

Australians at War Film Archive

Christopher Seymour (Chris) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1951>

Tape 1

00:36 **So if you would like to give us that introduction?**

My name is Chris Seymour. I was born in Sydney in 1948. My father was in the merchant marine, served with the merchant marine during the war and after the war. My mother was a secretary who worked for the RSL [Returned and Services League]

01:00 in Campsie. I grew up in Sydney, went to Campsie boys or Campsie Public School and was quite good there. From there I went to Belmore Boys High School - used to be the Belmore Technical School. I did the last year of intermediate and that was quite interesting because we had two lots

01:30 of education going on at the same time. While I was at Belmore Boys High I was in the school cadets. During that time I rose to the rank of company sergeant major and that's where I had an interest in being in the army. After that I went to work in 1964 for Woolworths in Lakemba.

02:00 I worked with them but my intention all the time was to be joining the army. This all started my father was also a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve - ran a sea cadet unit in Canterbury, TF [taskforce] Shropshire. He always said to me when I was young, because I used to go there on a Friday nights and Saturdays when they had their parades, that he'll get me into the navy cadets. I always said to him, "Nup, I'll

02:30 join the army before I'll join the cadets." But I did every thing that they did. I knew how to do the weapons drill, going out on the boats, the lifesavers drill, rowing, all the knots and lashings. Anyway after I left school and was working at Woolworths I told them then that I was going to join the army when I was eighteen. So it was only a temporary job in between. I left then and then I did

03:00 with the post office - the postmaster general's office. It was an exempt temporary postman around Lakemba, Belmore and then I did a bit of relieving from that. During this time my mother died in 1964 and my father had already died when I was ten years old so he was out of my life very quickly. I worked doing that and then I put my application in to join the army

03:30 and from there I went to Kapooka did my three months' recruit training then went up to Sydney to the infantry centre. At the infantry centre I learnt the basic infantry drills advanced rifleman and IT training. From there because I was still too young I was then posted to the Demonstration Platoon or Demonstration and Tracking Platoon.

04:00 What we did there was demonstrate the different types of drills, bush techniques and things to the younger ITs. During that time we learnt a lot as well. We used to go and do the contract drills for the trainees and during that time we used to teach them how to move instinctively in the field whenever there was action.

04:30 A little bit after that when I turned eighteen I was posted to the reinforcement wing at infantry centre While I was there I did a combat medic course came back from that and I had a posting to the Defence and Employment Platoon at Vung Tau in Vietnam. We formed up as a platoon in infantry centre from there and we went to Vietnam on the 6th of

05:00 June, 1967. We flew in to Vung Tau then went across to Nui Dat where we would do familiarisation training during that time and whilst we were there, the regular soldiers that were with me, we received a posting order. What had happened was in a political bit of turmoil saying that there was too many national servicemen in the front line, all regular

05:30 soldiers had to be posted to the infantry battalions. So myself and six others were pulled out of the platoon was posted into the 1 Australian Reinforcement Unit and we continued doing our familiarization training. The other platoon - our posts were taken by national servicemen and they then flew out to their posting at Manius Tee [?] in Vung Tau. From 1ARU

- 06:00 I was posted to 7RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. First off we went into Admin Company where we did familiarisation training and from there I was posted to a company within the battalion who I served with until July 1968 after we came home. I was posted to the Kanungra - to the jungle training centre as it was known then to their headquarters', 1 Div Headquarters' Defence Company,
- 06:30 which was the demonstration platoon at Kanungra. However we were a formed unit. Later on I while I was there I had a road accident and I wasn't able to participate in a regular way so I was downgraded medically but I was allowed to stay in the army so I took a posting to 17 RNSWR [Royal New South Wales Regiment] in Sydney which was a reserve or at that stage a CMF [Citizens Militia Force] unit
- 07:00 where I went there as a private and left there as a corporal. I spent approximately five years with them and then I was posted to New Guinea. In New Guinea I went over there as part of the Australian Defence Advisory Group. During that time it was my role to train the Pacific Islanders and that of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force in teaching them
- 07:30 parts of their trade and how they did their job. I came home in 1975. From there I was posted to the DSU or the District Support Unit in Adelaide awaiting discharge. I took discharge and I moved with my wife and family to a place called Buckleboo in South Australia where we helped her father and mother run a general store.
- 08:00 During that time though on the day I was getting out I was spoken to by a carter member of the 43 Battalion Royal South Australian Regiment and he who had been a friend of mine asked me to stay in the reserve and be in that unit. So I transferred across from the ARA [Australian Regular Army] to the reserve game.
- 08:30 I spent five years with that unit and in that time we moved across to - because the numbers were falling - went across to 10 RSAR [Royal South Australian Regiment]. From 10 RSAR I then reinlisted to the regular army and I went to 41 Supply Battalion in Adelaide. During that time I went and did my subject courses again and was promoted to a corporal at the battalion. Then
- 09:00 I moved across to 4 Army Recruit Unit in Adelaide where I stayed for three years. During that time I went from there across to the Defence District Support Unit at Watsonia in Melbourne. I did another two years there then I was posted to 331 Supply Company in Pukapunyal
- 09:30 where I did twelve months there promoted to staff sergeant. Then I had a posting to the Royal Australian Army Ordinance Core [RAOC] Centre at Bandianna as an instructor. Went up there and served another four years there. From there I was then posted to the District Support Unit at Pukapunyal who became the base
- 10:00 support unit for Pukapunyal itself. I was there 'till '93 and just before I got out we did the change over to the civilian contractors doing the defence ground maintenance and all the CSP [commercial support program] jobs. I got out of the army there and because I was in a category that I could get a
- 10:30 redundancy package. So I took the redundancy package and one of my obligations was that I remain in the inactive reserve. So I stayed with the inactive reserve for nine months and then I transferred to the active reserve at the RAOC Centre and assisted in the instruction and writing TMP's or Training Management Packages during that time. I stayed
- 11:00 with the RAOC Centre when it amalgamated into the Army Logistics Training Centre [ALTC]. Then I was asked because of my knowledge and expertise in certain areas I was asked to go to the Directorate of Ordinance where I helped write packages for new training and the amalgamation of trades. I stayed with them for just on a year and a half and
- 11:30 then I was posted to ALTC again. I stayed with them for five years where I worked with a training development group and then from there I took a posting to the Army History Unit as the quartermaster and I have been with them now for three years and that's what it is up to date.
- 12:00 **Now what we might do is I'll move back in time to your early childhood days and I'll get you to tell us about your father and your mother if you could?**
- My father was a strict disciplinarian. When he died he was thirty nine - he was eight days before he was forty. He was with the merchant navy,
- 12:30 as I stated before, during the war. He served with the Australian Merchant Navy also with the US Merchant Marine. He was quite a silent sort of a person who didn't talk much - not to me that is.
- 13:00 I didn't see him for a long time because a lot of times he was away with the merchant navy. Later on he came back and then he started working for the Sydney Harbour Tugboats - Maritime Services. I used to go out with him sometimes when I was on holidays - he used to take me out on a tug and we would go all around doing
- 13:30 the jobs that the tugs do with their shipping. My one highlight with him was that when the Queen came in 1954 or around that time he took me out on the tug and we were part of the tugs that towed the Britannia in. It was quite good and being down where I was I could look up and see the ship and every thing. I was only young but that was one of the highlights.

- 14:00 He got very interested in training sea cadets. As I said before he was instrumental in making or developing the training ship Shropshire out at Canterbury and getting it off the ground and I used to go with him quite often. My mother was a secretary – she worked for various firms. She was partially
- 14:30 blind in one eye and also had diabetes. During that time she was quite often sick and me being the only one home when I was young had to look after her. When my father died I was ten years old. He died in 1958 and it was my task then to look after my mother as much as possible. We lived
- 15:00 in various – our house, we couldn't keep up the payments for our house so we moved around to different rooms and places around Belmore, Lakemba. After that my mother found another man, Cyril Douse, and she remarried. I didn't really get along with him because he wasn't my father for a start and just
- 15:30 kids don't always take to stepfathers. He never adopted me or anything so I never changed my name to his. My mother died in 1964. I was at high school and when she died I left school and got a job. At the time I wasn't living with my stepfather,
- 16:00 I was a free agent. So I got myself some rooms after I started working for Woolworths but my mother was a very gentle sort of person. She came from Newcastle. It wasn't until her funeral I met some of my aunts and uncles from Newcastle.

Were you the only child?

I was the only child.

16:30 How did World War II impact on your family?

The way it impacted was my father who as I said was in the merchant navy. The thing about it was that he and my mother married in 1945

17:00 no sorry '44 and then I came along in '48. But during that time he was working in the islands even after the war. I never knew who my father was for many years after I was born because I didn't see him and then he'd come home on his leave and then trip off to the islands or on a ship again.

17:30 And that went on till I was about seven years old. Then he came home sort of thing and I got to know him then. The way the war affected my father was that he was in a torpedo ship called Pegasus and during that time a lot of his mates died especially being on a freighter like it was.

18:00 He never talked about the war much. He used to take me to Anzac Day and we'd go in and watch the march in Sydney and after that he would go off with his friends and we would come home, my mother and I. I always wondered what he was doing then. I knew he was going with his mates but what he talked about but

18:30 we never really found out. He used to sit down at the table or that during summer and quite often during summer when it was hot and pull little bits of lead and shell out of his legs even after those years 'cause he was badly

19:00 lacerated because he was in the engine room of this ship. But he didn't talk much about it so I don't know too much other than that. It's only in these last few years I've actually found out about my father through writing to relatives and sort of doing my family history.

19:30 Would you say that in retrospect, you said your father was a firm disciplinarian, was that as a result of the war you think as well?

I don't know. It may have been. He might have been just intolerant at some things. I used to think it was, I didn't deserve getting some of the discipline that I got at the time for very small things.

20:00 I was afraid of him some of the time – well I should say most of the time.

Now how did you find your social economic position in the late '50's when you could remember your parents? Were times tougher in that period?

Well it didn't

20:30 seem to be but my father and mother lived fairly well. It might have been with his job and my mother was working too as a secretary and that sort of thing so they seemed to be alright. We used to go out on Saturday nights to the pictures things like that. But we never went out much

21:00 to other things. We didn't seem to want for much. Food was always on the table, clothes were always available so I think in that way we weren't that bad off as I remember it. After my father died it completely changed. We were, say the word, poor.

21:30 My father didn't have a life insurance so the money that we'd get was what my mother earned. One time I remember losing the rent money going down to pay for the house and I didn't realise how critical it was. I then started to learn about my family and things like that.

22:00 I was only ten and I lost this money this day and it sort of brought it home to me that we didn't have

much money. The Campsie RSL used to look after me quite a lot. They helped us out with always making sure my mother was ok. If there was anything that had to be done they'd help us out there.

22:30 Then we lost the house because we couldn't make up the payments and so forth. We took in boarders at one stage but that didn't work because my mother got very sick and had to go to hospital. The boarders took off while she was in hospital. We then had to give up the house and then started moving around, living in rooms in houses. We never had anywhere like a flat

23:00 or anything by ourselves. We always had to share a house with part of it and things like that though the people we lived with were quite nice. It wasn't 'til my mother married again did things seem to get a little bit better. Better family wise as far as my mother went because he made here happy for a while

23:30 but then she got very sick again and was confined to bed for a year or so before she died. Then things weren't too bad as far as getting things and doing things up to the sixties.

Up to the time your mother passed away I understand you were working at Woolworths?

No that was after. When my mother

24:00 died Cyril, my Mum's husband, sort of didn't want to know me sort of thing. I was just a bit of a nuisance. He put me with some family or some friends of his family. They were quite nice people but as soon as my mother died I just cleared out.

24:30 I got the job with Woolworths the same day as I left school. Just went to the CES [Commonwealth Employment Service] and got a job. I went for an interview and they said, "Do you want to start tomorrow?" so I did. I then was with them for a week and then I found a room for myself and I went to live in that.

25:00 What made you interested in the army?

I always, it was only that my father used to say to me that, "I'll get a uniform on you, you're joining the navy cadets and you'll join the navy when you get older." It was from that that I said, "No, I'll join the army", because I didn't like the water for a start.

25:30 I had a fear of swimming in the ocean and things like that. I just didn't like it. To be on a ship at that stage, it was alright while I was on a tug, but if I had to go into the water I used to think of all the nasties - the sharks, the octopuses, things like that that could be in there, especially after seeing Jules Verne's 10,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

26:00 You know you always wonder if those things are around in Sydney Harbour and everything. After my father died the other reason was that his ashes were scattered in the water in Sydney Harbour and I used to have a fear that he would be in there. So I never wanted to join the navy and that then brought it home more.

26:30 Then I just had more interest in the army and that developed after a time and that got more and more and more and when I joined the cadets well that was the best thing ever cause I learnt more about it, went away to army camps and things like that and just I was in the army and that was my life ambition.

You said before that you feared that he may be in there, can you

27:00 tell us what you mean by that?

As a ten year old you don't know about these things and the night that his ashes were scattered I always used to have that fear that you know is he, even though he's ashes, because you used to see movies that people would be in all little pieces and that all come together.

27:30 Horror movies and that where they would all come together and they were a whole being again. I don't know. It was just mind play that I always thought my father's in there. Even though he was ashes would he be in the water if I ever went there. And then I had a fear of drowning that

28:00 I might get pulled under or something like that and see him. It used to scare me.

Was not joining the navy also a type of keeping a sort of distance and respect for your father's career?

I don't think so. I never thought of it like that because it became my ambition to join the army and that was it. I have got no problems with the navy. I have been on ships.

28:30 We sailed home on the Sydney. I've been on cruisers. I've got no problems with them now but back then it was different.

What other appeal did the army have, I mean, in terms of the differences in organizations, camaraderie, and things like that. What appealed to you as a young man?

I'm not really sure.

29:00 I don't know. It might have been because my father used to dress me up in a sea cadet uniform and all

that. I knew all the drills. Maybe it was seeing soldiers doing the drill as well. Maybe it was the uniform. I don't know. It wasn't the thought of war. I knew a

29:30 chap who had done national service in '52 or '53 and he explained things about the army and that to me and I still liked it and it just made me more determined to join the army because that's what I wanted to do.

Now you've obviously had a fairly rough start

30:00 **in life with both your parents passing away at a young age. Did the army offer you something as well in the sense of a family something like that, security, that you were looking for?**

As a security you always knew at the end of a fortnight that you were going to get money. You had a job for as long as you remained fit. You could always,

30:30 you always had friends there. Whether they were just acquaintances to start off with and then some of them became very good friends and you did things together. Before I joined the army though, while I was at Woolworths, I got to know a boy who was working there, had been working there longer than I had and he invited me home and I've got to say that his parents were very, very good to

31:00 me and in the end it was a case of more or less they became my substitute Mum and Dad and they looked at me that way too as if I was another substitute son and those people today are still what I call Mum and Dad and the children of that family also consider me to be the brother. So I had

31:30 that before I joined the army so I was accepted as a family member by the Wicks family and they have been my family ever since. So it wasn't that the army became a family because I had already gained a family before that.

You joined up with your mate Rob?

No Rob joined up twelve months later.

32:00 I went in he was still working with Woolworths. Then after I left it wasn't long before Rob left as well and he went to work with his Mum and Dad. They had an orange shop, milk bar come coffee shop type thing,

32:30 and he went to work with them and at that time I joined the army. And then I used to tell him about it and twelve months later he joined the army as well and we have sort of progressed through. He also joined, in 1965 we both joined the CMF in Sydney as well, before we went into the regular army, to try it out and see whether

33:00 we liked it and we did, we both liked it. He stayed in the CMF when I got out and then he joined the regular army as well.

Tell us about your CMF experience?

Well I joined as I said in 1965. I was still too young, I was seventeen, had to be seventeen, and I thought I would give them a go first to see what it was like in the regular.

33:30 army. After that, during that time, we went to 3RNSWR in Arncliffe in Sydney where we did our first camp. We went to recruit camp. There was Rob and myself and also we had two other blokes from warblers join up and we all went to this camp. Because I had been in cadets I had a little bit more

34:00 knowledge about army things I was a bit, my knowledge level was higher than Rob's and Bill's, who was the other friend, so I got advanced in the recruit area - I went to advanced side and then we went to there was an exercise going on and I was taken from the recruit side into the advanced group

34:30 and we did an exercise down in Nowra with the 5RAR at that time so my experience then was greater again. We used landing ships and working actually with the battalion and that assisted me with a bit more knowledge of what it was like in the regular army. So I stayed with them

35:00 after that camp and I was put on a subject course, my first appointment, which was a lance corporal. I did all the courses. I finished that however it was coming up to my eighteenth birthday and then it was just my one mind concept going through to join the regular army. So I transferred from

35:30 the CMF into the regular army at that stage.

What was the contract obligations for you for the regular army?

For the regular army. Well I joined for six years. There was either a three year service or a six year service. One you were an ARA soldier, an Australian Regular Army and the RAS which was Regular Army Supplement. Those were the people who were only in for three years. During that time

36:00 because I wanted to be in, I wanted to stay in I joined the ARA side and did a six year enlistment which I just kept renewing every six years. Under the contract was that what we had to do was be in the regular army and do what we were told and that was about it. At no time then '65 was the

36:30 start of Vietnam but that was just a name it wasn't really anything to me at that time.

I don't presume you would have been fully aware about what was happening at that time at that age especially politically?

No, not really. I wasn't really interested in politics then, you know. All I wanted to do was join the army.

37:00 I didn't understand. Well politics was just something that happened. I didn't have to vote then and so I didn't take any interest in politics that way. I didn't follow any particular what the government was doing at that time so nothing like that at all.

Did you know much about previous wars like Korea, Indonesia?

Yes I had read

37:30 all about them. Not so much Malaya and Borneo at that time but I had read about Korea and I had learnt about the Kapyong. I looked into what had happened in Korea and how it had happened. I also knew about the war in Europe, the Japanese side as well. I looked into those. I read books all the time on and

38:00 learnt about what had happened during those times and that. So I became sort of a history buff in that regard. All the books I owned or that were all about world war two and I used to study it quite a bit.

Did you know many veterans yourself at that time of previous wars or any wars?

38:30 No not really. At the RSL I met a lot of people down there. Whether they were veterans or social members I don't know but I did know some of them but that didn't make any difference. You can't tell a veteran from anybody else except on Anzac Day

39:00 and that's because they wear the medals. Some do - not all.

Can you tell us about what took place once you joined the regular army. What was the process of training and induction and so forth?

When I joined we went down to Kapooka. It was during

39:30 April, May, June time - very cold - and the army always has this knack of finding a place that is always cold in winter and hot in summer out in the middle of nowhere. But Kapooka had just been rebuilt and I think it was the third national service intake had just left or were

40:00 in the process of being there. We went down the same time as the fourth intake. The platoon I was with was mostly all regular army soldiers. They did include some of the national service soldiers who'd had been deferred so they were a bit older than the normal national servicemen to go in and we all trained together.

40:30 Now Kapooka's a place where it teaches you the instinctive of being able to take an order. You are put on a parade ground, you are made to do everything as a group. You are told to drill. Everyone has to do the same thing at the same time in the same way. You don't become an individual, you become a person of a team

41:00 and you learn to do everything as a team. Even if you have to clean the toilets, polish the floors and clean the rooms you do it as a team not as individuals because you can't afford to be individuals in that way. As I said it was very cold down there and we didn't go out much. You never got any leave until after your first six weeks and on the six weeks

41:30 you'd get five day's leave in your home town.

How long were you at Kapooka for?

Three months.

Three months and that was the initial training?

That's the initial training.

Tape 2

00:33 As I was saying the training there is instinctive training you get taught how to be in a team. We had a few people there who were individuals but they then started to learn how to be team members. We went through all facets of training. We went through PT. We learnt physical training.

01:00 We had to pass tests that we had to do. We did drill, we did weapons, mainly the rifle and we learnt some of other things like the self loading rifle, the automatic rifle, the Allen submachine gun at that time because the Allen was still in. We went to the range. You had to go to range

- 01:30 practice. We did route marches but it was all in those times. We also got different knowledge lessons, bush craft, how to see things and various basic skills which you learned whilst there. Map reading was another one. Just little things like that but it all - you look back on it and you think that was all there for a reason to teach us how to do things so everybody
- 02:00 had the same knowledge and everybody could help everybody else out. That was the start of being able to do things instinctive. Don't question an order just do it and then find out about it later on. We had a good time or I had a good time while I was in Kapooka apart from getting a bad cold there for one stage. For a
- 02:30 few of the other blokes it was very tough for them. We had a Seventh Day Adventist chap I think it was against his religion to learn the weapons but then later on it was made so that he could do the weapons because it was to save his own life for his own self defense not to be aggressive or
- 03:00 any other aspects of it like doing bayonet fighting or that. He didn't have to do that but to learn how to unload a weapon or load it in his own defense and he could do that and he ended up going to be a medic and he was a very good medic too - a very caring person. Most of the other people in the platoon were all diverse. There was people from Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria
- 03:30 and when we marched out of Kapooka we marched out mostly all of us to infantry. A couple of blokes went to artillery, a few went to RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] - who were people who had their certificates, vehicle mechanics and things like that and then others most of us went to infantry because that's where the main call was.
- 04:00 We all had choices. They gave us choices of which core we wanted to go to and again at that stage I wanted to go to infantry and I put down infantry, infantry, infantry as my three choices and when I went in they said, "well we can see what you want to do you've got your choice". Other people asked for other courses but didn't always get them. From there we went to Sydney

04:30 to do our core training.

Before we get to Sydney a few questions on Kapooka? How did you take to the army life and was it difficult for you?

For me no it wasn't. Having already been in the reserve and cadets it was very easy for me and it was because I wanted to do it, it made it easier for me. For some of the national service people it was very hard for them to

- 05:00 some of the because in some cases they were people in high positions in jobs before they came in and from going from them being in civilian life a boss coming into army where they were an underling it was hard for some of them to change. For the regular army soldiers they are there because they wanted to be there. Not all of them were able to pass out on the
- 05:30 parade because we had one chap who had night blindness but it wasn't picked up until we did one night march. He kept falling over fences and getting lost so he was unable to continue. We had one chap who's feet gave out while he was there and I think that's about all. There was only about three that didn't actually make it through.
- 06:00 recruit training. But I think most of us because we were there because we'd joined up and as I said most of our platoon they were all there because they wanted to be there except for the national servicemen. But those national servicemen took to it like a duck takes to water too, it was good, and we melded very good - made some very good friends.

06:30 **I was just about to ask that. How was the relationship between the national service people and the regulars?**

There was no animosity between us. We were all there and we were all there as a group and we all knitted well. There was a couple of people who were toughs outside - one bloke who was golden gloves

- 07:00 champion in his age division in Queensland and he got taken down a peg or two by other people in the platoon - but we all melded very well and there was no difference between a national serviceman and a regular soldier. We were all there, we were working as a team, as a platoon, and everybody helped each other. The stronger helped the weaker
- 07:30 and sometimes they were able to help other people in other ways and it was very good like that. Even today I still have quite a lot of those people as friends.

How different was the army life in training compared to your life before joining up?

It was more so

- 08:00 everything was predetermined. You will be having breakfast at six thirty in the morning. You will be at this place at that time. The only thing that came near that was, alright you had a job on the outside when I started at Woolworths. You had to be there for nine o'clock to start work or you get there a little bit earlier because nine o'clock was when the shop opened. Breakfast, well you didn't have to have

breakfast. You were more free to

- 08:30 do things in the civilian life. Like at lunchtime if you wanted to go out and shop you could go out and shop. In the army at lunchtime you had enough time to eat your food get back and if you were going to be in a different uniform for things say you were going for PT you would go back get changed and be ready for them. It was instilling discipline in you whereas before the army it was
- 09:00 everything was relaxed. Here some people would shout at you and you do what - if somebody said jump you'd look and say, "how high," while you were still jumping and things like that. You became instinctive to order as I said before and that was the thing about it. You had some free time but even that free time was taken up in maybe nine, ten o'clock at night and you were just
- 09:30 getting into bed or it could be eleven o'clock and the fire alarm would come on. Everybody would race outside. You had to be dressed a certain way when you went out there. You had to shave every day. That was the discipline. You had to have a hair cut and you had to keep your hair short and you learnt about why you had to keep your hair short because it was hygiene. You sweat a lot so
- 10:00 therefore your hair gets quite sweaty and oily and if you don't keep it clean then after a while it can get bugs in it. You had to learn that especially when you were in the bush you learnt that sort of thing. Why clean shaven? Because it was a requirement to be clean shaven and everybody did that. Why did you iron your clothes, your uniforms, you always had to look smart and that was a requirement.
- 10:30 You did have to look smart. If your clothes weren't ironed properly - you know you were only allowed to have a single crease down your trousers, you couldn't have two or they would call them tram lines. It was instilling into you that you only put one crease in there so you ironed it a certain way. If a button came off you didn't have Mum to sew it back on so you had to learn to sew it on yourself. So it gave everybody a purpose doing
- 11:00 that. Whereas you don't have that in civilian life. "Oh Mum, I've got holes in my socks". "Oh, I will get you new pair". In the army you get holes in your socks you get your sewing kit out and darn them until such time as you can buy a new pair or things like that or you wore the holes in your socks until you threw them away and things like that. It's that way of making you more disciplined within
- 11:30 yourself because you have to change that discipline and you had to learn what size clothes you wore. Before the army a kid would say, "Mum I need a new shirt," "Well you can go and buy it," "Well what have I got to get," and it was things like this and I've seen it so much with kids of later generations coming through and you say "What's your shoe size?"
- 12:00 "Oh, Mum used to buy them for me." That sort of thing. Whereas we used to be able to say straight out what our shoe size, whether we used small, medium or large socks, what was your waist size, what was your chest size, what was your neck size so you always knew. You would walk in to a shop and say, "I want a forty four long sleeve and I need it to be one hundred and six centimetres long," so you didn't get a shirt
- 12:30 that was too short for you in the sleeves and that sort of thing. It gave you that extra knowledge above the outside and it was good that way and it prepared you for other things in the future.

It sounds like it taught you a lot about self reliance?

Well it does. You have to. You have to do everything for yourself. You don't rely on others to do it because if

- 13:00 you have to rely on others then others rely on you or they think you say, "Ok, I'll leave that for so and so to do," or they'll say, "I'll leave that for so and so to do," so it doesn't get done in the end. But as I said before for group things you have to work as a team. If you don't work as a team it doesn't get done. Your own side, well if you don't mend your socks or you don't buy new socks for yourself, you don't mend your trousers, you don't iron your trousers, well you are the one who is
- 13:30 going to get into trouble and quite often when that happened also it may be that everyone in the room might serve the punishment instead of you. When they came in an did room inspections it was nothing for them to rip your whole wardrobe apart, throw everything on the floor and if it was you maybe the others would collect punishment as well.
- 14:00 So it would be a collective punishment instead of a single punishment so you did it because you didn't want to get them into trouble as well. So you tried your best all the time.

How would the others react if there was a group punishment?

Well it depends on what it was what it was about but you'd get some nasty prods and people would be cranky with you because

- 14:30 they didn't want to be doing it so you become the one to get pointed at or bad words said about or even taken down to the, it depends on how bad it was, taken down to the wash room and given a shower or something. That was the thing about it. As I said before you had to learn to be part of a team because everybody

15:00 is affected if you don't do your job.

When you were all going through this training and learning self reliance it probably also gives you a common experience which helps you bond together is that true?

It does. Everyone bonds very much so in some form. It doesn't have to be the old buddy, buddy, it might be just an acquaintance

15:30 sort of bond where ok you know this person, you know what they are like and what they do and you learn about each other and it might be some people you will bond immediately with so it is a very strong bond and like I said before some of the people are still my friends now. I could say I'm going somewhere like in August I'm going on a holiday. I rang up a couple of people and I said, "I'm coming over." "Ok, we've got a bed for you."

16:00 and that's a bond from 1966. Don't see them all the time but we might see each other maybe at a reunion. It might have been ten years ago but that bond is still there. So you do form these bonds with people and very much so. Especially people you keep going on through your career with than maybe somebody that goes to another core.

16:30 But you still remain friends with those people and you might see them around the traps somewhere. They are always friendly to you because you are friends. You share that bond of recruit training and later on you may serve the same bond through going on active service.

How did the discipline of the army compare to the discipline of your father?

It was different.

17:00 The discipline of the army was if you did something wrong you paid the price. With my father I couldn't always see why I got it. Sometimes it was perceived that I did something with my father, he may have not even seen it, but my mother may have seen it and said, "Chris did this," and whack.

17:30 No questions, by your leave how it happened or what happened. So I either got the strap or the hand around the backside. Those sorts of things. But even though it was short and sharp it didn't have a lingering effect but with the service discipline it has that lingering effect

18:00 in the way that if you do something wrong it's recorded and if it's very bad it's recorded forever and it depends on the situation it could be that you get discharged from the army if it's that bad. Or if it's that bad you might be sent to military corrective centre so you might have it that way. Which is good really

18:30 because you know what's right and wrong and you learn what's right and wrong. Whereas with my father I didn't always know what was right or wrong.

So you could accept it more in the army?

Yes because they would tell you why you did it wrong and you would know why it was. But then again you've got to look at it that I was a child then and not quite as understanding as I was when I was in the service.

19:00 I'd grown up a lot in that time.

What type of things would get people into trouble and what type of things would be the discipline in the army?

One occasion while we were being inspected in the morning a bloke hadn't shaved properly so he was sent away to get his shaving gear, his shaving mug, or he got his razor

19:30 which was the old stainless steel type. He was on his way to get that, a cold cup of water, come out and was made to shave in front of everyone because he hadn't shaved properly. That was really a form of discipline. Collective discipline sometimes when somebody didn't come out in the

20:00 correct dress everybody to race back and make sure that person got dressed in the correct manner that was required. Weapons - we always had to clean our weapon every night. It had to be clean at all times and we'd have inspections and they'd inspect the bore of the weapon and if it was dirty then that person could get into trouble for that.

20:30 If, and we always knew that we had to clean our weapons at night, and if somebody came on the parade the next morning and found a dirty weapon that person could be charged with having a dirty weapon and get a fine, extra punishments, at that stage in recruit training. So those sort of things. If they were found to be malingering they could get into trouble.

21:00 It had to be fairly bad. Answering back. You know you might after a while you might snap at what some instructor says about you and you could answer back so that's insubordination because that person is a corporal and you were only a private or a recruit at that time - you hadn't made it to private. So those are the sort of

21:30 disciplinary acts that you could get.

Going through training were there guys that always got into trouble?

Yes we had some who wouldn't ever learn but again this is what I was saying about the team work. We were doing a guard. Alright all the people who looked alright and did alright they got the ones who were sloppy and so forth and helped them

22:00 and one stage there one guard where we all got ready for it, was in our duties week, this bloke was the sloppiest bloke you could ever get so we all dressed him. We ironed his shirt. We bloused his jacket so it was right. We put a magazine down the front and it was alright. We made sure his boots were clean. We bloused his trousers over it and we put little things in his trousers to hold

22:30 them down. He looked fairly good as far as we felt as good as us. We went out and we had the inspection before he got the best dressed and got the night off. Meanwhile we did the guard. But that's the sort of thing. Everybody helps everybody and that's the idea.

I guess it's better him getting the best dressed than all of you getting in trouble for something?

Well that's right. It's much better.

Was there any bastardisation

23:00 **or anything going through training?**

I can't really think of it as, some of these fire drills that they had, yeah they were like a bastardisation but when I looked back on it those were requirements to make you react. They didn't have to be done at one o'clock in the

23:30 morning or two o'clock when snow was on the ground but those sort of things they still made you react to go out and do what you had to do. You got up out of bed and you went out. To make sure you made your bed right where you had to pull the bottom sheet off your bed and stand in the hallway to get your name marked off. They weren't so much bastardisation. But there was some cases of bastardisation

24:00 where a couple of the instructors got down on a couple of the slack ones and they took it in turns of being very, very nasty. But we all took care of him and we made sure that that person was alright. A couple of times we had to do it ourselves because there was one bloke who didn't shower

24:30 very often and we had to take him into the showers and give him a shower and wash him and then put him in the bath and used scrubbing brushes on him and things like that. But that was only because of our own hygiene. But I never actually saw bastardisation in the way that a lot of others have. That's been brought out over the years and that.

Now what type of things would the

25:00 **sergeants and so on do to the guys who were lagging behind?**

Quite often it would mostly be abusive in that they would call them all sorts of names. Tell you your mother wasn't very nice and things like that or on a parade ground during a drill for instance this bloke might not have been able to get the

25:30 rifle up quick enough so they'd send him around the parade ground a dozen times with the rifle over their head and every body else would be having a break and this poor bloke's running around the parade ground and when I'm talking about the parade ground I'm talking about twenty metres by twenty metres square and they'd be running around that quite a bit of the time. But

26:00 these are the sort of things that were or make them go and do things like send them on errands. Where they might just be getting comfortable, "Private so and so, get here! Go up to the quarter room and get such and such," so they'd have to race up there and race back keeping them from getting to tea except for the last fifteen

26:30 minutes so they can get to their tea but when they get there, of course, everybody else has been through and there's not much left but there is still just enough food. It would feed but, you know, you always like to always get there first and get your meal so you can sit there and talk to friends and make your way back easily but otherwise it's, you know, they have to go to tea then soon as that's over because we always had night lectures or something like that for a couple of hours after tea,

27:00 then they'd have to race back and if they had to change uniform then be in that uniform and things like that. That's about all.

How fine a line do you think there is between bastardisation and discipline?

Discipline is there to,

27:30 it can be utilised wrongly. I never really saw it wrong and I can't say I have during my whole service. I might sometimes think it's unfair but then again you've got to look at it from more ways than one. You've got to be objective as well as being subjective about it. The people that I've seen I might

- 28:00 think to myself, "Well that needn't have been as severe as that", but then again if it's not done then a lot of things happen that shouldn't happen. I can't say I've ever been in a situation or a unit where I've actually seen the bastardisation so I can't really draw a parallel in that line.
- 28:30 I know I have disciplined people. Some of them turn around and say "Well, that's a bit unfair" and I say "Well no because it's that way and it doesn't matter". But there's other sorts of discipline or bastardisation that have gone on in many places that I've never seen or I would
- 29:00 never impose myself. That is what you call bastardisation when people are really down on people and bashings and things like that. When I first joined up and later on during core training, ok, if somebody was doing something really bad they got taken around the back of the toilet and come back a
- 29:30 bit sore then it wasn't always bastardisation because it was teaching them a lesson. Either you do the right thing or this is what can happen. But it was always mostly that I saw, and even had it done to me too, told well this is what you deserve for doing that and sometimes it was deserved so that's where
- 30:00 I see the line drawn. Either you deserve some of it or you don't.

When you say people are taken 'round the back and come out a bit sore would that be the soldiers themselves or the sergeants?

Sometimes it's the soldiers, sometimes it's the NCOs [non commissioned officers]. It was the old platoon sergeants used to do that

- 30:30 take them around the back and you'd hear a thump and they'd come back. But after that they'd shake hands and it was quite often the soldiers would do it themselves if it was a known trouble maker or does the wrong thing and they are all being punished for it, sometimes it's the soldiers themselves.
- 31:00 **A bit earlier you just said that if it isn't done it leads to problems in the future. Could you just expand on that a bit?**

Alright, if somebody is doing something always wrong with weapons for instance if they don't get the habit of doing it right or they

- 31:30 keep shirking in some way. We have a policy during private period when everybody helps to clean the machine gun or the big weapons. It helps everybody to get out faster. If somebody sits back and has a fag instead of helping out they shirk it a bit and that can get noticed several times.
- 32:00 It's always, "Oh, I've got to go to the toilet," or "I just got to do something for a minute," and that sort of thing. Those people who are very slack and don't help out all the time, everybody might be busting because it's Friday afternoon, you've got to have your weapons clean on a way so that everybody can knock off. They go and shirk it in the toilet or outside the hut things like that while
- 32:30 everybody else is working that becomes known. Sometimes it's, "Don't ask him - he won't help when you really need everybody to help." Everybody starts looking at him saying, "Oh no, he doesn't help so we won't worry about him." You are one person down out of your team and, of course, during that time you've got to have everybody to help
- 33:00 to do things and that's the idea of the team altogether. Everybody works, everybody does the same thing, everybody helps out everybody else. If you've got a person who goes jack, goes away, won't help out and it's constant then it becomes bad for everybody else because everybody else knows that person is getting away with it so somebody might take him around the back and say, "Listen, you are part of the team
- 33:30 and we need you to help."

Talking about what it can lead to in the future, can it even lead to, if somebody doesn't know how to use the gun or clean it properly when you get into a combat situation that can't be good either?

No it's not because if somebody is not familiar with doing certain things with it and it comes to a point where you have to utilise your knowledge of that particular weapon

- 34:00 and they don't know how to do it then it costs lives in the battle and that happens in a lot of cases. Especially with the Americans during Vietnam and their weapons because they didn't know them properly.

So when you are going through training you are really trying to get the laggards up to the same level as you so everyone is learning at the same time - is that right?

Well

- 34:30 they have to be there. As much as possible they've got to be as close to that standard and that's the way we look at it. Everybody's got to be the same standard so they can do the same job or take over a job that is able to be done in the future. So if someone goes down somebody can step into that position and do the same thing. It's the same as all the way through our army time

35:00 from recruit training through to core training, through core training to the unit you always are taught everything that everybody else knows as well and at any time you have to step into somebody else's shoes. Your section commander may go out so you must, someone must, be able to step in and carry on and do that part as well.

35:30 If a machine gunner gets shot during an action somebody's got to go there because that's the main fire power of the section. They've got to be able to step in and be able to fire that weapon and carry out everything that the gunner did before. And that has happened so many times that somebody has got to step in and help out in those areas.

At the end of this section of your training

36:00 **and you had the option to go why did you decide on infantry?**

I was, well, I didn't want to sit behind a desk. I knew nothing about mechanics or tinkering with anything so therefore I wouldn't be any good for RAEME. My aptitude tests came back and said I would be good for clerical positions, so I didn't want to be in a clerical position

36:30 and I just wanted to be out doing things and infantry is the only one that's out doing things. More so than having to have a trade and learning that. There is, or was, a good many cause. I didn't want to go into armit because if a shell strikes a tank or an APC [armoured personnel carrier] not many get out.

37:00 Engineers, well I wasn't really fussed about being an engineer building bridges and things like that. It might have been good but I didn't want to do that and that's just the way I looked at it. I didn't want to drive at the time because I didn't have a license anyway. So I just was interested in the infantry and that's why I said "Infantry, infantry, infantry", and I maintained that all along and proud that I did.

37:30 **When you are at this stage and you're putting down infantry were there thoughts that you would be going to war?**

No. Not at that time. Was still that stage you still didn't hear much about it to start off with. Later on during our core training we started to meet people who had been with 1RAR

38:00 who were our, they became our mentors and instructors and that was when we started to learn about Vietnam or Malaya or Borneo - that was the period and but it still then was the furthest thing from our mind. You know nobody realised that we'd be there within the year. Not really. It was just put out of our minds altogether.

38:30 **So when you actually joined up were you thinking I'm joining up to go to war. I'm joining up to be a part of something else?**

No. When I joined up I was going to be part of the army. War was there. I knew that if there was a war, but in those, we didn't think of war in the little campaigns or things like that 'cause we hadn't heard much about

39:00 Malaya or much about Borneo and Vietnam, well at that time I wasn't really, as I said before, I wasn't thinking of political science or anything about it all I wanted to do was join the army. And the same with a lot of other blokes it was the same thing. It wasn't until later on the realisation of what we were actually going to do that it really hit us.

Did you join up more so for your personal development?

39:30 Yes. The army was going to be my career and I was going to stay in the army as long as I could stay in there. That was about it. I didn't understand about trades at that time as well 'cause I didn't know. I knew there were corps but I didn't know about what trades were anywhere in there or whatever.

40:00 **So then you headed off to Sydney as an infantryman?**

Yes.

And where did you end up training there?

We went to Ingleburn army camp which was the school of infantry.

Tape 3

00:31 **Ok so Ingleburn, tell us about the training there.**

Ingleburn is where, or the school of infantry is where we do our core training for infantry. In there they do all the various things that we learn which takes us that one step further towards being a qualified infantry man. Things like learning how to do contact drills, ambush drills, radio

01:00 procedures, learning how to dig fox holes in trenches - how deep they are and the different stages of depth for defensive positions. We learnt about patrolling - the different types of patrols. What we need

to know. Field signals. It's a lot of things that put us in that much of an advanced state. It's just before you go

- 01:30 to the battalion. It's about ten weeks. I started off, when I got to Ingleburn, I started off with the group of blokes I was in Kapooka with however I got sick at one stage and went to hospital came out of that and I had to start up again with another platoon. Those blokes all went forward
- 02:00 before me then. We were formed into a platoon and we started our training and we got issued all our combat webbing, helmets, weapons, different types of weapons and we carried on learning more about them. Here we also learnt about machine guns, what they could do, the different types of grenades and
- 02:30 what we could do with them and in depth knowledge of what we were required to know. During this time again we made new friendships, everybody working together again and still the instinctive obedience to order because you had that with your drill then you'd do it in your bush craft.
- 03:00 Everybody must know what everybody's doing and where they're going to be at that time. Ambush drills. How we run an ambush drill. If it's an ambush right how everybody moves through to the right, if it's an ambush left we move through to the left. Rear and front and different types of things that needed to be known to do those drills. Again those drills become instinctive because as soon as it happens
- 03:30 you've got to act and if you don't act you could be dead. Radio - learning how to be a sig. Not as in depth as in signal training because sometimes when you finished core training you could be sent on a course such as signalman, assault pioneer - these are the people who learn exactly the same skills as an engineer. Mortars. They go and learn about all the different types of mortars.
- 04:00 How to deploy mortars. How to fire mortars and these are all parts of the battalion jobs that people go to. It starts off as a game when you're heading to PT every morning. During the day even in the evening you do route marches and they start to vary in length. One of the last things you've got to do is a fifteen,
- 04:30 well at that stage, was a fifteen mile route march and you had a specific period of time to do it within and again everybody's got to act as a team Everyone's got to finish except for those who say had been medically taken out but everybody's got to finish together. It's a team effort. Again it's the building of the team, the section, the platoon and getting everybody up to that standard where they can do that as well.
- 05:00 As I said I got sick. I went to hospital and got back to a new platoon when it was there. So I formed new friendships again with those people and because I was so far, I had trained so far ahead then I went into this other platoon. So therefore I was a bit more ahead of other people again I could help other people in
- 05:30 doing things because I had already learnt about it and, again, because I was interested in it and everybody who was there then were regular soldiers in that platoon. There was no national service men in that platoon as well. But there was a lot of national service within the centre because there was about, oh maybe, ten platoons going through at a time at various stages of training. So it was very good
- 06:00 as far as it went.

Was your mate Rob with you at this stage?

No, no Rob still hadn't joined up. We're still, we've done the Kapooka which is three months then we went to Inf[antry] centre which was another two, three months but Rob hadn't joined the army.

Now before we were talking about, you were mentioning to Miles about military culture and training and bastardisation and things like that. Is it an accurate reflection in films like

- 06:30 **Full Metal Jacket, Tiger Land? Is that any sort of a reflection about the way your training was conducted if you've seen those films?**

Oh I haven't seen those ones but I've seen things on TV the American - you mean like their boot camp and that?

Well yeah, those drill sergeants how they would verbally abuse

Oh well that started from when we were in

- 07:00 Kapooka. The reason why is to, for you to learn to maintain your own discipline. If somebody is standing over the top of you nose to nose and calling you all sorts of names and telling you, like I said before you know, saying your mother's not a nice person or your father does this and all sorts of things. Instead of,
- 07:30 one of the instinctive things you would do is to punch out but your own self discipline, and that's what they're trying to do is instill discipline in you where you don't do it. Ok you can think all the things in the world that you'd like to do to this person and it may be some dark night you might do it but there and then on the spot you don't do anything.

Did anyone react to that?

I have seen it. Yeah I have

- 08:00 seen some people. During core training. Some things during recruit training I saw a couple of people move to do something but others have just put their arm out to stop them from doing it because they know what it's doing and it can become very upsetting to hear this you know. Someone standing
- 08:30 as close as your nose and the spittle from their mouth is going over you at the same time. So everybody's reaction is different. We are taught to, if someone is doing that to you, you don't react you just sit there.

That happened to you I take it?

Oh yeah, it happened to me. It happens to everyone. Everybody in turn gets told something at some stage throughout their training.

- 09:00 **And when this first happened, obviously the sensitivity is there from your own personal background that is with your parents, when the sergeant or drill instructor walked up to you and said something like that having your sensitivity, personally what was your immediate first reaction to that?**

My own opinion was that "How dare he do things like that, however I know what he's doing so I won't to anything".

- 09:30 But it does put a little thing in your mind and you think well, you know, you won't always be a recruit and you won't always be under this person's command and like I said there's always a dark alley some night.

That's when we'll get to Vietnam. Vung Tau. That's interesting. Now Ingleburn would be considered more advanced

- 10:00 **training?**

Oh it is.

Is it actually advanced training course?

Yes. Recruit training is where they just give you the basic discipline. That's why they call it basic training. You learn drill, you learn the fundamentals of being in the army and what you have to do. You learn some weapon training generally being the rifle and the sub-machine gun and the automatic rifle.

- 10:30 That's at Kapooka and when you go to Ingleburn you learn about other things such as you still, you know about your rifle, you know about the F1, the Allen machine gun and we were introduced to the F1 then which was like another sub-machine gun. The M60 machine gun - you learned to do that, you learned how to fire that and you actually go out and fire it and you learn everything about it. You carry it

- 11:00 in your sections. You make sure that you understand what it does, the type of ammunition and the way it's set up. How you'd make sure it's clean before it goes into the weapon because you use belts of ammunition. The different types of grenades that can be used. You know, you've got white phosphorous grenades, you've got smoke grenades, you've got hand grenades that are just high explosive

- 11:30 and various other types. Which types you can use. Which ones best for these places. You learn about the forty millimetre or what we called the - I've forgotten the name at the moment - but we learnt about firing it like a little shot gun. The M79 projectile and

- 12:00 what it can do. All this sort of information is drilled into you and you have tests on it like you do in Kapooka too. You learn you have to be able to load, carry out the different immediate actions with the machine gun. If something happens with it you've got to be able to fix it. You've got to be able to change a barrel on a machine gun because it's getting too hot. You've got to be able to change the

- 12:30 various parts inside it. If something breaks you've got to be able to put something else in there. You've got to make sure that if a round gets stuck in it what you have to do to get it out. How to clean it. How strip it right down to do all the gas filters and items to make sure that they're clean and work properly and this is the idea of it. All the in depth training and it's constant every day, every week. And also during that time

- 13:00 you learned basic first aid and you have advanced map reading and things like that where you have to actually go out and map read on the ground. You take a section you go so far and somebody else takes over with a compass and a map and you do that again. All sorts of different actions that you learn which are a skill that you are going to need in the future.

- 13:30 **It's very elaborate training?**

Oh yes, yes. Everything there is designed to teach you what you need to know to do your job.

Were SLRs at this stage in the army?

Yes, yes, the self loading rifle had been in for a long time then and we hadn't started looking at any other weapon at that stage.

Now, were you involved in jungle training at Ingleburn or

14:00 **anywhere else?**

Not at, there was no jungle - we were always learning for jungle training. Our concept of war was jungle because of South East Asia and all that. So our concept was always towards jungle training. While I was there at core training we didn't go to jungle training centre. That was later.

14:30 During that time we learnt about it and all your actions were carried out in thick forests. When you went on exercise you went into the thick forests around down to west Cambelltown and all the back of Moorebank and Holsworthy range and you did your exercises there. You dug in and you did your patrolling and you did wiring, you learnt about wiring during this time.

15:00 Putting up a defensive position. How a platoon goes down, how a section goes down or interlocking lanes of fire on each pit so that everybody knew was able to protect everybody else. Everybody knew what was happening. Night routines - the way that people moved from their pit to the machine gun pit. How to put up string lines so you could get around so everybody knew where they were going. How to set up flares outside.

15:30 And it was all training towards the jungle concept. It wasn't until after I went into reinforcement wing at a later stage that we actually went to do jungle training. Everybody went to Kanungra to do jungle training before they went over.

How long did Ingleburn training last for?

It was supposed to be ten weeks but I, it took longer for me because of a stint in hospital. I was about four weeks in hospital

16:00 so then I went back, as I said, joined another platoon and then did the rest of the training in that area. But the march out of our platoon again I was still too young to go overseas. Of course you had to be nineteen to serve overseas. I was still only eighteen. So therefore I got put into Demonstration and Track

16:30 Platoon at Inf centre and that's where anybody that's too young goes into these areas and they stay there until later on and they go into the reinforcement wing.

So after Ingleburn you were sent to? Can you walk us through what happened after Ingleburn for you?

In Ingleburn itself you've got the three areas. You've got the core training area. You've got Demonstration and Track

17:00 Platoon where we went to until I was nineteen. Then we went to reinforcement wing. Reinforcement wing was where they do training - still doing training and they then go to the jungle training centre at Kanungra for three weeks and they do jungle, real jungle training in Queensland. Then they come back from that and they are allocated to go

17:30 overseas to the army reinforcement unit in Nui Dat. It was then that you start to realise what's going on and what you're about. When you go to Kanungra then it really starts to hit home what you're really training about. But, as I said, I still was too young so I went into Demonstration and Track Platoon. In, there was about thirty

18:00 five of us, thirty five, thirty six people in that where some people went and learnt how to handle the dogs, the sniffer dogs. I didn't go there I went into the platoon itself. My role during that time was to do demonstrations of contact drills, ambush drills and various other things. Different procedures we had

18:30 on the ground for the troops to - we modeled what they were supposed to do. My own platoon sergeant was an old, old instructor and he was very knowledgeable and we used to do things. He used to say we will do this four times for simplicity. The first time we'll walk through it. The second time we'll go a little bit faster. The third time we'll trot.

19:00 The fourth time we'll do it at the speed you need to be able to do it and that's how we used to impart that knowledge to them. We used to wear helmets painted in different colours so that everybody knew what position they were. These were the rifleman, that was the section commander, that was the scout group, that was the gun group. So that they'd all stand there and they'd watch the procedure. That was how we moved, which way we moved. If it was a contact front how we moved up.

19:30 Then take over the orders of moving into the attack. So we did that for a period of about four months and then I marched into, I turned nineteen and the week I turned nineteen I marched into reinforcement wing. When I got there I was told I had been posted to the defence

20:00 and employment platoon of headquarters 1ALSG. The Australian Logistics Support Group at Vung Tau. We were going over as a full platoon. That is the platoon was formed in Ingleburn. Everybody came to Ingleburn. Everybody learned various things and it was a team of specialists. There was people who came from 2RAR who were assault pioneers. We had drivers, we had

- 20:30 anti-tank people. We had mortar people. We had trackers. There was no actual people who were just ordinary riflemen. From myself and six others we went for a course at Vung General Hospital on to be a combat medic. We learnt about that came back and
- 21:00 six people again went away and learnt how to be drivers. How to drive the vehicles that we would be utilising. So we had at all stages throughout the whole platoon everybody knew another job. So everybody was cross trained. There were six drivers so that means that we had three sections so there was one nominated driver but there was somebody else to take that persons place. There
- 21:30 were six gunners or six machine gunners, number ones and there was six number two's. So there was three teams. We had one machine gun each section. We had two teams per section. The only ones, the medics, there were six medics amongst us so again there were three sections two for each again.
- 22:00 and this was for the whole platoon. We were thirty strong in the sections. Ten men per section. We had platoon headquarters of a lieutenant and sergeant and a radio man and bat men so that we had the whole total of thirty four people. One and thirty three soldier's altogether. We trained together doing various things.
- 22:30 The machine gunners all spent a week on the range at Moorebank, Holsworthy range and we all went out there and we fired our machine guns. We fired so many rounds. We had to change the barrels about four or five times. We learnt how to fire them in the dark. We learnt how to fire them all day. We learnt the different positions. We knew our guns backwards and both the whole six people knew,
- 23:00 the two teams of six, knew how to do those weapons. We could fire them at any time. We could be woken up in the middle of the night and we slept beside the guns and then just rolled over when we were woken up ready to fire and we were given targets, indication targets, and we would have to fire at that time. Everything became instinctive with those weapons again. You probably realise I say
- 23:30 instinctive so much because we had to learn everything to be instinctive. So we trained together. We did everything there then we went to Kanungra for three weeks as a platoon. We worked as a platoon again and went through all the jungle training up there. Up there what we learnt was various aspects of jungle fighting. How to do village searches. How to,
- 24:00 there was a mock village made up of a VC [Viet Cong] camp or a Vietnamese village. It had VC and it had people in it who were normal peasants. You'd go into there and you would get full weapons, food, ammunition, you'd maybe have a contact in there what to do, why you were doing it, how you should fight in a village. How to search.
- 24:30 Which ways do you learn to search. Either a body or looking in areas under fire pits, in bunders, underneath the beds, inside the houses and things like that so you became aware of what you would see. What you would be coming across in Vietnam. The people that were in there were dressed as Vietnamese as well. They didn't talk to you or anything.
- 25:00 You had to interrogate them in some way but that was shown to us by other instructors. How these people were interrogated. How the sort of things that come back from them and what you need to do. We went on route marches, we went on rain shoots. We went, we learnt motorised ambush drills as we move out on the back of vehicles and while
- 25:30 we are in the back of vehicles we have a contact in what happens in that time and then we go into attack. The different types of attacks. There is one scenario where you attack a camp during the early morning and there is casualties so you have got to carry those casualties out. Those are the sort of things that we had to learn how to do. And its very
- 26:00 full, very tough, hard training. From the time you get there to the time you leave you don't have any free time except for the last few nights were you can go to the booze and have a few things. You do what they call a confidence course. Running over logs, climbing wall, jumping pits and the last thing you do is jump into the river.
- 26:30 Which was very good. You do bayonet fighting. You learn different bayonet fighting. You learnt unarmed combat during some of this time as well and you practice it. You learn helicopter training. When the choppers come in you get on, you get off, taken for a ride, come back, gotta get off. You do the drill when you get off as well. So you're learning
- 27:00 all this new procedures that you're going to be carrying out whilst you're in Vietnam.

Did this include dropping from a rope?

Rappelling? No.

It's called rappelling is it?

Yeah. No that's not our role. We didn't do any rappelling.

That's more Special Forces type?

Yeah

I see. So you are talking about a chopper just landing on the ground?

A chopper coming in to land. You've only got a certain amount of seconds to get out of the chopper because once their

27:30 skids hit the ground by the time they've come to the front they are starting to roll forward to take off. So you've got to be out of that chopper in that time. Same as when they come into land they don't like to be on the ground very long so you've got to get on in a specific time.

Australia was using Bell helicopters at that stage?

We had the Hueys. The Bells were mostly used for the - you're talking about the bubbles.

Yes

Yeah like in MASH. They were using them

28:00 for reconnaissance aircraft. The 161 recce flight used those. They were used for taking people out to have a look at an area of operation that they were going to be using and things like that. We had the UH1D and 1B which were the normal American helicopters.

Now you spoke about before about a mock Vietnamese village. I've seen some footage

28:30 **of this in a actual move called Tigerlands where they do some mock training here. Who would behave as the VC. Would that be other soldiers in another platoon or something like that?**

Yes. Up in Kanungra as well they have the demonstration platoon. These were the people who act out the roles required to be in those villages. Each one will be, one will be a peasant, one will be a

29:00 VC in VC garb. Black, or what we knew then as black trousers and black tops, conical rice hat or just a bit of a, or no hat at all. Sometimes they carried weapons, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they had concealed weapons that we had to, these were the things we had to find when we went in there.

29:30 Caches of weapons that would be put into say various places that had been found on 1RAR's trip to Vietnam and also then 5RAR's trip. All this information was coming back, being fed back into the infantry centre. The infantry centre would then put that into doctrine and the general training centre they would also put that into doctrine there so you would find

30:00 a tunnel, you know, it might go hundreds of metres. Also there might be a man hiding in there. There might be pits of punji stakes which were set at angles and you learn how to find them. How to find trails and this was one of the things that they took you over in Jungle Training Centre. You got taken over these trails and you had to interpret what was actually on these trails.

30:30 So, you know, trip wires, there might be red blood, or red coloured paint splashed over rocks and that. You might find a few shells around so there might have been an action there and the blood might have been from someone and you would then follow the blood trail until you come near the person or whatever and you do the contract drill on them and various things like that. These are the sort of things yeah. So the villages were set

31:00 up as the way that they'd been seen in Vietnam and the people doing the things that they had been doing. The only thing wasn't there was women. Sometimes it might be a soldier dressed up as a woman though to give you a bit of realism.

So by this stage you've done some pretty comprehensive training at Kanungra. How long did this go for?

Three

31:30 weeks.

Now, this is were they were preparing you for Vietnam for deployment. Just one thing, you said there was information coming from previous detachments who'd been there and this was passed on?

Yep.

So you had instructors who had actually had experience?

Yes, most of the instructors that we had in the infantry centre had all, were all ex 1RAR or training team who were over there at that time

32:00 too. They'd come back. They were senior NCOs and they were there and they would instruct us about the various things. The same as at Kanungra. Most of the instructors there had been 1RAR people and they would be giving you all their insight into the information of what they found there. Then they used to tell us what we used to call warries.

32:30 Stories about what had happened in a certain contact. You come across such and such and then it was a warry in the way that they were imparting knowledge to us about what had happened and they would

also tell you funny incidents and various other things and they would answer your questions about what they'd seen and what action went on whilst they were there.

What was the opinion at that stage. What was the

33:00 opinion of the VC, NVA [North Vietnamese Army] forces?

Well, most of them would say that the NVA and the VC were good soldiers in as much as they would have to fight. They also were called cut throats and they were rotten because of the acts that they carried out on

33:30 villages and people of professional type people, teachers and doctors and local government officials and things like that. Because we learnt all this as well. You were told what the atrocities were that they carried out. What the cutters would do to these people in these areas in extracting payment and food and things like that and they were

34:00 indoctrinating the people through fear. If you don't do what we tell you this is what's going to happen and they'd shoot the head man and all this sort of thing. So they told us about this but on the whole as a fighter they would say that they are very good as far as that went. They were like phantoms because they shoot and run.

34:30 When they went through their contract drills they'd find a place but never find a person. Though some cases where they fought, pitched battles and that where there was lots of casualties because they were attached to 173rd Airborne and they did fight some pretty horrific battles at that time.

Who, the training instructors you are talking about?

Yes, they had been with 1RAR when they were attached to the 173rd.

35:00 How did this impact on you?

It was just knowledge to us. We weren't there yet. We hadn't really thought about it. It was still a case of oh yeah well they're teaching us about that but that's about all. I really didn't think about it at that stage yet.

35:30 It wasn't 'til one night when we were back in the infantry centre the platoon was taken into a hall and the whole platoon was sitting down and then we had these two officers come in and they said, "Ok, what we are going to be doing now is teaching you about Vietnam and what we are going to do also

36:00 is to give you some insight into Vietnam". So they started teaching us and saying you will be doing this and you will be doing that. That's when it started to sink in but not as much. We were given leave, pre-embarkation leave which was five days pre-embarkation leave and we went home and then we came back. We were able to tell people, "Yes

36:30 we have been warmed for overseas service." But that was about it. You couldn't say much else. You weren't allowed to say much else. And then when we came back that was then you marched back into that same room and it was said - the Captain got up in front of us and said, "Who amongst you does not want to go overseas," and

37:00 one bloke put his hand up and stood up after a little while because then it really sank in that we are going overseas, we are going to the war so we're going to be doing everything that we've learnt. How would we go. I know, at that time, it was going through my mind would I be up to doing everything that we had been taught. How would I go there. Would I be alright or would I turn

37:30 and run like or would I be strong enough to do everything that I had been taught and to maintain that discipline and would I be up to it in that method. And then one person stood up and said, "Well, I don't want to go." He was a national servicemen. Anyway, he was immediately led from the room

38:00 and we were told that he'd be replaced tomorrow. Though we didn't say much then but that's when it really came home that we had committed ourselves to go there. And that's why we had made out our wills. We got our ID cards for over there and we were now

38:30 warmed to go. We couldn't go out of camp. We had to stay in camp. We couldn't even go over to the canteen. We were stuck inside the camp.

Why's that. Why was it so strict?

Well one way is because you don't tell anybody that you are going. Nothing can happen to you before you go so you stay in the camp. It is just like a

39:00 like they used to do during the other wars. You know if you were going on operation or anything you are just stuck there together and you get yourself ready and you don't, you can't tell anyone for security reasons so this is the same sort of thing. If we decided to take off or go AWOL [absent without leave] at that time well, or if we went over to the boozier and got a skinful

39:30 of beer and that, or what have you, and decided to take off and not come back well that's where by being in camp you're stopped. You can't go anywhere. Everybody's there together so when it comes to

time of ok you're leaving tomorrow then that was it. Everyone was still there.

Tape 4

00:31 **What was the next stage?**

The next stage was that we left Sydney on the 6th of June, 1967, and we had our relatives there to say goodbye and our platoon plus a group, I think it might have been about a troop of or two troops of engineers, left Sydney

01:00 on a very cold, wet, rainy morning and we flew from Sydney to Darwin which was the first stage of our flight to going to Vietnam. It was very emotional then because this is when we really realised that we were actually on our way to war. The plane was an old DC

01:30 six speed. We were watching the wings flap as we went and when that plane took off there was dead silence in the plane. Not a sound and everybody was just sort of lost in their own thoughts. Thinking well, is this the last time I will see Australia? Is this the last time I'll see my family?

02:00 And it was very comforting for me too because there was Mum and Dad Wicks, Peter, Sue and Jennifer and Robert had come to the airport, the whole lot of them. And after I said my goodbyes and was just about to go out the door and Mum gave me a small parcel. She said, "You're not to open this 'til you get on the aircraft." So I carried it on

02:30 wondering what it could be and when I opened it and looked at it, it was a bible, and in the bible it said to Chris from Mum, Dad, brothers and sisters and that was very emotional for me because that made me really feel as part of their family and it was something that I'll

03:00 never forget and I've still got the bible in there. So everybody on the plane was, you could see it if you looked around or as you looked around, that these people were all having the same sort of feelings about, you know, what am I going to, am I really going to be coming back? Because at that time casualties were starting to come

03:30 through and this is when we started taking notice of what was really happening there. So as the plane flew over Sydney and then all of a sudden out of the aircraft somebody started singing 'There Won't Be Many Coming Home', which was a song of that era, and it was quite chilling the goose pimples

04:00 down the back sort of thing. And then we flew to Darwin. It was a long flight. The hostesses and the pilots were really good. They actually took us up to the flight deck and let us have a look and see where we were and showed us on the map and on their plotting board where we were and what time and what our routes were over there. And we landed at Darwin at about seven o'clock at night

04:30 and we were picked up by some buses and taken to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] side of the base. We landed on the civilian side in an Ansett plane and then taken to the RAAF side by buses with our trunks and everything else. Taken to some transit huts in the back there, left our stuff there, secured our weapons, because we got our weapons from the aircraft.

05:00 We hadn't been able to carry them on but when they unloaded them we picked them all up and took them over, secured them and then we went to tea at the airmen's mess. We had a very good meal and then we were told what our briefing was for the next day - that we would be leaving at zero eight hundred hours and our aircraft would be a C130 Hercules

05:30 to take us to Vietnam on the last leg. And they said "Well there's nothing else for you to do, you can go into Darwin if you like." So we jumped in some taxis, about half a dozen of us in each taxi, that's in the old days with people sitting on people's laps and things, and went into Darwin and had a look around. It was fairly dead. It was about nine o'clock at night then so we

06:00 came back and went back to the airmen's boozery and just had a few drinks there. Then to bed and wait for the next morning. Then rudely awoken when the Air Force MP [military police] came through the place waking us up, bashing all the tin cabinets and everything else. So we got up, had breakfast and then came back and our luxury aircraft was waiting on the tarmac

06:30 outside, waiting for us. We loaded all our trunks and everything else onto the aircraft, or onto a pallet and then they were taken into the aircraft, along with a lot of other stores, and we went onto the aircraft after that and, they're very basic inside, nylon strapping seats along each side and up towards the front. There's three places in it.

07:00 The front - it's very hot, the centre - it's just nice and the back end - it's very cold so I was lucky I was in the middle and I could stretch out and have a sleep. And that's what just about all of us did on the way over because it was too noisy to talk in the back. They gave us the ear plugs so can't shout through ear plugs anyway. So we landed in Vietnam on the seventh at about

07:30 around two o'clock, between two and three in the afternoon.

I'll just stop you there and ask you a couple questions about the trip. When you first got that bible and it said from Mum and Dad and so on, before then did you regard them as your Mum and Dad or was that the first official recognition of it?

Well I called them Mum and Dad because what had happened was after I had been going home with Rob

08:00 all these times and they, I used to always say Mr and Mrs Wicks. "How are you Mr and Mrs Wicks", and all that and Dad Wicks said to me, they were both there actually, he said to me, "Oh, this Mr and Mrs Wicks is getting - that was my Dad's name and you only called him Mr Wicks," and he said, "You need to call us something else." I said, "Well I

08:30 can't really call you Horrie and Mary. That's not the done thing," and Rob said, "Why don't you call them what we call them - Mum and Dad," and Mum Wick's said, "That'll do me," and Dad said the same thing so from there on it was Mum and Dad. But I never really classed Rob and that as my brothers at that time. There was Rob and Peter and Sue and Jennifer and

09:00 I never really classed them as brothers and sisters at that time, as I said. But when I got to open the bible up at it was there, written there in that way, as I said, It was very emotional for me and like now we're still brothers and sisters and when ever any one of them says, "Oh, this is my brother Chris" there is no distinction what so ever.

09:30 **When you got the bible were you a religious person at that stage?**

No, I haven't got a religion myself. I've been to Baptist, I've been to Church of England - both the high and low church. My mother used to take me to Sunday School and things like that but I never found them to be very

10:00 supportive or that. And then I started to think about it and I never could believe that you had to have a religion to believe in God. Because as you read in the bible and so forth it doesn't say anything about having to have a religion you know. There is Jewish but that's a nation.

10:30 There is Egyptians but they are a nation. But it didn't actually say that they were Church of England or Church of Christ or they weren't Roman Catholics or anything like that. So I thought, "Why have you got to have a religion to believe in God." I do believe that there is a being or something and you can be anywhere praying, and you are, so

11:00 from there on, and when I joined the army I said nil religion, and I still maintain that. My wife, she's Church of England, that's her belief and I don't try to dissuade her or anything else.

At the

11:30 **time that you were going you said this was the first time you realised you were off to war was that the same for all the people around you as well?**

Yeah. Except for that night in the hall when they asked us if there was anyone who would not, does not want to go to Vietnam. That's when we started to think about it but we still hadn't left. But once you had your feet on the aircraft and were flying away

12:00 then that's when it really sunk in.

And as you were going on the trip does the tension increase by the hour or what's going through your mind?

No not at that stage because we were still in Australia and we were going to Darwin. We really didn't get tensed up or anything at that time. It wasn't 'til

12:30 we were actually landing in Vung Tau before it really hit us because when we landed, as I was about to say before, as we landed the first thing we had to do was get our rifles and as we walked off the aircraft a bloke was standing there with ammunition. Giving us ammunition and we loaded our weapons. We filled all our magazines up.

13:00 We had three magazines at that stage and we put the sixty rounds in there. We put two magazines away and then we put a magazine on the rifle and that's how we had to carry it from there on. We always knew that from there on you carried your weapon where ever you went. Even if you went to the toilet you always had your weapon with you and that's what we did.

13:30 And the other thing was that where the aircraft was when we looked around there was Chinook helicopters and Huey helicopters. There was South Vietnamese army marching past in platoons with full battle gear on. We looked out towards the road and there was rolls and rolls and rolls of barbed wire and there was gun in placements on towers

14:00 and that's when we knew that we were in a war zone and this wasn't just an adventure this was the real thing. And that's what we took it to be, to start off with, this is just a big adventure, we are all going away. Something that I didn't tell you before is the chap that said he didn't want to go. The next morning he actually came back and said, "All my mates are going

14:30 so so am I." So he came as well. And that showed one thing which was the spirit, the comradeship of everyone there. His mates were going and he didn't want to be left behind because he trained with these blokes and we had all trained together. We were all friends so therefore he wanted to be with us. And that was one of the

15:00 things that you learnt after a while is the comradeship that you form during that time.

Just a little note. Were you told before you go that anyone in black pyjamas was fair game?

No. No. Because we were told identification of people was to be a main thing. You never knew who the enemy was going to be. If

15:30 they were in your area of operation and they shouldn't be there then they're fair game but first you have to try and find out who they are. We were never trained to just blast away unless they were carrying weapons and they looked hostile to you and that was what we carried out all the time that I was there. We would always tell the people to stop because we

16:00 found farmers and people who used to, if we were in the area of operation, and that's where their land would be and that's where they had all their fruit and their vegetables and other things they were always looking after because a lot of people had been relocated and they would come back into that area and, because there were in our area of the operation, then we would have to stop them and they were flown back to the villages or

16:30 flown back for interrogation to find out why they were there and then returned to their village and things like that. But no we were never given any words like that.

And all this was explained to you before you went - the techniques of identifying people and so on?

Not before we went. When we got there you go through an induction process. Induction, familiarisation and

17:00 also to get you acclimatised. It generally takes, well it took us and most people, a three week period. During that time you have lectures about what the rules of engagement were. You know, do you just blast away as soon as you see someone? This is what I'm talking about in being told, "Ok, this is the requirements. If they're hostile

17:30 or make any move against you then you can protect yourself. If you are out in an area of operation and they shouldn't be there, you've been told there's nobody there, if they're moving at night for instance, it's a hostile." If we were doing a cordon and search then the rules were that nobody fires anything unless they have to, to defend themselves from somebody whose got another weapon

18:00 or attacking you and that's the sort of thing you get told during this time. You are also familiarised with what's happening in the province at that time. What's happening with the Australians at that time. You get a what they call a sit rep [situation report] every night as to what's happening. What the taskforce has done. What each of the battalions has done. What your own people are doing and that's fed to you all the time. So you always

18:30 got an update of information about what and where was happening. And that was even when we were out on the field when we were operations. You know such and such happened to B Company or such and such happened to RAR. They had an ambush and they got so many kills and that sort of thing. And as well as information that was going to affect you for the next day.

During the induction

19:00 **process were there any Americans involved?**

No. The only Americans involved around us were the artillery. They were on the WAU [?] was on the perimeter. We had next door to us was the Kiwi [New Zealand] battery, 161 Artillery Battery. They were there and then across the road from them was the 175 and 155 mobile guns. But we

19:30 never got to speak to them or anything but they were there for our support. Apart from that we hadn't seen an American since we got into Vietnam.

And when you landed in Vietnam can you just give us a sense of the Australian situation at that time?

It was well in the wet season the battalions were

20:00 doing continuous operations. There was no taskforce operation at that time. 2RAR were on operation further out to the north/north west of Nui Dat where the battalion was or where the taskforce was. 7RAR were doing TAOOP

20:30 patrols which was tactical area of operation patrols just around. They weren't in operation at the time. And that's about all. There had been no fighting or general contact for the battalion in the first days we were there. It wasn't 'til the first or maybe the second week we were there and there was a major

- operation and we could hear a major action
- 21:00 going on. That was 2RAR.
- During the induction process as well would they talk about STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] and lectures about that as well?**
- Not that much in fact not at all because we weren't anywhere, see the taskforce itself was a complete sealed community. It was only the battalions there. We didn't have civilians
- 21:30 coming into the area. No civilian entered the area whatsoever. Out on operations well you don't see anyone. I didn't see or go near any civilians 'til later on about a month later on when I was manning a checkpoint on the engineers road and we had to check the passes and so forth, and vehicles, but
- 22:00 didn't come into contact with them.
- Also when you landed there weren't any Americans involved. Were there any South Vietnamese involved or around?**
- They were around. As I said there was a platoon of soldiers marching past in full combat gear. They were moving towards helicopters. I'd say they were going on operations or something in the Chinook helicopters because that's what they were heading for.
- 22:30 But apart from that we didn't speak to any or see any at that time. No.
- Do you know if they were being trained or helped by Australian troops?**
- They were being assisted by the Australian army training team and they were serving all over at that time. Being assisted in training their troops and so forth but there was also Americans in those
- 23:00 advice teams as well.
- How did you personally feel when you landed and you're in Vietnam and you're in a war zone and then you have to go through three weeks of induction. Was it a, probably the wrong word, but a bit of an anticlimax when you're stuck learning for three weeks again?**
- No not really because during that three weeks we actually, or the three weeks period we were
- 23:30 still as platoon and our platoon was doing familiarisation training with M16 rifles while we were there. Because we hadn't had much training on that back in Australia so we were learning that. So we were putting up tents, making accommodation areas because more reinforcements were coming across all the time and the tent lines weren't big enough. So we
- 24:00 did our time sandbagging, digging pits, putting these tents up, clearing ground. The training by people coming in and telling us about the various booby traps we would find. Giving us more insight into the weapons that were being used by the VC.
- 24:30 Telling us about how the carders worked. Giving us a full detailed information of how Vietnam was set up. How the forces of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese army, airforce, navy, marines, and so forth, how they worked. We were given information as to the American forces that were there. As to what formations, where they were, what units they were,
- 25:00 what their roles were, how they would, if anything had happened, how they would assist us or vice versa. We were given the disposition of what the AVRN units were around us. Because there was places like Swan Lock which had regular AVRN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] soldiers in it but they were very
- 25:30 they were highly classed people. The talk of the police. What the Vietnamese police were like. The paramilitary forces of the Vietnamese 'cause there was regular soldiers and there was part time soldiers as well. And we were just given information about them and what to expect from them. And more so
- 26:00 we had intel[ligence] about the what was happening in Wau Long which was below the taskforce. What was happening in Dat Tau for instance. We also had a defensive position at the Horseshoe then which infantry, the battalions were manning that, and there was a battery of guns there as well. So we were getting all this intel all the time
- 26:30 each day in these periods. It wasn't like induction as in, you know, "Oh you've got to do this and that." It was just mainly like talking about the intel and what to do if you were wounded. You know, you would have a medic come in and explain the types of wounds you could do and what you could do for this, while you're there. You know, make sure that
- 27:00 you always carried your field dressing or two. Always make sure you use the other blokes dressing and not yours so that yours was always with you so if you got wounded yours was there. Just general common sense things that we'd need to know while we were there and while we were on patrol. And during that time also we were tasked for patrols. We went out and did patrols. Early morning patrols,
- 27:30 clearing patrols to start off with. Then about a week after we'd been there the platoon was tasked to do

a fighting patrol which they went out and they did a night ambush and other things . Checking out areas. They were given a position which they were to check out and make sure that there had been no activity in that area whatsoever or

28:00 after the last reported time. Looking for any changes to the landscape that could be counted as a serious threat. That may have been used for, particularly observation areas for the taskforce, where they could, the enemy, can look into the taskforce, see what we're doing, find out what the disposition of units were and things like that.

28:30 **A couple more questions on the induction. Were you told about the different American tactics, say as in ambushing where Australians would be taught to turn into an ambush and Americans were taught to turn away from an ambush. Were you taught that as well?**

No. Not so much because we weren't going to be working as having Americans with us. Later on during operation we

29:00 worked with the Americans in the army in that regard but we always worked as ourselves. We didn't need to really know about that. All we needed to know what we'd do and that's what we did. Well later on we learnt about some of their tactics and things like that which we followed in a million years but we had our own tactics and why confuse it with anybody

29:30 else's.

Also it seems pretty full on what you were being told and the knowledge you were given. Did every soldier that went to Vietnam get that?

It depended on the type of unit they were in. For infantry soldiers like ARU and the battalions they got all that sort of information all the time. The, like the construction engineers, they wouldn't need to know the in depth knowledge that we would about them. They would have their own

30:00 training activities which they'd do but they were there as construction engineers. They still had to do their front line duties, that is, the night pickets, the stand to and stand downs, things like that and constantly manning their machine gun during the days to secure the perimeter. But they were there for a task. To build roads, to build houses, to make up buildings

30:30 so their knowledge wouldn't be the same as what we were getting. They'd get the intel reports. What happened to the task force now, yesterday. If there was any major operations. Everybody was informed about that and everybody got that sort of information. But everyone has a different role so they don't need to have that same sort of information. They probably got information about booby traps, about weapons being used because

31:00 they were out there in the front line with us sometimes. We used to have mini teams which were generally two engineers, combat engineers who used to travel with a platoon or with a company. They would come out with us and they were just like us. They did everything that we did. If there was a contact they were there with us as well. If they needed to fire weapons, they fired 'em same as everybody else. But on the whole

31:30 the people in the cavalry for instance 3 Cav they wouldn't be getting that same information. They would know, they'd hear about the intel reports, they'd hear about and they would find out about the weapons the enemy would have and especially what's going to do damage to their particular vehicles and that sort of thing. But they weren't getting, I wouldn't say, they

32:00 would be doing a sort of the same thing. They'd get all these to talk about who, what, where and why but same as us we'd get a little bit more because we're actually out there patrolling with them and we were actually on the ground doing those things.

When you went on those first patrols were they under threat or were they more acclimatisation?

Clearing patrols that we do

32:30 first thing in the morning were always assumed that the enemy were there because you go outside the perimeter. There's only about three or four people, mostly three people an NCO and two soldiers, who go out and be up to a hundred metres outside the perimeter and spread out in line and your task is to sweep around in front of your position and when you look at it

33:00 you make sure that particularly observation posts because the thought being that dawn was the time that attacks take place. During the night people would move into positions. So this is the idea of the clearing patrol. The first clearing patrol my heart was in my mouth the whole time and, I'll say it, I was scared because here it is

33:30 three of us out there. We were up to a hundred metres out from the wire. The rest of the company are all there in their positions. They are all on alert. They're all on stand to and here we are walking out here looking and there could be a regiment sitting in the grass. We wouldn't have known. And sometimes it happened to people. Not much. Not around the taskforce

34:00 area but out on operations and that it happened because we do the same routine every day, every night.

So, yeah, here we are walking out in the boonies checking to see if there's anything disturbed or any area that's been flattened down during the night or whatever like that. So, yeah, the best part of it was when we walked inside the wire. But

34:30 yes, we'd do that and that's when adrenalin starts to come in and pump but it doesn't always happen 'til something else happens.

You sort of explained it but a bit more. Why were you scared. Was it the unknown or the first time out or what was it?

Well the first time and out you didn't know what to expect. As I said here you are three of you just

35:00 walking around in the clearing in front of the taskforce or in front of your position. You're going into the unknown and, as I said, you don't know if there's a regiment crept up during the night and laying there waiting to shoot you. So yeah tentatively the first time I was scared and I know that the section commander that took us out his heart

35:30 was in his mouth too. You can be big and brave but there's a lot of times when you are scared and anybody that say's they aren't scared of something like that sometime, especially when it's their first time, they're lying in a lot of cases.

After more patrols do you become less scared or what happens?

Yeah you do. It becomes second nature then.

36:00 The thought is always there that there could be something in the bushes waiting for you. On other patrols and, you know, we went through some parts where I could be behind you, for instance, and you turn one corner of the bush I can't see you and you don't know if you're still there and because we didn't walk this close for a start. Anywhere from five metres to ten metres away depending on the country.

36:30 This grass and that would completely swallow you and the only way you knew which way somebody had gone was by the track that's been made. But you always had that feeling that it could happen at any time. And the other thing is we lived in a world of silence. We didn't talk during these patrols.

37:00 When you see the Americans out on patrols with their rifles slung over their shoulder or the machine gun hanging by its bypod over the shoulder, we didn't operate like that. We operated, you could go all day without saying a word. We used hand signals and ninety percent of the time you'd be alert because you were watching the

37:30 back and each of the sides of the bloke in front of you and you were given a, depends on your position with the section as to what your arc of responsibility was. So the scout for instance, the first man, his was a whole one hundred and eighty degrees. The person behind him generally did to the left. The next person to the right so that the hundred and eighty degrees there and these two

38:00 is three hundred and sixty and the next person is watching that next one, and the next person is watching that and you always had your weapon in that way. And when you carried your weapon, your weapon followed where your eyes were. If you were looking in this direction that's the way your weapon should be. If you were looking to the side of you your weapon should be around there because if you need it all of a sudden, and it happened sometimes, when you come into a contact or somebody. Not always the scouts

38:30 or the enemy. They could be at the side or they could be at the back and it does happen. So we're trained to do that and that's what ninety nine percent of the time you are doing. And you live in that constant world when you are outside the wire. The only times that you talked was when you have gone into a harbour at night and that's only in a whisper and you get your orders and that's always in a whisper

39:00 and most of the other time you don't talk. Day or night.

The guys who were at the back covering the back are they walking backwards literally?

It depends on the formation which you are in. We used mainly two formations and we normally operated as a platoon or as a company.

39:30 It depended on whether the country was open as to whether you opened up, and we'd normally, or a single file that we used to call it. But each person had to look back just to make sure that that person was there and every now and then there might be orders coming from the back. If you're the lead section then the platoon commander and the headquarters group are behind you. So you've always got to be watching them or the back person in case there's orders coming

40:00 forward. Or there's orders coming back from the first section. And again as I said, a lot of it was all done in field signals. So you had to be pretty switched on and you would hear little clicks or taps or noises which you'd look at the person in front of you for 'cause it meant that there was something that was coming through or back. So you had to be aware and

40:30 alert all that time.

What position would you usually take?

To start off with when I went to with the DNE [?] platoon I was the machine gunner so I was about fourth in line. Normally we only operated with one scout then the section commander so he was there in line ready to be able to see what was happening and get all the

41:00 information relayed to them. Then would be the machine gunner, the number two, the 2IC [second in command] and then the riflemen after that if we were walking in single line. If we were in open file where the scout and the section commander would be in the middle, on left or right flank would be the riflemen. Depends on the country and where the threat may have come from. So if it's higher ground then the gunner

41:30 normally went to the right so therefore I'd be the first one in that line. When I went to the battalion I went as a...

Tape 5

00:33 **As far as your first combat experiences are concerned can you walk us through what happened?**

Yeah, well I had been transferred to ARU then. What happened while I was at ARU was that there was a signal came from Australia, a political decision had been made

01:00 that there was too many national servicemen in the front line so the places where there are regular soldiers in non-combatant areas then the ARA soldier was to take the place in the front line while the national serviceman was brought back. We had six national servicemen in our platoon and we were all transferred to ARU for posting to the battalions. Our positions were then taken by national servicemen.

01:30 After being at Nui Dat at ARU the platoon, DNE platoon, they flew out to Vung Tau again to take up their position while we stayed behind. And we joined up into platoons of reinforcements that had been there. Our role then was to train with them and later on when the battalions required reinforcements

02:00 we would go to them. But during that time we carried out various duties such as a place called water point which was an old French fort that had access to underground water and we used to have a platoon that actually went out there and stayed for seven days at a time and their job was to patrol and be alert

02:30 and make sure that nobody got into the water point. Because this water point was the main area to supply the taskforce. So we went out there a couple of weeks after I had been there as part of a platoon. There was New Zealanders and there was Australians mixed because the New Zealanders used to do six months out of their twelve. Six months in Malaya

03:00 come up and do six months in Vietnam. They came up and we formed a platoon and then this platoon was transferred to the water point for a week. The second day we were there the platoon was allocated around and there was four gun positions, in the middle was a headquarters and there was smaller bunkers in between where the riflemen

03:30 used to be. We generally had four people in the gun group or in the gun bunker and we'd take it in turns on the gun and then go and get people from the other pits to come in to the gun during the night. We were going out on a clearing patrol. That was my section that was going out and we were under command of Ted Slewenski

04:00 and as we went out across, there was a bridge we had to cross, so just crossed over that and I was carrying the machine gun. The scout or at that time we had two scouts on that one and the section commander had crossed the bridge. I'd just come over, when there was a shot fired. There was contact and

04:30 our position was that we had to run forward where away was the enemy, the VC was calling out to everybody. And so we started going into our contact drill but before I actually moved I was still on the road and a VC jumped out on the road as well and had a Thompson

05:00 sub-machine gun and fired. Well people were going left and right and it was like you see it in the movies sometimes the way it goes in slow motion. And I was actually watching those rounds coming towards me and I'm thinking, "I'm going to get it here," and I watched the puffs of dust as they came down the road towards me. But I snapped out of it and I

05:30 didn't, didn't really know how I did it but I moved out of that way and I was firing the machine gun and I went through one hundred rounds just holding the machine gun there. And at that stage everybody else had come through and then we started to do a sweep. I changed the belt on the machine gun and we started sweeping across to the right where these two people had disappeared. They had been dressed

- 06:00 in, one in grey and black trousers. The other one was with a fawn top and black trousers. They started running through the bushes to the right. We followed doing our contact drill and made a sweep of that area. We got artillery support via a DF [defensive target] task down on to the position where they were running to and
- 06:30 we followed through after it. And then we stopped before we went too far because we didn't know what else was going to be out there. So we stopped formed a defensive position, made sure that everybody was alright. We were so we came back in. We started to move back. In the meantime the officer in the platoon, he
- 07:00 sent out a second section to protect us while we came back in through. But after it was all over I, the adrenalin rush hit me when I was firing at this bloke and I just sort of stopped and looked at the road where those rounds were coming and I didn't remember firing the gun
- 07:30 until my hand was being yanked against the slot for the bullet to go through and after it was all over I started to shake and then we talked amongst ourselves and we were very excited and that night nobody slept very much because we knew that they were there and that was my first action I'd been in and I was
- 08:00 absolutely elated in one way. I'd been able to do my job. I didn't freeze. I didn't get scared and not do my job. I was able to do it instinctively like I was supposed to do and that was the, I was happy then that I would be able to do the job. And
- 08:30 even though I was still scared after it had happened thinking you know, "I could have been dead or any of our section could have been dead." It was just lucky that they didn't fire at everybody. And that was the first time. Until then I didn't know whether I would make the grade and I was very glad that I did.

Were there any Australian

09:00 **casualties in that?**

Not in that, no. Nobody was hurt. We never found out if the DF tasks got them or anything. That was the way it started off and that's the way a lot of actions were carried out in Vietnam. They'd fire at you and disappear and you'd be left to do the drills and everything and to look for them after.

Now this patrol you

09:30 **were on were you walking along side the road or was this in jungle?**

No what we had to do was come across a bridge. The road, it was a main access route and because the other sides there was a river so we went through the bridge, on the bridge, and then we branched out from there. Which was our normal procedures and so

- 10:00 that's why I was on the road and I could see straight up when this one jumped out at the side and started firing.

So you walked around the bridge like that and then fanning out like that?

Yes.

Now these sort of ambushes were they, it sounds like just a harassing type sort of ambush?

In a lot of cases there were but they were out to,

- 10:30 I'll say, get us like we're out there to get them and if they can inflict casualties that's what they were there for.

When was your next combat encounter after that?

Not 'til Operation Ballarat when I joined the battalion.

This is 7RAR we're talking about?

This is with 7RAR. What happened after that, after

- 11:00 a certain amount of time, I think it was another week after that that I actually got posted to a battalion as a reinforcement and we went to Admin Company of 7RAR. And during that time we learnt the standard operation procedures for the battalion. That is they had their way of doing contacts. They had their way of doing formations. They did lots of other
- 11:30 different things. The way they set an ambush up was in a triangle which was different to other ways that we had been taught and this is the way that they had effectively worked and so they had three sides and any side can be the killing group. Like that the formations we used, their open formation which I
- 12:00 described before where one section would have the forward section and then two sections on either side with the commander in the centre with the platoon headquarters. If we were using single line with one

formation up, two formations at the side. That's so we learnt that sort of thing. We also went through familiarisation with the weapons again to the battalions

- 12:30 way of doing things. We also were issued with new rifles. Because each time we left ARU we gave our rifle back, traveled to the next place and then got another rifle from the battalion. We were told how the battalion operates. Who the commanding officer was, the RSM [regimental sergeant major]. Given who the company commanders were.
- 13:00 What the formations as far as who was who in each of the groups. Then we were posted later on, after our familiarisation training, we were then posted to a company within the battalion. I was posted to Charlie Company. There was four main companies. Rifle companies within a battalion plus a support company and an admin company. The support
- 13:30 company were where the mortars and the armour, pioneers and various signalers were and battalion headquarters and each of the rifle companies A, B, C and D. As I said I went to Charlie Company and it was quite interesting how it happened. I met an old friend of mine from back in Ingleburn who had been
- 14:00 one ahead of me all the way in the platoons and he saw me and said, "Oh." There was a show on that we'd been going to from Admin Company. We were walking down the road and this friend of mine, Dave, said, "Oh glad to catch up," sort of thing and we were talking about it and he said, "Who have you been posted to?" and I said, "Charlie Company." And he said, "Oh that's good, I'm in Charlie Company." Then he
- 14:30 said, "Oh you won't know who you're going to be with until you get up there will you." I said, "No." So he said, "Oh I'll put a good word in to the platoon sergeant about you." So when we got taken up to the company we were all standing there and the platoon sergeants were all there and he said, the platoon sergeant was this little fella called Shorty Nilligan[?] who was an instructor of mine at Kapooka. We used to call him Mighty Mouse because he was
- 15:00 only very small but he looked like Mighty Mouse, he had big ears too. He said, "Who's Chris Seymour." He said, "I think it's you isn't it." And I said, "Oh yeah." He said, "I've been given impressive words about you and you sound like the bloke we want in our platoon." So that's how I come to go to Seven Platoon Charlie Company. The company itself
- 15:30 was made up of three platoons and it ran numerically from each company. A had one, two and three. B had four, five, six. Charlie seven, eight, nine and Delta ten, eleven, twelve. So everybody knew who they were within the company, within the battalion. Each platoon had three sections. I was
- 16:00 put in three section of seven platoon and again the numbers ran one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. And again the same way with the organisation so everybody knew who was who. The actual company had been out on operations at that time. I went in as
- 16:30 into a tent and they said, "Oh you can go into this position for a bloke." He was down in the boob. In the correctional establishment. Snotted someone at one time and also drew a weapon on them. And so he got twenty eight days labour in the pit and also twenty eight days field punishment.

You said he drew a weapon on him?

Yeah, he drew a weapon on the bloke that he hit.

- 17:00 So I went to see this area and set up my bed and my bed space but there was nobody else in that section because they were out on the operation. They came back and I got a rio's? welcome and that's not very nice. Because these blokes all worked together
- 17:30 back in Australia and came overseas, most of them were national servicemen, a few regulars, they were all friends. They'd gone through contacts and operations and everything together right from national service when they came in, right through the battalion and up until now. When you join the platoon sometimes you are there to
- 18:00 take somebody's place that may have been wounded, killed or, like Brownie was, in the boob. So you're not given a very good welcome to start off with because they don't know you, you don't know them. So they came back that night or that day and nobody spoke to me and that didn't worry me. I just took my time waited
- 18:30 for them. I said, "G'day," but nobody spoke back. They cleaned up, got their stuff all together ready for later on then the section 2IC by the name of Slippery Dowling came in and he had a bed space opposite mine and he was the first one to talk to me. This was about
- 19:00 after six hours, six or seven hours. He come over and he introduced himself. And not before him the other blokes then started introducing themselves. But it was just, "Hello, how are you?" The way I greeted them before. We shook hands and anyway I had to go and, I was doing mess duties that day. So I went in and did the mess duties, came back that night and they were at the boozier.
- 19:30 The next morning after I woke up and Slippery came in and he said, "Do you want a make demp." And I said, being a new, not quite know everything soldier then, I said, "What's that." He said, "A make

demp." I said, "Oh dunno what it is." He said, "Do you want any socks or underpants

20:00 or rations or things like that." I said, "Oh no I've got all that." He said, "I can't believe it, you don't know what a make demp is." I said, "No I didn't." He says, "Oh, I'm calling you dumb." I said, " Oh well." Anyway he went away and the next thing another bloke came up and said, "Are you dumb." And I said, "Depends on how you look at it." He said, "Dumb, dumb."

20:30 My friend Dave who was there, bit of a jovial bloke, said, "Yeah the hundred and forty third slowest gun in the west." Anyway they all carried on, laughed and everything. They said, they then just called me dumb, dumb for the rest of the day. I was a bit taken aback but that was alright. Anyway I got introduced to the section commander, Roy Savage, that day

21:00 and the rest of the blokes in the section. That night on the evening parade, we have an evening parade every night and they give you Palladin tablet for anti-malarial and you get all the intel of what's happened with the task force. As I said you get that every day. Roy Savage stood up

21:30 in front of the platoon and said, "I'd like everybody to introduce everybody to my newest member of the section. This is Chris 'dumb, dumb' Seymour." Well they all had a good old laugh but it did one thing, it showed I'd been accepted. They'd given me a nickname and even today friends that I see, especially one mate surely he says, "G'day dumb, dumb."

22:00 So I've carried that nickname since then and it's good. But later on I learnt to work with the platoon and everything and then we got a warning order for an operation and we went out on this operation and it was called Operation Ballarat. On Operation Ballarat, it was one of the biggest operations that we had,

22:30 and it was on that that I actually came to the second contact of the time I was there. The battalion operation was to clear a certain area and to join up outside the specific area of responsibility. The A Company had been out for a week beforehand clearing the area and then

23:00 the rest of the battalion walked out to meet up with them. We'd been out about two, three days and it was on sixth of August that A Company hit a company or what seemed like, or started off like, a section of enemy. The company commander committed his first section and another section and then threw in the rest of his platoon. So did the enemy commander

23:30 and it was platoon against platoon so the company commander committed a second platoon. So did the company commander on the other side and they were very highly trained soldiers who A Company had come up against. They were also heavily armed with machine guns, wheel mounted twelve point seven Tricon machine guns. And through that action

24:00 they lost six men and quite a few wounded at the time.

Who did, sorry?

A Company. The enemy they pulled back later on and the artillery dropped DF tasks in on them also air strikes were called in. We could hear the action. We were about three thousand metres away from them when it happened

24:30 and we could hear their heavy fire, the artillery fire. They used gun ships and that and we were tasked to come in and assist A Company to cut off anybody coming from the back of them. B Company also were tasked to come in from the other flank and anyway we came belting through. We were called the road runners

25:00 as a company and we used to have a road runners sign. You know the coyote and the road runner? We adopted that as our sign or the battalion had let the company adopt that as a sign and anyway we were raced this three thousand kilometres or this three thousand metres in very quick time to get in position and we could always hear all the action as we were

25:30 going forward. We got into a position on the outskirts of them and took up so that we had enough time to put in a defensive position and to see if anybody was coming the other way. One of the company's actually went in and assisted A Company, I think it was Delta Company or Bravo Company came in. They actually assisted them in the field. They got into the fight as well. That's when the enemy started to take

26:00 off. After the action was over we were in this defensive position, in an ambush position and during the night our forward sections heard people coming along and because it was very muddy it was very defined. You could hear people squelching

26:30 along and as they came through the gunners opened up. Anyway it was heard the great thump and then away these feet went, slip, slip, slip, slip, slip into the distance. The forward gunners and that ceased firing and it wasn't 'til the next morning we went out and we found they were carrying a five hundred pound

27:00 bomb between them on a shoulder strap and they left the bomb for us so luckily none of the gunners hit it. But during that time the rest of that operation we were pulled back into positions and company after company got hit with both NVA.

27:30 and VC backing out of the area and quite often we could hear all day ambush after ambush going on. We didn't actually have any ambushes ourselves or any contacts ourselves other than that night. So that was the second action or main action that I was in.

You said that there was ambushes going on all day, you're referring to the Australians ambushing the NVA?

28:00 Yeah. The battalion was brought back into a rubber plantation which had a lot of roads and tracks going through it. The way we were set out by the battalion commander was so that each area was covered and these roads were covered and constantly they would get two or three or even up to ten VC walking along these roads or tracks in which they would ambush them and generally

28:30 get one or two maybe and the rest would escape or three or four usually plant more mines to assist in the ambush. That would help to get some of them. We actually, Charlie Company, the only thing that we contacted was a, as I said the battalion

29:00 was put down this plantation and the only thing that we got because during one of the nights there was four of us in a pit and we were looking out at stand to. It was just on the period when it was not quite dark but not quite light. Anyway, we could here these twigs snapping and we thought, "Hello someone's coming along in front of us." As we were waiting there it was getting darker

29:30 and the shadows were growing and this shadow started moving. We lay there and we gave the signal of enemy and we were sitting there and waiting in anticipation and the next thing this shadow kept coming towards us and it looked like somebody crouched. It came towards us. Anyway someone must have moved or something, they'd heard a noise and this

30:00 thing turned sideways and it was a tiger, and a big one. So he raced out the other side of the plantation and we then relaxed. But it was a hairy that night. So everybody was looking for tigers from there on. There was always pigs and other things.

Unusual encounter.

Oh yes, yes. Oh we had fun with

30:30 Yeah we had a lot of encounters with animals, chimps, possums, snakes. Those were the sort of things. Some funny times with them though. Nobody was ever bitten by a snake but some very close calls.

Any particular types of snakes?

31:00 Little vipers. Green vipers. One case I can remember while we were patrolling we were just moving through this bamboo area and I was watching out to the left. I'd just turned back towards the middle and I heard this rushing sound from behind me and I turned

31:30 around and one of my mates, Tim, was rushing forward at me and he had a machete in his hand and I thought, "He's gone mad. He's gonna get me." Anyway he just chopped it down next to my leg and I looked at my leg and, "No, it's still there." I looked down and here was this little, or it wasn't little, it was about a foot and a half

32:00 viper sitting on its tail ready to bite and he'd slashed it just before it bit, he'd decided to strike. Another one was when we were in a camp we had had an action and one of the engineers had to go down and search the tunnel and one of the things that the VC used to

32:30 do is put traps in these tunnels with snakes. Anyway the engineer climbed into the hole and we could hear shuffle, shuffle and then all of a sudden there was two loud explosions that were gunshots and then there was more and then there was five or six and next thing this head comes popping up

33:00 out of the ground and he jumped up and brushed himself down. I said, "What was wrong?" He said, "Oh there was a couple of vipers in the roof so I had a shot at them." He didn't get any but he had a shot at them. But he got out of there very fast. He used an automatic armalite rifle cut down and he shot at them with that. Not that you'd get very much but it was quite funny when it happened. Another

33:30 ambush in this same camp one night. The rustling was heard out the front. The claymore mine had been set out against the trunk of a tree and then we got the signal that it was enemy so we were all stand to. This rustling kept going on. It was on the other side of this trunk so they

34:00 pushed the claymore clacker which set it off, bing, boom. Anyway the next morning they found a pig that would have been coming towards them. So yes, quite a few things with animals.

How important is it to know the wildlife of the jungle in conducting operations against the VC and the NVA?

Well

34:30 we didn't know about tigers at that time. Really that was one thing that never really came up. The only thing we learnt about were the snakes as to tell which they were and how deadly they were and what

you needed to do if you got bitten. But we got told there was many different things. You had water buffalo, pigs, but we didn't know

35:00 about the tigers, as I said, and the snakes. Apart from that we didn't know much about them. 'Til one operation about monkeys too.

An operation?

Yeah, whilst they were on operations we'd been walking through this area and we heard these noises in the trees, low down in the trees further up. So we immediately got into an ambush. While we were waiting

35:30 next thing this family of monkeys comes swinging through the trees. They nearly got blasted. But yeah, those sort of things happened.

I've heard stories that monkeys have been known to give away positions of soldiers?

They could very easily. They could make noises and that. We didn't ever come across it ourselves in that regard. I don't know of any.

36:00 Only this lot of monkeys that nearly didn't stay together.

Were any soldiers attacked by tigers to your knowledge?

Not that I know of. Not that I know of at all. I have heard a couple of people got attacked by a water buffalo. They were in searching, cordon and search of villages and that, and of course the villagers always have water buffalo and they quite often

36:30 used to charge. They didn't like the smell of us. And I only know of one person who got actually hit in the back by this water buffalo. He had his pack and everything on so all he did was go forward into the mud. Was quite funny really. Apart from that, no, I didn't hear of anybody else.

What about crocodiles?

37:00 We had situations with them but we never actually saw them. On Operation Coburg we'd crossed a river in a patrol and we all waded across and everything and we met up with some APCs a little bit later on and when we met up with them

37:30 they said, "Oh, how'd you get across the river?" We said, "Well we waded, you know, came across it." "Did you find any bridges?" "No." They said, "Oh, when we were doing the crossing there was three crocodiles near the crossing." So when we went back they showed us where they had seen them. It was only about twenty metres from where we did the crossing. So it was quite interesting then. But we always, whenever we

38:00 went anywhere and anyone was bathing in droopers or that, we always had sentries posted not only for looking out for protection but also for water to make sure they didn't have any mishaps with animals.

What about insects?

Oh insects. Leeches, mosquito's. Leeches were the worst. Just about everybody

38:30 was affected by leeches. One particular operation again we had to have, the medical officer had condoms flown out because there was a lot of cases of the leech actually crawling up and going up the eye of the penis, which never happened to anybody in ours but there was several people affected

39:00 in another company. So they sent all these condoms out. I was very lucky in my time there. I only ever got one leech on me that I know of and that was on my wrist and I was never affected by them. Same with mosquitoes. I wasn't affected by mosquitos at all. Yet there was a couple of blokes in the section who had no end of trouble with leeches.

39:30 Dozens of them on them after walking through the swamp areas and the jungle and that as well. But I was very lucky. A lot of the other blokes were too.

So when you were given these condoms everyone wore them I take it?

No. How would you hold them on.

40:00 We didn't have rubber bands. No nobody wore them. Night time some of the blokes wore them but.

Only on trips to Vung Tau presumably?

No.

Not even then?

Not that I know of.

Tape 6

00:31 **What can you tell us about the Americans over there?**

Very sloppy. They didn't know about anybody else. They were only interested in themselves. We served several operations with them. One time it was with a tank unit and

01:00 they nearly ran us over even though they knew our position and we had to get up and out of their way during an evening. They had a wonderful way of doing clearing patrols. What they called clearing by fire and when we worked with them we had to make sure that we knew exactly where they were because they just opened with fire and cleared everything in front of them.

01:30 By the same token there was some good, very good units. They were very friendly when they got to know you. Their rations were fifty, fifty. Very rich in

02:00 sugars and things like that. We served with several units, as I said. During Operation Santa Fe we nearly got cut up by them because they had, our section was out on a patrol, a sentry post and they saw this movement in the bush and even though they knew that we were there

02:30 they changed their sentry on the gun on their tank and he looked up and saw a movement and immediately radioed in that he was going to start opening fire and he had the gun on the tank lined up and the fifty cal lined up and we had to stop them before they opened fire. During Operation Coburg they were

03:00 very nervous and one time while we were on, the whole company was on patrol, they flew over the top of us and dropped grenades on us which didn't go down too well. Also that same operation as a platoon doing patrols we got bombarded again by a small helicopter dropping grenades and firing.

03:30 What else? They didn't work very well in as much as what they did. Again on Operation Coburg we flew in to set up a fire support base. We were taking over from a light infantry unit. We flew into this clearing in Ben Wah province

04:00 and we were the first company in to set up the guns. So we flew in, took charge of the area. These Americans were there and there was a company of them and we said, or my section commander said to them, "What are the Cong like around here?" "Oh, no worries. No Cong around here," and they said, "Do you go out on patrol? What are your patrols seeing?"

04:30 "Oh no we don't go out there that's Cong land." Meaning the Viet Cong were outside in the bush but they weren't going out there so there was no Viet Cong where they were. That's all they were meaning. And on that same fly in, the rest of the battalion flying in, A Company flew in to the one corner of this big clearing. They'd just dropped and started moving

05:00 towards the trees and they hit or the Viet Cong hit them. B Company dropped in the other corner. They started moving in, they got hit. D Company went up further, they got hit, and these Americans were still there. They hadn't been flown out at the time and we said to them, "No Viet Cong here?" And we said, "Have you had any actions?" "Oh well we only had one." But it turned out that

05:30 it was one of their own patrols. The two of them had clashed in the bush and shot each other up. But apart from that they were good soldiers when they stayed away from us. Wasn't impressed with them. Yet when I went to Thailand on R & R [rest and recreation] with them, the two blokes I went with, one wasn't so nice but the other bloke was very, very good. He was from Cav Regiment

06:00 and he was very good. He was very nice. But the other bloke was a bit of a southerner and didn't like the Negroes so he let me know. But apart from that didn't have much else to do with them.

When you said firstly on a clearing patrol they would just clear with gun fire, do you know if

06:30 **is that how they were trained?**

That's how they would do it. Especially armored units. That's the way they do it. They don't get out and clear the same way we would do it. Even our cavalry people made sure that they sent out people to clear their perimeter. They don't always do it by vehicle but at least they give it a go.

07:00 Yeah we never experienced it ourselves. Just always made sure we were away from that area. And Operation Santa Fe was a combined operation and we had them with us most of the time but the time we worked with them was in the fire support base and they also had their guns there.

07:30 It was an armored unit that we were working with. They got a tank bogged so they brought up another tank to pull it out and it got bogged too so they bought up another tank to pull it out and they couldn't get 'em out so they said, "Oh you've got an hour to get it out or we blow it." So they were going to blow two tanks up just because they were bogged.

08:00 So that was interesting.

What would the Australians do in that case?

Oh well, at that stage, we didn't have any tanks there. They didn't arrive 'til after we left and the Australians would not have, they would have got the tanks out. But luckily they were able to pull it out. They towed it the rest of the way.

08:30 **How much, I'm trying to phrase the question properly. The American tactics - how much do you think they played into them actually losing the war?**

I really couldn't say because they're different, they had different tactics. Their marines had different ways, their army had different ways.

09:00 Never came into contact with any marines so I don't know if it did. But their idea was to occupy a bit of space and patrol from it whereas ours wasn't. Once they'd patrolled from it they'd go back and that's the end of it. The Australians when we, sure we occupied Nui Dat but we constantly patrolled

09:30 out in all our areas around the taskforce. We sent in major operations into those areas. We always had, it wasn't always clear but at least we were aggressive in doing it. Where the Americans would sit on a hill and stay there and let everybody else, the VC and North Vietnamese go around them

10:00 as much as we could see. But by the same token there were some units that actually went out and fought for ground and were aggressive in their patrolling but they didn't maintain the aggression all the time like we did. In as much as to losing the war, I don't think, nobody actually lost it. It was

10:30 agreed that everyone would pull out and that's what happened, everyone pulled out, and it was only then after everybody else had gone that the North Vietnamese broke the peace that had been signed and with their massive support they just rolled over the South Vietnamese. Because when you look at it, it was nineteen seventy five.

11:00 Australian troops were out of there by nineteen, end of nineteen seventy two and the Americans were out of there by seventy three. There was only a token force there to assist in training so really it was, they didn't really lose it. They lost a lot of people but they didn't really lose. It was just the North broke the truce

11:30 and that's my opinion. And the Australians never lost either.

Do you think, what do you think the Americans could learn from the Australian way of doing things?

Well everybody has their own tactics and things. I really don't know. They have a different concept of everything. They

12:00 have such a large army. They work in armies where we don't and I'm not a tactician in that way to say how they would.

What about, what did you see of the American fire power and machinery over there?

Fantastic. What they could do with their weaponry was magnificent.

12:30 But by the same token it could be very destructive. Their spraying of areas with defoliant. That was very destructive and yet maintained areas where we could operate which were opened up and gave us a chance. So

13:00 that nobody came near us and that. Around the taskforce and that hadn't been sprayed so got nothing there. We moved up into some areas where it did and you could always tell where they'd been, where they had been. The bombers, the B52 strikes and that you really knew where they had been and

13:30 they were very good when we needed them as well. During Operation Coburg we were in an action where we needed their bombing and they were very precision bombers. They really helped us out a lot.

When you called in air strikes and so on were the Americans pretty on the spot or

14:00 **pretty accurate?**

Yes they were. Yep. They were always on target where we wanted the, wanted it layed down. Sometimes it was close but that's what we required and they did a good job as far as that went. Most of their, the airforce side were very good like that and

14:30 they, as I said, they helped us out when we needed them and it was good.

What other planes would they send in besides the B52's as air support?

Well the B52's were mainly in big bombing runs. We mainly had Skyhawks, the Phantoms and we also had the Australians in the Canberra Bombers

15:00 and they assisted us during Oeration Coburg when we needed them. But the Skyhawks and the Phantoms they were very good.

Personally your view when you see the power of the American armed forces, is it a bit awe inspiring or how do you feel when you see them in action?

- 15:30 Very technical. Every things driven by technology. But that's alright so long as the technology doesn't break down and then they've got to go back to manual way of thinking and I think that would be their downfall because they're trained to such a high standard in technology. It helps to defeat
- 16:00 the enemy as it did in the current day wars. Vietnam well that was their testing ground for a lot of this stuff and it was a case where they couldn't or they didn't maintain it altogether and they should have been able to utilise that
- 16:30 technology of then to really carry on a proper war. Because they had the know how but it was all politically driven and that was a lot of problems with the American forces. It was political and we even found it in our side, the Australian side, that politics came across to our side as well.

17:00 How would the politics affect the man on the ground there?

- It didn't affect the man on the ground, what it affected was the decision makings at a higher level for various actions. That's like Westmoreland and that, if they really wanted their way they wanted to go all the way through to, they didn't want to worry about the DMZ [demilitarized zone], they wanted to go through to Howard in the very early stages of war and just cut it out
- 17:30 but politically they couldn't do it. And because repercussions, they used to say then, were that China would come in on the North Vietnamese side and then it would escalate into a bigger war and things like that. And in American the politicians were all swayed by the protestors and all that sort of thing. As were in Australia, we had our protestors during that time.
- 18:00 But our actions were governed by what our commanders wanted and how they did it. We didn't want to be joined to any American forces in such as the first battalion were amalgamated with the 173rd Airborne. We wanted a taskforce by ourselves, we got a taskforce by ourselves. We looked after our province by ourselves and we did it.
- 18:30 We did our task as we were required to do it and that was to go and pacify Phuoc Toy province and we did that for many, many years. It was only when we started to get taken out of the province to other areas that the VC and NVA moved back in to the Phuoc Toy province. 'Cause as main units the battle of Long Tan
- 19:00 was where we made our name in Australia as Australians and that was the first major defeat in Phuoc Toy province for them and it really made them aware of the Australian forces. From that date our skirmishes and contacts in Phuoc Toy province were only of a lower kind or small actions except for when you come to the
- 19:30 Tet Offensive of nineteen sixty eight when it was a major offensive by them but even that became quickly put down by the Australian forces in Phuoc Toy and that the battalion was outside or the taskforce was outside of the province at the time which showed that we could operate outside the province as well as maintain the province at the same time.

20:00 As an Australian soldier was the politics of the USA or the politics of Australia, which had more impact on you on the ground?

- The Australian politics were. As I said at the very start that I was transferred from the platoon I was supposed to be in to another platoon because of a political reason. And
- 20:30 that's the only time politically that it affected me and I can't really talk much more on that because I didn't know what the political decisions were being made above my head. I operated under the orders of what our battalion commander got and he got his orders from the taskforce commander and that's the way it worked. Politics didn't come into it for us. We had a job to do and we did it.

21:00 But at the time you understood politics was playing a part didn't you?

No not really. We didn't worry about it, as I said. In a lot of cases a lot of politics was going on but we didn't know about it. It didn't concern us at the time. We were there, as I said, to do a job. We did our job and then we left.

In Operation Santa Fe you worked with Americans or it was a combined

21:30 effort. How did the US and Australian forces work together in that operation?

- We didn't actually work together. They were given tasks and we were given tasks. We operated within those tasks. The Americans, what it was is we were going to our areas of operations, the Americans were on that side and that side, they were forcing the,
- 22:00 supposedly forcing the enemy down. The AVRN were coming in from the right hand flank and we were taking up the bottom and moving forward. We didn't actually come into contact with them 'til later on in the operations when their flank came around and met up with ours. 7RAR were on the left hand flank of

the taskforce units. They, we met up with the

22:30 tanks and that who were also with the artillery and they were there to assist with the artillery. They were operating north of us at the time so we didn't actually come into contact with them until this night when they decided to run through our position. Where they were going, we don't know. Where they stopped, we don't know either but that was the only confrontation we had with them in that operation

23:00 apart from while we were in the fire support base.

What was the main objective of Operation Santa Fe?

Well they were supposed to drive the enemy down towards us and we were supposed to be the cutoff party and take out as many as we could. It didn't eventuate like the whole story was supposed to be but we did

23:30 have major contacts during Santa Fe and we did what we were required to do.

What actually happened in the end? Did it fall apart a bit or?

No it was only supposed to go for a certain time which we were committed to during all that time. It was supposed to go from one date to another date and then they brought us back from the operation. We actually

24:00 escorted the Americans back from the fire support base because a lot of them came through us from the north and we ourselves with Australian APCs came back and supported and escorted them because they had a lot of damaged vehicles and various tanks and

24:30 that as well and we just had parts of the Cav Regiment in the front, in the rear, and interspersed between them as well and we just brought them all through and they went their way and we went ours back to the taskforce.

What can you tell us about the American soldiers and the way that they treated their black soldiers over there?

It was

25:00 very interesting that they, the things that I came across were that there was a lot of resentment against some of those the Negro soldiers. My time I had in Thailand, I went for R&R. The American white

25:30 soldiers would not mingle with the black soldiers. Some of their units, in some of their units there was if it was an armoured unit or an APC unit, this APC would be all Negroes and this one would be all whites. And quite often it would be a troop of Negroes and a troop of whites and they used to segregate them

26:00 like that. I didn't have anything to do with any of the infantry units where there was Negroes. I never came across any Negroes in the group the that company we landed in that took over from Coburg with. And apart from that I didn't see too many other Negro soldiers apart from when I was in Saigon

26:30 and most of those blokes were on leave anyway. They weren't in combat.

Off camera before you were telling us about having a drink with a couple of Negro soldiers and the guy, one of your mates, can you tell us that for the camera?

As I said, when I went to R&R in Thailand we stayed at a hotel. There was only two Australians that went to Thailand

27:00 in my plane load. All the rest of them were Americans. Mostly whites and a group of Negroes. There was one group of Negroes that went to the same hotel that we stayed in and I'd teamed up with two Americans. One bloke by the name of Ritchie and one by the name of Darren. Ritchie was a very nice American.

27:30 Tall. Very free with his money and that. He was very good to talk to. Been to Australia before and he liked it. But the other American was not a bad sort of bloke to start off with, but one day I had this drink, I was by myself, and I was sitting out next to the pool and the Negroes were down the other end.

28:00 So I thought to myself, "Well go down and join them." So I went down there and talked to them and we had a drink together and that and anyway when one of the other white Americans came out they said, "Oh, you'd better leave now," and I said, "Why?" and they said, "Oh, you're friend's up there." And I didn't realise much then and so anyway I said "Oh, okay I'll catch youse later." So I

28:30 went up and I talked to Darren and while we were talking he said "You want to stay away from them." And I said, "Why." He said, "Well they're black." And I said, "So?" He said, "Well you don't mix with them." I said, "I'll mix with whoever I want to," and I said, "If you've got a problem with it well that's your problem. It's not

29:00 my problem and if I want to talk to them I will because I'm not a rascist." We had Aborigines in the battalion. One of my very good mates in the platoon was an Aboriginal. In fact we had two Aborigines within the platoon and there was no difference between them and me. They bleed blood the same as I

do. They're doing the same job as I do and those blokes were doing the same thing.

29:30 So anyway I went back towards them and the, one of the chaps said, "Look we don't want to cause you any trouble. Thank you for the gesture, that's very nice of you, but it would be better if you stayed away from us 'cause we'll only get you into trouble with the whites." So that was a very interesting lesson I learnt about the

30:00 American soldier then. And apparently that went on quite a lot. When I spoke to friends of mine who'd also been to Thailand and other places with them that the Americans were like that.

Do you think it's funny that they treated the Negros like that and yet the Negros were fighting for them?

I think when they, altogether the whole thing, idea was stupid. They were there. They were all in the same army doing

30:30 the same job and a lot of them died too. So they were very narrow looking, as I said before, they only cared about themselves as far as that went and sometimes the American soldier is not really well educated in some cases. A funny thing happened in before we went to Thailand. Bill, who was the other bloke and myself are

31:00 sitting there and in what they called Camp Alfa, which was a transit camp. Anyway these group of American soldiers came up and they were sitting there. They were looking at us very peculiar. Of course we're talking amongst ourselves and anyway one of them came up and they weren't very far away, about as far as you and I, and they said to me, they said, "What army are you guys from?" And we

31:30 said, "From the Australian. From the Australian Army." "Are you guys here?" "Yeah." "God damn, didn't even know you were here." He said, "How come you speak English." And I was very quick on it and I said, "Oh we took a special course before we came over here in English so that we could talk to you blokes." And he looked amazed as much as his friends did. He said, "Golly that's interesting,

32:00 but I never heard of you guys being here." So they were wrapped up in their own world and they didn't know much about it. You ask them anything about America, yeah they'll tell you. You ask them anything about anywhere else outside of America and they can't.

Just a quick question on that. Do you think being the superpower they are running really very powerful in the world and yet they don't

32:30 **know much about the world around them, what do you think about that?**

Well I can't really answer that because I haven't really come across many Americans since then. The one's I have, have been through the current army and all those soldiers are very professional. They do know outside of America and when I was talking about that, I was talking about back in that time.

33:00 But, however, there's a lot of them that I've heard when they've been exercising with our troops on crocodile and kangaroo exercises that have been very dumbfounded to find out so much about Australia when they get here. So it doesn't progress all the way through. Some of their senior sergeants are very, very well educated. Half of them have got degrees hanging out of their,

33:30 all over them and they say they're smart and in a lot of cases they may be smart but they haven't got any common sense.

Can you tell us a bit more about the Aborigines in your company and why they were there and how they got there?

Well Duncan Newman was a very close friend and still a close friend. We see each other often. We write letters

34:00 every Christmas to Duncan and his wife. He lives in Queensland. Duncan was a regular soldier as well. He was as good as anybody. He is well educated. He is, well he's no different to you and I and he's a very good soldier. He stayed in the Regular Army for many years.

34:30 I think he got out at about nineteen ninety two as well. He also was in infantry for a long, long time and transferred across to ordnance. But he is and always will be, as far as I'm concerned, one of the best members I've known. The other chap, a bloke by the name of Mazza Clark. Mazza went back many,

35:00 many years with the army. He enlisted in the Regular Army towards the end of the Second World War. He did the Malaya, Borneo with 3RAR. In between that he was also at the Korean War and then he came back in for Vietnam when 3RAR first made up 7RAR.

35:30 And Mazza was an inspiration to a lot of us for everything. He had a lot of knowledge, bush craft as well as common sense. He was a real good bloke. Those, they're just two of the people that I know who are very good. I've met many other Aborigines during my time. There's

36:00 another photo or a painting of a bloke called Darcy Butler who his portrait hangs in the Australian War Memorial and Darcy was from Darwin and Darcy was his nickname. No matter what. He again was an

old soldier, a regular soldier, and he'd give you the shirt off his back. He is very good. He is a good mate again.

36:30 I've seen him twice in the last five years and I hope to see him when I go to Darwin next time as well. He keeps in touch with a lot of people and as I said there's no difference between him and us and they're all great people.

From what you saw of them, did they have problems fighting

37:00 **for the white Australian government type of thing or?**

Well they wouldn't have joined the army otherwise. They, as I said, every one of them were regular soldiers. I came across some medics who were there, national servicemen. They were also in the army and they were fabulous medics. There was no two ways about it. Every person that I know has

37:30 that I've seen in the army, both male and female, and that's back there and even up to now, They've all been very, very good people. There's no two ways about them. They're not politically motivated. They're in the army because they want to be in the army. They do the same job. Everybody gets their hands dirty. They're not looking for anything other than what they're in the army for.

And defending a united homeland

38:00 **I guess?**

Well it is. It's just as much their home as it is ours. There's no difference. That even goes back to the Second World War. Reg Saunders who was in the desert, later on he was in Korea. He was a normal soldier, a private soldier. Made his way up the ranks, got commissioned to captain battlefield

38:30 promotions and he was a captain in Korea at Kapyong and he was another one who was a truly respected man both for his bravery and for who he is himself.

Would they undergo any racism from other Australian soldiers or?

Not that I know of. There was always, "Oh yeah, you're nothing but an Abo," but.

39:00 I remember walking down the street with Duncan in uniform and there was about six of us and himself and we were all about the same size, height and everything, he stopped the lot of us and he says, "Hey, do you notice that all of these people are looking at us?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "They're not looking at you they're looking at me." And I said, "Why's that?" He said, "Well I'm the most handsome."

39:30 "Oh yeah Duncan." And he said, "True." He said, "I'm black. You're only white, you're just like everybody else." And that's the way he'd go on but we had fun you know. Even I saw him last November, Duncan, we went to a battalion reunion and it was great to see him and Barbara again and we just carried on like it was

40:00 sixty six was yesterday and he's still getting called all sorts of names and he calls us just as much as he gives. He gives as much as he gets.

Tape 7

00:30 **How often did you get leave?**

I got R&C once in Vung Tau which was five days and R&R in Thailand for five days. That was the only two periods I had.

What's the difference between R&C and R&R?

R&C is in country and it goes to Vung Tau only

01:00 and we had the resorts down there. R&R is rest and recreation outside of country. So you go, people used to be able to come back to Australia, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong. One bloke went to Honolulu. Those are the main places where they went.

How important was brothels to the soldiers there?

01:30 Dunno, didn't use 'em. I don't know of many like I said before the taskforce was a closed community and we didn't go, if we went out the only time was to collect sandbags or things like that or operations and the R&C,

02:00 well that's not what I went for. I went out to have a good time, buy some stuff from the PX [canteen] and things like that. That's what most of the people that I was with did too so I don't know. Never saw it during that time but there was a lot of bar girls and all that sort of things. Oh the only other time was R&R,

02:30 the Saigon Guard. When we went to Saigon we had one day on, one day off through that period. But as far as the Australians go I don't know really that much about it on that side.

Were you given any lectures about sex and VD [venereal disease] and all that?

Yeah we were told that. Before you left for R&C or R&R

03:00 you were given contraceptives to take with you if you wanted them and also they were available at the R&C and R&R centres. They were available in Saigon as well. One thing I do remember was in Saigon they actually used to put a board outside in the hallway of those bars where people had

03:30 been infected. They used to put them up and say they were out of bounds for anybody else once it happened. I remember we'd been drinking at this bar that was not far away from the hotel and when we walked in they were just writing it up that that one was out of bounds so we said, "Oh good thing nothing happened there." I didn't really go for any of that.

04:00 **Can you tell us about the terms that are unique to the Australians in Vietnam for instance to begin with you've probably heard of PCOD?**

PCOD, no I haven't, can't say I've heard that one.

No oh well, PCOD means Pussy Cut Off Date.

04:30 No haven't heard that one at all. No. No. That one doesn't strike a bell what so ever.

Apparently before soldiers would leave Australia they had to for one month, this is what the last guy said, that for one month they weren't allowed to go to bars or something like that and that's what they called PCOD, they couldn't go to Vung Tau.

Never heard about that one at all. Nup.

05:00 Completely new. Maybe it was after my time.

Is it possible that different units had different expressions?

Oh that could well be. Navy have different expressions to what army do. A pair of getters is a pair of thongs. A goffer

05:30 is a soft drink; in the navy it's not, it's a something else. Different things like that. Now I can't quite think of many at all. We used to have goffers. That's about all I can remember at the moment.

No unique slang?

06:00 No it was just normal.

What would you call the AVRN forces?

The AVRN? Just AVRN.

Was there any nickname? Chaven? Have you heard of Chaven?

No.

Charlie at night, AVRN by day.

No. Haven't heard that one. Don't know it.

Ok, it seems to be different units have.

Different units have different sayings, yes.

So Infantry and Engineers for instance, it seems from my experience just now and yesterday.

06:30 **What about Viet Cong and the NVA? Would you have your own localised expressions?**

Oh noggs.

Sorry?

Noggs.

Noggs?

Yeah or Charlie. That was about all we called them. Or fish eaters. That was about all. Or the bad guys. That's about it yeah.

07:00 **Can you define where did nogg and fish eaters, where did they come from? What do they mean?**

Oh fish eaters from they eat fish a lot. Fish and rice was mainly their staple diet in a lot of cases especially when you got down to areas around the beaches and Vung Tau and things like that. Noggs I

don't know where it actually came from but

07:30 sometimes it's a bit like some people used to refer as not oriental gentlemen. Same as some people used to call wogs westernised oriental gentlemen and things like that. Just a few names like that but the noggies or nogs we always used to say or it was just Charlie or that's about it really. But nogs was a general

08:00 term for all Vietnamese. Didn't mean whether it meant male, female, north or south.

Were you there in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive?

Yes. The nineteen sixty eight Tet Offensive we were well and truly in it. The battalion was given, or the taskforce was given a

08:30 task outside of in Ben Wa province out of Phuoc Toy and that was Operation Coburg. It started before the end of the new year, before the end of the Tet period, when the NVA and the North Vietnamese government gave, honoured a

09:00 peace during that period, a truce period. They said they were going to do it but what they did was use the truce period and the lead up to it to put many units into position for an attack that was to happen over that, the Tet. As I said the taskforce was give the task to fortify and protect the northern side

09:30 of Ben Wah air base and the taskforce moved up in January. We formed two fire support bases, Anderson and Harrison, and we went to Anderson. We set up the fire support base there. That's where I was saying before about the Americans

10:00 telling us of, "No there's no, we don't, no nogs here. No Charlie here." Or they didn't patrol because it was Cong land. So that's where we flew in to set up fire support base Anderson. The battalion itself, we were given an area on the western side of

10:30 the line between the taskforce area of Ben Wah, just above Ben Wah and more towards the main highway. Not too far off the main highway. The battalions role was to patrol the area, our AO [area of operations], and during that time it had

11:00 numerous contacts of the enemy both North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong units themselves and these were organised Viet Cong battalion size units. The Americans mainly left us to do all that area and so we were free agents to operate throughout that area.

11:30 As I said we set up the fire support base. We were support company of that fire support base. The guns flew in, they set them up. We did patrolling of the fire support base area. We went out in platoon lots, not as a company lot. Our platoon, during that period, we went out for several days at a time. The

12:00 company went up. That's also where we were talking about the crocodiles. The Cav had seen the crocodiles in the river where we'd waded across and they'd picked us up and brought us back. Each of the platoons within the company would have specific roles at the time. They would go out one side, we'd go out the other side and we wouldn't meet in the middle but we'd each

12:30 come a different way back so that nobody wouldn't get used to us. We were doing one patrol and we'd found a roadside or a road and we followed it up 'til it petered out. On our way back, as we came back the forward scout all of a sudden up with his rifle and shot and there was two VC who'd been following us. We didn't know whether they had been coming,

13:00 following us or had just been going up the track. We killed one and the other one took off to the bush. We following him, following this one across and layed down quite a lot of fire. We think he may have been wounded, it looked like blood, but we didn't follow him any further. We cam back from that to the fire support base. The task

13:30 force commander told that we were going to be relieved. That Charlie company seven was going to be relieved and they brought in Charlie company of 3RAR. At that stage 3RAR had been brought in to the taskforce so we had three Battalions on the ground. Charlie company 3RAR flew in and they took over our positions inside the fire support base. The company

14:00 then moved out and did patrolling of the northern areas. During that time that we had several contacts with the VC. We set up an ambush position after the Tet Offensive itself. When it happened we didn't know the full extent of the story. We had intel to say to them there was a lot of attacks around the nation and around South Vietnam and various

14:30 things. Anyway we were in this creek bed area and we had VC come past us, many come past us. One night we had three contacts in a row with them and killed two soldiers in each one. We were also lying, from our position the section commander, Doc and myself, we were looking out towards Ving Wa

15:00 and we could see what we used to call puff and the magic dragon. It was a C47 Nolta Koda fitted with Gatling guns and we could see it flying around dropping flares and firing their Gatling guns and they were using tracer as well and you could actually see it coming out of the sky where this aircraft was. It was like a big cone just coming straight down. These

- 15:30 machine guns used to cover the size of a Victorian AFL [Australian Football League] field with one round every six inches either way. We later got reports that when an infantry unit went in there, an American infantry unit, they found something like about nearly a thousand dead North Vietnamese. That battle lasted most of the night and we could hear it and see it and
- 16:00 it was interesting watching the fireworks from where we were. The American Air Force were going in there and bombing as well. We could see the explosions. The lighting up of the ground and everything when they went off. Several times we went in, had contacts through that area. Just small contacts to start off with and they grew in intensity
- 16:30 of the amount of people because what had happened was now that the NVA forced the Tet had been put down in a lot of cases and these people were getting away and they were coming through in unit strength. We had reports that the battalion headquarters where they were that at one stage there was over three hundred NVA went past
- 17:00 their position. They didn't fire because they were only about one hundred strong and we like to have numerical superiority in most cases. But they didn't fire but they called in guns on to them when they watched which direction they were going and hope that they hit somebody during that period. We later on, the battalion got
- 17:30 we were getting a lot of actions around the place. D Company had had quite a few actions. They had a lot of action contacts and one major battle. We, our company became the taskforce stand by company and the use of that is if any company got into
- 18:00 a bad situation or a bad action we would be put into it to reinforce them in the action. We then were given an area which we had to go and have a look at. It had been cleared by 2RAR and we were to go in and just have a look to see one area where they hadn't actually been through.
- 18:30 When we went into the area we found a lot of fresh tracks, roads and things so we started to follow them up. On one morning we were following that up and the 9 Platoon was the first platoon up and all of a sudden the field signal came back for enemy. So we went
- 19:00 down in ambush positions along the track and they went forward. The instigated or initiated the contact and what the message was later on coming down that the person they'd seen had been on the toilet, on a thunder box. So they waited for him to finish and when he pulled his pants up they shot him. When they did that all of a sudden they were hit by fire.
- 19:30 They were heavy machine guns and rocket launchers. We pulled back a little way and then regrouped, took our packs off and we assaulted forward. Again 9 Platoon was leading and when we did that this was later on we went forward, we'd already called in the artillery
- 20:00 by our forward observation officer. He dropped rounds onto the position where the enemy were and there was silence so we went forward again. We moved into the area of that, 9 Platoon leading, 8 Platoon in the rear and 7 Platoon was on the left hand flank. 9 Platoon come into heavy contact again with heavy machine guns up to the calibre
- 20:30 of about 50 cal. Rocket launchers, small arms automatic fire, so there was a major force there. At that time we'd taken three casualties in 9 Platoon and also at the same time in our position we came under fire, heavy fire by machine gun. The sections,
- 21:00 our section with Doc and that were all along this side of the track and 2 Section was along the other side. While we were lying there, as I said, we came under this heavy fire. It started to split the ground where we were and one of my friends who was no more than about eight metres away was hit in the chest. He rolled over and
- 21:30 another friend of mine, Slippery, he tried to help him but Mick died there and then. So we were ordered back out to break contact and move back and they'd bring in the bombers and artillery. So they brought the, 7 Platoon was to be the remaining platoon
- 22:00 while everybody fell back through us. When they pulled back through us they were carrying the three casualties of 9 Platoon. They took them back to a landing area and also the platoon sergeant came and picked Mick up and took him out as well. So we lost one killed and three wounded in that action, the start of that action. We pulled back to another creek bed. During that time the
- 22:30 artillery started to come in heavy on the position and we picked up our packs and moved back. Then they brought the bombers in and they dropped napalm high explosive on it. We had a chopper in the air and a Hawkeye aircraft who used to fly around and they also used to direct the bombers and also artillery. They could see
- 23:00 what looked like platoons of VC or NVA in the inside this area. There was heavy bunkers there and what they could see and the firing stopped when the bombers came in and dropped the napalm and that. We fell back to a bamboo clump about five hundred metres away

23:30 and the artillery went in again. It was coming on dusk at that time. The artillery was dropping, they reckon that they fired over a thousand rounds during that night on the position. They had B52s drop sticks of bombs and that and it was quite eventful during the night listening to the

24:00 rounds coming down and that. Nobody got much sleep. We dug into this bamboo clump and I know myself, I was scared. We were all scared and of course we'd lost Mick which was something very emotional for a lot of us. One thing I didn't say before was that while we were in the company position before we came to this

24:30 one, became the Task Force Company, we also lost another bloke in Ross McMillan. What had happened was we were putting mines, claymore mines out, during the night on dusk, before stand to and Roy Savage, our section commander, sent the word around that he was going out. He put his out and came back in. Just before he got back in

25:00 the machine gun started firing in the section on our right and what had happened is Ross had forgotten to tell people that he was going out and he was shot and killed by the machine gun. He was evacuated that night so we weren't on a very good, our morale wasn't very good after that had happened because that was an accident that had happened. So

25:30 when we lost Mick that was another story. That was we were down two and they were both from our platoon and Mick was supposed to come home five days before he got shot and that made it very hard. He used to have a nickname called Mr Wonderful and he was a very good friend of mine as well. He's also gone through core training and recruit training so it made it even harder.

26:00 But getting back to the night we always were letting off steam. "Oh they can't make us go back into there," and "They can't make us do this and they can't make us do that." But my section commander Roy Savage was just sitting back watching us and not saying a word. He was an old soldier and he was with 3RAR in Malaysia and Borneo and he said that later on

26:30 when I talked to him about it he said, "Oh yeah, I knew you were just letting off steam," and he said, "I was as scared as everybody else but you blokes all had your way of doing it and I had my way." So anyway the next morning we got told to go back in and have a look because there'd been nothing. Nobody had seen anything or heard anything from that area. So the company moved back into the position.

27:00 We crossed the creek. The bodies of the VC that we'd first shot were still there and then we went into the camp a bit more and it looked deserted. We sent recce [reconnaissance] patrols in around what areas we could find. We couldn't actually see anybody in there. So we pulled back and what we were going to do was go in the next day and search the

27:30 complete camp. The next morning we moved back up and as we did A Platoon was leading this time and all hell broke loose. They'd been waiting for us. They'd pulled out and come back in and in the first half hour or so we had heavy casualties in A Platoon. My platoon

28:00 was sent in to assist them and to reinforce them and then they took casualties as well. We were starting to lose casualties a lot. 7 Platoon were at the rear, we were being held in reserve. Then we moved up and we came under attack as well and the firing just intensified all the time. So we'd been

28:30 constantly getting hit for four, five hours then and we brought in artillery, we brought in the planes, the bombers again and they were again dropping napalm and that and it came to the point where the fire was getting so heavy that and the

29:00 planes were dropping the bombs too far out and also the artillery was too far out. We had our forward observation officer artillery directing fire in and also our artillery radio man was manning his radio but he'd been hit in the head and he was badly wounded

29:30 but he wouldn't relinquish his radio to anyone. He was putting the orders through on the radio to the taskforce for the guns and Major Phillips, who was the forward observation officer or Captain Phillips at that time, radioed forward to drop the guns down and to bring them in to maximum depth.

30:00 When he did that the CO [commanding officer] of the battalion got on to our company commander and said, "If the guns drop that low then it'll be dropping on your position," and he said, "Well if the artillery doesn't kill us then the VC will because," he said, "I can see them from where I'm standing,"

30:30 and then they dropped the guns down and we were lying there and listening to the rounds come in and as they came through the trees we could actually hear the primers going click as they come through the trees before the detonated. They brought the gunships in to fifty metres from us. That was alright but it still wasn't close enough so they brought the

31:00 gunships in to twenty metres and they were firing in front of us by twenty metres. We just put our heads down. While this was all going on we were trying to get in position. Trying to get up to 8 and 9 Platoon and it was, there was a big fire lane. We didn't realise it was a fire lane until we actually ran across it and at the end of it was a bunker with a machine gunner and he was firing quite

- 31:30 well. He hadn't been touched by bombs or anything else and he was very active. Anyway myself and two others had run across the fire lane and immediately we did it was into a creek bed and the first thing I saw was one of my other mates badly wounded. He had bandages on his head and there was blood everywhere and bandages everywhere
- 32:00 and he said, "Oh am I glad to see you. I thought you blokes were all dead too." And after that he said, "I'll be ok now. You blokes will get us out of this." So I dropped down next to one of the gunners from 9 Platoon, one of the section commanders from 8 Platoon was next to him. A bloke by the name of Bob McFarlane and
- 32:30 my section commander had stopped on the other side of the fire lane. Now this fire lane was about ten metres wide when we ran across it and the gunner had a perfect sight and was firing over the top of our heads because we were just in a small depression. While that was going on Roy, the section commander over the other side, he sings out to Bob, "Hey Bob, we've got to do something about this." And Bob said,
- 33:00 "Yeah ok." And Roy said, "Well I'll tell you what. I'll go up half way, I'll prop, I'll bring up my section and start firing then you come up with the blokes you've got there, you prop it half way and start giving me cover and fire." He said, "And then I'll go up." "Yeah sounds like a good one Doc." "Ok you ready." "Yep, I'm ready." Doc said, "Well, I'm going."
- 33:30 So he races up the side. We open fire with the machine guns and that at this bunker and we're firing away and then Doc propped. He said, "Righto." Bob said, "Well you're half way now you may as well go the rest." And he said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well you're doing the job you may as well complete it." So with that Roy let out a string of words, a
- 34:00 few blood oaths and so forth and "I'll kill you when I see you Bob." And he went off again. As he did he pulled grenades from his pouches, pulled the pins and as he dived on top of the bunker and threw a grenade into the slit at the front and then dropped one in the back and the grenade went off and as he went over the other side
- 34:30 the other grenade went off and he rolled down into the back of the opening and here was the nog trying to get out and he shot him and anyway while Doc was doing that the rest of our section or the blokes on our side and Bob and the blokes on the other side got up and started moving forward and from there on we just kept rolling. Just throwing grenades into bunkers and that. But it was a
- 35:00 very, very big camp and that. It took us until about seven o'clock at night until we cleared it. Everybody was really, the adrenalin was running and everything and as we were going along we felt like supermen at the time. Nothing could kill us today. We were there. We were screaming and carrying on and laughing and yelling at each other and everybody's the same and we're
- 35:30 moving through grenades into the bunkers and firing into the bunker slits as we went through and it was about six o'clock when we actually got to a point where the OC [officer commanding] said, "Stop. Don't go any further." And it was then that we propped and we started calling
- 36:00 out everybody because we've got a system when we stop after an action is to make sure that we know who we've got, has anybody dropped back, or has anybody been wounded or that and so we call out and each one in the platoon or in the section started. Our section, the other sections went through it as well and at the end we ended up everybody in our section was all there so
- 36:30 which was good. Bob's had a few people left and the blokes from 9 Platoon as well.

I'll just pause you there, I just want to ask you a few questions about that action. It obviously sounds like one of the hardest actions you were in if not the hardest in Vietnam?

Yes it was.

Could you actually think straight during that battle. I mean can you try and give me an idea how confusing such a battle would be for a soldier?

- 37:00 Thinking straight. Yes. The adrenalin was high, heart was in our mouth but to think at the time, yes I could see what was going on. I could see, you know, every detail was being taken in. I knew where Doc was. I knew where the other blokes in my Section were. In making a decision as to what to do at the time I
- 37:30 looked around and I made an appreciation from the ground as to where there was cover and where there wasn't. So I was able to slide into cover as I did it when I with next to the gunner, Tanksy, from 9th Platoon. Bill Osbourne, who is my, one of the other blokes that came across with me. He was on my right and also Slippery Dowling. We all knew what we were doing. We all did it instinctively
- 38:00 at that way that everybody knew exactly what everybody was doing at that time. We could see each other and so when the order to get up and go we just got up and go. There was no second thoughts about it. We'd had this. We'd seen our mates in that creek bed. All the blood and we didn't know who was alive and who wasn't and but we had to do something otherwise we were gunna
- 38:30 get killed and if we didn't do it. If we layed here and got killed or we got up and started to fight our way

out of it. There was the only thing that we could do. The OC was there with us and he was giving the orders and he was thinking clearly and directly and one time we told him to get down. He said, "This is my bloody company. If anybody else is going to get killed it'll be me." He said, "And I don't want

39:00 anyone else killed so you just shh. I've got to be where I can see what's happening." And that's what he did. And he stood, he was standing up and again in the middle of that was comedian things, very comical things that happened. He was carrying an M79 and, that's like a big shot gun, and he had all these rounds as well because that's what he'd been firing during this time when he'd been hit and

39:30 all of a sudden he said, threw this the 79 to Slippery, he said, "Here Slip take these." And he threw the gun and then all of a sudden he started to produce all the rounds for it. Which were only about that big and about that round. And he's pulling them out his pockets, his basic pouch, from under his hat, everywhere. We're sitting there laughing our heads off at him the way he and we said, "Oh yeah, he'll drop his pants in a minute and pull one out of his backside."

40:00 But he didn't do that. But they were just coming from everywhere and it was so comical the way it was happening and another one was with Tanksy, in that you know everybody was thinking, you know this is all still talking about thinking clearly, and Tanksy he said, "I'm dying for a shit." And we said, "Well you can't dig a hole here." He said, "No." He said, "I can't sit up either." Because the rounds had been coming from that

40:30 high off the ground where we were. And he said, "Well there's only one thing to do." So he pulled his pants down and boy did it stink So those sort of things happened and well he was thinking clearly. He knew he couldn't sit up to do it and so he just lay there.

In the middle of a battle?

In the middle of a battle, you know, he couldn't wait and the OC the same thing he was thinking clearly when he was

41:00 doing what he was telling us. "No I'll get down when my company's safe but I need to stand up and do this."

Very quickly. What were the casualties for that battle for the Aussies?

For us it was two dead and thirty three wounded during that phase. There were more casualties, more wounded, but they were only slightly so they weren't taken out. When we cleared as far as we went that night

41:30 and formed a perimeter it was dark and we had to get the casualties out. We couldn't carry them out because we knew that the NVA or VC were out there still because we saw them out there. One of the sections had screamed back that there was five VC running in this direction. So they called the choppers in.

Tape 8

00:32 **So if you could finish off how many casualties there were?**

As I said there was thirty three casualties that they had to evacuate and after we cleared the perimeter it was getting quite dark. It was around seven o'clock then and because they couldn't be carried out because the VC and NVA were still around so they called in the choppers. The choppers came in, medivac [medical evacuation] choppers

01:00 and they couldn't land but they dropped ammunition to us and also they winched out all our casualties and they were operating under lights which was very dangerous for them. But these guys were wonderful and they took every one of our casualties out. Some of our people, the not so bad, had just shrapnel wounds and that which wouldn't need the major surgeries

01:30 like some of the others did. They were choppered, they left while the others were choppered out and the next day A Team was brought in to cut a pad for them to bring in the rest of the choppers to take these fellows out.

You often see in films and things that the Americans have a doctrine of no one gets left behind. Firstly do you know if that's true for Americans and secondly is there something similar for Australians?

02:00 It's the same for Australians. If we have a casualty whether dead or wounded we always make sure they get out. To my knowledge there was only about six people lost in the Vietnam war altogether. One was a medic who was on a line being winched up and he was shot and the line broke

02:30 and his body was never recovered. They know roughly where it went down but they've never found his body since then. The others, I think, were mainly pilots and that. Not too many others that I know of.

Why do you think the casualties were so low for Australia?

Our training. Our professionalism with it. We knew what to do and how to

- 03:00 do it. And I think just the way we went about things. We looked for cover. Our aim is to run down, call, observe, fire. Where we go down is not the same place as where we fire from and sometimes we don't fire now. We observe before we fire. Or wait for the word to fire
- 03:30 unless we've got a clear target. And that's part of our doctrine and of course this would assist us in that case because you run down where you've dropped they know you've dropped there but we crawl away into some other place so there may be better cover or and that's what we do all the time. We look for cover so we dive down look for that cover and get to it. Sometimes it just there's
- 04:00 no cover but you've still moved away from where you went down, where fire can be brought to bear on you and until you fire they don't know exactly where you are. But as far as our other casualties, the way our casualties went I think it was just the professionalism of our soldiers in the way they conducted themselves during the contacts and that and we didn't suffer as many casualties in that regard.

04:30 Do you know if the Vietnamese people themselves looked up to the Australians, respected them for the way they conducted themselves?

I can't really say that. People I've spoken to on Anzac Day in Viet, Vietnam veterans, who march in the Melbourne one, the Vietnamese, I have talked to

- 05:00 them quite a few times and they were very thankful for our contribution and what we did and the way we were doing it. None of them have actually come out and said, "Thank you very much." Sort of thing though when I was working for the VC I did meet some Vietnamese people and when they'd found out that I'd
- 05:30 been to Vietnam I was thanked because they were able to get out and come to Australia and now leading a very free life as well as their family.

Personally how do you handle it when your mates get killed in action?

At that time I was very emotional about

- 06:00 it. We all were very emotional but we had a job to keep doing and we did it. When Mick was killed for instance and we went back one of our emotional ways was to spruik and say, "We're not going back in there, they can't make us go back in there." And all that when in truth, in the back of our mind we knew we would go back in if we were told to. Where else were we going to go? But it was an emotional outlet
- 06:30 to do it. Whilst I was in Vietnam I made a pact with myself not to drink when I was in Vietnam. The only time I did drink after the first night was when I went on R&C, when I went on R&R and the night we came back from Operation Coburg. I got as drunk as a skunk.
- 07:00 My mates had never seen me. None of the people in the platoon had ever seen me take a beer before and they didn't even know that I could drink and I drunk a lot of them under the table. I felt for it, felt bad for it the next day and I didn't drink after that again either. But it hit me very hard, especially Mick
- 07:30 he was a really good friend. It really did something to me. My friends at that time knew that I was hurting from it because I went and did that.

Did you actually see him killed or?

Yes. I was only about eight metres away from him.

- 08:00 Yeah I did.

Does it happen just very quickly and all of a sudden?

Some people it does. Mick didn't last very long at all. He'd been hit in the chest. Slippy rolled him over to try and give him protection and to talk to him and try and do something for him but it was only a

- 08:30 matter of minutes and he was gone. I could hear but I couldn't really do anything because I was here and he was there and I had my position which I had to maintain and that's what we must do.

You just stick to the routine?

- 09:00 We've got to. If you stopped and did everything that's part of our procedures, you know if somebody gets killed or goes down and you're in the action then you keep going. You've got to protect everybody else. It's part of the team effort and it's when you reorg at the end that you go back to see that they're ok. That's why we have
- 09:30 teams of sections who are up in the attack and there's a reserve section. The reserve sections come through and they are the one's who look after any wounded or dead. But you don't do anything. You've got to maintain that momentum. You've got to do things and I could see that Slippy was with him so I couldn't do anything more for him.

How hard is it to contain your emotions at that time?

- 10:00 It was very. Well I didn't and I know, a lot of people didn't but, you know, it's a hard hit to have someone killed near you and especially when you're such a friend and their life's snuffed out very quickly.
- 10:30 Sometimes it won't hit you straight away. Sometimes it eats you later on but I know my eyes stung there and then when Slippery said, "He's dead." But I had to grieve later, not then. There was things to do and that and I grieved during the night because there was nothing else I could do.

11:00 You said earlier you made a pact not to drink. Why was that?

Because I always wanted to make sure that I was alright. On the first night there I saw what it did to some of the blokes and I just said to myself, "Well I'm not going to be like them." Someone's got to be, if something happens, someone's got to be able to do something.

- 11:30 And that's what I did and when I went to the section it was the same thing. I know because of it I was always on the gun. Whenever we had a free night or it was our turn on the gun, well if there was any duties like that, it was always me during the day, myself and there was two others who used to always do it because we didn't drink or because of that.

- 12:00 There was one, Harry, he never drank while he was in there. Not that everybody saw at all. So we'd drink our soft drinks and so forth.

In a way was that a sort of punishment for not drinking?

No. It wasn't a punishment for not drinking. It was so that, alright, they can have their fun. They can get drunk

- 12:30 but at least someone was there to do the right thing to help them if anything happens. If everybody's drunk then. Have you seen two drunks trying to walk down the road? Well they don't get far and they don't go a straight line but if one of them's not drunk then they can look after them. That's what my thoughts were that if anything happened, and it did happen one night. We got called out to
- 13:00 a cordon and search at eleven o'clock at night. The blokes had been up the boozier. It was quite funny in some ways but there was three of us who weren't drunk and we were able to, and some not so drunk, that were able to make the section work properly and to get everybody into gear and to safeguard these people, let them sleep it off during the night and while we were there 'til the next morning and we were able to operate
- 13:30 effectively and if we needed them well, at that stage, they'd probably be able to operate. But there was several of us who just did it that way and it was my reasoning for it. To make sure that nothing happened to me when it was my fault.

After your mate died, though, and...

I got drunk that night, yes. I didn't care about any thing or any one else that

- 14:00 night. I just went to the boozier and sat outside and tied it on.

Was that in grieving for your mate or just the pressure of the actual operation?

I think it was a combination of things. I think it was, I can't say it was all to do with the loss of Mick. It was also to do with the loss of Mick, oh Mick and

- 14:30 Ross. It was to do with all the casualties that I'd seen. All my mates that had been hurt. The feelings that I had during the action. The near death experience that I could have been one of those. That if the bombs had dropped in the wrong place then none of us would be here. That if the enemy had
- 15:00 decided to counter attack us when we were inside that camp we might not be here. But these are the things that you don't weigh up at the time. It's only when you come down because it was we did two days in that camp after searching it and blowing it then we were taken to, the 3RAR blokes from C Company who'd
- 15:30 been in fire support base, they came up to help us out and they picked our packs because we hadn't had food or anything for those two days which is what we had with us. They picked our packs up and then when we came back they gave us our packs and then we moved back to fire support base and we were taken out from that. The whole battalion was relieved in the field and 3RAR came in and took our places when we went back to Nui Dat.

16:00 Could you talk about what you were going through with your mates?

In which way?

About the loss of Mick and Ross and the way you were feeling?

I actually, I didn't do it with my mates. I did it by myself. Like I said some of the blokes saw that I was drinking but I wanted to be by myself to start off with and then I joined in with them later.

- 16:30 But my initial starting was to just sit there and have a drink and reflect on what had happened, how it happened, what had been done, the way Mick died, the way Ross died. All that sort of thing and the emotion came with it. It built up
- 17:00 in me and then with seeing Steely and the other blokes all in that creek bed and not really knowing how many had survived because we didn't get told straight away because they'd been taken to various hospitals. Different ways they were flown to Ben Wa and a couple of other hospitals and some had been brought back to Vung Tau.
- 17:30 to the one general hospital there. They were scattered so we didn't have the real story of how people were going and what was happening. A couple of lighter casualties were there in camp too to greet us when we got back but like Steely I don't think I ever saw him again because he came home to Australia. Several of them we never saw again because
- 18:00 they were too bad then and they were flown home to Australia straight away. And that puts a lot in your mind too to think about, "Alright they've been flown home to Australia, they're bad. How bad are they." And just the thought that, "What's that person going to be like in years to come?" Emotionally for them too it's a bad time because here they are they're leaving all their mates and they've been wounded
- 18:30 and the emotion of just being wounded themselves is quite horrific because the pain and everything to go with it but they get morphine to make them drowsy and they don't think about it. It's not 'til later on then they start thinking about it. So it's very emotional and that's why I started off
- 19:00 by myself and I sort of did my own crying in my own way and I admit I cried. But after I cried I was able to mix with the other blokes. I'd done my main part of my grief and then mixing with the other blokes and then we were all together and we all talked
- 19:30 about things. "Oh did you see that machine gun that the napalm had hit? Or the Chiron 57 Coreless Rifle that the napalm had gone over?" and they weren't able to use the mechanism. Hundreds of ammunition rounds there but they were never able to put it into action because of that. And just talking with everybody else and everybody bringing their story out. And you'll bring your story out and you're talking
- 20:00 together and that relieves that tension. Gets it out of you and you feel a little bit better but I just kept drinking and a lot of other people did and they tell me later that they tried to wake me up for picket but they told me, they were supposed to have said that I was on picket but I don't remember them so I didn't worry about it. I fell out of my bed, lying on the floor boards, for the rest of the
- 20:30 night. Somebody threw a blanket over me later on and that was about it.

When you were talking with your mates would it be about the good things and the bad things?

In some cases. Talking about Tanksy for instance, about him having his crap in the middle of things, yeah. About Chapman, because some people were not there they did not know what Chapman had done and how he'd done it. Talking about that. Learning about other people

- 21:00 and what they'd been doing. Like Lieutenant Pingleton, who was the team commander of 8 Platoon. When his blokes got hit he was actually going out and bringing them back in himself. He got peppered with shrapnel all through the back but he still went out and he dragged people back in to safety to get them treatment.
- 21:30 Another bloke got hit in the hand and that. So he got hit in the right hand so he couldn't fire his rifle so he had his rifle stuck up between a fork of a tree and was using his left hand, firing, and when it came to changing his mag everything was done with his left hand and he was a cacky hander all the time but. These sort of things come out. You hear about
- 22:00 what people have done and the way they have done it. How another bloke, we'd sent up all our M72 rockets to them. These were a little rocket in an aluminium tube and you pulled it open. They were an anti-tank weapon but they were put up against bunkers and some of them were using them against bunkers. But these bunkers didn't go against anything. They were rugged and tough and
- 22:30 they didn't make much of a dent in them and how they were being shot at shot constantly over and over in the early unit, these bunkers, to try and get rid of the machine gunners and stories of during the night people, we took up our positions in the trenches, in the bunkers and that, while we were in there and one bloke slept on a
- 23:00 reed mat during the night. He rolled over the next morning and there was a body underneath it, one of the VC, and just little things like that. All these little stories came out about who did what and what they'd seen and so it helps you to relieve those pressures. You laugh about things. You feel sad about other things but you hear, at that stage you're talking about all the things that happened, the heroic things like Pinky
- 23:30 bringing back blokes and how many lives did he save in doing that. They reckon he went out about eight times and he didn't get a medal for it or anything like that. Our, the gunner, the bloke on the radio, he

sent one message down to drop fifty and when he did it he said, "And that's bloody close." You don't swear across the net at all and

24:00 when he said that these blokes at the other end of the gun line said, "They must be in trouble." And he's sitting there manning this radio with a bandage over his head and there's blood all over his face. We saw him in the end. He was in the creek bed but he was still manning that radio and he ended up coming back to Australia. He never came back to us. He had a steel plate put in his head. And they're little heroic things that happened during that time and you

24:30 sit and you smile about even though he was badly wounded the way he did it. How that went across the whole taskforce net. Right back to the gun line in taskforce for these guns to fire. Just it helps the emotion to bring it all out. The next day I had a headache but I felt better and we all felt better because we'd been able to do this.

How do the casualties affect the morale of the unit as a whole?

25:00 Well it was very hard for the role call to see how many were missing. We had a company parade and here we are we should have been about one hundred and twenty strong and we were about sixty and that's three platoons and the headquarters and that. It really hit home how bad it had been, the action, and we never really understood how

25:30 much the action was 'til later on. We were told later on that that action was one of the greatest actions that happened to the Australian forces in Vietnam apart from Long Tan and Coral. It's been written about in our books that this is one of the biggest battles fought because it was fought over three days in this time the casualties, the things that happened, the size of the

26:00 camp that we'd taken out and what we'd found there and that has a big profound effect on everybody because you don't know where the casualties were taken or how they were in the end and you just look around and you say, "Where's Steely, where's Mazza, hope they're alright." But life's got to go on. We've still got to go on. We

26:30 still had a job to do.

Did you find alcohol a good coping mechanism?

No. No. Not at all.

Why not?

Well all it did was make me drunk and I just wanted to be there with the boys. The boys were drinking and that's one of the reasons I was drinking too. It's just that it was one way for me to just get rid of things, to deaden

27:00 the feeling that night and then, as I said, I never drank another one from then until I got home, or on the Sydney when we were coming home the last night.

Did others around you use it as a coping mechanism?

I think some, many of them did. Some of them wouldn't go very long without a beer or whatsoever. So I think they did use it as a mechanism.

27:30 Can you take us through your last couple of days in Vietnam and coming home and?

Yeah. We became non-operational towards the end of March and then we were coming home by the Sydney. We were told what date it was going to be in the actual bay for us to be picked up. We had to pick our things,

28:00 pack our stuff up. Some of the people who'd been on the advance party, they all flew home. When 1 RAR came in they took our positions as we were going out and I knew several of the blokes that I waved to in the landing boat as they came up the beach and we went down into the barges and into the sea. And we left behind some of the blokes that hadn't been in country long enough for service in country

28:30 and they went to 1RAR. When we got on the Sydney the first thing that was served up was a meal and when the meals that navy prepare were very, very nice but everybody just looked at it and, because we lived on ration packs and things for so many months our stomachs were kind of about that big and it didn't

29:00 take much to fill them because of the time there, in ten months, I'd say that nine months of it were actually in the field. So we got on the Sydney and here's these big meals. Well it took us, we were on the Sydney for seventeen days and I don't think I really ate a full meal until the fifteenth day. And that was like everybody. The cooks would cook it up after the first

29:30 day and then by the second day they'd halved it and then the third day they'd halved that again and then people started to eat round that much and they did gradually increase it. It was really good coming home. We relaxed. They had a ration of beer on there every night. To start off with because I still didn't drink very much, I used to get in the last bitter on my nest egg and that was good.

- 30:00 We'd only used to pay two bob for it or twenty cents and it was really good like that and we really relaxed. During that time I also did subject B for corporal for promotion and that was down in the bottom of the ships and we'd do half a day of that and the next half day up on the deck sun baking and watching the world go by 'til about the second last day,
- 30:30 We actually arrived back in Sydney on the twenty sixth April and we didn't realise it but the, we had a coxswain in our mess deck and he came down and he said, "Hey come up here." We weren't allowed on deck at night and he said, "Oh that's the lights of Newcastle." So we had a quick squizz over the flight deck, make sure we didn't get caught, back down, "Lights of Newcastle, we're nearly home."
- 31:00 "Yeah, yeah, yeah tomorrow." However the next night he said, "Come up here." So we went up again and he said, "Have a look over there." We said, "Yeah." He said, "That's the lights of Wollongong." We said, "What? Where's Sydney?" "You'll see." So the next night he brought us up again and we said, "That the lights of Sydney?" "No that's Newcastle again." And we said, "Why?"
- 31:30 and he said, "Because," he said, "Do you realise what today is?" We said, "No." He said, "Its Anzac Day." And we hadn't even given it a thought. We didn't even know. We'd sailed up and down the Australian coast line all Anzac Day and then we weren't brought in 'til the twenty sixth of April and we docked at
- 32:00 Sydney at the naval base there, Garden Island, and that's when it really hit us that we were home. Then after that we formed up, we were allowed off the ship to see our relatives and everything and that was very good and then we said the battalion formed up with the other two services, the airforce and the navy, and bands and

32:30 we marched through Sydney on our way home and

Just quickly, why couldn't you dock on Anzac Day?

Because there had never been troops brought home on an Anzac Day before. It would just cause too much turmoil in the city because of the Anzac Day celebrations that were going on and that then so the decision was made that we don't dock 'til the next

33:00 day. And we'd been watching our wake on the Sydney and it was going around and round in circles and it was quiet. We used to ask why that happened. "Oh, no, no, it's just the way we're doing it. We're carrying out exercises on the way home. But yeah.

So then you had a parade?

We had a parade through Sydney and all the RSL had been invited in and they formed a guard of honour down

33:30 George Street and all the way to Circular Quay and we marched from the dock around Woolloomooloo and we didn't like the wharfies very much but they paid us a tribute when we marched past them and then up George Street and everyone a lot of people were still there because of Anzac Day and the crowds were very thick and that's when we went passed the RSL ex-servicemen going

34:00 "Good on you boys and." You could see people the way they their chests swelled and a little bit more spring in their feet and the other thing was, "Why are these people clapping us so much," and it was really good to see. We didn't have any demonstrators or not that we saw. And it was good to see people at the Town Hall. Blokes that had been wounded and that,

34:30 they were there. There was one bloke lost his legs, he was there in a wheelchair and we could see all these people and it was great to see them.

After coming back did you have nightmares or anything like that?

I've had a nightmare ever since I've come back. Vietnam has made an impression on me very much so. I can

35:00 remember things about Vietnam now as you've heard me say. I can tell you in detail what things are but my wife will say also be able to say, well she's asked me, "Do you remember such and such?" and I won't have the foggiest idea of what she's talking about. My memory, in a lot of cases I'll walk from place to place and not think, "Oh I'll go and

35:30 get such and such." And I'll go there and I'll stand there and say, "What am I doing here? What am I doing here?" And I'll forget things very, very easy. And memories of short term memories and that and even long term memories outside that one year I can't remember, but that year I can really

36:00 remember everything. People's names, what happened, when it was, how it was, colours. I can see it as if it's in my mind now as if I'm watching a movie.

What nightmares do you have? What about?

Different sorts of nightmares. I have nightmares about what happened with Mick. The actions that happened there. Sometimes

36:30 the first contact those rounds coming down the road towards me and I wake up, sometimes I don't even wake up really but my wife says my legs are running. Sometimes my arms are flaying. I'm trying to get away. I'm trying to do other things

37:00 I've got a lot of, I have memories like of different things of different times walking through swamps and climbing up hills and firing and lots of things like that but I don't know ask me one thing about most of them they all involve Vietnam and

37:30 war. It happens all the time.

Have you found it hard to cope with them or not?

No. I've learnt to repress some of them in I'll start a little ritual in my mind about things and

38:00 I don't sleep properly which was very good for my wife when we had kids because I always heard them. I do so now. I can tell you what happens out in the street during the night. I used to be able to hear my daughter walking down the street from out in Dalgleish street. I knew her walk and when she was coming in, when she took her shoes off to come in the house. I can say, "What time did you get home last night?" "Oh, such and such a time." "Oh, don't lie to me it was such and such." "Well why'd you ask me

38:30 in the first place?" You know things like that. Something happens I can hear it by instinct and quite often I'll... I sweat a lot when I sleep. Not that I really go into much sleep. I take pills to get me into a deep sleep. I don't sleep a full... I've been to sleep therapists and I've done sleep

39:00 therapy treatment and I don't go into full REM [rapid eye movement] sleep and that's been several times I've had these tests and I never reach REM, the stage of REM of sleep. Only when I take these tablets. They knock me out but I'll only sleep for a couple of hours with them and wake up again.

Is this a part of post traumatic stress

39:30 **disorder?**

Well it's been explained to me that it is. I didn't think I had it until one day I was talking to a counselor and something Jan said while we were talking and he started asking me questions about it. What would I do if such and such happened and do you sleep alright? And she said, "No he doesn't sleep." She answered for me

40:00 in a lot of cases and I never thought I had any problems and then when we started talking about it completely I found that I had a lot of the symptoms.

It's sad to say but Chris we've only got about a minute left and what we usually do in this minute is give you the floor basically and if you want to give a message to whoever's watching this tape or looking at this video and the floor's yours

40:30 I've enjoyed my time in the army but I hope it never comes to where people have to go to war the same as what we do. The soldiers that go today, they get better help than what we do, did, at the end of that war. They get counseling when they come back and they get a lot more help than what we did to start off with and I just hope that everybody gets that same help if they do.

INTERVIEW ENDS