odd, where 30-odd were destroyed and we found another 30-odd, but I believe there have been some bigger.

25:00 **Well you said that you were quite nervous when you got to the bunkers. What other fears did you have when you were out there?**

Just a fear of the unknown, you don't know what it is you're going into, and how many there are. Is it more than we can handle? How long it's going to be, who's going to get hit, who's going to survive, how long is it going to take? All that sort of

25:30 thing goes through your head. I think it goes with everybody, must think about it.

And what injury did you fear?

I never really thought about it actually. I think everything, I don't think I'd like to lose a leg, I don't think I'd like to lose an arm. Because I know what it's like now, if I injure my leg and I can't use it, well like this, I couldn't have a shower the other day because this arm was all covered up in bandage, trying to

26:00 shower with one arm, so I can imagine what it's like when you don't have one permanently. I think about being blind, you know, permanently blind, I guess hearing would be the best, if you had a choice of injuries, but that would be a very bad thing to have too, hearing loss. Because I've got a friend who had both his legs blown,

26:30 and he's a black belt in karate now, and he always works his legs but you can see his scars, his legs

have just been stitched together, but he's so muscly now because of all the exercises he does for his karate. You wouldn't even know he stepped on a mine until you ask him and you look at his legs and say, "What happened to you"? And he's good, he was in hospital for about eight months, and he's recovered pretty well.

27:00 Then you see guys in wheelchairs who've had both their legs blown off or amputated for some reason. I don't think I'd like to be in a wheelchair. I don't think there'd be many injuries I'd like.

Well I mean you've spoken about treating guys who've lost an eye. Did you ever treat men who had lost a limb?

Yes, a bloke called Bootsy, he lost his leg from the knee

27:30 down, he's got an artificial leg now. He's accepted it, he didn't mind, he came back, the government bought him a car, a special car fitted out for a one-legged person, it's all hand controls, you know, the accelerator and things like that. There's only one guy I know that's actually lost a limb.

And do you remember treating him?

Yes, yes.

How did that happen?

That's the guy I think I

28:00 mentioned, he stepped out in front of a tank, and the tank opened up on him, had to amputate because he'd severed his femur.

And when you were treating him and assessing his condition, what was your assessment, at that point when he got hit?

Well I just had to keep on putting dressing son top of dressings, he wouldn't stop bleeding. We

28:30 ended up putting a tourniquet on which you don't use nowadays, but we had to stop the bleeding somehow, because the dressings weren't working, and we had to put quite a few on, and gave him some morphine and medivac'd him out. Not much else we could do with him.

Did he at any point ask whether it could be saved or …?

No, I don't remember that, I think he was too – he wasn't with it,

29:00 he was too under with the drugs, I think.

And when you returned from operations, what was the process you would go through? Was there a debrief?

Yes, you'd have a debrief, everybody would get together and – wouldn't last that long, I think everybody had a shower and that first, got changed into clean stuff and we'd all go up to the

29:30 boozer, you know, a little bar type area, and we'd have a debrief up there. And then when that finished everyone has a few drinks, and then more or less go into town, if it was only for a day or so we'd all just stay around, have a few drinks and watch films, if they were there, a concert or whatever, and maybe go out next day or the day after.

And what would you discuss in the debrief?

30:00 Well, the boss would find out I guess, what enemy we'd hit, who they think it might have been, how many there might have been there, things that we could have done, things we should have done, to avoid the enemy or whatever, it was just a general debrief they have on most things,

30:30 do's and don'ts, shoulds and don'ts.

And what about your pack, what would you do with your pack after an operation?

You had to unpack it if you got time, wash it out and clean it, get all the mud off it, throw everything in the was and repack it once it's all dry and everything, repack it with clean stuff, new ration packs, ready to go the next

31:00 time.

And what would you do with your ammunition?

Hand it in, most of the time, but as I said I used to find it under the floorboards, the guy who used to throw it out. Some would throw it down the toilets, grenades and things, because they were those deep trench ones, and just throw everything down there, and then we'd get reissued with all new stuff, because

31:30 it gets dirty and rusty and things, and then you can have too much water Claymores or something.

Why wouldn't they hand their ammunition in?

They did sometimes but not all the time. Depends, I mean it wasn't accountable, wasn't strict to keep an eye on it, like it is in Australia. Over there with ammunition, you just get it, whatever you want basically you can get, if it was available.

32:00 I don't think it was controlled too well, because in war time they'd see it's not controlled.

And how would you unwind?

Have a few beers, a few drinks and just sit around, relax, read, write, read letters from home and whatever, just wind down until next time.

32:30 **And any of the casualties that you treated, would you follow them up?**

No, we'd hear about them, yes, most of the time we'd find out what's happening to them, whether they were evacuated back to Australia or we were getting them back, come back out to us, usually the boss would tell us what's going on.

And when you say the boss, are you talking about the doctor?

No, the major, yes, the company commander,

33:00 it's his responsibility I guess.

And would you see the doctor once you got back from operations?

Sometimes, yes, we'd just go along and give a rundown of what's happened, get resupplied with medical stuff, and he'd let me know what's going on with some of the people too. And he'd run the sick parade for us too, you know, so I'd take guys

33:30 over there from my company who needed to see a doctor, the guys who'd been playing up, and guys might have a rash or something like that, take them up there so he could have a look at them and treat them.

And the men who had lost mates whilst out on operations, would you counsel them in any way?

34:00 I don't think you'd call it counselling I guess, just say it was a mate of ours, he was everybody's mate and we're going to miss him or whatever, type of thing. But I mean we're not trained counsellors, we're called life counsellors I guess, things that come to you naturally and things you just talk to them about naturally and stuff like that. But

34:30 they never had any trauma counselling like they do nowadays, any – I'm saying any little thing, but anything that happens now, our school kids they give counselling to them. None of our guys were given counselling, no, proper counselling.

And after – you mentioned that some of the guys would go and have leave after operations?

Yes, depends, I mean

35:00 they'd say you're going to go on R&C, which is rest and – whatever the C is, I don't know, I know what R&R is, rest and recreation, but we used to go on R&C, it might be "rest in country" [this was different to rest and care], I think it might be, and we used to go down to Vung Tau, but the whole company used to go down, most of the guys just wanted to go to the bars to meet the girls, and get drunk basically. A few of the married's wouldn't go down, but they'd come into

35:30 town, maybe do some shopping or something. Because it's still a dangerous place even if you were just going down there on leave, so we used to go round in groups, keep an eye on each other. And that happened about half a dozen times I think, the whole time I was there.

And where could you find the women in Vung Tau?

Any bar, any bar you wanted to go to, there's always girls hanging around there trying to

36:00 entice you to come in and have a drink, and buy them some Saigon tea [black tea sold to the bar girls at the price of whiskey and soda] or whatever it was, just a watered-down drink, just to get the money off you. And if you wanted favours, you pay extra for things like that.

Well how does that work if you want favours? Is there a pimp, so to speak?

No, you just go in there and a girl starts talking to you, and she'll say, "I'll charge you so much", or you ask her how much, and things like that. I guess they had

36:30 the momma san, who was the woman who ran the bar, and there was a pappa san there, and he'd be in charge of the pub as well, and I guess the girls worked for them.

But any arrangement you made with girls was one on one?

Yes, and I guess they must give them the money as well, part of the money.

How were the men treated for VD [venereal disease]?

Depending which way it was.

37:00 Basically Procaine or crystaline penicillin then antibiotics, tetracyclin, penicillin or whatever, and that was just for your gonorrhoea, that issue, but anything like syphilis or anything like that was a lot stricter, I think they might have even been sent back to Australia, I'm not too sure, with their antibiotics, I don't know. But

37:30 just the basic ones were just antibiotics.

What was the most common one?

Gonorrhoea I think. They give them a pill called Vibramycin, and everybody got a pack of seven, I think it was, and it's called no sweat pill, you're took these before you went in, and it's protect you, but it didn't work. So everyone had these Vibramycin thinking it was going to help them, but they didn't. I don't

38:00 know why they did that.

I was going to say, what about condoms?

Yes, you can go to the RAP and ask for them yes, I think some of them did.

And how much did the girls charge?

Five dollars or something, it wasn't very much. I think it was 100 piesta or something they're called, or dong, which is the Vietnamese money, and the

38:30 MC [military currency] was the other one, the piesta was like a military-type money I think. It wasn't very much. I guess it depends if you were there for an hour or if you wanted to stay there all night, whatever you wanted to do.

So what was the preferred currency?

I think piesta, which is the emcee I think, I didn't see too much of this Vietnamese money, dong, I think it was piesta.

And what about

39:00 **US dollars? What was the value of that to the Vietnamese?**

I guess it was good, we never saw US dollars. I guess they preferred that to our money anyway. Yeah, I didn't see any over there.

And Vung Tau, did you surf there?

Yes, at the Peter Badcoe Centre [soldiers' club], which was the centre where we used to sleep, and had a

39:30 swimming pool there and baths, restaurants, and it had a beach, it had all barbed wire round parts of it, you could only swim in certain places, but it was a pretty good surf there, there were surfboards there, you'd just grab them and take them out.

How many feet was the surf?

About three or four feet, it wasn't all that high, but it was better than nothing, it was something to do, the old

40:00 South China Sea. But the water was never clear, not like in Thailand.

And would you hire everything from – sorry, what was it, Peter …?

Peter Badcoe, he was an Australian guy that was killed in Vietnam, he was in the training team, he was from South Australia actually, they

40:30 just had his Peter Badcoe Medal on Anzac Day for the football. His daughter's still alive, it's just the name of a centre where you can go and have your rest and recreation. As I said, you sleep there and have showers, eat there and stuff like that, just go there for a couple of days rest before you go back to Nui Dat again. You get briefed when you get there by the provost marshal which is the military police, and they tell you

41:00 what bars to stay away from, no out of bounds, that was out of bounds, that'd be out of bounds, for some reason, somebody might have been killed there or – venereal disease is very, you know – so they tell you what bars to stay away from. We used to get that briefing every time we went in.

We've got another tape change.

Oh, okay.

How's your back?

Tape 8

00:34 **Okay Graham, just before we broke then, we were talking about the girls and the fellows playing up and going and getting girls and that whole sort of scenario. Was there much – or what sort of stigma was attached to fellows coming down with VD and those sort of sexually**

01:00 **transmitted diseases?**

I don't think there was much at all, 79 per cent of guys got it over there, very high percentage. Even married men too.

And what was the army's policy or line?

There wasn't any policy, they just put them on antibiotics and write up a special card, it was a notifiable disease and I think they had to let the Department of Health know back in Australia, but that was about it, I think.

01:30 **And was it frowned up by the army, or …?**

Not in those days, no. Because even the officers were playing up too.

Well, what sort of other stories do you have from the demilitarised zones, the civilian areas that you would go into?

02:00 They had curfews there and you weren't allowed to be out after a certain time. If you did you had to make sure you were in some building, hotel, whatever, and you had to – I think it was midnight or something like that, no Australians were supposed to be on the road. But a couple of times we managed to sneak back in. There was a way of getting back in to camp without being found, go along the beach and through the barbed wire and come

02:30 in that way. I never came that way myself, I came in a little camp and got to know the guy on the front gate and he let me in without reporting me. There were certain places that you weren't allowed to go, there was a couple of camps near us, one was the Vietnamese, the ROK, the Republic of Korea guys, we weren't allowed to go in their camp, I don't think we were allowed in the American camp

03:00 either. And there was a Thai camp near us too, and they even said there was a VC centre there for them to go to, but I think it might have been just a story. And even in Vung Tau there were places we weren't allowed to go into. The Grand Hotel was for officers, but a couple of us did slip in there a couple of times, but I believe it was supposed to be only for officers.

03:30 Temples and things like that you weren't supposed to go to, because one of my mates got married over there, even though he was getting married over here too, but it wasn't recognised, the one over there thank God, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to get married over here. He got drunk one day and married a Vietnamese girl, just a five minute job. It took us –

04:00 we did a bit of sightseeing there, they've got a lot of places of interest, a lot of French stuff there, but you weren't allowed to go on your own, they had to be organised. A lot of top secret stuff there, can't go on any of the bases, couldn't go on the airfields or anything like that, that's about it, I think.

And was there any -

04:30 **or were there any activities like I guess PR [public relations] sort of, with the local population, those kinds of goodwill …?**

We used to throw sweets to the kids and myself and another guy used to go down to the orphanage. They had teams of people specially trained in doing that sort of stuff, ours was just

05:00 throwing little red lollies to the kids and smiling at them, and giving them the two finger victory sign, type of thing.

Careful of your microphone there. What was the attraction for you to go to the orphanage? Why did you go there?

Somewhere different, just to see how the other half lived type of thing, not just going to the bars and things like that.

05:30 It would have been nice to go into a South Vietnamese house too, and see how the South Vietnamese families live, but we never had that opportunity, because we didn't know whose side they were really on anyway. The orphanage was run by nuns I think. I've got a picture of one of the kids in there actually.

And were you able to talk to the children very much?

Yes, but

06:00 I mean we couldn't understand them. I think they were French nuns, I think, and they could speak a little bit of English and explain where the kids came from and how long they'd been there and that type of stuff.

And what did you find satisfying about going ...?

Just seeing the smiles on their faces, we used to take food into them as well, Australian stuff, and they liked that.

06:30 I guess we were a novelty to them, as much as they were a novelty to us. Just nice to get out and go somewhere different, and just not think of the place as a war all the time, you know, just a bit of normality about the place.

Well one of the

07:00 **I guess big things about Vietnam is not being able to determine who your enemy was, particularly when you were in civilian areas. How conscious were you of that when you were in these kind of areas?**

You just watch your back, basically, and never go on your own. Make sure you've always got some mates with you.

And would you carry weapons of any sort?

No, the Americans

07:30 carried weapons with them I think, but we didn't. One of my mates got into an argument or got picked on by some Vietnamese and they started to give him a good hiding, and he killed one of them. And they threw him in a rubbish bin, then some Australians came and helped him out, and they got him out of the place pretty quick. Nothing ever happened about that, life was very cheap. You had to be careful with the

08:00 kids who were on motorbikes, I'm trying remember what they used to call them, there was a name for them, but I don't know, but they were crims, but they were on little motorbikes, and you had to be careful of the White Mice, which were the local police, if they'd start firing in the air and tell everyone to drop, you dropped as well, because that means they were chasing somebody, and they didn't care if you were Australian or what. Yes,

08:30 I guess we were lucky to keep out of trouble, even when you're on leave. At least when you're out in the bush you've got a weapon with you if someone starts shooting at you, but if you're in a town, it's different. I think overall it was a pretty safe place, Vung Tau. I never got to Saigon, I don't know what it's like there. Some of the guys went up there.

09:00 **Well I was going to ask you, I mean there were more Americans up in Saigon but how much contact did you have with the Americans?**

Only in the bars in Vung Tau and the guys that were in the choppers that used to take us around in the Chinooks, they were all Americans. The Iroquois helicopters were manned by our guys, Australians, whereas the Chinooks were Americans, even though we've got our own Chinooks now, but we didn't have them then,

09:30 I'm sure we didn't. And we had – we did operations with Americans, there'd be a battalion of them and a battalion of us type of thing, and guys we saw on leave down in the bars, that was the only time we had contact. You'd see the planes going over, bombing runs and things like that.

And what did you – or what were your impressions of the Americans?

I was

10:00 glad they were there, otherwise we wouldn't have been there for a start. It was good to have the support. They did cock up a lot of things but I guess – I don't know whether it was worthwhile them being there altogether, but I'm just glad that they were there when we were there, they helped us out quite a bit,

10:30 well we had Americans weapons, American rations, we had our own as well, but I mean, just saying a lot of the stuff we had was theirs.

Well the Americans did have a bit of a reputation for being a bit gung ho and loud and brash, what did you see of that?

The guys on leave were, yes. They were as

11:00 brash – I've seen them in movies and stuff you know, walking around with transistors on their – giant boom things on their shoulders and that. I never saw any of that, but they did – the girls in the bars used to prefer the Americans because they had more money than us, and the Australians were too shrewd with their money, we wouldn't part with it, whereas the Americans used to throw their money

around, and

11:30 of course the bar girls would go straight to the Americans if there was any in the bar. I can't say much more about them. I work with veterans now, American veterans, when I go to the United States I do a little bit of work with them over there. They're very nice guys.

And did you trust them when you were in the Chinooks?

Yes, yes,

12:00 yes. See them on the guns on the side there with their M60s, yes. I didn't see any reason not to. Some of their choppers used to come in where some of our guys wouldn't, chopper guys wouldn't come in, if they thought it was too hairy, because if our guys lost a helicopter, that's millions of dollars, whereas the Americans, "Oh, we've got another one to replace it", and they'd come in situations and help us out, whereas our own guys wouldn't. Not all the time,

12:30 but it has been known to happen. We've had their gunships firing right over our head with the shells just falling on us, the empty ones, I mean the shells, the real ones that go in the bullets, we were just getting empty casings, but that shows you how close they were, 1500 metres in front of us. They were good pilots, they'd come in pretty close to you. They never had any

13:00 accidents, drop shorting or something like that. They weren't too bad.

And the sound of the choppers, that's a very iconic sound from the Vietnam war?

Yes, I love the sound, I think you'll find most vets [veterans] do, because it means something to different people. To me it means new rations coming

13:30 out, mail, going home maybe, or going back in, it means something different, it's just a nice sound, it makes you feel more comfortable because you know they're around, bringing more ammunition, taking our sick guys out, bringing fresh guys in, just different meanings. But it's so good when you hear a lot of them together though. The most I've ever seen was 12 in Vietnam, I

14:00 saw 300-odd once in England at an air show, 300 helicopters flying at once, but in Vietnam it was about 12, I think, and that was pretty spectacular, dropping off a whole company.

Well as you say, the chopper sound does mean different things to different people, and to some people it's a fearful sound, but for you it's quite different.

I like the sound, yes. If I

14:30 hear – I'm outside and I hear a chopper go over I look up to see if it's an Iroquois from over at Edinburgh or you know, one of the Black Hawks or something, you can tell the difference, or if it's just the Channel Nine TV chopper or something. Yes, I like the sound of the choppers. And you'll find like when we do these parades and marches and stuff, most of the guys like a chopper coming over. We went on one in Canberra and it had three of them flying over, and it was

15:00 great. I think most of the guys liked that.

One of the other stories that we haven't touched on today is I understand you had an incident where you crossed a creek and had a bit of a back problem. What happened there?

We were just crossing the creek and there was a vine, and people were grabbing the vine to help them down I did, and

15:30 it wasn't my turn, the vine snapped. I had a pack on my back and I landed on my pack, but I was winded for a while and had a few back pains from it. It was probably about 20 feet, but lucky I had the pack on my back, I guess. But it knocked the wind out of me. Here I am lying on my back and the guys are laughing their heads off, seeing me snap the vine.

Well it does bring to mind a little bit of a

16:00 **Tarzan image, crossing the creek with the vine. Was that a regular occurrence?**

There just happened to be a vine there and I saw the other guys using it so I used it. Yes. And I guess that was the start of my back pains, back problems, but there were some funny times like that, I can laugh about it now.

16:30 A guy had a tick up his backside, that was a funny one, if you want to know about that. I had to get two guys to hold the cheeks open while I had to get the tick out. He still reminds me to this day about that. Because you can't control those ticks, they go anywhere.

So did you have the job of actually removing it?

Yes, I had the tweezers. They

17:00 always tell you to turn them anti-clockwise because they reckon that the ticks drill in clockwise, so you pull them out anti-clockwise. But I think that was just a fallacy. I've still got half a one in my leg, it's

been there 35 years, couldn't get it all out. I should get the doctor one day to cut it out, I thought I'd removed it all, just a bit of a lump. You've got to be careful because some of those ticks, they carry diseases too. But this is just annoying sometimes.

17:30 **And when you were back at camp, how often would you get news from home or relatives?**

Well in England I'd probably get a letter every month or so, from my mum. It used to irk me because everybody used to get free postage to Australia, and from Australia, but I had to pay because mine was all to England, so I had to go and

18:00 find somewhere to get stamps and things like that. But that's one of those things. But I used to read the other guys' mail from their girlfriends and things. They let me do it.

And why was it common practice to share those letters around like that?

Well I guess they know some people didn't get mail and things like that, don't have girlfriends or something, and it helped to cheer them up. A friend of mine, who lives up in Brisbane,

18:30 I went to his wedding and everything, and he always reminds me, he's still got the letters too, he's still married to the same girl, yes, they'd just let you read their letters.

Can we just stop for a minute? We were just talking about letters from home, and did you write back?

Yes, usually all dirty, it's very hard to keep clean. They used to have to

19:00 buy aerograms because the stamps were already in them, and when the chopper came every five, seven days, send them back with them. Some guys even got parcels with cakes and things in them, and they used to share the cakes around, that was nice.

And how edible were the cakes?

Weren't bad actually. You'd get those fruit cakes and they'd last for ages, send them in the mail they don't have any problems.

19:30 **And what would you tell your family about what you were doing? What could you tell them?**

Well, I told them I was away at a contact today, a couple of guys killed or something, whatever, things like that, I wouldn't explain to them exactly what happened, but you know, I think they were censored too, I'm sure they would have been, you couldn't tell them where you were and how long you were going to be away for and stuff like that, they just knew you were around

20:00 somewhere. But I used to tell them a bit.

Well for you, what do you think was the worst time in Vietnam for you?

That first week, I think, yes, when we lost those guys. See the rest of the

20:30 time was pretty quiet, we had a few guys wounded and stuff, but we never had any more fatalities in our particular company. We had a bad time when a chopper crashed, but they'd already removed the guys from it, there were two or three killed in it. Another company had already removed them, but we saw them bringing their bodies out, they'd hit a bunker system and the chopper got shot down. We weren't too sure what we were going

21:00 into there. Luckily the enemy had shot off, so when we got there they must have seen us coming or something. That was pretty scary, because we knew there was somebody around, whereas that first couple of weeks we didn't know. So when you hit something you don't have time to think. And the

21:30 made me section commander once, we were in ambush for three weeks, and we were short of people so they put me on the perimeter with a machine gun and five guys, and we heard somebody shoot some – fire some rounds or something, and we heard this yelling, and it was a Vietnamese guy, a Viet Cong, they'd shot him, and he left half his stomach

22:00 around the tree but he'd crawled off, we couldn't find him, but we could hear him in the distance, because they used to get these – take this stuff that used to coagulate their blood so they wouldn't bleed too much, and it slows their blood flow down, and we guess that's what he was on, because there wasn't much blood, just his intestines and stuff. And of course then we had to lay an ambush then to try and catch him

22:30 or anybody else was there, and they made me section commander and one night I was sleeping in my pit and my number two was on the gun, and all of a sudden somebody up and up'd with the M60 and let the Claymores off, and they started firing up there, because everybody stands to then, and I'm standing there and I could hear something in front of me falling down the bank into this river, and splashing down and I'm thinking, "Should I shoot, should I

23:00 shoot"? I didn't shoot, I was scared. And the guy who was with me, if he'd been there, we might have talked each other into shooting, but because he wasn't there, I'm saying, "Oh, I'm sure there's somebody there, I'm definite", but I was worried that there might be someone over there, the enemy

over there could see me shooting and start shooting at me, so I didn't shoot. They went out and sent a search party out in the morning and they reckoned they couldn't find anything, but something did fall down in

23:30 front of me, and I heard it go down the bank. And we were there for three weeks, about 15 of us, five in my section, and it was a pretty scary time because not – I'm not used to being in charge of infantry guys, but it's just that I happened to be a corporal. But I didn't have too much to worry about there, no serious stuff happened.

24:00 **And how bad do you think – I can imagine that it would be far worse to imagine something rather than at least when you can see your enemy, it's a known quantity. How bad do you think paranoia was?**

Well we had guys that used to shoot anything. Is that what you mean? Yes, they had to send them back because if anything made a noise out there they'd start opening, start shooting. They were a danger

24:30 to themselves, a danger to us I guess, give our position away, we'd have to move, we couldn't stay in the same position. Some guys' nerves just snapped I guess quicker than others. I never had that problem shooting, I mean I had the opportunity but … I remember once we had these little headphones on, and they had these little

25:00 sensor things, 100 metres, 200, 300 metres, and you sit there and listen, and you could hear anything go past. And I counted up to 36 going past, and I thought, "Jesus, that's a lot of people", there was only about 20 of us. So I told our boss could we handle that many people? He said, "Sure we can", you know, the amount of automatic weapons we've got. Turned out it was one of our own group, but they didn't tell us they were out there till after.

25:30 But these little sensor things, when I kept on hearing boom, boom, boom, that means one person's walking past, two people, great little contraption but it doesn't tell you who the enemy is and who the friendlies are. Monkeys used to set them off too.

That's interesting, because these are the early days of what is now very commonplace and modernised equipment. Do you know how they worked?

26:00 No, just like a little microphone, just stick it under at tree, so they can't see it, disguise it, and have the wire going – cover grass or dirt over it, all the way back to where you are, with the headphones, a receiver and a transmitter, and just tell you if anyone or anything's walking past. I think there were other contraptions too, but that was the most modern one we had. We didn't have it for

26:30 too long, because it was picking up everything.

And how often or what was the danger of friendly fire or firing on your own?

Well it happened quite a bit, we had quite a few people killed I think by our own fire. You're just only out a couple of hundred metres when you bring in artillery or something like that, and the shells drop short or gunships come in too soon.

27:00 One of our blokes killed one of his – not in my company but in another one where a forward scout saw the guys in front who happened to be tailing Charlie of another company, he challenged him, and then he shot him and killed him, and didn't realise it was one of our own. But when he found out they had to get him out of the country pretty quick, because he was so upset. I think a lot of that sort of stuff happened

27:30 because of lack of communication and proper directions and map reading, just given the wrong information, I guess. Ands I think the Americans – probably a half of their guys killed in Vietnam were probably through accidental fire or whatever you want to call it, it mightn't have been as much as that, but probably 25 per cent,

28:00 I'm not too sure how many of ours, but I reckon quite a few of ours were. I think that happens in any war though, it's very hard.

Well how much – I mean you did your tour in '71, and that was towards the end of the Vietnam war, how much or how aware do you think you and the rest of 3RAR were that it

28:30 **was starting to wind up, or looking like it might wind up?**

I don't think – the war itself wasn't winding up, that was just going on as normal. It's just that we had less people and I think we were more wary and more careful I think, we did lots of operations, I think we were probably lucky in a lot of them, but

29:00 the war went right up till '75 I think, and we had Australians still in the embassy in Saigon till pretty late, I don't think it was quite '75, but the last battalion pulled out in '72, but it didn't stop people getting killed in operations and that. The enemy was still pushing and you know, I think we were just lucky that we had

29:30 the casualties – the least casualties that we did. 4RAR, who were after us had more than us, more

casualties, I'm sure they did, and they were there for about the same amount of time as we were, I think we just …

Well while you were there, did you ever begin to doubt why you were there?

I never even thought about it, no, it was a job, I had

30:00 pay coming in, I was saving up to get a car, and it was just a job to me, I suppose.

And what was the pay?

Something like 300 a fortnight or something, it wasn't all that much in those days, but I don't know what it equates to nowadays, but you could buy a brand new Fairmont car for $3000, so

30:30 it's a bit different, they're $50,000 now.

Just be careful of your microphone, sorry.

Yes.

Before we move on

31:00 **and hear about the end of your tour, is there anything else that you feel like that we haven't covered from your tour of Vietnam?**

No, I just think probably 90 per cent of the time wasn't too bad, just 100 per cent – 10 per cent or whatever it was, was bad, bad and sad,

31:30 just a sign of times and just happened, there's nothing you can do about it. The guys who've gone, there's nothing you can do about it, we're losing guys all the time now.

Actually one of the things I haven't asked is on a more lighter side, one of the other aspects that gets – or themes that gets associated with Vietnam is the music.

32:00 **Did you have very much music in your camp?**

Yes, everybody was going out buying these Akai Mark 10s, they were big reel to reel tape players, and I think the Akais had the cassette to cassette, and some had a e-track thing on the side, and I had one, but I thought, "I'm not going to buy records, tapes, reel to reel's an 8-track, so I swapped it for a Sony TC330 which was just

32:30 a reel-to-reel and cassettes, and I had a record player that I could run through the amplifier. And when we came back, somebody would go down and buy some new records, and we'd record it and have all these stereos set up and we'd all be taking copies of it, and I've got a friend who went to Taipei [Taiwan] and he brought back all these LPs for 30, 50 cents each or something, and they weren't supposed to last

33:00 long, I've still got some to this day that still work, you know, Janis Joplin and things like that. But music was a big thing. Because a friend of mine was a DJ over here, worked in the local radio station, he wanted me to come and work down there because I liked music and I knew a bit about music, but my boss wouldn't let me go, being the only medic, so I never went down there, and he was a DJ up in Townsville, this guy,

33:30 he's in Charters Towers now. But music was a really big thing, you know, Credence Clearwater Revival and The Beatles, Rolling Stones type of thing.

And were there any particular songs when you were in Vietnam that you really associate, that got played over and over or became like anthems?

Yeah, John Denver. West Virginia, you know the

34:00 song? We changed the words to South Australia, "Take me back to South Australia", and that was our anthem, and we had a song too, a Maori song, which one of our guys used to get us all to sing, "Come a-lie, come a-lie, come a-lie la vista", I don't know what it means, it's just a song, you get about 100 guys singing this song, and it sounds really good. One day I'll ask the guy where he got it from.

34:30 But I guess Credence Clearwater Revival, some of their songs, as soon as I hear them, it'll remind me of Eric Burden and the Animals and Sky Pilot, that's one that reminds me of Vietnam too, because that's a war one. There's quite a few I can't name at the moment.

What about any of the other more sort of heavier metal kind of …?

35:00 I've got all Black Sabbath's stuff, Ozzie Osborne, got a lot of his stuff, Uriah Heap, Status Quo, I'm sure Status Quo were around then, Pink Floyd, I've got all their records but I'm too sure where they were there in that period or they just came out after that. I liked some of the heavy stuff,

35:30 and the light stuff. I like folk, a lot of classical, I like all music actually.

And what sort of occasions would you all break out into the come a-lie come a-lie vista song?

Well, going over on the boat, coming back on the boat, down having a few beers down at the boozer, yes, a couple of times. You wouldn't do it out bush naturally, but

36:00 when all the boys had a few beers inside them I guess. We sing it now when we're at reunions, if we can remember the words. Yes, music was a big part of Vietnam, everyone carried – well I did anyway, a little transistor radio, because you'd listen to the American music station and the Australian one too, it's all today's music so you keep in contact with it.

36:30 But our boss didn't like us using transistor radios so you had to do it discreetly, because you never know, it's all quite at night time and you can hear somebody in the jungle who's got a little radio on, even with the headphones on, you've got to really cover it up.

Your boss – you keep referring to him as your boss, but he does sound quite strict or stricter than others perhaps.

He was, yes.

How did that go down?

37:00 If you put you hoochie up too long he'd get his bayonet out and pull it down and cut up, and made a noise, he'd really have a go at you. I saw him sling a rifle at a guy because he picked up the wrong rifle. He was a bit of a cranky guy, he used to be heavy in the stock market and he'd get reports over the air about his stocks have gone down, lost $100,000 or something you know, he was pretty well off, he had a farm up in Young, New South Wales. He died last year, actually.

37:30 But we've heard since he was like that, because he was worried about us, you know, that was his way of showing he was keeping an eye on us because this was his second tour, he was in the training team with Jock, same as my CSM, he was in the training team too, he died about three years ago.

Well at the time …

We used to call him the Pig,

38:00 yeah, he was very well liked by the guys, but it's only since Vietnam we realised that he was doing it for a reason, and he wasn't as bad as we thought he was.

Well as a team leader did he kind of get you into shape and in line, sort of thing, or did you do it begrudgingly?

Yeah, I

38:30 think I was into line, yeah. He was a colonel when he got out, growing plums and making them into prunes, that was his business, prunes. Yes, he's buried in Canberra.

And did everyone call him the Pig, or was it …?

Well everyone knew who he was, yes, the Pig.

39:00 His name was Stipwich, I think it was Czechoslovakian or one of those eastern European names. But when he died, a lot of guys turned up for his funeral, because some of our fellows were pallbearers, I didn't go myself, but – whereas the CSM was a general, and he was a nice guy, when he died everybody went to that.

And did you have a nickname yourself?

Yeah, Doc.

39:30 All medics are Doc. If somebody calls me Doc now I – gee, I haven't heard that for a while. Yes, so even some of the wives still call me Doc.

Okay, well our tape is

Tape 9

00:34 **And we were – things didn't actually wind down in Vietnam as you said, but Vietnamisation [turning over the running of the war to the South Vietnemese Army] was starting to become the key thing towards the end of your service in Vietnam. How did your time in Vietnam come to an end?**

Well we started switching off. I mean we knew we were getting to the end and we didn't – weren't getting

01:00 contacts, and if we saw anything like smoke or anything like that we'd just avoid it, or any new tracks or anything like that we'd just avoid them, because that means we had to follow and it means we might get

more casualties, so we just – we left, and we just couldn't wait to get back to Nui Dat, pack our stuff up and go, it wasn't a very nice way of going I suppose,

01:30 leaving the Vietnamese to look after themselves, but I guess you've got to look after yourself. And it was so nice to go on that ship and come home.

I was going to ask you how you felt about leaving the Vietnamese behind?

It was sad, I mean we left our bushman scouts there to their fate, whatever that was, and some were wanting us to try and bring them back to Australia, but I don't know

02:00 how we would have done it anyway. Some of the guys married Vietnamese girls. A friend of mine went back and he stayed there, even after everybody had pulled out, and he married a Vietnamese girl and brought he back to Australia. He lives in Sydney now. Yes, it was so nice to get out of the place, even if it was only eight months. I got back and I volunteered to go back again, they wanted some people to go back on the training team, and of course there was

02:30 still another year or so to go, and I said I'd go, I've got no ties. And I went and had my medical and everything and myself and another bloke, Bruno, he went and I was supposed to go a week or so later and they cancelled my post after he got over there, and he was only there a month and he came back.

Well when you left Vietnam did you feel that you had completed your job there?

No, it was definitely unfinished,

03:00 but I think once we had word come through we were going home, we just didn't think about it, just wanted to go. Just the way things happen.

And when you came home, what kind of homecoming did you have?

Excuse me. There were a lot of people at the docks. My mate was there waiting for me, because he came back a couple of months earlier, so at least I had somebody to welcome me back, had him and his family

03:30 there, because I used to stay with them, write to them and that. So it was nice to have them. And people in King William Street, some of the people I knew were there to see us come home, but not as many as I thought, there wasn't the thousands and thousands you expect. And that was it, everybody went on leave and I picked up a car and went to Queensland, to go to a wedding,

04:00 came back and I went to England, so it all took about three months because I'd accrued three months leave or something. That was before I went back to 3RAR again, and of course by then there wasn't that many people there, they were just starting to build up again, because all the national servicemen had got out, people had been posted, but there wasn't too many of us at Woodside in early '72.

04:30 **And how did you find settling back down when you got back?**

I had no problem because I was still in the services, I just went straight back to Woodside training again because something might come up, until I got posted to Townsville later on in the year. I had no problems, I never got spat on or anything like that, when you hear some of the vets got a hard time, I never got refused

05:00 entry into RSLs [Returned and Services Leagues clubs] or anything like that, I never had to go into RSLs really. Nothing really affected me.

Did you have any nightmares or …?

No, not really. I mean I have since, but then I didn't, no.

How long after you …?

It's only in the last few years, but I mean not an everyday occurrence, maybe once every couple of weeks I might have a bit of a sweat, but

05:30 nothing – like you hear some of the guys, every night. It hasn't really affect me much I don't think.

And what would be dreaming in these nightmares?

Half the time I wouldn't know. Just people dying I guess, back in Vietnam.

And how – did you have any other post traumatic stress come through?

06:00 Well see I've only had post – PTSD recognised as of last year. I got my TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated payment] in 1994 basically it was, without being PTSD, because PTSD is a big thing, if you're putting a claim in you've got to have lots of problems, and I was told I think too much, so a guy just told me I had not problems, and it was only in the last year, two years that I've

06:30 started getting the signs, I guess. And I went and saw a shrink late last year and they said, "Yes, you've got it now".

What were the signs that you were getting?

Well, having those nightmares I suppose, and waking up in a cold sweat, jumpy, getting sharp with people, you know, short tempered.

07:00 Not alcohol. I've never had problems with alcohol, I know I can control that. I think they're the main things, yes.

And do you think being a regular army – being part of the regular army made access to the RSL easier for you?

I honestly don't know, I don't know, so many have had problems with the RSLs, but

07:30 some guys were told they weren't welcome and things like that, but the ones that I've gone too, not very frequently, but I've had no problems, sign the book and you're in basically.

And what about telling the people about your experiences, your having gone to Vietnam?

What do you mean like?

Do you share any of …?

Oh yes, with other veterans, yeah, they tell their stories and I tell them, that type of thing. But I

08:00 wouldn't – unless somebody asks me, if civilians ask me about it I won't say anything unless they ask me, I won't, you know, not that I'm ashamed, I just don't think about it.

So when you got back from Vietnam you explained how you went for a second tour but that was cut short, so what did you do and where were you based in that time from returning to Vietnam?

Well from 3RAR to Woodside,

08:30 to Townsville, to another battalion up there. As I said, I was only up there for 12 months and I'd been married by then, got married eight months after I got, to somebody I met, so it was a pretty quick engagement and marriage, and went to Townsville and spent two years up there, and she lost a baby up there and she hated it up there, her

09:00 family was down here, so I had to get a posting back here, and I went back to third battalion again, from '74 to '80, six years.

And when you came back you in the late '70s were posted to Malaysia?

Yes, that was in '77, yeah, did four months up there. That was just a posting, doing the guard at Butterworth, the air force base up there, and did a bit of jungle

09:30 training up there, went down to Singapore a couple of times, just doing things like that.

That was quite a quiet operation that was happening.

Yes, we had live ammunition and that, but we never had any problems up there, there was Communist terrorists up there, but we had no – we saw the planes taking off with live bombs and stuff going up to the Thai border there, but it never affected us.

10:00 If there was any trouble around they'd just confine us to camp and try and – because it wasn't our country basically, we were there protecting the aeroplanes, so we had no trouble there.

And why were you doing further jungle training?

Because it was there, just to get us used to – break the boredom and looking after the planes, the sent us down near Johore Bahru, which is down near Singapore, and stay down there for month, just doing training.

10:30 **And it wasn't long after that that you moved to the air force, what was the motivation to change from army to …?**

Just trying to save my marriage, because the army you're never home, whereas the air force is more static, and I transferred over in '80 and went to Canberra, and my ex-wife decided she didn't want to come over there, but I was already over there, posted, and she changed her mind. So I stuck it over there and she was back here with the kids.

11:00 So having no car or anything, the first couple of months was awkward. Then I had to get a car and come back and take the kids over there and come and stay with them and bring them back, it was a bit of a bind. But got through that, and got divorced in '80, I initiated it, because I thought I'm not going to get back together, I'm not going to get back here, I'd love to come back here with the kids and that, but I didn't want to get back with her.

11:30 So I stayed in the air force, and went where they posted me to.

Well you mentioned that you had to go through rookie training again for the air force, what was different about this rookie training?

This is down at Edinburgh, because I came back here for Christmas because it was just before Christmas, and it was handy to do my training and stay down here so I could have Christmas with the kids.

12:00 Basically a lot of it is the same, you just use the same weapons, you just have to do air force history, but all the other things like drill and stuff like that are basically the same, a bit slacker in the army, but it's basically the same. Just did 10 weeks down there and graduated from there and then I went to Canberra.

And how much older were you than the other guys who were rookie training?

A lot older,

12:30 they made me the course orderly, the guy who has to march them around everywhere, I was the only with medals up and all these young recruits. I didn't go in as a recruit, I went in as an AC, aircraftsman, but I had to start from scratch again when I was a sergeant in the army, I had to start back at the bottom.

And how did that transition work for you?

I got through it, didn't like it, it took me

13:00 eight years or nine years to back up to sergeant again, and that's as far as I got. But I guess all my mates who have stayed in the army, they got up to majors and captains and WO1s and RSMs and, but I look back now and I think, was it worth it? Then I think, oh no, I wouldn't have met my present wife, and all these different circumstances now. Would have never got

13:30 over to the US and things like that.

So you were then posted – by the time you finished training, I'm anticipating it's late 1980 now?

Yes, 1980.

And you were posted to Canberra. What work were you doing in Canberra?

Working at the base at Fairbairn there, the base medical flight, there's a chopper place there and the VIP fleet takes the Prime Minister everywhere. But I used to do

14:00 a lot of chopper stuff, go out on search and rescue up the Snowy Mountains and stuff like that. Interesting. But most of the time would have been in the medical section looking after sick RAAF guys and things. But yes, I enjoyed it, I had a very social life in Canberra, coached basketball, played basketball three times a week, my whole life revolved around basketball. I enjoyed

14:30 Canberra. The worst place was Richmond, didn't like that.

That was your next posting.

Yes.

Did you do any ambulance work with the choppers?

Yes, we had ambulances there on the base, if any maydays or any pancakes, they call them, you just go out there, follow the plane in and make sure the engine's shut down, and no problems. Yes, there were no real problems, we had a few choppers go down and we'd go looking for them, but there was no-one really hurt. Yes, it was a good posting.

15:00 **What about training accidents?**

There was lots of them, yes. But there was no-one killed there, it was when I was in the army, had a training accident and five guys were

15:30 killed and I had to go and find them and – but that was back in '78 or something. But once I was in the air force I never had any.

Well, can I ask what that incident was with the army?

That was at El Alamein [camp and firing range, Port Augusta, South Australia], you know, near Whyalla, Cultana area, I was a duty medic, and one of the choppers hit the hill just behind Cultana there, and they took me up in a chopper to see if we could find anyone, and they winched me down to see if anyone was alive, but all five of them were dead,

16:00 and four of them were incinerated and the fifth one was pretty smashed up. Had to go the Board of Inquiry and all that of stuff, because I was the one that found them. Yes, that was in '77, late '77, it was after I got back from Malaysia. But once I joined the air force we had a few accidents, but no-one was killed as far as I know

That army accident, was that the first real

16:30 **severe accident that you had dealt with since Vietnam?**

Yes. I mean I've been to car smashes and things like that, but that's the first time I've actually – the first time I've ever seen an incinerated – anyone incinerated before, never saw anything like that in Vietnam.

Must have been quite different seeing your own guys as well?

Yes, because you don't recognise them, yes. Trying to work out who they are.

17:00 No, it's not very nice, the smell goes through your clothes …

So what did you do once you identified them?

Well we had to put them in body bags and get them out, and that's hard, easier said than done, because they – I don't know if you know, a body swells up like that, and you've got to break their back or something to get them in the body bag, because they've been incinerated and – it's not very nice. But you have to forget who they

17:30 are, forget what they are, someone has to do it. And the other one was broken up, he was the wing commander, he was smashed up, he was easy enough to get out. I met his wife years later, didn't like to say I was the one who found your husband. In Canberra, yes.

Did you say …?

No I didn't, no I didn't. What do you say?

18:00 say?

Yes. And you said that there weren't that many accidents with the RAAF?

No, I did come across a parachute jumper, a guy dived in, on over-shoots, and he died on us, but that was the very last one, it was one of the guys from my

18:30 old battalion, 3RAR, went parachuting and ended up in – I don't know if you know Cooktown, North Queensland, this is way past there, a place called Lakelands, it's inland, on exercise and 3RAR jumped in, and I was part of the chopper crew, and we saw this guy spear in, both his chutes failed, and we had him alive for half an hour but he had so many internal injuries, his bones went right through his boots,

19:00 but he but he was moaning and groaning and we thought we'd managed to save him, but he died about half an hour after we tried the old paddles on him. Yes, he died. He was the last person I saw.

And how do get over something like that?

I guess you don't, you think about it, but it doesn't upset me or anything, just one of those things.

19:30 Because I think if it did you'd be a nervous wreck, wouldn't you?

Well we did talk about debriefing and counselling earlier when you were in Vietnam, have you throughout your time, had that debrief?

No, never had counselling. I mean – sorry, I stand corrected there, I've had counselling with the Vietnam Counselling Service in town, but that's nothing to do with them, that's just problems in general.

But when you were out in the

20:00 **field, actually …?**

No, we didn't have counselling in those days. They give it to everybody now, firemen, policemen, yes.

Do you feel you could have benefited from it then?

No, I think I'd be the same now, I think medical helped me, by being a medic, seeing death from an early age and I think that kept me sane, I suppose.

It's an interesting observation. How did being a medic keep you sane?

Well

20:30 you're used to seeing all that stuff, aren't you? I guess I didn't think I'd need that counselling. I was used to seeing it, yes.

And when you talk about it, does it come back to you?

I think about it, yes, but it doesn't upset me. I've got willpower.

Well after Canberra you

21:00 **went to Richmond and you've just said that that was your worst posting. What made Richmond so bad?**

I didn't get on with the staff there, guys who'd been in the air force for years and they were veterans, but they did medivac service, they weren't combat medics, and they didn't like the idea of an AC [aircraftsman] or whatever it is coming in and got medals up, and they only had one, type of thing, because they went into Vietnam equipped to pick up patients and come out. And the warrant officer

21:30 there I didn't like, he liked the women, and he was a bit jealous, I think. I was shadow-posted to a unit in Queensland whenever there was an exercise. I used to go out with them and get away, I didn't mind doing that. But going back to Richmond, back in the wards, I didn't like that, I enjoyed it when I went to Sale.

22:00 **And what were you doing in Sale?**

The same sort of thing, doing search and rescue stuff down there, because they had the oil rigs off there, and working the RAP there, what do you call it, based medical flight, we had the Roulettes [RAAF exhibition flying team] down here, we had a couple of emergencies where two of them crashed, that was pretty exciting, no-one was really hurt bad, they ejected. I enjoyed that down there.

22:30 Then from there I got promoted to sergeant in Melbourne, and that was good, I was in recruiting, on air force recruits, doing the medicals on them. I enjoyed that for three years. But then I got posted over to One SD which is closed now, that was a stores depot, and I was the boss there, I enjoyed that. Then they closed it down and I got posted to a hospital in again, didn't like that.

Where were you in the

23:00 **hospital, what …?**

In Laverton, I was in charge of one of the wards, sergeant in charge, I had about 20 medics under me. But I wasn't very happy there, they were making me do courses I didn't want to do, and I'm saying, "No, I'm too old to start doing these sort of things", so I thought, "That's it". My back was starting to play up, and trying to pick patients up and things like that, go out in ambulances

23:30 and picking them up and litters and things, and I thought, "Well maybe it's time to get out", so I retired.

What was it about hospitals? Because this happened quite early on in your career, what was it about hospitals?

I always thought to myself I was never a medic, a hospital medic, I was a bush medic, I preferred to be out in the bush with the boys rather than in a sterile environment in a hospital. I'm not saying it's because I was working with the women, I got on all right with most of the women, but it's just,

24:00 we were back wearing whites in there again and I don't know, just different.

It's starting to – we're talking early '90s now, when you were at Laverton, '91, so it's 20 years now after Vietnam, what signs were you seeing of vets, Vietnam

24:30 **vets, having post traumatic stress?**

I didn't have much to do with them actually, because I was still in the services, I never went to any Anzac Day marches or anything like that. I still kept in contact with a couple of guys, when I came back to Adelaide, looked them up and things like that, but that's as far as it went with the veterans. So ever since '94, '96, I've become involved with the veterans' organisations

25:00 and things, and marching and stuff like that.

Well when you were in the services, why didn't you march?

Because I was marching all the time in – I mean it's part of our job. I think I only went on one Anzac Day march and that was when the whole unit had to go, and that was to march through Brisbane once, that was the only march I've ever been on, while I was in the services. I've done all these Freedom of the City marches and things, Edinburgh and Melbourne, Townsville and that, but

25:30 not Anzac Days.

And you said it took another what, five years, or three or four years before you got in touch with the veterans again?

That's when I came back to South Australia and I got out, and I was working as a civilian at the RAAF base there for two years, I started mixing back with my mates again and caught up with them, and started going out with them for dinner. And that was good.

26:00 **And what signs of the trauma of Vietnam were starting to come through?**

Maybe it was mixing with them, because they all got PTSD and they all went for pensions, and they all became TPIs and that. And I used to be a pension officer, welfare officer with the Vietnam Veterans'

Association, and maybe it wore off on me a bit after a while, helping these vets get their pension claims through and stuff.

26:30 And I was always told it's not catching, but maybe you know, some parts might have got through, I don't know.

You hear of quite a few stories of Vietnam vets that once they actually regroup after years and years, after Vietnam, there is a new kind of camaraderie that comes out.

It is, yes. The group I go with down to

27:00 Repat [repatriation hospital] once or twice a week, we all go for coffee after and we go have a meal once every couple of months, anyone's birthday, and that's a really nice, you know, good group of guys. And the other group I get on pretty well with too, there's two different groups down there, because they go different days of the week, I get on pretty well with them too, and play volleyball, whatever you want to call it. And we do that twice a week, gym work twice a week.

27:30 Yes, it's good catching up with all the guys, and just talking, we don't talk war or anything like that, we talk about football mostly, and things like that.

Well post traumatic stress is one of the sad repercussions that has come through of Vietnam, but some veterans have also suicided because of that. Have you come across vets who have …?

28:00 **Yes, loads of suicides, yes. I've been to four**

28:03 **funerals since last year, a couple of those were cancers and a couple were suicides. One guy down the Repat hung himself, he wrote his will out, wrote his own eulogy wrote it out, everything organised in his house, everything was sorted out, that was for his daughter, that was for his daughter, and he had everything worked out, then hung himself. Another guy shot himself, my mate Jock died three years ago, but his was cancer, smoking and drinking.**

28:30 **The homeless, we found a vet a couple of months ago that had come down from Mildura, been in Royal Adelaide Hospital since Christmas, three months, nobody claimed his body, had no family, and we heard about it and we got all the boys together and we went down to Centennial Park. They were going to put him in a pauper's grave because he had no money, but we go the RSL involved and they got him a proper**

29:00 **burial, military funeral in the military section, and there was a nice little girl by the name of Catherine Lambert, she was a singer, she came along and sang down there, and it was a nice service. We still haven't found any family, but there's a lot of vets like that. They found one dead down in Port Adelaide somewhere, he'd been there for three weeks before anyone ever found him. They're trying to stop that now, I don't know how they're going to do it. If these people don't want to mix**

29:30 **with other vets, when you've got no family I don't know how you're supposed to find out about them.**

What do you think will stop that?

I don't know, if you can try and find these vets before they do this sort of thing, if you could, but I don't know how. It's just a shame these things happen, if you could find out where these guys are before that happened you might be able to stop them from killing themselves

30:00 **And how could you?**

I don't know. I don't suppose you could, but I mean you feel so helpless that you weren't around and some of the guys actually served with these guys, and they'd say, "Oh, he was such a happy-go-lucky person", and over the years they've changed, and just lost contact with everybody, just won't have anything to do with other veterans.

30:30 **Well how would you describe this new form of camaraderie amongst the veterans?**

I don't think it's new, it's just …

Sorry, I should reword that, it's a different form of camaraderie.

Yes, I don't know, but I think they just – try to look after each other, keep an eye on each other, like we've all got each others' phone numbers and our addresses and keep in contact with everybody. If nobody's there for a couple of weeks, they ring up and find out where you are, type of

31:00 thing. I think it's great, should be more of it, there are still lots of guys out there who won't have anything to do with it, with other veterans, but some are still working too, they don't believe in – they think they should still be working, it's their prerogative. I guess one day it'll come.

How much of your experiences do you share

31:30 **with your wife and family?**

I haven't really much with the kids, unless they ask me. My wife, I think she knows everything, my present wife, yes. I'd love to sit down and talk to the kids about it, but I don't know how you approach those sort of things. One day I will.

What would you tell them?

32:00 I don't know, that's a hard one. I'd just get them to ask me questions, I guess, because I couldn't just come out and tell them something, it'd have to be a specific thing or something. I tried to get one of the boys to join the army, but he chickened out in the last minute. I thought it might be a good thing, you know, just three years, six years, help them sort their life out. But I

32:30 think if anything they should join the air force and get a trade, whereas in the army you go in the infantry, you don't learn anything really, how to shoot a rifle. But if you do go into the services, make sure it's somewhere where you can learn a trade. But neither of the boys are interested, and my daughter's definitely not interested, so you can't push them.

If there was anything from your experiences that you wanted

33:00 **them to know, what would it be?**

I honestly don't know. Of course they don't really know what's wrong with me, the problems I have, they don't know. I don't even know if they know I've got PTSD,

33:30 they know I've got a thing called sleep apnoea, I was told I've only got a certain time, amount of years to live, and things like that. But I've only been joking, I've never really told them seriously how long I've got to go and things like that, or how long I've been told I've got. Yes, it'd be very hard, I don't know.

Well why did you want to share your story with the archives?

34:00 I just thought it might be interesting, it might be interesting to somebody, somebody might be able to pick out something of interest, maybe they might learn something out of it, I don't know, it's very hard.

And when you left – well first of all I'll ask you, when you left the army, did you miss

34:30 **anything about it?**

Just the mates. When I joined the air force – when I got out of the air force it was a lot easier, because I hadn't got many friends in the air force, they're all army guys, I've only got one or two air force guys I still keep in contact with, and the majority of them are army guys. I think the military is a great career, great job, but I don't know whether

35:00 war's a good thing or not. But I guess that's what you're in the military for, isn't it?

What do you think is so beneficial about the military for an individual?

Well it teaches you a lot, I reckon. It teaches you self discipline and it can make you, you either come out a better person or definitely a worse person. You find yourself,

35:30 you know whether you make your mark in this world or not. Just so you can prove to yourself, I think everybody should do it, just for maybe six months, national service or something like that, it might be a great career thing for kids, we probably wouldn't have as many problems around now if you did do that.

36:00 But overall I've enjoyed my career in both the army and air force. But people ask me what do I prefer, and I always say the army. The air force was just a nine to five job basically, really, go home at night, whereas the army you were mates and you stick with each other and stuff like that.

Well what was your proudest moment in your army career?

I think going to Vietnam,

36:30 being a medic over there. I'm proud of that. If I saved someone's life over there, well and good I don't know, but it was a great time, I enjoyed it.

And how would you like your experience in Vietnam to be remembered?

I don't really know.

37:00 It's been an experience and I don't know if everybody could really stomach doing it, I don't know. But I definitely think it's made me, but I have no idea what I'd be doing now if I hadn't joined the military and gone to Vietnam. Just hope that if anyone –

37:30 whoever looks at these archives, they might get something out of it and learn something. Got not much else to say, I don't think.

Well how did Vietnam change you?

I think it made me more mature, I don't drink as much now, I've stopped smoking, '72 was the last

cigarette I had,

38:00 I'm not saying my health's improved, I don't know, but I often wonder what I would look now if I hadn't joined the army and stuff like that, and just so – mates just working nine to five type of thing, and losing their hair and putting weight and stuff like that. I think it's definitely done some good to me, I'm sure it will do to

38:30 other people in the future as well.

Well this is an archive, so it's for future generations to look back on it, and to learn something about Vietnam and your experiences. If you were to leave any advice or last words for that generation, what would it be?

Don't wait to be called up. If your country needs you, doesn't matter what it is, you go,

39:00 you know, if your country wants you there, you go for it. Hopefully it's for the better, it's for the right reason, and make this world a better place I suppose. We don't know whether – well it stopped Communism in a way I suppose, now we've just got the other problems to sort out now, and maybe in time

39:30 it'll all get sorted out, hopefully. I think we're in for a good future, I can't see the world just ending like that, you know, I think we've got a long way to …

And is there anything else that you'd like to share with us today?

Not really, I've enjoyed this – doing this, makes me talk about things I've forgotten about

40:00 and it's been a long day but I think it'll be worthwhile, and I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

Well thank you very much Graham.

Thank you.