

Australians at War Film Archive

John Morey - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1959>

Tape 1

00:41 **It would be great to hear about your earliest memories and where you were born and grew up?**

I was born in a place called Southsea a suburb of Portsmouth in England way back in 1946.

01:00 The first time that I can remember is living in Southampton. We were living in Southampton, well we moved to Southampton, that's where most of my childhood memories were. And we migrated out here in 1956 arriving in Melbourne on December the 23rd. I remember it was only a couple of days before Chrissie [Christmas].

01:30 I thought it was great because in England you had summer school holidays so we had all of summer, six weeks of summer school holidays and then a trip out here on a boat. Then as soon as I arrived here I had school holidays here so I had about six months off from school, it was fantastic as a kid.

What do you remember about your time in England in those ten years in Portsmouth because that was just after the war

02:00 **in the 40s, 50s and the place got severely bombed didn't it?**

Yes. In fact where we lived in Portsmouth there was a large church just around the corner and that was still basically in ruins where it had been bombed. The house that we lived in, the semi detached houses, it wasn't hit but I think the.

02:30 one next door had been bombed but it had been fixed. But when we moved to Southampton I remember playing in some bombed out houses there as a kid. I expect it's all changed now. There wasn't a great deal of visual reminders of the war except this church

03:00 that had been bombed in Hayle Ave.

What about your folks what had they done what had they done and what was their experience of the war.

Mum was a machinist and also worked in a tobacco factory during the war. She was on I think they call it, the Home Guard. Dad, prior to the war in India, he'd joined the army

03:30 and fought on the northwest frontier in India when England, UK [United Kingdom] was trying to control some rebels, I'm not quite sure of that he had a twelve month stint over there. After his tour finished in India, he went back to England and it was only a month or so until the outbreak of World War II.

04:00 He was then sent to Singapore and was taken POW [prisoner of war] at the fall of Singapore and spent the rest of the war as a POW at Changi. I always found it difficult for Dad's reasoning for why he hated Japs or anything to do with Japan and why he wouldn't eat rice and that, I can understand that.

04:30 now that I've been diagnosed with PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] that I can understand why my father was like he was and why he would never talk about it and why he had aversions with basically anything to do with Japan. His brother died as a POW over there at the conclusion of World War II. He

05:00 was discharged and then he was lured back into the army because they were short of specialist staff and he was in the Signal Corps and the prospect of a pension and various other rewards enticed him back into the army then after the war he went over to Germany on various postings but I'm not quite sure

05:30 What he did over there.

Did he talk much about those experiences or were they too hard?

He never talked about any of these experiences as a POW whether it was too hard or not I don't know.

06:00 He'd talk about leading up to his capture. He'd talk about his stint in India but as far as his war and prison years I don't know what he did. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know how he was treated or he just hadn't talked about that. He was awarded and Mentioned in Dispatches

06:30 He was caught behind enemy lines because apparently the Japs advanced pretty quickly by land down the peninsula and they were taken unawares, he was trapped behind them for a while. He had a lot of radio communications gear and he had to render that inoperative and he had to catch up with his unit who were heading south.

07:00 He talked about that once. I just don't remember all the details of that. He must have had quite a harrowing time.

It must have also been a tough time for your mother because she wouldn't have known I assume?

No that's right and in fact they'd only been married a few months before he was gone

07:30 overseas. He'd come back from India then proposed and I think Mum's parents said, "Oh look he's going away to war again." so they thought, "Why not?" So they'd only been married a couple of months before he went off, a couple of weeks actually before he was sent off to Singapore.

08:00 Yeah so, Mum never spoke about it much but I guess she missed him.

Could you tell us a little bit about those days in the south of England and your schooling and some stuff you got up to as a kid?

08:30 I can't remember a great deal, I guess my earliest recollections were going to school at Portsmouth. We lived on a property, near a property called Battens Point which was my father's father's property and that all got sold up and subdivided probably in the early 1900s

09:00 I suppose but Battens Point is still there, near Portsmouth and we used to walk past there on the way to school. I remember going and playing in a playground down that way near Battens Point and playing on the swings and slides. My grandfather when he was alive was very interested in

09:30 entomology and insects and things like that and I picked up that interest. I guess I was just a six year old kid that played and I don't remember a great deal of day to day things. Then we moved from Portsmouth to Southampton

10:00 and we lived above a shop and my parents went into a partnership I think it was my mother's sister and her husband and they lost a lot of money with them. Dad didn't work in the shop. Mum did occasionally but not very often she used to do piece work at home

10:30 as a machinist. And Dad used to work for some electronic company. After his stint in Germany he retired from the army and went to work for an electronic company making tape recorders. I remember the place was at Hydes but I can't remember the name of the company he worked

11:00 for but he did get to quite a few air shows and a couple of overseas trips with them. I don't remember a great deal of Dad but I did go to school over there. Had a few friends and just did kid things, built billy carts, they weren't called billy carts over there,

11:30 they were trolleys. I used to run around the streets in those things. I was also forming interests in insects and I used to go up to the commons and look for butterflies and moths and beetles. And I used to do a lot of butterfly collecting and pick up caterpillars and putting them into jars and feed them through on various host plants

12:00 Yeah watched the butterflies emerge. I started developing my interest there.

What was the shop?

It was a mixed business. They sold everything from groceries and clothing and toys and I think it eventually wound up going down the gurgler [failing].

12:30 In the meantime Dad was offered a job out here, a job out in Australia. I don't know all the lead up to it but all of a sudden I found out we were going to go out to Australia which was pretty exciting for us in those days and the first thing I can

13:00 really remember about something was really going to happen when we went to see a film "Smiley." 'cause that was supposed to portray Australian life. It probably does up in Queensland outback, but not down here in cities and places like that. We went to see that and I thought that looked pretty good as a kid and I was pretty excited about a boat trip out here.

To look at new insects?

13:30 I didn't even think about insects in those days, at that time. I was looking forward to the big adventure to come out to Australia. I remember we had to sell up everything we came out here on the five pound assisted passage. We sold all the furniture

14:00 and packed up a few things yeah went to Tilbury docks and jumped onto a boat we called the Stratheden and came out here. Dad's sister had been out here a few times before and also got told about the virtues of the place and got Mum and Dad interested. Yeah and we came out here and landed on December 1956

14:30 And it was a whole new life to us.

(UNCLEAR)

Yes Dad got off the boat at Fremantle and flew over to Melbourne and arranged a few other odds and sods and bits and pieces and they met us down at the docks on the 23rd of December and we had a house to go to straight away through his contacts at work.

15:00 In the meantime on the way out the company that he was going to work for sponsored him to come out went bankrupt and disappeared so he was basically unemployed but he soon found work in those days and started to work for Astor Radio. I think it was down in Port Melbourne or South Melbourne. He was at Astor for quite a while

15:30 and he ended up working for Pye Electronics and he was there until he retired, I can't remember when it was, the '80s I guess.

Just one or two questions about that time before you set sail and also the trip itself if you remember that. Just curious because we've interviewed so many World War II guys

16:00 **and also because we've heard a lot of stories about England during the war but not so much about the period after the war. Do you remember the rationing that was going on?**

No I don't. No I have no recollection of that at all. I think the rationing was probably finished by then. I was born in 1946. My sister was born in '48. She was born in Ireland

16:30 and he was still in the army when we went over too Ireland. I can vaguely remember Mum having coupons but what they were for and what they're entitlements were I don't know. No I don't remember much of the rationing aspect .

What do you think sold your parents on the idea of moving to Australia?

17:00 The idea of a better life I think. There may have been more personal reasons behind it but I don't know. As kids we weren't told we just thought we were going to start a new life out here

17:30 and as kids we really didn't care. It was just a big adventure and I was looking forward to it. And the fact that Dad did have some work to come too out here but here may have been deeper personal reasons that I'm not aware of.

So how many kids were there again?

There were two of us kids.

18:00 Myself and the younger sister.

What do you remember about the voyage on, what did you call it, the Stratheden?

The Stratheden. Had a ball, loved it. I remember embarking at Tilbury docks in London and it was a real foggy night and we were supposed to leave

18:30 this particular day I can't remember the dates. I was really disappointed that we didn't leave because it was foggy. I could hear the foghorns going off on the ships and I was really excited the next day when we actually started moving. I don't remember the first couple of days because I was probably too busy exploring the ship. I had a ball as a kid and I dunno what my sister did

19:00 I didn't really care. Don't know what Mum and Dad did. I had a great time. I learnt to swim on the boat because they had a couple of swimming pools. I remember getting pretty sick as we went through the Bay of Biscay on the west coast of France and Portugal

19:30 The weather started improving and getting sunny and I loved it. I met up with some other kids on the boat and yeah had a great time most of the time. Really, really enjoyed the trip out here.

Was it all immigrants? Were there tourists as well?

Most of them were immigrants at this stage. We did meet another couple from Queensland. I can't remember their names now

20:00 who'd been over to England visiting and they were returning to Queensland. There might have been a couple of tourists in those days but I think it was mainly migrants.

So was Fremantle your first port of call?

No we had a few stops on the way out. Our first port of call was the Canary Islands for rations.

- 20:30 Then from the Canary Islands down to Cape Town, South Africa, Cape Town to Durban, Durban to Fremantle. I remember getting off the boat at Cape Town and I remember they had a Woolworths there but we didn't see a great deal.
- 21:00 We only had a few hours there we went round the shops with Mum and Dad but I really can't remember much about that. But it was pretty good I really enjoyed it. Of course when we came across the Equator we had the King Neptune thing, had a certificate somewhere about crossing the Equator. I think the adults had more fun than the kids did, they had their indoctrinations,
- 21:30 things like that, a big party time. The whole trip was really a big party for most of the migrants it was really good fun.

So what first struck you about Australia when you got here?

That it was warm and sunny. We had basically left in summer in England and of course we had summer all the way.

- 22:00 Towards the Equator, fantastic weather, I loved it. The first thing I can remember in Melbourne was that it was a pretty warm day when we got here. It's fairly quiet and seeing palm trees and I can't remember if that was on St Kilda Road or somewhere else.
- 22:30 My first visions of Melbourne, memories were just palm trees and sunshine. And anyway we went straight out to a place called Mount Waverley and took up residence or rented a house there. I went off and started exploring and loved it but it was still pretty warm.
- 23:00 Yeah so it was pretty interesting.

So you had Christmas here?

A couple of days later it was Chrissie. I don't think we got any Chrissie presents. Yeah some young kids across the road sort of indoctrinated me into a few things like barracking for a football teams and I was asked who did I barrack for,

- 23:30 I didn't know what barracking was and I didn't know what they were talking about, but he said, "You've got to barrack for Melbourne." so it's followed me ever since. I'm not a mad football fan but I like to see Melbourne win ever since I was told that, to barrack for Melbourne.
- 24:00 I remember starting state school, went into grade six when school resumed in 1957. I was a little bit disappointed and I was ahead of them and I had to sit through a lot of things that I'd already gone through a lot of things that I'd gone through in England. I found some of the things fairly easy. Things like
- 24:30 multiplication and long division I'd already done so I found it quite easy and made lots of new friends and I think a lot of people liked me because of the Pommy [English] accent which I've lost now but yeah, that was state school.

25:00 So your English accent, people didn't give you a hard time?

No, no. I guess I didn't have such a broad accent as a lot of other Poms depending on where they came from. Their accent wasn't as broad as some of the cockneys and what have you. No they would pick me up on various words

- 25:30 and sayings and things like that. I got on well at school and loved it did fairly well at school I s'pose, typical kid.

You mention how the kids asked who did you barrack for? Do you remember other things that struck you as odd which was English yet not the same?

Probably terminology,

- 26:00 we had catapults in England but they were called gings out here. Trolleys were billy carts. Trucks were lorries in England and they would be talking about trucks or semis or things like that, just slightly different terminology I wasn't quite up with a lot of that
- 26:30 but, no I found it quite easy to slip in and I remember quite a lot of the kids asking what it was like in England all that sort of stuff and they were curious. I was the only Pommy kid at school that I'm aware of. Yeah but it was good I thoroughly enjoyed my school days. My interest in entomology continued.
- 27:00 I remember having to get up and talk about insects one particular day at school and they started calling me "Prof" after that. Yeah it was good. Then I met a couple of guys that I'm still great friends with, when I moved up to Queensland we converse regularly on the phone. Another chap still lives in Melbourne I saw him last week.
- 27:30 They're about the closest school friends that I still maintain contact with way back in those days.

What was Mount Waverley like? It was a pretty new suburb wasn't it?

It was an outer suburb. I dunno if it was so much a new suburb but it was certainly undeveloped there was a lot of vacant land around, a lot of vacant building blocks where we lived the roads were

- 28:00 sealed but there was some building going on. Railway line went as far as Glen Waverley as it does now. The shopping centre consisted of a couple of dozen shops.
- 28:30 But a few years after we moved to Mount Waverley they were building a bigger shopping centre but where that went it was like heath land. I just enjoyed it and I learned to ride a bike out here. That was another thing,
- 29:00 in England as little kids we used to wear shorts all the time even through winter and I was still wearing shorts out here I think that must have been a bit of a novelty for a lot of kids. The fact that I was running around in shoes and shorts in the middle of winter and
- 29:30 it wasn't until I started high school that I had my first pair of long pants. Yeah I met some other kids, it would have been about 1957 and they had bikes and I learnt to ride a bike. One of these kids had two bikes and I remember going along the side of his house trying to keep balance on this thing.
- 30:00 I soon mastered riding bikes and I thought it was fantastic. I used to go down and borrow his bike and take off everywhere. The chap that found the house for him, and was friends of my parents he said he'd lend me the money to buy me a bike
- 30:30 if I found work to pay him back. I said yes I would do that and he leant me some money. I think it was about five pounds to buy a bike. So I went and started doing a paper round. It was great. It was a Malvern Star bike. I started doing a paper round in the '50s and did it for about ten years
- 31:00 And loved it. But that was great that gave me a sense of freedom and independence. We got a couple of shillings pocket money but when I started doing a paper round I felt a lot better, earning my own money, and I felt that I had earned my bike. I used to love my bike. I would be riding everywhere on it.

How far afield

31:30 did you get on the bike?

In those days only around Mount Waverley. But as I got older I think the furthest afield I ever got was down to Lang Lang with another guy. He had an uncle living down in Lang Lang and we thought we must go down and visit him one day. I remember it took about all day to ride from Mt Waverley to Lang Lang and I was as tired

- 32:00 as buggery when we got there. Then we had to ride all the way back the next day. But we did it. We'd do forays from Mt Waverley to Nunawading and Glen Waverley, Stud Road and it was all out in the sticks [in the country] in those days. There wasn't much traffic on the roads. It was good fun.

32:30 What about at school when you were called a "Prof"? Were you much of a scholar?

No. It was just because of my keen interest in insects. As soon as I left primary school and went to high school that disappeared and fell off. There's a whole new world I suppose, it was even for kids

- 33:00 these days, to go from primary to high school. Learning different things. I probably was just an average student. Later on when I went to high school, or the later years of high school, I had interests in science, geography and science, and biology and I wasn't very keen on
- 33:30 maths. In fact I was very poor with mathematics. And that was a bit of struggle doing physics and chem[istry], because I wasn't very strong in maths. Other aspects such as biology and science I loved. I used to be a bit of a lad at school. Nick off every now and then and yeah just play
- 34:00 around. I probably wasn't a model student by any means but I always did pretty well in science but not in all those other things.

So what sort of mischief were you getting up to? Were you wagging [deliberately missing school] and smoking?

Oh yeah we used to go up to the oval and smoke cigarettes up there at lunchtime. It was great in winter times

- 34:30 because it was foggy and you could walk around and no could see you. We would smoke in school. We did wag school a couple of times, probably later on in the years. A couple of our school friends we just got I with a few guys and we'd jump onto the train at lunchtime and go to Melbourne
- 35:00 or I remember towards the end of sixth form and one of the guys had a licence and had a car we used to jump in the car occasionally and nick off for the afternoon. I used to try and pick my subjects and if it was a subject I enjoyed I'd stay for that but the ones that I didn't like, which was probably the wrong way of doing it now looking back, things
- 35:30 like maths and French we'd wag school and that certainly didn't help with the maths part of physics and

chem. I used to be a rocker in those days. I used to wear pointy toe shoes and pegged pants and white socks. I used to always be told off, trousers were too tight,

36:00 things like that. It was good fun though. We thought it was good fun. We had some great times at school.

I guess this was the height of rock 'n roll. Were you heavily into the music and the rest of it?

Wouldn't say heavily into it. I

36:30 used to like the radio and rock 'n roll. One of my mates were quite good at playing the clarinet and saxophone. And he was fairly into music and another mate was into music. We had a common theme there. I remember going into town and watching a show down at the Melbourne Town Hall.

37:00 I think, I can't remember who was there now, the Delltones, Johnny O'Keefe was there one day at this particular concert, it was a big thrill for us. Whenever I hear those types of songs it takes me back to those days and

37:30 I reckon anybody who probably went through the fifties and sixties probably had the best music of all time. It was a really good era for music.

If you were buying records, who would you go to?

Oh, there was Elvis of course and Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis in the earlier days, Roy Orbison.

38:00 And "Hit the Road Jack" came out in sixth form. Oh, Bobby Rydell, oh, there were a heap of them and The Shadows. We used to love the instrumentalists, Johnny and the Hurricanes, yeah there was a whole era of great music.

38:30 **What about the Aussies? Were there many popular Aussie outfits then?**

No. Although I can remember Johnny O'Keefe, the Delltones, Normie Rowe wasn't a goer then that was just prior to Vietnam days.

39:00 There was an instrumental group called The Atlantics. All these names going around and around inside my head and I can't get my tongue around them at the moment.

39:30 I can see faces but I can't remember names. Col Joye was another one.

How often would you get to go to dances?

Not very often. I had a fairly strict home life I think and didn't venture

40:00 far from home. As I grew up on Saturday nights I'd go to Malvern Rock with a few mates and that's about as far as I'd venture to go out. I had a group of mates at home and we'd go hanging around together, go around to each others places and play records do things that people these days would find

40:30 pretty mundane and boring. Went down the bush, we had a cubby house down there. We built a tree house down the bush we'd get on our bikes and go down there and sit up there and listen to the radio and smoke. We'd just make our own fund, build things, build billy carts, it'd be a pretty

41:00 boring life compared, it was great fun in though in those days but kids today would find it pretty boring. We used to make our own fun. As we got older some of the kids were getting cars and that was a whole new era again they had wheels or some of them had wheels. If your mate had wheels he was a real good mate.

Tape 2

00:31 **I was just going to ask you about your gang. It would be good to hear their names.**

There was John Jewart[?], I met him at state school. His father was in the air force and they'd been posted down, I think they'd come from Canberra, I think it was his first day at school,

01:00 we sort of introduced ourselves and befriended ourselves and he ended up being a great mate all through school to the present day. Another chap was Rod Muir met him at state school and we stayed friends right through school and state school. Although I remember with both of them, we both had our

01:30 disagreements at times over various things. Rod was pretty into music and had a guitar and all that sort of stuff and formed his own band or part of a band later on. Rod and I were great friends. There were a few other kids that I've lost contact with now. Peter Stephenson he was pretty talented as an artist I dunno

- 02:00 what's happened to him. I have a few of his pictures on the wall. He ended up being a brickie [bricklayer] and then ended up becoming more devoted to his artwork. Then there was Anthony Bullings or "Bull Ant" as we used to call him.
- 02:30 Mel Hopkins, Noel Brown, the Worley Brothers. I've lost contact with a lot of those guys, Rod and John were the ones that I made contact with. I still see them so whatever happened to the other guys I really don't know, moved around and gone on.
- 03:00 **So if you got into the city itself what would you get up to there?**
- When I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, I was still doing paper rounds, then I worked in a little kiosk in Mt Waverley railway station selling newspapers, cigarettes and lollies to commuters of a morning.
- 03:30 On a Saturday morning when I finished there the newsagent would come along and pick up the takings and bits and pieces, merchandise. I would jump on a train and go into Melbourne. I used to have a bit of a set routine. I'd wander around the shops, go and buy
- 04:00 a record or two. Go off to the bookshop, I think it's called the Technical Bookshop off the top end of the RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology], Swanson St. I used to love that bookshop. I'd go off and buy a book on insects, and I'd just spend a bit of time browsing few the books there or go to Melbourne Baths and have a swim and probably have an hour or so there in the pool
- 04:30 then come back down go into the museum and I'd wander around in the museum at the top end of Swanson St for an hour or two and then wander back down on the train, jump on the train and be home about five o'clock in the afternoon. And I'd do that most Saturdays. I don't know what I did on Sundays. I used
- 05:00 to be a bit of a loner at times. I'd do all this by myself other things we used to do would be drive around on our bikes. We used to use our bikes as BMX bikes in those days, there was this path through the bush up at the reserve out at Waverley and we used to hurtle down these little foot racks
- 05:30 they were just paths, not maintained paths. We used to jump logs and used to have some big spills there and fall off our bikes and bend our wheels and have a good fun. Another stupid thing we used to do I had and airgun. And a few of us had air guns and we used to have air gun wars.
- 06:00 Some of the things we used to do, the rule was no headshots. We were not allowed to shoot each other in the head, but we'd sneak around the bush shooting each other. I've got a scar here right in the middle of my chest where I got hit by a slug one day. Stupid things we'd do. Oh
- 06:30 the tree hut one day I was up there and Max Worley came down and I saw him in the bush and I was up there all quiet by myself probably just reading or listening to the radio which I often used to do and I saw him going through the bush and I had my air gun up there and we started shooting each other. I shot him in the ear one day and I thought I'd killed him and I got a hell of a fright
- 07:00 I was going to come down from the tree and he was wild and wanted to kill me, "You bastard, you hurt me!" and I thought, "Jeez I hope I haven't killed him and he's not gonna die." He was really wild and we calmed each other down a bit. We'd had a helluva fright and I found out I'd only hit him in the ear. Two days later he said "That's yours." "Oh yeah." "I got it out of my ear."
- 07:30 I think that really stopped us shooting each other with air guns because it was a close call. Silly things we used to do. We used to throw [fire] crackers at each other. Because crackers were freely available in those days and the guys on the ground would shoot rockets up at us and we'd be up the top throwing bungers down at them. We thought it was good fun anyway.
- 08:00 **So how were things at home with your folks? Had they settled in pretty well?**
- Didn't have a big, I didn't feel that we had much of a family life. I guess that's why I spent so much time away from home with my mates. Both Mum and Dad worked.
- 08:30 Dad was working at Pye Electronics in Clarinda, Clayton at this time. Mum used to work at a garment place, dressmaker's called Happy Garments up at Notting Hill. So they'd be off at work in the morning. My sister and I
- 09:00 would get ourselves off to school. And we'd be home and we'd have set chores to do and Mum and Dad would get home and we were meant to have some of the dishes done and all that. We had to be home by a certain time. Dad used to spend a lot of time down at the RSL [Returned and Services League] and
- 09:30 particularly on the weekends. On Friday nights he'd spend all his spare time down at the RSL. He'd work Saturdays and then he'd pop home on the way home and come home half cut, pretty drunk. That was a pretty harrowing time for us, he was an argumentative drunk when he came home and I remember once Mum saying, "Promise me son, you'll never drink beer."
- 10:00 I said "Okay, Mum I won't." As I grew up it sort of stuck with me, I was never a beer drinker, I'd give everything else a bit of a nudge, but I wouldn't drink beer. I used to say I didn't like the taste of it. But I'm a beer drinker now; it took me a while to

- 10:30 work at it. That was a matter of economics, later on; it was only a few years ago that I started drinking beer, ten years ago. Yeah Dad used to hit her pretty hard, with his mates and I didn't understand them, I just thought he was a piss pot and used to dread him coming home late, both my sister and my Mum could... he used to be very argumentative.
- 11:00 It used to be a pretty harrowing time often on weekends. But now I can understand why he was like he was. If I'd known then, I'd have been able to relate to Dad a lot more. But this was in the days before I went into the army, or I got called up
- 11:30 or even after. But I learnt so much about Dad since he's died and since I've been diagnosed with PTSD than I did beforehand. It's a shame why but them's were the breaks. I must admit we were never wanting for anything as kids,
- 12:00 although Dad used to buy his beer, he always used to pay his bills on time, we were never wanting for food or clothes. So we were pretty well looked after. I was fairly close to Mum. But yeah, not too
- 12:30 close to Dad.

By the time those guys got back there was no counselling it was just get on with your life and do it yourself?

And I guess I understand that now, but as a kid, he didn't seem like a Dad to me, because he'd rather be off with his mates than with his family. So as a father and son, we didn't grow up very close together.

- 13:00 Or occasionally we'd go on a family drive up to the hills of Monbulk and around but we didn't go very far. When he was working with Astor in Melbourne, he somehow made contact with a guy who he was over in Changi with, found out that he was living out at Yarrawonga,
- 13:30 and he made contact with him, which was probably in the late fifties and sixties. Probably in the sixties I think it was. We started going up to Yarrawonga and seeing this chap. And Dad made a few friends up there at the RSL.
- 14:00 We'd go up there once a year, holidays and that was good fun. That was about the only time we went anywhere on holidays up to Yarrawonga or along the river on the Murray. Most of the time, my sister and I were fending
- 14:30 for ourselves, or doing our own things on weekends when we weren't going for a drive. Social activities we'd do with our parents, consisted of going to see mates, going around to mates with a few friends and having drinks. If they had kids we'd wander off and watch telly somewhere and do our own thing in the kitchen or whatever we did.
- 15:00 Mum didn't have many friends so if we went anywhere or did any social things it was always with Dad's mates. We never went to any shows; we didn't do anything out of his circle of friends.

15:30 Your mum must have been through some tough times with her husband missing and being thousands of miles from home, leaving family behind?

Mum had a pretty tough life yes. Amazing woman though. She was pretty devoted to Dad. I remember often saying to her as kids we'd say, "Well why don't you leave him?" And she'd say, "I've got nowhere to go." and, "This is my house, too."

- 16:00 She obviously loved him but she wasn't treated very well, ignored. She was a great mum to us. We'd often go off and talk and do things together. Wonderful dressmaker, she used to make a lot of our clothes. Pretty amazing woman in a lot of ways.

During that period,

16:30 in the early sixties, just tell us about the music and the social scene, smoking, was alcohol playing a factor?

No. Not in those days, not really, Dad would only drink beer and I remember trying it as a kid. No I didn't like beer. I think the first

- 17:00 time I ever tried alcohol was one of Dad's friends, work mates. Took us to New Year's Eve party, my sister and I. We tried some Marsala and lemonade and it was pretty sickly sweet stuff these days. We thought that was okay and we gave that a bit of a nudge.
- 17:30 That was basically our first introduction to drinks. When Dad had a party he used make a great punch I can remember that. I can't remember his ingredients but I know it had a bottle of gin in it. Pimms, Number One and few other things. I remember all his mates
- 18:00 and their wives all used to love Dad's punch. I found it was rather drinkable too but alcohol was never a big part of my life in those days, not until I got into the army. That's all you had to do was go down to the boozier [bar]. I didn't drink much. I guess I became a bit of a regular smoker.

18:30 Not a very heavy smoker. I couldn't afford cigarettes in those days. That was about my only vice. When it was available I'd pinch one.

And during the teen years how important did the opposite sex become? Did you have any girlfriends at that time?

Yeah, I

19:00 had quite a few girlfriends. Not at the same time. I did find girls attractive. Attractive is not the terminology, more appealing. As I grew up. I tended to prefer feminine company to male company.

19:30 I had a couple of girlfriends. I can remember my first girlfriend was Gail Meredith in Waverley Primary. I used to go and see her a fair bit, used to go down to her place. Ride home with her after school.

20:00 Come home. I had an interest in girls in those days.

So what was the score about taking a girl out? Where would you go and what would you do?

Well because I didn't have any vehicles I didn't go out a great deal, most of my girlfriends were

20:30 just limited to school time and down to their place after school and on weekends. I'd drive down on my bike and see them. I can't remember going anywhere as a date or anything.

21:00 Even when I got my licence and used to see a girlfriend called Gillian. I don't think we even went anywhere. I was mainly round to her place or she'd go around to my place. I don't remember going anywhere with her on a date as such. Probably that was one of the big problems.

21:30 With girls, I never went anywhere until I got a car. There was one particular girl I met and we started going out and going to the beach and the piccies [pictures - cinema]. That was Sandra.

22:00 She meant a lot to me in those days.

So how old were you?

I would have been about, I got the car when I was about nineteen, prior to that I was over eighteen when I got my licence. I used to work in a service station, part time and I learnt to drive there.

22:30 Sort of self taught. When I wanted to go for my licence, Dad started taking me out and teaching me to drive, but he was not a very patient, and I'd be doing the wrong thing. Either too heavy on the clutch or too heavy on the accelerator, or too heavy on the break and lacked a bit of coordination.

23:00 Yeah Dad wasn't a very patient instructor. I didn't like him as a teacher. I remember getting a driver instructor and I only had a few lessons with him, because I could drive a bit better by then.

23:30 We went and I got my licence. I used to drive Dad's car and that was a bit of a hassle because I might promise to take a friend out or see a girlfriend and Dad would be down at the RSL and he would forget to come home or come home late and it didn't do our relationship a great deal.

24:00 So I decided, "I need my own car." I remember one day in Melbourne I popped into a car shop, wanting a Cortina. Why I wanted a Cortina? I was over eighteen and some friends, we went up to

24:30 Queensland we were going to go to Cairns. It was John Jewart, myself and two of his mates and one of his mates had a Cortina and we decided we'd go to Queensland for our holidays. So yeah we chuffed off up there and one

25:00 of his mates worked in a PMG [Postmaster General], Telecom or Telstra whatever that called it in those days and I remember popping into a couple of exchanges on the way up to tell Mum and Dad where we were and all that sort of stuff. We ended up rolling the car in Tenterfield. I was in the front passenger seat and John and another guy was in the back and we're all asleep including the driver. He tipped the

25:30 car over and anyway we got out without any injury, I was pretty dazed. I don't remember getting out of the car but I remember leaning on it and saying, "Oh shit!" The two guys in the back went out the back window just minor injuries in hospital. I remember having Dad's roof rack on the car and I had written on it 'Cairns or bust' and we busted and we thought that was a bit of a joke.

26:00 Anyway we ended up going to John's brothers or stepbrother in Brisbane and we stayed there a few days after our mates got out of hospital in Tenterfield we caught the bus to Brisbane. Had Christmas there in Brisbane and then came home. That's when, I liked the Cortina I thought it was a good car.

26:30 When I decided I needed a car and couldn't rely on Dad I thought "I'll get a Cortina." I went home on this particular day and asked Dad, well told Mum and Dad "I've got a chap coming around, I want to buy a car and he wants you to go guarantor." and Dad wasn't too happy about it all. He said, "What if you can't pay it off?" and anyway he signed

27:00 up. I paid the car and I had my first set of wheels which was great.

Did you make it up to Cairns on your road trip?

No, not when we crashed. We only got as far as Brisbane and stayed there.

The car was a bit of a write off [destroyed]?

Yeah. I think it was written off. It wasn't my car

27:30 but I think it was written off. I claimed a tent where I lost a tent in the accident on his insurance. I was pretty sure it was written off. We never did get to Cairns but I did later on, prior to getting called up, in my own car.

Just take us a back, this was when you were nineteen?

28:00 I would have been about eighteen, or early nineteen.

So which high school were you at?

I went to Waverley High which doesn't exist anymore. It's on the corner of Huntingdale and Waverley Roads. Loved it there. I left high school at form six.

28:30 Matriculated, didn't go to uni [university]. Really didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't get very high marks toward the end of school. My marks sort of went down as I went up. The higher I went in school the less interested I was in some subjects. Still did fairly well

29:00 in science, geology and biology not so good in English and maths and I hated history. Left school not really knowing what I wanted to do. One of Dad's friends owned a service station at Mount Waverley and he offered me a job there. So I was working at the service station

29:30 pouring petrol. Just a bit of a gofer, running around doing this and that and everything else and tidying up. Started working for Paul. I remember my first real work. I applied for a job. All I knew is I wanted to work outdoors, preferably with nature.

30:00 Somewhere outdoors. I saw an ad [advertisement] in the paper and I applied for it. Anyway it was ending up selling encyclopaedias. That was a bit of an eye opener. I sort of started. Mum bought me a suit that I looked pretty smart in and I went down

30:30 there. I didn't really know what the job was until I got to this interview room and there was heap of other guys there. And we found out it wasn't so much an interview as an indoctrination. Went through this spiel of flogging Nunn's Encyclopaedias. Gave it a whirl for a few days but it had whiskers on it. We worked on a commission so they were

31:00 getting free exposure at our expense. I just didn't have the gift of the gab so I gave that away after a week.

Do you remember the spiel?

No I don't. I did for a while but I can't now. I did remember it because not long after we were married we were living at Montrose, a young girl came and knocked on the door

31:30 and she was selling the same encyclopaedia. So I asked her and I said come on in. And it all came back to me. And I started saying, "This is what you say." and I said, "Look lady, give it away." And I hope she did. Yeah the spiel all came back to me as she knocked on the door and said exactly what I used to say

32:00 when someone was answering the door. But I can't remember it now. My wife thought it was probably a bit rude saying that, "Forget about it." but I had to do it. No I can't remember the spiel, they were real slick, smooth operators. It was just typical

32:30 salesman type stuff. It wasn't my thing. Then I think I went back and worked for Paul for the service station and whilst I was working for him, I saw an ad in the paper,

33:00 "Assistant site search party leaders wanted" and it was a program for Sirex wood wasp. The Forestry Commission had the task of surveying, trying to eradicate this wasp that tried to kill pine trees. I found that interesting because it was an outdoor job. It was to do with insects and so I applied and got an interview,

33:30 and got one of the six positions that were available, and loved it. It was fantastic. I loved that work. Nice guys. Older guys. I was pretty lucky. I used to get picked up at home before I went out and saw a lot of Victoria. Originally we started working there was day trips away. Wherever

34:00 we went was within a couple of hours of home and as Sirex wood wasp spread so did out area of searching. It spread overnight and we'd go to various places and stay there on the Monday and come home on the Friday and search areas around there. That was a wonderful job I loved it.

34:30 Saw a lot of Victoria and they were wonderful guys to work with.

How did you do the work were you receiving reports and having to go and check them?

No. How it worked was. Sirex was discovered in 1966 on the mainland in some packing cases at a mill at

- 35:00 Nunawading. 1967, it was realised Sirex could have a big impact on the pine cone plantations in southern south east Australia,
- 35:30 Victoria, New South Wales and Tassie. Was doing a lot of damage in Tassie before it was discovered on the mainland. There was a national Sirex fund that was established. Various states contributing dollars according to the various ratios of land they had under pine plantations. So there was a national Sirex fund administered by the Forest Commission.
- 36:00 Our job initially was to drive around and note the locations number, age, and species of pine trees on properties around the countryside. New places, this was all recorded and put in tabular form
- 36:30 on sheets. So some places were inspected a couple of times a year, or three times a year and then we had these funny sheets of addresses with pines, the name of the property owner, number of pine trees, crown allotment and comments. So we used to just drive around checking out all these pine trees on various
- 37:00 properties. If they changed hands we'd make change of address. As we went further field we'd have to form our own lists for future reference. That was great fun. To find these trees we used to travel on every road there was.
- 37:30 Just map them all out. It involved speaking to a lot of cockies [farmers], landholders, farmers, it was outdoors, I just enjoyed it. It was really good and we travelled as far as Bacchus Marsh, Colac and Gippsland.
- 38:00 It was a most enjoyable time. I learnt a lot and I had a good time as well. Most of the chaps I was with were older than I was. A couple of them around about my age and we had good fun.
- 38:30 We used to play cards a lot, a few drinks, occasionally go to a dance if there was one on midweek to check out what was going on. Through the Sirex work, after I came back from Vietnam that I met my wife Dawn. But whilst I was working there,
- 39:00 After a while I was working on Sirex I was there for nine years or so, they started working on biological control and because of my interest in entomology I was offered the job of breeding parasites for Sirex. And I said oh yeah. Shortly after that time
- 39:30 With the advent of biological control a search parties were disbanded. Certainly eased off and then disbanded. I was the only one, apart from a forester in Melbourne, I was the only one working on Sirex wood wasp control. I loved it and I did that for about twenty years.
- 40:00 **So eventually that was totally under control?**
- Yeah when I left, gave that away in '86 it was pretty well under control in Victoria and I haven't heard of Sirex since. I felt fairly proud in having a major impact on the control of Sirex in southeast Australia.
- So what was the process of eradicating Sirex?**
- 40:30 It changed. Originally it was a program of eradication where the search teams would go out, examine the trees and if they had evidence of Sirex we'd mark them and send a report to Melbourne. Then a destruction party would come along after they received it our report and
- 41:00 go out and cut down the trees and burn them. Sometimes particularly in the flight season in summer the time difference between receiving the reports and getting out there, the insects had emerged and disappeared. It was like locking the horse in after it had bolted.
- 41:30 It eventually changes from a program of destruction to one of control. That's where bio control came in when we realised that we'd never eradicate Sirex but we could get it down to manageable level. And a manageable level mean that Sirex the way it worked it would tend to attack where you would suppress trees first.

Tape 3

- 00:31 **So you were working for Sirex and you got paid. Can you just give me what time was that?**
- This was in the sixties, '67. I'd got into the biological control stuff after my national service had finished. Whilst I was on the search party teams
- 01:00 I was notified that I was lucky enough to serve for Her Majesty in the army and I was told to present myself for a medical examination down in Oakley at nine pm this particular night. I didn't go because I thought,

01:30 "Nobody goes for medicals at nine o'clock at night." Not only that I was working away from home down in Korumburra. So I didn't go I didn't take anymore notice. Then I got a letter a few weeks later in the mail. Saying that I didn't

02:00 front up for the medical as directed and was now liable for prosecution under the National Service Act or whatever it was and to present on the next date that they'd given me down at Oakley and it was a little bit more civilised. I think it was at about six pm at night. I went down to Oakley at this designated location and

02:30 went through the medical process. I was a bit disappointed because none of my mates got called up. I was the only one out of a group of six, eight guys that I used to hang around with or go out with every now and then. But all my mates dipped out. I was feeling fairly fortunate prior to this I thought I might get out too.

How conscious were you of conscription

03:00 **as you approached your birthday?**

I was very aware of it. But I didn't know anybody that had been called up. When I did get called up, when I found out my marble had been called. I just accepted it. I thought, 'Oh well that's part of life.'

03:30 I know of several people, I don't know them personally, who were conscientious objectors who didn't want to go and carried on a treat. I just accepted it as part of life and the government of the day. And Dad was in the army and he was quite proud and he thought it was the best thing for me to do.

04:00 He was quite happy prior to me being called out. When he actually found out he wasn't so happy at all. I remember when we were back at school and from some of his trips back from the RSL of an evening. He was going to frogmarch me down to the army office and make a man out of me.

04:30 But when he found out that I'd been called up he changed his tune a little bit. I think he was proud, but probably mixed emotions. Happy in as much that the services are good,

05:00 disappointed because he was more attuned to the news and facts over there than I was. Anyway I got called up, did my medical and after that I was told to report to Swan Street at such and such a time on such and such a date and

05:30 told what to bring, just a few personal items. So Mum and Dad and sister all went down to Swan Street and offloaded me there. There was a heap of other people and their sons and all their brothers and sisters and we went in there. I can't remember exactly what happened but we were put on buses all waved goodbye and off we went off to Pucka [Puckapunyal].

06:00 To commence our national service training.

So you said your father was more informed than you were about the Vietnam War and what was going on. Did he talk to you? Did he try and inform you?

No. I can't say that he did.

06:30 **What about your mum?**

Mum was more disappointed at me going than Dad was. I think Dad, he thought it would do me good to do a bit of National Service and a bit of army training and discipline and make a man out of you and all that. And he was pleased from that aspect.

07:00 But I don't think that the fact that I'd be going to Vietnam had sort of entered into his mindset at his stage. He was quite happy for me to go in and do National Service and do that bit. Mum wasn't keen. She was a little more reserved.

07:30 She wasn't as happy as Dad was.

How did she express that?

Mum had difficulty expressing a lot of things because Dad was so, I wouldn't say powerful over her,

08:00 she wasn't that intimidated, but Dad was fairly overpowering and she wouldn't sort of contradict or go against Dad. I remember her saying, "I wish you weren't going, son." And she'd just leave it at that. Just her mannerisms and speech. Dad was smiling and Mum wasn't.

08:30 **And your mates, what was their reaction?**

I can't remember. I think it was, "Oh you lucky bastard." or, "You poor bastard." depending on their views. No they weren't that, I honestly can't remember

09:00 what their reaction was. I know that when I came back they were glad to see me back. It was a real good welcome back home from them.

There had been by then quite a bit of media coverage of the war and the

09:30 **antiwar protest movement and the movement was growing. You talked about knowing conscientious objectors?**

That was about all. I was aware of it. I didn't take a great deal of notice or interest in it. I was aware of it. I wasn't into reading newspapers

10:00 in those days or if I did I sort of glossed over it thinking not sort of putting myself in that place. Yeah I didn't take a great deal of notice of news and things. I guess it's like a lot of young people today who'd rather listen to the music on the radio or watch a comedy on telly or a

10:30 show rather than watch the news and current affairs. I think as you get older you become more attuned and more aware about what's going on around you and around the world than when you were a twenty year old, who really couldn't give a stuff. More interested in doing your own thing. I was aware that there was conflict over there, but I didn't take a great

11:00 deal of notice like my parents would.

Pretty amazing really given what a big impact it had on your life.

For sure. When we did basic training we didn't have access to newspapers. The only news you got was a snippet, if you had a radio up there, if somebody had taken a radio,

11:30 a bit of news on the radio of a morning before you got dragged out on parade. There was usually so much going on that you didn't have time to sit and listen to the news during that first bit of basic training pretty divorced with what was going on outside of Puckapunyal.

Let's talk about your training. So you went up on a bus.

Yes.

12:00 That was June or July. I remember it was cold up there. It was fairly fortunate that we didn't have a great deal of rain but I remember, gee it was bloody cold. I remember we all got off the bus up there. They lined us up and put us into three ranks. Marched us off.

12:30 There was a difference between day one and day seven as far as marching. We were allocated our clothing. We all had haircuts. We all had to go to the dentist at one stage. It was quite a shock to the system. I know a lot of the guys

13:00 had rocked up at Swan Street with a haircut, but that still wasn't good enough. Everybody still had their uniform and short back and sides, whether you had one or not. Unless you had a crew cut. Didn't matter if you'd spent ten bucks on a haircut you still had to conform with army standards.

Many boys with long hair?

Yes there were quite a few.

13:30 I didn't have really long hair. My Dad didn't approve of it. Certainly wasn't as shoulder length as some of them were.

So how did they deal with the haircut?

A lot of them were very disappointed, didn't like the idea of losing their hair. But with fifty guys watching on you can't break down

14:00 in tears. We were even at that time starting to bond a little bit. Although we were fairly quiet, we accepted it and laughed at each other. Laughed at somebody's before and after looks. It was just one of those things you had to go through.

14:30 I remember our uniform issue was another thing. They'd hold up a pair of trousers to you, "That'll do. Too small, too big, sort it out between yourselves." They'd go around trying hats on you and if the hat fitted, it was your hat for the next two years. You'd come out of this Q [quartermaster's] store with your arms loaded with pyjamas and shirts and

15:00 trousers, all sorts of things. It was a little bit exciting in a way to get back and see what you got. The novelty of that soon wore off.

So what about the barracks the accommodation? Can you tell me about that?

Yes. There was I think about sixteen or twenty per hut.

15:30 It was fairly crowded. We had a bed, a wardrobe and a desk each and a little carpet square. Four rooms of four. I can't remember if we were

16:00 allocated a bed or we chose a bed or that was it. Or that was it and you got stuck in it for the next ten weeks. We were shown how to make a bed and that was the way the bed had to be made. We were shown how to put things away in your locker and that was the way things had to be put away. Civilian

clothes weren't supposed to be seen they had to be

16:30 put at the back. Shirts and things had to be folded a certain way. So it was quite a learning experience for us.

How did they teach you to make the bed?

I think we were allocated several corporals to a platoon. I

17:00 think one of them demonstrated on somebody's bed and said, "That's the way it's got to be made." And go away and make your bed. We often had room inspections, if they couldn't bounce a twenty cent coin on your blanket and find it all over the floor.

That's how they tested?

Oh yeah, you had to be nice and tidy.

17:30 Every now and then they'd have locker inspections and you had to stand beside your locker and open it all up. You'd get extra duties or tickets if it wasn't done properly.

So how quickly did you take to it?

I guess you learnt fairly quick. Army training

18:00 then is totally different to what it is now. I've recently been discharged from the Army Reserve. Things have really changed. We learned to adapt fairly quickly. A, you just didn't want to be ridiculed by the other guys in the hut or B, have to sit down

18:30 and do it all again. A lot of conformity was enforced on you by the other hut members. And that was the way the army operated in those days. They'd leave it up to your mates to sort you out. So if somebody didn't conform it would be up to

19:00 them to straighten you out, one way or another. For example if somebody was slack in going out on parade, a bit slower than everyone else, everybody won extra duties or jumps as we used to call it, go out and do parades and things like that.

19:30 It never came back on the individual; it came back on all of us. We would then encourage, coerce whatever you want to call it, to smarten up. It was fairly effective in most ways, mainly because you didn't want to stuff everybody else up or

20:00 didn't like the idea of being harassed by everybody else. You didn't want to cause too much strife because you didn't want to be unpopular with thirty odd guys.

So the other three fellows that you roomed with, how did that happen, was that completely random?

Yes it was very random and I wouldn't have a clue

20:30 who they were to this day. I can't remember them. I can only remember one guy, his name was Woody, or we called him Woody, it was part of his surname, I can't remember any of the other guys. Though one other fellows name does come to mind because I came across him later

21:00 in Vietnam, of the name Lee Archer. There was a Peter Price; I got on fairly well with Peter. I can't remember any of the other guys in my hut at all.

So by the end of the first week, how was it different?

21:30 Heck the end of the first week, I supposed we started to look a little bit like soldiers. We all started to work together; we were talking to each other. We all started to know each other. We all had things to do. Boots to clean, shirts to iron, beds to make, floors to sweep.

22:00 And we were starting to become an organised group of guys. We were all started to jump when they said jump. We'd never even asked how high in those days. We were starting to do things as a group of guys.

22:30 **Did you know much about the other guys, the one s that you were spending the most time with? I'm just trying to get a picture of what kind of cross section.**

Yeah a little bit. That reminds me of another guy called Mick, I can't remember his surname. He came from Ashburton. I lived at Mt Waverly in those days. We worked out. I asked out where everybody lived and there was another guy,

23:00 can't think of his name who lived not that far from me. I think after so many weeks we were allowed home and we could take our own vehicle up. And I remember going home and picking up a several guys on the way back to Puckapunyal.

23:30 I can't remember the backgrounds they came from apart from Mick who lived at Ashburton whose

family was in the Housing Commission area. I can't remember what his parents did or what he was doing

24:00 prior to call up. A chap who lived on Blackburn Road. I think his parents ran a shop, a milk bar there. I'm not quite sure of his background. I can't remember the background of most of the guys there. They could have come from a diverse background. Although Peter Price,

24:30 worked in a building society and his father was manager of Eastern Suburbs Building Society at Box Hill. But what Peter was actually doing, I think he was helping his dad out. As for everybody else there, no I can't remember what they were doing. Or what backgrounds were they from.

25:00 **Was there any rebellion in the ranks?**

No not really. I can't remember any. There was one chap who was a bit of a toughie and didn't like being told what to do and what not to do. I think everybody had a bit of

25:30 a run in with Lee at one stage or other. Generally everybody was pretty well behaved. I don't think there was much rebellion. I can't remember anybody being kicked out or unruly behaviour. I think one chap got

26:00 kicked out on medical grounds. That's all I'm aware of.

So the training, what was the range of training that you did at Puckapunyal?

The first few weeks the training was mainly spent on drill. Marching, turns, drills without arms, then drills with arms,

26:30 with our SLR [self loading rifle]. Probably the first four or five weeks was mainly drill work, parade ground work, learning how to march, doing all sorts of things that soldiers do on parade grounds. As it progressed, I learnt about the rifle. How it works why it works.

27:00 We had target practice. We gradually got into the soldier type activities, map reading, first aid, various aspects of warfare, patrolling and so on.

27:30 That culminated in a few days out bush. Where you employ all those various areas you'd been trained in map reading, radio procedure, patrolling.

Do you remember that exercise?

Yes, because it rained

28:00 and we had our raincoats on. Just went out to the range of Pucka and we had corporals in charge of us. Then we just went on patrols and just played war games [war games] basically.

Do you remember what they taught you about patrolling, like how to patrol?

28:30 Yes. I can remember a fair bit of that, because when I joined the Army Reserve when I came back I had to go through it all again various formations you use, the hand signals, enemy, yeah good, obstacles,

29:00 some of those sort of things. Radio procedure and map reading. I found that interesting as I was always interested in travelling and map reading and surveying.

Was map reading about finding bearings?

Yes. All aspects of map reading,

29:30 finding out where you are, knowing where you are, finding a place, reading the terrain from maps and so on. I guess because I had an interest in geography at school I was interested in travelling, I enjoyed it and got a lot out of it. It was very interesting. I did find

30:00 bearings and grid bearings, magnetic bearings fairly easy where some guys had a bit of a hassle getting their minds around it, various terminology and the figures there. I enjoyed that.

How did they teach you to read a map?

I started off with very basic.

30:30 They had maps and then they'd start off with a legend, symbols used on maps and what they represented, went through them one at a time, gradually built up a whole picture of what was on a map and what it portrays and spent a bit of time on

31:00 scales and bearings, grid squares and so on.

Did they give you maps of Vietnam?

No. They were just using local maps in those days. Usually maps of Pucka training area. I think they were metric those days.

31:30 I can't remember whether they were made to the inch or metric maps.

I think we went metric in '66.

We went metric in coins on the fourteenth of Feb '66. I can't remember about maps and things. I think it was a bit later.

What about the weapons training, what sort

32:00 **of weapons were you trained to use?**

Basically the only weapons we had were training on the SLR, self loading rifle. The F1 machine gun and grenades. Were the three weapons we trained on. In the thirty one years I spent in the army it was the only time I threw grenades, was in the National Service.

32:30 And there were only two of them. We had to lob them into a box. I don't think anyone got into this cardboard box. And that was a harrowing experience, they have a time fuse and your instinct is to pull the pin throw it and duck. But you're supposed to wait, see where it lands and then, I think it might be

33:00 a three second time fuse and the instructor would be right beside you and he would haul you back up if you ducked down and then he'd put you down before it went bang. They were pretty switched on. It was amazing everybody would duck down and wouldn't see where it went. We had on the rifles a static target

33:30 shooting over various ranges. We had to zero in over twenty five metres and shoot over up to one hundred, two hundred, three hundred metres. And on the machine gun we'd even go through a mobile, what they call a "walk up range." A lot of this was further exemplified when we went and did our Canungra training where a

34:00 greater emphasis was placed on shooting there. They were the three main weapons we use for training.

You'd line up on a twenty five metre range?

Your targets would be over different ranges and then you'd shoot those over one hundred metres and then you'd move back and shoot over two hundred meters and then move back over one hundred metres

34:30 and fire over three hundred metres. And add up your scores.

Was this from a standing position?

Various positions. We had standing, sitting, lying. And then there was standing supported and unsupported. So you'd be standing supported and then unsupported, lying supported and lying unsupported and son on.

Supported by what?

Usually sandbags.

35:00 Or a brick wall, which was stepped. You'd have a sandbag and you'd rest the rifle on the sandbag.

Was this always in an open space?

Yep, on the main range. Though oddly

35:30 the machine gun we'd use was on a twenty five metre range which backed into a hill up at Puckapunyal. In fact most of the training was done outdoors.

Had you picked up a rifle before?

Yes I had. Because the chap that had found our house

36:00 when we first moved to Mt Waverley he sold me a .22 rifle for five pounds in those days I would have been about fourteen years old. And I'd fired a .22 rifle and I had an air gun as a kid which was nothing compared to the 7.62 millimetre self loading rifles.

36:30 They had a real loud bang and a bit of a kick to them but I used to like shooting and I did fairly well at target shooting. I loved it. I won't say I wasn't a bit of a natural but I was always good at shooting.

Were you given earplugs?

Not in those days. Oh we may have had earplugs. I honestly can't remember.

37:00 Back in nasho [National Service] days, I know later on in the army reserve we had earplugs.

What about safety on the range?

Yes, safety was paramount.

37:30 There was always an instructor behind you with a big stick. It was pretty important you do the right thing. And everybody did conform too. It was really drilled into you the safety aspect.

38:00 Sometimes I even thought they went overboard with their safety. Still I s'pose accidents still happen occasionally. I wasn't aware of any happening in those days and recently. Safety was paramount.

So you trusted the other fellows, you didn't have any concerns?

No. You trusted them and you were certainly well

38:30 behind them. Didn't have any hassles at all. I remember on the twenty five metre range with a machine gun you were told if you had any problems to stop and put your hand up and not to turn around or anything like that. I didn't have any instances in our group of anybody

39:00 doing the wrong thing basically. They were pretty well trained.

What was the F1 machine gun like? Was it a big gun?

No. Not that big. The total length was about yay long including stock and barrel and it had a magazine out the top. That was our standard issue in the medical corps

39:30 in Vietnam. Whereas the infantry and a lot of other people had rifles. Not very effective past about twenty five to fifty metres but I suppose better to have one of those than nothing at all if you really needed it. They weren't that accurate.

40:00 I guess it was one of those things that you needed training with, practice with.

They were a hand held gun?

Yes.

Do you remember first being taught how to use it?

Yes we were shown how to

40:30 stand and how to hold and how to aim. And before we even fired any of the weapons we had extensive training on maintenance, cleaning, stripping and assembly. Immediate actions, which is if you have a problem what to do to

41:00 rectify that problem a lot of training before we actually used live ammunition. We were issued with rifles through training and our F1 or machine gun training was an adjunct.

41:30 We went through a fair bit of training before we actually used the things.

Tape 4

00:40 **What was the condition of the weapons that you were issued with? Were they new or were they old?**

01:00 They weren't new but they had been pre-used. But they were in pretty good condition, in good working order and of course we had to maintain them in good working order. There were inspections. Frequent weapons inspections. If the barrel wasn't clean or there was dirt or grunge somewhere you were likely to win extra duties somewhere along the line. That was one of the things that was really impressed upon us,

01:30 cleanliness and maintenance of our personal weapons.

How would they inspect them? Would they inspect them in pieces?

Maybe. But usually on parade they might do a look down the barrel, there was a certain drill action which was you used to place your thumb at the bottom of the chamber and it would

02:00 reflect the light back up the chamber to see what was down there. Or there could be just random inspections and they'd look into all sorts of nooks and crannies that you didn't think existed on a rifle and find grot there. You certainly learnt where to look and where to clean. They were

02:30 pretty meticulous on weapon cleaning.

Were those inspections nerve wracking or did you get over that?

All inspections were to a certain extent because you never know what they would find somewhere along the line. They were going to have a room inspection and they'd wipe up on the top of your cupboard and you'd think, 'Oh crikey I haven't dusted up there for the last four days.' Or along the windows and you never cleaned your windows.

- 03:00 They'd always think of somewhere different to look. Someone would have got something somewhere along the line. I think I was fairly lucky most times. One time during our basic training, we had a few days out in the field and they had a dixie inspection, and dixies are your eating utensils, knife, fork and spoon
- 03:30 in their little fold up dishes. If they weren't clean, this particular day a whole heap of guys got extra duties because they sprung this inspection on us and they hadn't cleaned their dixies or they weren't clean enough. They were all charged. I think that was their introduction to army discipline.
- 04:00 Most of them won extra tickets, or duties out of that. I had pretty clean things so I passed the inspection. A lot of the guys didn't. Out of twenty about eight of them went up on the charges just for having dirty mess tins.

You mentioned something about jumps as a form of punishment?

- 04:30 That was a term we used or the army used. Every morning we had inspections, a parade and we had so many seconds to be out on parade and if you were too slow, or a bit slow getting out there, we had what they called "jumps" or parades later on that evening.
- 05:00 And the chap in charge, usually a corporal, would come along and call us out on parade and you'd have to be out there on with boots, belts, shirts and things on. And they'd say, "Okay you've got a minute to be out here in greatcoats only." And you'd have to go in and come out in greatcoats and then go back and, "Okay, you've got a minute to be out here in certain
- 05:30 items of clothing." You'd have to go in and rush in and put them on. So you'd be going from one thing to another. On greatcoats off sort of thing. You'd have greatcoats and thongs. Then you'd have to run back in and change into sporting gear. Then you'd have to run back into parade order
- 06:00 with your boots done up and gaiters on the right way and have a full inspection. That would smarten people up because it was frustrating and time consuming and irritating and we'd used to really hate that sort of thing but it was a method of training us into being punctual. And it was fairly effective.

So how did men express their

06:30 frustrations?

Probably amongst themselves. Or later on towards the end of the training or half way through we were allowed to go down to the boozer [bar] because occasionally you'd have night lectures you'd go down to the boozer between eight and ten and or seven and closing and you'd take it out down there and have a few beers.

- 07:00 Laugh about it. Talk about it and get drunk. What would they do about it. Conform most of the time. Conform to a military way so they would avoid having to go through it again. I guess it's one good way of training people to work together as
- 07:30 a team. Although I believe it's frowned upon these days.

At what point at Pucka were you able to nominate the corps and why?

Towards the end of the basic training we were told we had an option, we had to think

- 08:00 about what corps we'd like to go into. The army has about eighteen or so different corps or did so in those days. Some people didn't have an idea what was available, or what the army did even. And our instructors were from infantry corps
- 08:30 So they did a pretty good job of encouraging people to join the infantry corps. They were saying what a great corps it was, how the mateship and camaraderie that was there and they extolled the virtues of the infantry. Some people were truck drivers or plant operators and they new that they wanted to be a plant operator in the army and they'd nominate for engineers or (UNCLEAR)
- 09:00 or someone. My attitude was, "Hey look if I'm in the army I may as well do something that I like and I can get them to train me up I was interested in mapping and surveying." because I used to use it in my employment a fair bit. So my first choice was survey corps. My second choice was artillery; my third choice was medical corps.
- 09:30 Artillery because they used maps a fair bit for artillery fire and medical corps I put down because I was always interested in medical type things. This would be a good thing to fall back on in civilian life knowing first aid and basically anything to do medically.
- 10:00 I was told I probably wouldn't get survey corps because it took long to train civilians and as long as you had civilian training in that area you wouldn't get it. Why I didn't get artillery I didn't know, but I got medical corps and I was quite happy with that. I put down infantry as my last choice.
- 10:30 I think I put down engineers and radio and transport and a few other things.

What was the turn up with infantry?

Well I was a bit of a coward I didn't like the idea of being shot at.

- 11:00 It just didn't appeal to me. If the army is going to train me to do something I could do in civilian life, something that could come in handy. That I could use in later life. That's the way I thought then. And I'm glad I did because I did learn a lot in my medical
- 11:30 training. So we finished our basic training. Had our march up parade and then I think we had a couple of weeks and then we were posted to our various corps training. Some people went to Kapooka all over the place.
- 12:00 Medical training was done in Healesville in those days. And that was great. We had a couple of weeks off. We had to report to this place in Healesville on such and such a day and time. We rocked up there, the accommodation was tents and that was towards the end of August or September. I know it was pretty chilly some of those days.
- 12:30 Life was a bit different after basic training. We had more time to ourselves. We were treated more as individuals and more as adults than kids and as a group too. Life became
- 13:00 much more interesting in corps training. We did quite a range of things. A lot of it wasn't really relevant to what I ended up doing in Vietnam. We did a lot on drugs, what various drugs were called what their actions did and doses.
- 13:30 We learned how to make beds. We learnt how to wash patients. We learnt how to shave. We learned how to give injections by injecting oranges. I think we even had to inject ourselves with sterile water at one stage. We learnt how to carry stretches, ambulances a lot of it was
- 14:00 just nursing care and we had quite a few lectures too, classroom type activities. The medical corps, medical training was interesting. It was good fun. We had a lot more freedom. Although we still had picket duties. We were allowed to go out and do things and be ourselves.
- 14:30 We could go home on weekends too, which gave us a lot more freedom and was a lot more enjoyable.

How many of you were there?

I can't remember. But there were probably about forty or fifty of us doing medical corps training.

- 15:00 There was only one guy there who had done that I had done the troop training with, that was Peter Price. Virtually everybody else was new and they had come from various states as well. Some from Queensland, some from New South Wales, Peter was the only one I can remember from Victoria
- 15:30 I didn't know too many people there and I can't remember many of the people there either.

Were you taught anything about war wounds or gun shot wounds?

No. The closest we came too treating war injuries or traumatic injuries was one particular day we had lectures

- 16:00 in a classroom and we heard a screech of brakes as 'bang' outside and we all rushed out and there was this chap lying on the ground with fake blood, spurting blood and we all stood around looking at him, well, call an ambulance sort of thing.
- 16:30 The ideas of the whole thing was, "What are we going to do?" Well, stem the blood flow and that. Some of the wounds were fairly realistic but we had to treat this guy as a patient. He had a broken leg and various other so called injuries and then we had treat him. That was the only traumatic
- 17:00 injury training we ever had. I think most of us came through pretty dismally because whether we thought it was a set up, we all just stood around and looked at this guy lying down there who had supposedly been hit by a vehicle and suffered all these horrific injuries.
- 17:30 So that was a bit of learning experience I s'pose. But that was about the closest we came to traumatic injury treatment. Of course when we got too Vietnam some of the injuries over there were totally different to what we'd seen
- 18:00 here, totally different. You can't fake an amputated limb, pretty gruesome. That would come later on.

So what impression did they give you that training at Healesville was

- 18:30 **unrealistic? Did you wonder about that at the time?**

No because it was all new to me. It was all interesting. We learnt about various diseases and illnesses, drugs and their actions, dosages, bandages. How to

- 19:00 put bandages on properly, how not to drop them on the floor, how to take them off, how to shave people, how to make beds, how to carry people, how to splint people with broken legs and resuscitation. And it

was all very interesting, good basic first aid training, as well as an insight

19:30 into various illnesses and diseases.

What were those illnesses do you remember?

Oh nothing like we encountered over there. Things like diarrhoea. They talked about Malaria, parasites that you might

20:00 be open to. I can't remember a lot of it.

Did they talk about VD [Venereal Disease]?

No, not at all. But it was a time of good fun and that ten weeks seemed to go pretty quick.

20:30 I do remember towards the end of our training we did get a choice of our posting choices. "Where would you like to go?" I liked the heat and I liked travelling, my first choice was Butterworth, Malaysia.

21:00 I'd heard a little bit about Butterworth when I lived at Mt Waverley. My girlfriend, her father was in the air force. He'd been over there. He'd had a great time over there. My more recent girlfriend, the one I had when I was called up, her father was in the army and he'd done a stint over there.

21:30 And also Indonesia. It just appealed to me, Malaysia, Singapore. So that was my first choice. I think my other choices were Darwin, Perth and a few other places around the world and Vietnam was my last choice. I didn't want to go there. Not really. Not on

22:00 a real live battlefield anyway. I never heard anymore about that.

That was clearly the impression you had, that Vietnam would be like that, very dangerous?

Yes. We heard about people being killed and shot at.

22:30 We didn't necessarily want to go into that sort of environment. There were a lot of other postings available throughout Australia and other parts of the world. Had more appeal than Vietnam. I put those down and didn't think any more of it.

23:00 We had a few weeks leave after that and I was posted to a place up in 2 General Hospital in Ingleburn New South Wales. I thought this would be interesting but it wasn't. It was a hospital by name only. It was next door to two military hospitals where they had

23:30 patients. But 2 General Hospital was a holding unit only and from there you were farmed out up to various locations as and when required. Whilst we were there we didn't do much at all. We were just filling in time just filling in sandbags.

24:00 A little bit of drill not doing any meaningful jobs at all. I was only there a couple of weeks and I was posted too. I went on a school camp with cadets up at Singleton and that was my

24:30 first experience with patients. So I had to go there to Singleton. The school camp, the cadets were probably ten, twelve, fourteen.

25:00 I was working in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] which was a first aid post. Heck that was a quick learning curve for me because I had kids coming in with tummy aches and ear aches and head aches. I had to either treat them or assess them and send them off to see a doctor.

25:30 That was pretty horrifying in a way. Not so much what I had to do but the responsibility of assessing young kids with headaches and tummy aches and sore limbs. Do I send them to a doctor or do I give them Panadol [headache tablets] or give them some anti-diarrhoea type stuff and tell

26:00 them to come back the next day. Anyway I sort of bumbled my way through that but towards my three weeks there I remember getting ill myself. We had a bit of a food poisoning outbreak, we had all of a sudden a lot of kids came in with diarrhoea and I was giving them all,

26:30 dispensing all this stuff. Anyway word got around that something was happening in the kitchen but that got cleared up after awhile. Towards the end of my stint there I became ill, I got really crook. I got a high temperature and I was put into hospital for a couple of days

27:00 with (UNCLEAR) Pyrexia of unknown origin. Sat in bed there in the hospital probably had about three days there. Went back to the RAP and by that time the cadet camp had finished and they'd all gone back to school and I went back to Ingleburn.

27:30 Hadn't long been back there when I was told I was going to Richmond the air force base because the hospitals there were short of medicals and orderlies. And I was being leant to the air force. And that sounded pretty good and so I went to Richmond and that was a whole new life. That was fantastic.

28:00 Instead of sleeping in old wooden huts we had brick buildings. We had our own rooms. Our tucker was a much better than army food. They had good working hours. Normally they worked a five day week; we

worked a five day a week too. We didn't necessarily get weekends off but we'd have a couple of days off

28:30 on shift work. So that was really interesting. But that was working in a hospital looking after medical patients mainly. There was very little surgery type stuff by they did do some surgery and that was my first experience or exposure to surgery type wounds and treatment.

29:00 It was usually mainly elective surgery. The removal of varicose veins, sudden case of recessions in the nose or dislocated limb or a broken bone or limb from sports. Most of the patients were medical patients,

29:30 headaches, tonsillitis things like that. It was pretty good. I enjoyed life there at the air force base. The weather was good. I made some good friends there. Partied a lot and that was probably when I had my first drinks, not being a beer drinker in those days I started drinking spirits.

30:00 I started drinking gin with a dash of lime. I'd get pretty happy on that or Bundy [Bundaberg Rum] and Coke. Usually gin. For a lot of time I was alone and do my own thing. I used to like travelling. I'd jump in the car and look around the Blue Mountains and look around there. Sleep

30:30 in the car, go for bush walks and I'd do a lot of day trips.

Were they all air force personnel working there?

Yes. There was one or two other army guys. I didn't have a great deal of time with them because we'd all work different

31:00 shifts. The only time I'd have contact with the army was any medivacs [medical evacuations] from Vietnam. Used to be brought in by the air force and they'd land at Richmond and be offloaded and put into army

31:30 ambulances or occasionally they used air force ambulances and transferred to military hospitals so I didn't see, although Australian or army patients came in there I didn't have anything to do with them they were straight into the ambulances and taken off to army hospitals.

32:00 All we had at the hospital at Richmond was air force personnel. During my time there I was called to the boss's office and told that I was lucky enough to have won a trip to Vietnam.

32:30 And that I would be shifting out in a few days, and get my gear ready. I found out I'd be going back to 2 General and have a bit of training there. I think, "I might have a week or two weeks leave." and then I went home. Our training back there basically consisted of running and drill

33:00 or work. And getting gear ready to go up to Canungra .

So tell me how you felt when they told you were going to Vietnam.

I wasn't excited. I was just resigned, "Well what can I do about this? Oh well I'm going." I certainly wasn't enthused about it.

33:30 I thought, "Oh well at least I'll see something different." But I wasn't overexcited about the whole thing at all.

You said the medivacs would come to Richmond. Would you assist at all with those?

No. I didn't even get to see them. All I knew was that there was one coming in and I might see

34:00 the ambulance go out. And some of the guys would go down there to give them a hand to unload and just check them, minor things. I wasn't involved in that at all. I didn't have any contact with them at all.

And during that time, you said when you were at Pucka you heard very little about the

34:30 **Vietnam War, but you had leave and so how informed were you by then?**

Still not very informed because I was having such a great time doing my own thing. A few of us would got off we'd go to a party somewhere

35:00 or I was off more than likely I was off by myself and I'd just choof [go] off for a few days. Occasionally I'd come home. Sometimes you'd work nine day s straight and then have a few days off and I might come home to Melbourne. At that stage I still wasn't interested in overseas events and what

35:30 was going on. I was more interested in life, life at the time I suppose and doing my own thing. I didn't pay much attention to what was going on because I didn't think I was going over there. It was my last choice and I hadn't heard anything and I was having a great time in the air force and Vietnam was miles away. It wasn't even thought of until I was told I was going

36:00 over there. I thought, "Oh shit this is happening."

So when you went home on leave prior to going to Vietnam, how were your parents?

Dad changed his attitude then. He didn't want me to go. He was friends with

36:30 I think, Bill Snedden [politician] was a member of the Glenn Waverley RSL [Returned and Services League]. Dad knew him through there. I think he was also the local member and Dad tried to do something about that, but he was told that he didn't have any control over that at all. So Dad didn't like the

37:00 idea of me going over there then and Mum didn't either.

Were there political reasons that they were concerned about?

No they weren't political, just the fact that it was a war zone and that there

37:30 was a possibility of harm. They just didn't like the idea of me going. I remember just after my twenty-first birthday was about then and I had a bit of a party and one of my mates got speaking about it before Rod came around with their guitars and amplifiers and set up this band

38:00 in the room and Dad didn't like it at all. He went right off, "I don't want these people here." It was too noisy for him, he didn't like that sort of music it was too loud, so we had a bit of a discussion. "This might be the last time you ever see me." and he didn't like that at all and I wasn't allowed to talk like that,

38:30 we had a bit of a disagreement about my birthday party. The band didn't play and we still tried to carry on and have a bit of a party but it wasn't a wild party. And shortly after that I choofed off to Sydney.

39:00 So that was really playing on your mind, the possibility that...?

Oh yeah it was. I'd done my Canungra training by then and that was a harrowing experience. I was in the air force, told I was going went to 2 General. From there went up to Canungra and we were told that it was

39:30 going to be a pretty physical, demanding few weeks up there and they weren't wrong. I used to hate running. I used to love walking and bush walking, but you ran everywhere up there. The only places you didn't run was downhill. In case somebody would stumble and everybody would fall over. But the moment we got off the bus we ran

40:00 and by the end of the first week I felt as if I was dying. The end of the second week I thought I was dead. The end of the third week I felt pretty good. They do knock you into shape. That was quite a demanding three weeks up at Canungra. We did a lot of everything in preparation to going over there, rifle training, shooting training,

40:30 jungle warfare training, patrolling. A lot of physical exercise. Interesting but very demanding. Came back from there. Couple of weeks leave, party and from there they took me down to the airport and

41:00 I flew back to Sydney. And then had to jump on the airline there with a few other guys and we flew over Sydney over Vietnam and it was cold and we had to go out in polyesters and gee it was cold.

Tape 5

00:34 Alright John before we fly over Vietnam can you tell us a bit more about Canungra? You said that it was pretty arduous training there. Could you give us a few more details?

We got off the bus. We were met by a few instructors and

01:00 they introduced themselves and I can remember one of the guys, saying, "I'm so and so and I'm a bastard and this is Sergeant such and such and he's a cunt." They were straight into it. They said "Whenever you move anywhere you'll double. You go to meals

01:30 you double, you walk back, everywhere you've got to double." They were really tough instructors. I s'pose they had to be one. As soon as we picked up our gear off we went double down to our lines. We slept in tents and we weren't that far from Canungra River. It was cold there too.

02:00 Everywhere I went seemed to be cold. It was pretty chilly there. I remember having ice on the ice bucket of the morning. And we'd be up at six o'clock going for our run. We'd form up in three ranks, we'd have an M60 machine gun up the front and off we'd go In the morning. As you ran you had this machine gun, it got passed to the guy behind you after a few hundred metres and then that guy at the front would run round to the back

02:30 So eventually everybody had a go at carrying this gun and we did this two-mile run every morning. And you go back and you'd be knackered. You'd go and have a tub and then you'd run up to breakfast, walk back, it was pretty arduous. And at the end of the day you'd flop on your stretcher and have a good

night's sleep because you're so buggered from

03:00 the day's activities. But that was all training to prepare you physically and mentally for going over to Vietnam. They had mock villages over there. They envisaged everybody going out into the jungle and the training was the same for everybody no matter what rank you were,

03:30 what age you were, what corps or whatever, it was still the same for everyone. It was quite arduous. Some of the guys who had been training and prepared they found it not too bad but gee if you hadn't done any physical training before it was fairly demanding. We did have a three week course,

04:00 on the second week we had off. I didn't go anywhere. I just flopped and relaxed. A heap of them jumped on buses and trucks and wrote themselves off down there but gee they suffered the next morning. It was an interesting experience and one that I'll never forget but it was

04:30 quite a good time.

You said they had mock villages, did they conduct mock battles?

Yes. They'd rely on information that was brought back from previous veterans I guess, people who had been over there and they'd built villages to the same style, the Vietnamese village, complete with tunnels and booby traps and things like that.

05:00 They would tell us about what to expect and demonstrate some of the things that people on patrol were likely to find in the village. Then we might have to go through and clear a village. Be wary of booby traps and hidey holes and things like that. It was quite

05:30 enlightening for us because none of that was taught in basic training. It was basically a hands on exercise prior to going over there and they made it as realistic as possible. The culmination of the three weeks was the battle inoculation course towards the end.

06:00 Everybody had to form up in assault pattern and go through this course where they had live firing overhead and slabs of TNT [Trinitrotoluene] and real battle noise simulation. I remember I was allocated as number two on the gun because we went through in sections,

06:30 rifle men, a machine gunner, signals and so on and I was allocated number two on the gun which involved carrying a bag full of spares, a spare barrel and bits and pieces as well as belts of ammunition as well as our own rifle and a bag of spares is called "the golf bag" and I had that thing over my shoulder as well as the ammunition.

07:00 Every time we went to go to ground this thing would swing around my neck and pull me down on the ground and I'd get up and sling it back again and we had to go down through these lines of TNT would go off and we'd be covered in mud and dirt. It was quite a noise experience. It was something I never had to face over there fortunately.

Were there any mishaps or accidents during those?

07:30 **Because we heard some people...**

Not while I was there. But I had heard of several incidents over there. We had to take our rings off or tape them because we did hear of people jumping out of trucks, if we went anywhere by truck the seats were down the centre of the truck and they were designed if we had an ambush you could leap out of the truck and take cover.

08:00 A few people had jumped out of the side of the trucks and had rings caught and stripped their fingers off apparently. There was no incidents of any mishaps, I don't remember anyone on my particular course. No doubt there would have been with some of the training there. I know that on one

08:30 particular course the obstacle course at the end of that is a thirty-meter tower over the river and you'd progress through the obstacle course through pipes and over walls and over rope ladders and at the end of it you'd have to jump into the river. And it was amazing, some of the guys would get up and freeze.

09:00 Some of the bigger guys who didn't seem to be afraid of anything else found it difficult to jump off the tower into the water. But gee it was refreshing after running through that thing, that water was cold, it was good and we'd be trudging back to our lines with all these wet greens on.

Before lunch you basically told us about getting on the plane to Sydney. What other final

09:30 **preparations were there, inoculations that sort of thing?**

Most of that was done up at South Head. I can't remember the exact sequence of events. I can't remember if I had my leave and went to South Head and South Head was just a prep place. We were only there a few days while you had your inoculations you got your Vietnam issue clothing.

10:00 There were a few lectures on protocol, customs, that's where we got our GP [general purpose] boots and rising sun badges sewn on our shirts. It was just a final preparation for going over there. I've got an

idea we

10:30 left straight from Sydney. Other people might be able to remember better than I do. We were probably at South Head for four or five days prior to leaving from the airport. I remember flying out from Sydney and I remember getting dressed up in polyesters and we had to get a set of civvies [civilian clothes] with us because on the way over the plane stopped over at Singapore.

11:00 Singapore was seen as a neutral country then and we weren't allowed to be seen in uniform. But there wasn't much difference with twenty year olds in uniform and twenty year olds with short back and sides, army boots and short sleeve shirts and shorts on. It looked rather ridiculous but that was the protocol we had to go through. So we flew out of

11:30 there. Stopped at Darwin and that was quite a shock because it was so cold in Sydney in our shirt sleeves and four hours later we jumped out at Darwin for a couple of minutes and it was like walking into a sauna

Was it a commercial flight?

Yes we went over with Qantas and came back with Qantas. A lot of the guys went over with the navy and some flew over in Hercs [Hercules] and so on.

12:00 But we had a very comfortable flight over there. I can't remember much about it. Except Darwin, Singapore, weren't allowed out of the lounge area there, had brekkie [breakfast] and then went back on the flight to Saigon.

Can you just put us on the timeline what month are we talking about?

12:30 This is 1968 late September '68. I can't remember the day of my departure but I was over there for about nine months.

Did you have a steady girlfriend at the time?

No. I was lucky. In fact the girl I was pretty close to

13:00 left me prior to going. Just before I was called up I was going with a girl I was quite smitten with and never did find out what happened to Sandy. I was always unattached and free when I left.

Can you tell us about landing at Tan Son Nhut?

Well, flying

13:30 in there we were all a little apprehensive. All of a sudden we were in Vietnam and we had visions of being shot at and shot down but as we flew into Tan Son Nhut airport and I was later to learn that Tan Son Nhut airport was the busiest airport at that stage. Flights in and

14:00 out, both civilian and military. The aircraft that was sort of taxiing around and sitting in hangers and bunkers was amazing. But I can't remember a great deal of what happened then. Disembarking and I can't remember what exactly

14:30 happened but we were put on a Caribou or Hercules to go from Tan Son Nhut to Vung Tau. So I didn't spend a great deal of time at Tan Son Nhut, moved off pretty rapidly to Vung Tau and I remember the

15:00 tarmac was perforated metal plates that the Americans had placed down on the runway, being loaded into a back of a truck and driven from there to an Australian base. The first thing that struck me was the smell of the place. It had a peculiar

15:30 smell, it was sort of unpleasant, yet unfamiliar and it was quite alien but I noticed after a few days I didn't notice that smell. It was an Asian smell, I guess anyone's been to Asia could relate to it. It was warm, semi-tropical, it was just towards the end of the monsoons.

16:00 And I was just agog at the culture as I drove through to our base and the small glimpses I got of the civilians' life and houses and villages there was very, very new. In a way I was excited, this is quite different, excited.

16:30 Yet very wary at the same time being in a different country, seeing different sites and smells. We got to 1ALSG [Australian Logistics Support Group], it was an Australian base and I can't remember what happened then, what we did or where we went but I remember

17:00 prior to going over there we were told that you'll be acclimatised because of the tropical, hot, humid weather and it would take up to a week to become acclimatised where we were going. Well we had our acclimatisation up to about two days and I was assigned to a team, there was a heap

17:30 of us. Assigned a corporal and then we were filling sandbags. And that was our acclimatisation program and that afternoon it pouring with rain just bucketing down for about half an hour, disappeared and then the sun would come out and it was just so hot. You'd literally see the

- 18:00 steam or water vapour coming off the puddles and roofs. Filled in about two days and on the third day I found myself working in a ward. A lot of this is a blur and I've been trying to remember this frequently since I've been back, but I can't remember what, where, why and how and different events but when
- 18:30 I first went there, my posting was as a steward and I was a bit disappointed and I didn't be a steward. I'd trained as a medic and I wanted to do medical work. When I got there my position was in the wards as an orderly and we had a brief indoctrination as to what
- 19:00 goes on and a tour of the area and an introduction into what was required and away we went. The uniform consisted of boots, socks, shorts and a blue smock. We took our weapons into work, we'd put them in the gun rack and off we'd go and do our nursing duties. We'd
- 19:30 make beds, fed patients, doled out medication, sponged them and most of my patients were medical patients, probably eighty, ninety percent were malarial cases. That was new to me as we hadn't done any malaria treatment in the medical training so I learnt a little bit about what malaria does and how it works.
- 20:00 The hospital then was in a big tent and as things progressed they were replaced with more substantial timber buildings and steel building.

What was the name of this, AFH?

Yes, 1 Australian Field Hospital. It was previously know as

- 20:30 2 Field Hospital but it was known as 1 Australian Field Hospital.

Was it the only one in Vung Tau?

There was an American hospital, 36 Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau somewhere in the American base somewhere. I think of course there was a civilian hospital as well

- 21:00 I never went there and I didn't see much of it and I don't think it was much by our standards. Ours was quite a substantial set up. I was quite amazed at the beds and the equipment that they had there. I didn't really know what to expect.

What about your hut or your quarters? What were you living in?

We were in

- 21:30 timber huts that slept about sixteen to twenty people. There would have been about four of them where we were. It was quite good. We were on top of a sand dune,
- 22:00 all the windows on either side were louvered. Openable anyway if they weren't louvered and surrounded by sandbags to the height of about nine hundred millimetres. It was quiet comfy in there It was took a little while to get used to. It had a bed, a sheet
- 22:30 and a mozzie [mosquito] net. We had to sleep in a mozzie net every night. But they were fairly basic. I had a locker, a bedside table, a steel chair and a bed.

What sort of personal effects were you allowed to bring?

I don't think I took much at all.

- 23:00 I didn't have a radio, shaving gear. Civilian clothes that was about all. Most of the stuff I acquired over there. I bought a radio.
- 23:30 I had a radio before I went but it got pinched prior to going over there. Without pay one of the first things I bought was a radio to listen to. Just a cheap trannie [transistor radio] and magazines to read.
- 24:00 There was always plenty to do. Lots of guys to talk to. I used to work a fair bit. We used to work in shift work, if you weren't doing that you were on piquet and duties. I didn't have a great deal of spare time. It's amazing what you did in your spare time. We had one day off a week
- 24:30 and that allowed you to get around and see the place. Mainly for the first three weeks we weren't allowed out of the base and that was a bit frustrating. And when you were allowed off the base you had to go in the company of somebody else. So if you did want to go into town you had to find somebody else to
- 25:00 go in with you and to get a bus.

Well you've given a really good picture of where you were, your hut, can you do the same thing with the hospital itself, with the tent for starters and the set up there?

When I got there it was in the process of being renovated up to a more substantial building. Our huts were

- 25:30 up on the sand dunes and the hospital complex itself was below us and we could look down on there.

There was a medical ward, a surgical ward and an intensive care unit. Medical ward didn't have individual cubicles, they were beds side by side. All open.

- 26:00 One large ward. As I say ninety percent were malarial cases, the other made up of minor and other ailments, dysentery, tonsillitis and other odds and ends. One guy had syphilis. Surgical was usually made up of
- 26:30 casualties, battle casualties, prior to being repatriated back to Australia. Intensive care ward was full of people who had just come out of surgery. They had a theatre there. It was quite a substantial building and I
- 27:00 remember that being built there, a new theatre. But a lot of it looking back on it is a blur and I'd often like to get a map of the area, the layout, just to refresh my memory. I can't remember a lot of the stuff there. Although I do remember, near the front of the hospital there was
- 27:30 a tent which became a building called the Sallyman's tent and that was run by the Salvation Army and they were there for the patients. The Salvos [Salvation Army] did a wonderful job. I gained a lot of respect for them after being over there with these guys but there was also some
- 28:00 females too. They'd go around and talk to the patients. Write letters for them and post letters and do small errands for them. Provide them with reading material. They were generally great, great company for everybody, kept the morale up lot. They were just a pair of ears for some guys who just wanted to talk.
- 28:30 Not far from them was a dental unit. RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and a VD [Venereal Disease] clinic and a pathology area. I got shifted out of the medical ward after a few months.
- 29:00 I didn't find it very exciting or interesting. It was pretty mundane sort of stuff. I got shifted to what they call a "Jack Shack." which was the VD clinic and I had some good times down there, learnt a fair bit about VD. We'd
- 29:30 hold a clinic every morning and chaps would come in and complain to the doctor about having drippy dick or burning and all this sort of stuff. And the doctor would tell him to drop his pants and take a swab. And I'd fill in all the paperwork and send it off to the path [pathology] lab for ID [identification] of the ailment or culture. And they would come back the following day and be treated
- 30:00 for the diagnosed problem. I had some fun there. It had its advantages. I got to know where to go and where not to go. We had to keep a running list, on the questionnaire that these people had to fill out. They had to fill out where they went and where they think they got, picked up the problem
- 30:30 and if an establishment came up so many times or fairly frequently it was place out of bounds. It was great to tell your mates, don't go here, high incidence down there.

Was the brothel blacklisted?

Yes basically, if soldiers were caught in there they were liable to be charged.

- 31:00 Black listers were put out of bounds. Not only brothels but eating places too. Some of the guys would do health checks of eating areas and all those places would be put out of bounds and if anyone was caught eating there they would find themselves on a charge as well.

So how would the troops know? Was there a circular saying these are the places not to go?

- 31:30 I can't remember but I'm sure there would have been. We were certainly told where not to go somehow. There would have been routine orders that came out daily or weekly that would have had these names on it and everybody would familiarise themselves with it.

- 32:00 **Can I just say I reckon your memory is pretty good. I think you're being a bit hard on yourself. Your memory's not bad at all. We've spoken to a few guys who were at the hospital and no one's gone into such detail about the layout. Your memory's pretty good.**

I can remember the buildings, but I can't remember the exact layout where they were. I remember the path lab [pathology laboratory] and dental unit were very close by. What

- 32:30 they looked like I can't remember. The pharmacy I can't remember, but I know it was there. I know the VD clinic was in the same building as the RAP because I was in the VD clinic as well as working in the RAP. And after awhile the chap I was working with got an RTA or return to Australia and I went down to the RAP and I spent the remainder, or most of it down there,

- 33:00 which was quite a good experience.

So your first couple of months were with the medical ward, then the Jack Shack for how long?

I'm not quite sure that would have probably spent about a month or six weeks there, and

- 33:30 then a few months the rest of the time, I can't remember the timelines. But until the week before I came

home I spent the rest of the time down at the RAP. Although there were times, medivacs come in, you'd be

34:00 required there, if you had to off shift and one of these came in you were expected to turn up and assist and we had some bad experiences with some of these dust offs [medical evacuation helicopters] that came in.

The battle casualties?

Yes.

34:30 **So were they going straight into the surgical ward?**

The triage [evaluation of medical need] and be assessed. It was quite a, it was a bit like M*A*S*H [reference to a 1970s American television series about a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital during the Korean War] in a way, it was just chaos depending on how many came in.

35:00 And a lot of rushing around and wanting to know different things. Names and tags, triage people, trying to assess injuries and the extent of injuries all that sort of stuff. And prioritising who was going into theatre first and

35:30 who would be treated elsewhere.

So when you were involved with the medivacs, what was your role?

You just go in with stretchers and get them off the choppers. You'd take them into the triage and strip them off, their clothing off,

36:00 get some personal information off them if you could. Start filling out other forms and then running around following doctors and nurses, be taught to doing a lot of the work on them and then once things quietened down you'd go back to your normal duties. It was pretty

36:30 harrowing at times.

Were they always Aussie soldiers?

Mainly, not all Aussie soldiers, not all of them came to us. The very severe cases might have gone to the American base. Most of our people were Aussies and Kiwis. Occasionally we'd have a Yank if they were attached to a unit of ours out in the field as an adviser.

37:00 Occasionally we'd have some South Vietnamese too. If they came in we'd, not only South Vietnamese but Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, if they were injured and taken prisoner we'd stabilise them and then ship them out to, if they were South Vietnamese they'd be sent to their medical people

37:30 and if it was enemy they would be stabilised and sent off to the Americans for treatment and interrogation etc. We didn't have too many of them, but I remember some of them coming in.

I guess you had nothing to prepare you for the blood and guts?

Yes and some of the injuries were pretty traumatic.

38:00 Traumatic amputations, limbs, people hit with mines. I remember one Vietnamese guy came in. He'd been hit in the open with a bell grenade and we thought he was dead and then he started talking later and that was pretty horrible with the guts hanging out. It was pretty horrific.

38:30 **You know what became of him, did he pull through?**

No he died there. Yeah we had a lot of Aussies come in with mine injuries and gunshot wounds, things like that.

If you were involved in the dust off there, were you ever able to follow up and see how some of those guys progressed and whether they made it?

Oh yeah.

39:00 Usually they'd go through the theatre. And once things were sorted out a bit, if I was down at the RAP some of them would be sent down, minor shrapnel wounds might come down to me once we'd sorted things out and we'd clean them up and document all their injuries and all their wounds. And do some minor patching up down there. But most of them

39:30 went through the theatre. You'd often see them a couple of days later on different shifts. It was very gratifying to see them slowly get better. Some of the guys would be in intensive care for a few days and I'd be working in intensive care and you'd talk to your mates and ask how is so and so going is he getting worse or dying. Usually

40:00 didn't have many deaths there. Most of them came in improved. Then they might go back down to the surgical ward. A few of them would come into medical ward when beds were available and surgical was getting pretty full. You'd see them improve and getting better. Of course a lot of them were medivaced

home back to Australia

40:30 and some of them would recover and go back up to Nui Dat and would go back out again. I reckon that would have been pretty hard on some of them, to back in the firing line. Basically depending on the extent of their injuries and what they were.

Some of them who had lost a limb, were the chances still good if they got back in time they'd be patched up?

Generally so.

41:00 The medics out in the field did a great job. That's what I thought I'd end up doing but I'm glad I didn't now, looking back. It would have been a pretty horrific time out there. Although probably ninety percent of the time nothing happened but when it suddenly did go wrong they were in the thick of it basically. It would have been very difficult

41:30 treating injured people there on the battlefield. I'm not envious of those guys and I have a lot of respect for those people out there. It was bad enough being down at RAP where we were.

Tape 6

00:32 **What can you tell us about the doctors and nurses? Did you get to see much of what they were doing, how they operated?**

Yeah. We had female [nursing] sisters over there who were in charge of wards and who oversaw us guys in the ward.

01:00 And we had two categories of doctors over there. We had army doctors and we had civilian doctors. A lot of the civilian doctors went over there for experience in either tropical medicine and tropical diseases or for

01:30 experience in gunshot wounds, things like that but not necessarily one or the other. But mainly for tropical medicine experience. I generally found that civilian doctors easier to work with than the military guys. Though there were some very nice guys. A lot of

02:00 the military doctors were, I just found them rude and demanding, rather than pleasant to work with. They expected and demanded a different sort of loyalty from soldiers. Not so much loyalty, work was very regimented. But the civilian guys were

02:30 great guys to work with. Most of the sisters weren't too bad to get on with either. But then again, you get this in civilian life. Some people are easier to work with than others.

Was there any kind of rivalry between the civilian and army doctors?

None at all, not that I was aware of. No they went in as honorary majors and they were treated and respected

03:00 as a major over there. They weren't given any other treatment.

It would be good to get a picture on those different phases. You said while you were there that the buildings at AFH became more substantial. How far into it did that process take place or was it ongoing?

It was

03:30 an ongoing thing. I was only there for just over nine months. I certainly noticed a change from tentage to more substantial buildings. And that was happening not only in the hospital but all over the base. Though a lot of the buildings when we got there were quite substantial buildings too. Living quarters and mess quarters, workshops for example they were all

04:00 quite substantial buildings. Yes there was a continual upgrading of facilities while we were there, all for the better. I guess people didn't know how long this was going on for. They probably got about a five year use out of some of the infrastructure over there.

04:30 **Now I'm going to try and not leave any stone unturned. That first couple of months that you were in the medical ward as an orderly can you just talk through the routine of that period?**

There were three shifts. A day shift and evening shift and a night shift towards when I was there earlier. Later on in my time there just before I was coming home

05:00 there was, I was working twelve hour shifts. Of a morning shift you'd report to work. And you'd go down, you'd put your rifle on the rack and you'd sign on and have morning handover and you'd go around

- 05:30 at ten o'clock before, you'd go round with the doctors and administer any drugs or injections. I think it was only the sisters and the nurses who gave any injections when we were over there. We'd administer drugs, make beds, change beds, breakfasts
- 06:00 for the patients. Then we'd go around with the doctors on his wards and follow any orders that he'd pass down to the sisters and we'd look after that. Then there was just basic nursing duty. Supplying bedpans for those people who weren't ambulant. Sponging patients when they had fevers,
- 06:30 changing linen whenever necessary, dishing out meals and so on. Yeah it was just sort of pretty dull, routine nursing stuff. If you had surgical patients it was a little more interesting. Dressings to replace and
- 07:00 I was more into that aspect of things or wanted to be than the medical type stuff. I wanted a more hands on role. I think that was why I was replaced or shifted from there to the RAP and the VD clinic. But that was all part of being a nurse over there
- 07:30 I guess. We had some great times and we had some pretty low times. The worst times were with the battle casualties.

What were the relations like with the sisters there?

It varied depending on the sisters. Some guys got on better with the sisters than others.

- 08:00 It was the same with personalities everywhere. Some were easy to work with and some were more demanding. With the hierarchy in the military system, there was certainly no fraternising between officers and other ranks.
- 08:30 Nursing sisters were all officers. We had very little to do with them and nothing to do with them socially. So there was a big class distinction there. When we'd knock off we'd do our own thing and we'd go down to our boozier [bar] and some guys would write themselves off or get pretty merry. I can understand it, there was nothing else to do.
- 09:00 It was one way of getting over the tension and getting over some of the things you saw over there.

Of the guys you were working with, what percentage was national service?

I'm not quite sure now. Probably two thirds were Nashos. All our supervisors would have

- 09:30 been regular army guys, corporals and sergeants. Although most of the sergeants and senior NCOs [non commissioned officers] were doing admin [administration] type work, theatre text, bits and pieces of everything. Most of the guys I was with were Nashos.

Were there any guys doing the same job who were not doing National Service?

There may have been, but I can't remember. A corporal I worked with over there was a regular army guy. I didn't work with him a great deal.

- 10:30 There would have been a few regs [regular army personnel] but the guys I worked with were Nashos.

Can you tell us a bit about the boozier and the letting off steam after hours?

I didn't get down to the boozier a great deal because if you

- 11:00 were on night shift you didn't get a chance to get down there. We also had piquets to do. You always had a piquet every night round your area and whilst I was in the wards they were looking for projectionists because one of the things we had in our unit was movies every night.
- 11:30 I thought this was a way of getting out of some work and I might learn a few skills so I did this projectionist course. Which got me out of the hospital for a while and it was great. It was really good fun. Learning all about 35 millimetre projection. Although we didn't have any 35 millimetre projectors they were all 16 millimetre. During the course I learnt a lot about film
- 12:00 and projectors. Though I didn't realise at the end of it I would end up becoming a duty projectionist. So a lot of my time if I wasn't on shift work, wasn't on piquet I would end up as duty projectionist and often that would double up and I was on piquet and duty projectionist at the same time. So I'd miss out on the first shift of piquet duty and I'd come in later on.
- 12:30 So I didn't have as much free time as the other guys. And it would depend on where you were. If I was down at the RAP I had to sleep overnight. You were sort of on twenty four hour shift down there. It was manned twenty four hours a day. So I didn't get down the boozier as often as a lot of guys.
- 13:00 But when I did I probably really give it a nudge. And a lot of the guys did because it was so cheap and so easy and there was nothing else to do unless you went into town. Beer was ten cents a can over there and once a week they'd have a five cent night and once a fortnight they'd have a free night and you could drink all the beer for free.

13:30 I wasn't a beer drinker but I'd give the gin a bit of a nudge still have some pretty good times. A lot of the guys spent quite a bit of time. You can't say they spent a lot of money down there because it was so cheap and cigarettes were cheap as well, so everyone was smokers and drinkers over there.

14:00 **You talked about piquet duty, what did that entail?**

It was basically guard duty at night. You'd walk around your area. You'd have a designated area with your firearm. It's like night service or patrol service

14:30 in civilian life. You'd just be a roving piquet checking that no-one was doing the wrong thing that everything was okay. Check that there weren't any fires etc. It was just a security check, twenty four hours. Well during the daytime it wasn't on so much but at night it was just a nice security patrol.

Did you have any trouble while you were on duty?

Not at all.

15:00 We used to have fun though because one of the tasks of last piquets, two on, was to light the choofers, or water heaters. They were petrol fired heaters. We used to try and remove the chimneys off these things by putting excess petrol in there and chucking a match in and it would go boom.

15:30 There soon came an order out that there weren't to be misused and lit properly. That was about the extent of it. There were no mishaps. The only thing that happened to me was when I was on duty down at the RAP I would often have minor casualties come in, people who had got into a brawl, been into town and got into a fight and got hit over the head

16:00 with a bottle. Or a couple of guys had a few too many and had walked into a wall or something like that and you'd have to patch up on a few cut eyes or split heads, bruises things like that. No most of, all the piquets I was on were pretty uneventful. Sometimes you'd have things going off in the distance, bombing raids or not long after we got there

16:30 the American base got rocketed. And I slept through it and I didn't believe people. "Did you see the rockets?" I thought that they were just stirring me being the reo [the reinforcement guy]. I thought they were just having me on but when I got up in the morning I'd saw the clouds of black smoke when they'd hit the fuel dump I thought, 'Shit this is real! There is a real war on.'

17:00 **In general was there a sense of the proximity of what was going on? Was there a feeling of unease or threat at all?**

Generally not where we were. Vung Tau was

17:30 regarded, I believe, as a rest and recreation area not only for allied troops or Australians but also for VC [Viet Cong] and North Vietnamese. There were never any problems. We had it brought home to us when we went into town inasmuch as we were only allowed to go in with company.

18:00 A lot of military aircraft was flying around the whole time. Helicopters backwards and forwards, jets, propeller driven aircraft but Vung Tau being on the peninsula was generally out of it. At night we'd often sit out there and watch the

18:30 (UNCLEAR) being bombed, up in the mountains, and we'd see these flashes. We were fairly secure there until we went out. I went off base a few times up to Nui Dat and I went on a spy convoy once. And you were very aware as soon as you'd leave the base area that there was strife out there,

19:00 potential strife. There would be whole mood changes, people you were with changes, joviality goes out of it to a certain extent when you were going up to Nui Dat or convoys up into somewhere just out of Vung Tau, it was very

19:30 real I s'pose.

Do you remember one of the first times you went out of town on one of those convoys or was there a particular experience?

I remember, we worked a six day week over there and you generally had one day off per week. Really good compared to the guys up the front

20:00 because they'd be out in the bush for up to six weeks at a time with no breaks at all. So we had it fairly easy. But on our one day off you could virtually do whatever you liked. You could go down to the beach or go down to the pool. You could go up to Nui Dat you could go out anywhere provided you had the CO's [commanding officer] permission.

20:30 I remember one instance where they asked for volunteers to go out on a convoy, a supply convoy to a fire support base. I had the opportunity and I thought why not, while I'm here I'll have a look and see a bit of the country. I can remember I had to be ready at five o'clock in the morning, report to some orderly room,

- 21:00 with my tin hat and flak jacket and weapon all that sort of that. It was all rather exciting in a way until we got into the convoy. That wasn't too bad because we all lined up in convoy and there was various tanks and trucks and APCs [armoured personnel carriers] and more trucks and another tank.
- 21:30 And we headed off into the sticks [countryside]. I often then wondered what I'd got myself in for. We went past buildings that had been shot at and blown up, where there had been a lot of action. I remember going through a rubber plantation and all of a sudden the convoy stopped and APCs took off through the rubber plantation or through the trees and you'd hear the machine guns going.
- 22:00 You'd see people running off over there and we didn't know what to expect and we were just sitting there in the truck. A shotgun, you had the driver and we were there to protect the driver basically and you stood on the seat and the manhole on the truck was open, and you sort of stood up in the manhole and you're virtually totally exposed to anything that was going on.
- 22:30 But the APCs peeled off at that particular time and a few shots rang out and then they came back and joined the convoy and sort of forgot about that little incident. I don't really know what went on. One of the tanks in the convoy hit a mine and blew a track off. And we passed a few villages and we were getting up towards where we had to drop off all this ammunition. And
- 23:00 one of the trucks hit a mine, lost a track and we all came to a halt again. We thought we'd have to spend the night out there and I was shit scared 'cause you could hear firearms going off here, there and everywhere. A lot of those I learnt were unauthorised discharges.
- 23:30 As we were waiting for a new track to be flown in by helicopter and a group of South Vietnamese Army came out of the bush and they were yabbering and carrying on, a very ill disciplined mob of guys. You'd hear banging and someone would shoot off a round now and then that was pretty disconcerting just being
- 24:00 amongst this ill disciplined mob of people, knowing that there had been nasties around there, blowing mines on the road that was pretty disconcerting too. We thought that we'd have to stay the night there but they flew in another track and got it going and we got out and we got home just on dusk. But that was rather interesting, it was an experience.
- 24:30 Another time when we were at Nui Dat and were flying back in the dusk in a helicopter, we got shot at and I didn't like that either. You can't hear much except the noise of the chopper and you could see these rounds going off, the tracers zapped past. It's not really nice either. I was glad to get back on the ground after that.

Was that a gun ship or what?

No we just had routine trips up to Nui Dat or resupplies or

- 25:00 whatever and one particular day I thought I'd go up and have a look around so we hopped on the chopper in the morning and it was great, saw a lot from the air and we'd pick up civilians here, there and sort of drop them off. It's like a sort of taxi service. It was quite fascinating. It hit home when I was coming home and we got shot at.
- 25:30 Guys in the choppers didn't seem too fussed at all.

They didn't fight back?

No they just kept going and I was glad to get home and I'm sure if we'd been hit, and all I could think of was being hit and going down. Not so much being killed but being taken prisoner by them and I didn't like that idea at all.

So their attitude was just nonchalant?

Yeah

- 26:00 I just think they turned the navi [navigation] lights off and just went up a bit higher and it stopped. I don't know where they came from. I couldn't see the source of them rounds. Got out of there quick.

Did you go back in a chopper after that?

I think that was my last

- 26:30 time. No I didn't. I might have if I had the opportunity but the opportunity never rose. I might not have taken it up if I could have. Just one of those things that just stays in your mind.

How about Vung Tau itself, the town?

- 27:00 **How often did you get into town?**

You could if you had the time and friends permitted and you had to ask for a leave pass. And you had to draw out some money and change it into local piastres and you had to be back at nine or ten o'clock but I can't remember now.

27:30 But I loved it. I found it an interesting place. Generally they were fairly friendly people. I didn't see too many young guys in there. They were all mainly kids, and young girls and women and older people. I guess the men of fighting age were out fighting.

28:00 But I enjoyed it in there. I found the sights, sounds and smells interesting. Another thing I did over there was there was a camera club and I joined a camera club and often I'd go sightseeing around the area, local places. The gardens

28:30 and temples, things like that and we'd jump on a Jeep or Land Rover and do the sites and just take photos. I found the whole thing rather interesting at Vung Tau. Loved it. I'd love to go back there and have a look. I believe it's nothing like it was, now.

What sort of sights would you look at?

Just the markets

29:00 and the smells and the veggies [vegetables]. The way people lived. It was just a whole new way of life. We'd often go into town for recreational purposes. We'd go

29:30 in there for a massage. I enjoyed going into town but often the opportunities didn't arise. Or we didn't have the time to go in there because of duties and so on. We'd go in as much as we could and we really enjoyed it.

So were you everybody's best friend, because of your knowledge of all the cleanest places?

30:00 I used to keep that to myself. Me and a couple of guys it was just between us. We didn't want everybody else to find out about it otherwise it wouldn't have stayed clean.

So how often would one avail oneself of those

30:30 **attractions?**

Depends on the person. Some guys would be going in twice a week or more. On average I would only get in once a week or so. I wouldn't necessarily go for a massage at all, or visit every time. I probably wouldn't have got in more than once a week

31:00 for various things, even if we were just going on a trip, or going to the markets to have a look around.

Did you get to know any of the girls reasonably well?

No. Though we had some civilians working in the hospital. They were very difficult to talk to. Some of them were very attractive, particularly the ones with French ancestry there. Asian French they were,

31:30 very attractive. But they were very difficult to talk to. Not necessarily because of the language barrier. Maybe there was little bit of distrust between the two people. A lot of the guys would try to take advantage of them and they were very wary.

32:00 I never had any girlfriends over there.

Was that common though, that guys would get together romantically?

Not that I'm aware of. I'm aware of one guy who married a Vietnamese, but generally no. Certainly not amongst us guys we were too young. We had too many other things to worry about.

32:30 **How would that normally work? Was it a kind of bar girl situation?**

Oh yeah, you could get sex virtually anywhere, usually through the bars. "You buy me Saigon tea?" The girl would come up to you and sort of sit on your knee, rub your crotch and all that. Yeah and because blokes being out in the field and blokes being blokes and twenty

33:00 years of age, they'd be pretty receptive to that sort of treatment. It could be fairly expensive buying Saigon tea or whisky coke. Which is more coke than whisky. But usually bar girls or massage parlours. And there were a few massage parlours around. Most of

33:30 those had very willing girls there, because that was the way they made their money.

So what would a night out cost you?

Not a great deal, probably no more than ten dollars in those days. I'd leave most of money at home because you could easily lose it with, pickpockets were rife. You could really get carried away buying

34:00 (UNCLEAR) at exorbitant prices in town. Some blokes didn't care. They would go and blow twenty, fifty bucks in town, which in those days was a lot of money, quite easily and I learnt very quickly not to take all your money into town. Only take ten dollars and leave the rest at home. And once it's gone, you can't do much. We found it cheaper to drink in the bar at home

34:30 in our boozier. If you were a beer drinker, guys would love going in there for a beer and drinking the local stuff and they'd have a good time. And if half a dozen went in they'd have a ball. We never had that

opportunity, 'cause we were all working different shift works and there would be only two or three of you that could get in at a time.

35:00 I s'pose we were a little bit more responsible than some of the other guys.

Talking about responsibility, were condoms standard issue?

They were very available if you wanted them, and they were encouraged to use them. There was always a box of them there, for people from our unit. Other units would have their own supplies. We'd supply them.

35:30 They were always encouraged to use them but a lot of blokes didn't.

Was that part of your job at the VD clinic?

No basically my job there was to get the details, take down any notes. They had quite a questionnaire to fill in,

36:00 age, unit, number rank, serial number, where you went, was she amateur or professional. Did you pay for it or did you get it for free. Where did you get it? How long have you had it? What are the symptoms? Have you had it before? How many times? All that sort of stuff. Then the doc would have a look, "Flop your dacks [pants]." pair of forceps and have a look at it. And then take a swab and put it on the slide

36:30 I'd prepare the slide, label it. And send it off to the path lab. When the results came back he would prescribe injections, jabs and I would give it to them and I'd give them a course of antibiotics, which usually would be over a three or four day period. Some guys

37:00 were very embarrassed about it. Others were very nonchalant about it. Some guys you'd see them over and over and I remember one guy being charged because you weren't supposed to go into town for so many days after commencing treatment. Some blokes couldn't help themselves, or did help themselves too much. They virtually continually had VD.

37:30 So what were the most common diseases and how were they treated?

The most common was gonorrhoea and NSU, non-specific urethritis. Off the top of my head I'd say about seventy percent were gonorrhoea

38:00 and twenty eight percent would have been identified as NSU because they couldn't identify the organism. And the other two percent would have been syphilis. Syph was present over there, but it wasn't very prevalent.

How did the syphilis present?

Either chancres or sores on the penis.

38:30 That was usually the first symptoms they had. Other symptoms of gonorrhoea, NSU were excruciating, very painful. Pain on urinating, they say it's like pissing broken glass. I don't know.

NSU. What was that traced back to?

39:00 NSU being non specific they didn't isolate the organism. Both were treated with penicillin. One was a different dose from what I can remember. I think they had an initial injection of crystalline penicillin which was quite painful. It's supposed to feel like broken glass being injected into your bum,

39:30 followed by five shots of, over a course of days of procaine penicillin which wasn't as painful. Syphilis I can't remember the exact treatment. It was antibiotics. But I remember one guy being hospitalised with it. When I came home, the organism was

40:00 covered in spinal fluid, so God knows it wasn't real flash. Didn't have AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] in those days. Herpes was another thing that popped up in those days but not very often.

40:30 You said there weren't any young Vietnamese males around. Did the (UNCLEAR) encounter any problems with the male society?

Yes occasionally. Vietnamese Army guys only on leave too. I think most of them would get into brawls with Yanks or themselves

41:00 in town rather than the Vietnamese. Although I never had any hassles, but it depended on where they went or how drunk they were and so on. I know some people who would get into brawls with Yanks. They would often fight amongst themselves. They used to intimidate the Vietnamese quite often

41:30 And I've heard more tales since I've been back than when I was over there. They used to go into town in the Lambrettas and taxis used to be Lambrettas and you'd get about six or so guys and they'd all crowd in the back. And there only three wheeled vehicles and of course the thing, you wouldn't be able to

steer it.

Tape 7

- 00:34 One of the duties in the RAP, because they had to be manned twenty four hours a day. That was where the radio was kept for any dust offs who came in. Dust off being a medivac from out in the sticks [the country] and they could come through any time of the day or night.
- 01:00 If a radio call came through on a particular frequency so we didn't hear any other chatter they'd call up the Vampire pad, which was us and let us know how many were coming in and what they were. GSWs, gunshot wounds or KIAs, killed in action and so on and I had to jot down all these notes here

01:30 then hit the alarm. That would sort of summon everybody to come to the helipad. Somebody would come down and get the details off me. And so either relieve me or I'd go up there to assist or whatever. And that was one of the duties, and I hated that every time the radio came off because you didn't know what was coming in. I used to get very, very frustrated

02:00 and angry at some of things that would come in. All you'd want to do was go out on a chopper and go out and shoot somebody.

What would they say over the radio?

"Vampire pad this is Casevac." I can't remember the exact terminology but they'd say, "We've got two KIAs, three GSWs, and a shrapnel." And you'd know

- 02:30 that there was two deadies coming in, three wounded and you wouldn't know how badly wounded. So you'd hit the siren and people go to the relevant stations, like the doctors, surgeons and the anaesthetists would report to the op [operating] theatre, theatre techs [technicians]
- 03:00 would gown up and get ready. People not on leave would go down and help to bring them in and go to triage and see what was required until things would calm down and they would go back to their normal duties again.
- 03:30 There would be a bit of rush in regards to what was going on. Sometimes there would be only one person go in and everybody would disappear again. But if there were a couple of choppers coming in you might have six, eight, ten people come in if there had been a big contact. There would be people running everywhere.

So you would turn up on the helipad with what?

- 04:00 On the helipad itself would be just the orderlies with stretchers.
- 04:30 There would be somebody from the Q store to take their weapon. Take their packs. There would be somebody from admin taking all the details off them and so on. There would be a whole range of people getting various range of information, getting different things. Once it's all sorted out it would go back to normal again.

And how far was the helipad from the hospital?

- 05:00 Twenty metres, just out the back, not very far at all.

And where were you located?

The RAP was probably the furthestest part away. It was quite a while away. But you'd hear the chopper coming, you'd know that they would be here at ten to fifteen minutes at the latest. And you'd hear them coming and if you weren't ready and waiting from them you'd get there pretty soon.

- 05:30 **Would you be there at the arrival?**

Sometimes, not always. It all depends on where I was and what I was doing. If I was done in the RAP I'd have to stay there. But if I was a medic, an orderly, I'd be up there. Sometimes if you were off duty you'd be called in if they'd need assistance. I remember going down the theatre once I was off duty,

- 06:00 wasn't working in the wards. I went into the theatre and helped the guys in there. Gowned up. I remember the guys said, "You can sew him up now."

Had you done much suturing before?

Not much but I did a lot in the RAP, mainly minor cuts and abrasions down there.

- 06:30 They'd be coming in after a brawl and they'd have a gash in the head or something like that and I'd give them a local and sew them up. Or sometimes they were that drunk that I wouldn't even bother giving them a local because they wouldn't feel it. It was hard enough to get them to stay still. But I got quite adept at it and I did some pretty good jobs at times. It was interesting.

07:00 It was fascinating in the theatre watching the guys; the civilian doctors were extremely good.

Do you remember what the surgery was (UNCLEAR)?

No, I don't remember now. Gee we had quite a few guys come in with various wounds, and problems. I remember one fella was a tank driver

07:30 or was in an APC [armoured personnel carrier] and he lost most of this buttocks, backs of his legs and his heels. He was in a bad way and they left him towards the end to do because they weren't sure of his prognosis, but he came through okay. I remember seeing his x-ray s and there was eleven pieces of shrapnel

08:00 embedded in his buttocks or what was left of them, even a spring of a ballpoint pen was embedded in there. But he made a recovery and he was flown home. Look there was gunshot wounds to the legs, arms, mine injuries, blast injuries all sorts of things. No, they all sort of meld

08:30 into one. I remember one other guy who died on me. For every body who died there had to be a cause of death. The doctor had to write down cause of death and the injury that he sustained. I remember working,

09:00 being dragged off to a ward one day and a chap was there and he was very, very ill and he died and stopped breathing and we were doing CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] on him, we could hear his sternum breaking because

09:30 we couldn't see why, why he should die. The only injury on this guy we could find was a lacerated toe, but

10:00 when we had to look at him we just saw a little bit of blood on his forehead and he'd been hit in the forehead with a pellet from a Claymore.

10:30 We thought, "Shit, how unlucky." that would have been one of our Claymores used against us. There was lots of incidents that guys would come in hurt and you just were pissed off and just wanted to go out

11:00 and shoot some bastard for shooting your mates, hurting your mates. It used to be pretty hard.

Were any of these people, people you trained with? Did you know any of them prior to?

No I didn't. Yes there

11:30 was one guy. He came in before I was due to come home, which was in a few weeks. I don't know where I was working, I was working somewhere. A siren went off in the evening or night.

12:00 All we knew was that he was a burns victim. And this guy was flown in and he had burns to ninety eight percent of this body. And he was a guy I did recruits with, a guy that wasn't very well liked,

12:30 he just rubbed a lot of people up the wrong way. I heard later that someone chucked a match in his tent and his burning tent fell on top of him and he was badly burnt. I heard a few instances of people who were disliked were sort of dealt with in a sort of nasty way,

13:00 hand grenades lobbed into their tents. The only guy I did recruits with was this burns victim fellow. He didn't survive. When he first came in he was bright and cheerful until the shock set in, until the pain took over.

13:30 They flew him over to the burns unit in Japan. But he died just before or after he got there. It's strange that he was the only guy I can remember going through recruits with, mainly because he was not so well liked.

14:00 You mentioned before how fabulous the medical staff were. I mean they were treating wounds that they never had to treat before?

Yes it was interesting in a way. We saw some pretty amazing x-rays, lucky ones. A guy who was shot in the neck and

14:30 the bullet was still there and he was so bloody lucky and others that kept the bullet that they were shot with and kept it as a souvenir. But it was great to treat somebody and see them get better or getting well enough to go home, but a lot of

15:00 them were injured so badly that they would lose a limb and they would be amputated.

So were you privy to discussions or debriefings about any of the surgical...?

Not really it would all be documented on the patients' records. Because I worked mainly in medical wards, I didn't get to see,

15:30 or it wasn't relevant, all you needed to know was that the shrapnel wound had been dressed and treated and divided and all that sort of stuff and you just had to maintain the dressing. They weren't ill as such or they were just recuperating from wounds and surgery. Some of those guys were good fun and

16:00 saw the light side of it, others were very bitter and upset about what had happened to them. It affected different people in different ways.

What about for you, you were obviously very affected by what you were seeing, did you feel quite a responsibility to try and maintain morale?

No, not really.

16:30 With a lot of the guys, you'd get to know the personalities of some of the people and you could have some really good fun with them. Others you couldn't. Either because they were too sick or they weren't that sort of bloke.

17:00 A lot of the guys were just good fun and you could play tricks on them. You'd put a bedpan in full of ice, just mucking around, to give them a hard time, wake them up and ask them if they wanted a sleeping pill because they were subscribed. Wake em up, "Do you want a sleeper?" "No piss off!"

17:30 Yes we had fun with some of the guys. You just got to know who you could muck around with and who you couldn't. But as far as trying to maintain morale, all those things affected different people in different ways. You would usually go down to the boozier after

18:00 and sort of write yourself off [get drunk] if you could, just a way of getting over it. I used to pop a few Librium capsules, pretty easy to get a hold of.

What was the effect of those?

They're a bit like Valium,

18:30 same effect as Valium. Ease the effects of alcohol and hangovers too. Whether that was true or not I don't know. Every now and then I would have some Librium because I could. It probably helped me a bit. You'd have your good days and

19:00 your bad days and morale was generally pretty high. The only time, I don't think I ever saw morale low. I saw people upset at some of the things that they would see and that they would handle. It wouldn't affect people at the time. The only thing that would get me going, at the time, if I saw these guys coming off the chopper all I would want to do is grab

19:30 their rifle jump on their chopper and go out and shoot somebody else. After ten minutes you'd calm down and pull yourself together and get on with doing what you're supposed to be doing.

What about marijuana, was that available?

I believe so. I could have bought some over there, "Hey would you like to buy some marijuana, want grass, good cheap grass?" Little kids were selling it down the street.

20:00 But I never indulged in it. In fact I don't know if drugs were a problem with us at all. I was just never aware of anyone who was into marijuana or any other sort of drug, apart from me slipping Librium every now and then, and alcohol of course. But I remember going on a tour with the camera club one day and we

20:30 all jumped into the vehicles. It was a temple tour around various temples. They said, "Come on in, come on in." and we went there and he offered us a smoke, and I didn't know what it was, we all said okay just to be polite and somebody said it was hash afterwards. I've got a photo of myself afterwards sucking on this bong with this stuff in there.

21:00 That's about the only thing I ever smoked over there and then I had about two puffs. It didn't affect me in any way. But I'm certainly not aware of anybody else with marijuana. I believe the Yanks used to get into it a fair bit. I certainly didn't get into the happy weed.

Did you think someone was pulling your leg at the temple?

21:30 No I believe it was probably real good stuff, but we just had a puff and passed it around and I didn't take a deep puff. I didn't know what it was and I wasn't going to take a deep puff and I wasn't into that scene. But we just had a puff to be polite. He'd say 'No, no, like this.' and he'd

22:00 take a deep breath and grin at you with two or three teeth hanging down and they'd all be brown teeth and all this smoke would be pouring out of his face and he'd be sitting there with this grin on his face and we'd go, "Oh yeah." and pass it onto the next guy and about four or five of us had a puff.

You didn't do the drawback?

No I wasn't into that sort of stuff in those days and I don't think the other guys were either. And we said thankyou very much.

22:30 **Just getting back to the dust offs, were they American and Australians choppers that were coming in?**

Both, either or. I don't know the difference between them; they both used the same choppers. It could have been either, or piloted by Americans or Australians. I believe a lot of

23:00 the Yanks went into places and retrieved casualties where the Australians weren't so keen to go into. Some of the stories I've heard of dust off chopper pilots, I've got nothing but admiration for them. Apparently they did some pretty heroic flying over there. But we didn't have

23:30 time to talk to them on the pad. They would just come in, land, we'd just grab the people, patients whatever and they would just take off again. So we didn't have time to talk to them.

How long do you think it would be before they were evacuated, or picked up the injured and got to hospital?

Depending on how far away. Heck it might have been only fifteen, twenty minutes flying time before they were at the hospital. It might have been only a few hours after they were hit.

24:00 Depending on the situation they were in and how they could extract them through the canopy. Probably within an hour or half an hour. Some of them would have just been transferred back because they had a small hospital at Nui Dat and some patients were air lifted down from there.

24:30 Some malarial cases that were getting a bit serious, or injuries that they couldn't handle, it was two fuel ambulances up at Nui Dat and if they couldn't handle them they would be forwarded up to us. And there wouldn't be any great urgency. We would know they were coming in. We wouldn't hit the dust off button for that. Word would get around

25:00 That they'd notify. I can't remember how we did that now. A chopper would come in and usually walking wounded, walking people. I guess pretty sick and we'd look after them until down there until they were good enough to go home again, go back to their unit.

Were you writing home during that time?

Not much. I was a lousy writer. But what I used to do was,

25:30 I started writing for starters, and I did write, but towards the end of the time or half way through I started sending tapes. And I'd sit there and talk to this microphone and next day I'd have another talk for a while. Or between things at the RAP if nothing had been happening, I'd tell Mum and Dad what I'd just been doing.

26:00 Then send a tape home and they'd listen to it. So they'd be about an hour tape. Then they'd tape over it or send another one back. So a lot of letters were voice letters rather than written letters. They were good fun.

Have you still got some of them?

Yes got some of them. In fact I've got them all. In fact I haven't listened to them since. Strange. We were only

26:30 talking about them once before saying we should listen to them.

What sort of tapes are they? Reel to reel or cassette?

They were cassette tapes buried up there somewhere. Of course everybody came back with a reel to reel tape recorder. I've got one too, got a few souvenirs from Vietnam.

What do you mean everyone came back with a reel to reel?

Oh well, not everybody, but a lot of guys

27:00 bought a reel to reel tape recorder and a lot of the guys bought an Akai tape recorder because they were available over there fairly cheaply. I went to a few guys' homes over here and in fact some friends who used to live up at Shady Creek, first time I ever met them. I said, "You're a Vietnam vet." he said, "How

27:30 did you know?" And I said, "Tape recorder." We got to be quite friendly. They were just neighbours and I didn't know he was a vet until I saw this tape recorder. And nobody else would buy that tape recorder out here. But a lot of people bought electronic gear over here because it was relatively cheap and they could I s'pose. Listen to something in time.

28:00 **You could get music couldn't you? Tapes?**

We had that tape. Yes I had a few of those tapes, I know a list came round, you supplied the tape, pick which ones you wanted and go and pick it up a few days later. Got a few of those pirated tapes. It's amazing I've got all this stuff and I never listen to it these days. I buy

28:30 CDs [compact discs] and stick them in.

It was worth its weight in gold?

Yes it would be. There's music, and you'll hear a song today and it will take you back to a certain place, or a certain event at a certain time. Purple Haze would always take me back to recruit days up at Puckapunyal. And I can visualise myself sitting out of the back there polishing

29:00 boots and belts and other things take me back to Vietnam.

That means that you were listening to quite a bit of music at those times.

Yeah. I had a tape recorder and bought a radio. And if there wasn't much else to do sometimes I would just lie down there after work and down at the RAP we'd have it on in the background because it was pretty quiet.

29:30 Most of the time and I'd have the radio going on in the background.

What radio stations?

Oh there was two over there. Can't remember, it's on the tape there.

The one at the base?

No it was an American one I used to listen to.

30:00 A lot of what they used to play was soothing type stuff, James Last, lot of instrumental stuff rather than the Beach Boys, Beatles and Stones. You just didn't get much of that on the radio. I believe the theory behind it is easy

30:30 listening type elevator music was more calming on people than rock and all that sort of stuff. Every now and then they'd have a program a bit of rock. But we didn't hear it very often.

I wouldn't mind hearing a little bit more about the RAP? How did the work you were doing there

31:00 **compare to the work on the medical ward in the hospital?**

Much better I thought. I enjoyed it more because it was more hands on stuff. I'd be not so much making beds and washing people, I would be removing ingrown toenails, wart removals, laceration

31:30 sewing. I used to enjoy that sort of stuff, sort of see something for my efforts. It was almost instant stuff. It was more the stuff that I envisaged doing when I joined the medical corps. It was more injury

32:00 related, more visible surgical type stuff as opposed to medical type stuff. But I wasn't prepared for a lot of the real severe trauma coming in as a result of clashes out in the bush.

32:30 Gunshot wounds and shrapnel wounds and mine injuries. It was really one extreme to the other. Some of those were not what you wanted to treat either.

So there would be a ward and then a dust off?

Yeah ,Yeah..

In front of you?

33:00 Some of them would come in to remove an inverted toenail. Do a nerve block; from there you would be working on someone who had just had their leg blown off. I didn't like that so much, mainly because of the sights and smells.

33:30 And that would sort of get you. I'd rather be working on live people with minor ailments. Gee just talking of smells. I remember one chap came in. He'd been out in the bush for a few days before they found him and he'd been killed out there. And the stench of him was something you'd never forget. Body smell is pretty rank.

34:00 Gangrene. A remember a couple of patients had gangrene set in, in their wounds. They don't teach you that in training. I s'pose they can't teach you what the smell is like. You soon find out and you never forget it. There's something that you don't

34:30 set out to learn about. Its all part of it I s'pose. You put your name down to do medical corps stuff thinking it's going to be something different to what it is. It's the same as doing anything being infantry, you go out there thinking being a soldier and you don't

35:00 picture yourself coming back without some of your mates. You never think of that when you put your hand up for doing things. I guess you're always optimistic.

It's a long way from the fake accidents of your school?

Oh yeah, a long way.

You must have laughed to yourself?

You never laughed.

35:30 It's certainly a long way from that sort of thing.

Did you work with anyone else down at the RAP?

Generally no. Although

36:00 there was a doctor available if you needed him. Sometimes he'd come down to see what was going on. Or he'd see somebody because there was doctor's rooms were up from the RAP. Sometimes they'd come direct to me or others would see the doctor first or he'd come down to explain something and show me what he wanted done to this guy. But generally I was on my own down there.

36:30 So were you responsible for ordering medical supplies, that sort of thing?

Yeah. I honestly can't remember because I would have been. I would have known what dressings and what drugs they would have used.

37:00 I used to order from the pharmacy I guess. I can't remember what I did do along those lines or whether it was somebody else. I can't see anybody else who would do that. That's an area I can't remember anything about.

Did any of the fellas put any pressure on you for painkillers?

37:30 No because the unit, we were all in the medical unit and if they wanted that sort of stuff they could have got it themselves. We didn't have much contact with guys from other units.

38:00 If they wanted it they could have helped themselves to it throughout the ward, dangerous drugs were always kept under lock and key and were always accounted for. Other things like Panadol, I could go and grab them anytime you needed it. All the other DDs [dangerous drugs] were accounted for.

38:30 You couldn't misappropriate those. I'm not aware of any, we were all pretty fit healthy young guys over there I s'pose. We didn't need any of that sort of stuff.

So were your patients only from the medical unit?

You mean the patients pressurising? No, I thought you meant other guys in the unit I was with. No

39:00 look, if a patient wanted something generally we'd okay it with the nursing sister. No if they said if I've got this headache or I can't get to sleep and I need a sleeping pill or whatever we'd go to the sister and we'd say, "He can't sleep, can he have a sleeper?" She'd say, "Yeah." and hand out what

39:30 pill to give him. Any drugs that a patient wanted they could request through us and we'd see the sister and that would be written down on his documents what he had, how much, all that sort of stuff. But all the malarial cases, mainly quinine and anti malarial drugs

40:00 were prescribed a certain dosage, rate and time. So they didn't really long for anything else that I was aware of. They might have longed for a beer. They usually had a beer ration and that's about all.

What about people who were really on the edge?

40:30 Psychologically and emotionally? Did you have very much to do with them?

No. But I know some that were and that needed assistance. There were doctors who would talk to them. There was a chaplain available at any time. Anybody could go and see the chaplain or he would come to them.

41:00 I remember one chap came in with some casualties because his best mate was killed and he found that extremely hard to handle. And he was a real mess and a lot of people counselled him. Salvation Army people, chaplain,

41:30 doctors gave him, I'm not sure but he might have been prescribed drugs. After a few days he was sent back to Nui Dat against his wishes and I don't know whatever happened to him. How he coped, but he was a bit of a bad case.

Tape 8

00:34 That's right, an interesting aspect of how people were treated and what the expectations were that people would recover.

I don't think the psychological aspect of this was understood much in those days.

- 01:00 A lot of the people that were injured had counselling and comforting but it's hard to say as I didn't follow that aspect through. But I know some of them were traumatised mentally. I guess we all were one way
- 01:30 or another there from our experiences. But it wasn't recognised over there. Having been diagnosed with PTSD [post traumatic stress syndrome] myself I now understood now why my father was like he was. I can understand how
- 02:00 a lot of other guys are like they are a lot of the Vietnam vets that I've met over the years and since in the last thirty years, I can understand why they are like they are. I don't necessarily agree with a lot of things that they say and do, but I can understand why they say and do these things. I thought it was just me that
- 02:30 used to have bad dreams and things like that. I'd often had dreams of being shot at and even shot. Although I never experienced that face aspect I've often wondered where those dreams come from. I don't know. I can understand it
- 03:00 now, okay I've got these problems. I can understand why I get upset when I'm watching some war movies. Whereas before that I thought it was just me. I often think hey so many guys from World War II that must have worse problems than what we've gone
- 03:30 through, but who haven't got any recognition or treatment for the problems that I have now. I think the psychological aspect of a lot of what we went through is not understood by those who haven't experienced it.
- 04:00 It would be trying to understand the loss of one of your relatives or a loved one if you haven't lost one yourself. Or never been heartbroken if you haven't lost a lover. It's very hard to explain what its like and the effect on
- 04:30 people.

When did it start to affect you? When you returned to Australia were you aware of it?

No. I don't know. When I was RTA'd, returned to Australia in 1969 I was glad to get out of the army, I really was.

- 05:00 I'd done my bit and I was glad to get out of it. I just put it away behind me. I just didn't think of it. I was never asked about it. I never talked about it. I just put it all behind me.
- 05:30 I could remember the good times because I had a lot of slides of good times. Heck I had a lot of good times over there. I had a lot of good times and a few bad times. It's the bad times that sort of affect you later on.
- 06:00 I guess, knowing what I know now. We probably had been married for about four years before I was having hassles. They weren't hassles to me then. But I
- 06:30 can see why the things I was doing was related to that. I was very demanding of the kids, very exacting. It was probably the military exactness and discipline that I then started expecting of Dawn. I started expecting it of my kids. I was getting pretty agitated at some of the things they would do and wouldn't do. Yeah when I first came back. I got out of the army,
- 07:00 went back to work. Started doing what I was doing before I left and met Dawn about two months after I arrived back home. I was still going around looking at pine trees on properties and I remember going to her place
- 07:30 and she was studying her nursing exam. I sat in the car, I was doing something in the car and the guy I was with, I heard him say, "Oh you don't look old enough to have a daughter this age." Check this out. Jumped out and saw Dawn and she was doing some studying and we started chatting and we had something in common, her nursing thing and my medical background.
- 08:00 And that was how I met Dawn out at Colac. But it never bothered me for quite awhile and I don't think I'm not aware of it affecting me for a long time. As I say until we got married. We started seeking counselling because of
- 08:30 my attitude, mannerisms to Dawn and the kids. Yeah we just sort of bumbled our way through life for quite awhile. I'd have pretty high ideals and standards and dreams but I just thought that nothing was wrong with me. It
- 09:00 was everybody else was a bit crazy or whatever.

Did you have much to do with other vets when you got back?

Not really. The only area I had contact with them was through the army reserve. I got back and was discharged in 1969 and I went

- 09:30 back to work and in those days a lot of government sponsored army units, CMF [Citizens Military Force] army units. The SEC [State Electricity Commission] had an engineer unit down at Yallourn. The Vic [Victorian] Railways had sponsored infantry units. Country Roads Board had some plant units.
- 10:00 I was with the Forest Commission and they sponsored a unit called the Forestry Squadron. And a lot of the guys joined this forestry squadron or belonged to it. And it had some perks. You had an extra two week leave per year. You got paid
- 10:30 twice. Paid by the army and paid by the department to do military training two weeks a year. And the guy I worked with at Sirex at this stage. He was an RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] at the unit and tried to talk me into it. I said, "No you can stick your army I've done my two years. I've had enough of that." But then a lot of guys at work were saying, "Why don't you join it? It's good fun.
- 11:00 It's different from what you've done, or you'll slip into it real easy." Anyway I said to another guy, "I will if you will." and he said, "I will if you will." and we both joined up in 1972. And I met some guys in there who had been over there in Vietnam, and that was great and I could relate to them. A lot of the guys
- 11:30 that were in the army, I don't know, they sort of looked at me and looked up to me. I got a lot of respect from these guys. And I found this mateship with other Vietnam vets in the units I went with. And that helped me cope with a lot of my things. I could
- 12:00 talk to and understand. Yeah we just had this common bonding and mateship. Anyway this guy I signed up with did his two years and got out and I got out only a couple of years ago when they kicked me out because I was too old. Because I found this mateship, this bonding in the army reserve. I sort of
- 12:30 prolonged it a bit, but I found that it was an escape. I could talk too other guys. It was good. I found it therapeutic in a way I guess. Sort of running away from the army and I ended up joining it again. I wouldn't say I was running away from the army. But a lot of the things you were taught came back to me. A lot of the
- 13:00 things I learnt from. But the thoughts and the memories are still there. It would have been there whether I was in the army or not. I found I had somebody to talk too, a lot of people I could relate too. We often talked about our time.

Is that right that you found these other people had similar problems or reactions as you?

Oh yeah.

- 13:30 A lot of them had had broken marriages, drinking problems and we'd sit and talk and we could understand each other, you know, "My wife doesn't understand me." They had funny little idiosyncrasies that I could relate too. Just sort of things like, "I remember that."
- 14:00 You could just relate to a lot of things. And it was just a mateship, a friendship, a bonding again that I hadn't had for a long time. We'd been having what we thought were marriage problems for quite awhile and they probably weren't really marriage problems.
- 14:30 Just my expectations, and thoughts and mannerisms. Things how they affect me. It was only four years ago I was diagnosed with PTSD and all of a sudden a lot of things fell into place. And I started to understand why I was like I was. That I was a real bastard towards my kids at home, not always.
- 15:00 Why my Dad was like he was. I wish he was alive now, I could sympathise with him, I could do a lot of things that he would have liked me to have done with him. I had no time for Anzac Day. Anzac Day was just a holiday for me. To him it was a big thing and I understand that now
- 15:30 I would have loved to have done some Anzac things with Dad. I realised all these things all too late.

But what was the relationship with your dad when you got back?

He was proud to have me back. He showed me around like a prized dog. Obviously so proud and excited to have me back. I didn't

- 16:00 I couldn't handle that. A lot of his mates, "Yeah, g'day John, that wasn't a war, you were over there rooting sheilas." and things like that, they'd heard different things. I got different reactions from different people. A lot of guys I've met got a lot worse reception than I got.
- 16:30 I guess our reception home was pretty hurtful. I was stuck in a taxi and I had to pay my own taxi fare when I got home after the discharge. It was pretty ordinary.

You finished your tour early?

- 17:00 No, because my two year national service was up, I never got to do twelve months over there. I did just over nine months because I was on loan to the air force for awhile. I was lucky. I missed out on the wet season in a way. I got there just when it ended and I was leaving just as it started. I had accrued a certain amount of leave and by the time I got home and used that leave
- 17:30 and gone through the discharge process. I think I got discharged and used my accrued leave, and the

couple of other vets that I was over there with, we jumped into a car and a mate I knew before I went away, the four of us we went around Australia. We were up at Fitzroy Crossing when we celebrated our official discharge from the army.

18:00 We just sort of flew home, sent to Watsonia. Handed in our gear. And they caught taxis for us and away we went. That was it. Thanks fellas. I don't even remember getting, "Thanks fellas." And we just said, "Okay, see ya."

18:30 And that was the end of my army. And all I was glad to do was get out of there. All I was glad to do was get out of there. I'd seen enough, done enough. And a few of the guys we were with. We'd talked about it before we got home. We were going to go around Australia. We jumped in my Cortina and around Australia we went. We got home and I was

19:00 back at home for about two weeks. And I went down to Colac and met Dawn through work.

So you went back to work pretty quick?

Back basically as if nothing had happened. I think it was a legal obligation that your employer had to take you back with no loss of privileges. I went straight back into doing what I was doing before I got called up.

19:30 Just carried on as if nothing had happened. That two years had been taken out and put over there and you're back into the real world again.

Had you saved much money?

Probably not a great deal. I didn't squander it on things. But I bought a great deal of things. I must have saved a bit of money because

20:00 I spent it on fuel and stuff to go around Australia. I just can't remember financial things. I must have had a bit put away.

That's strange being at Fitzroy Crossing, at such a remote place when you get your discharge.

20:30 Yeah. One of the guys must have said, "Hey we're out of the army today." And yeah it was great. We had a few beers, I had a couple of gins, I still didn't drink beer. It's only two years ago that I started to drink the stuff. It was good fun. We were out we were free. The poor bastards that were over there.

So the other two guys were from the medical unit?

Yeah. Dunno whatever happened to them.

21:00 Last time I heard they were up in Queensland and I met one of them a few years ago down in Melbourne. I rang him a few times. I believe he's got problems. He's always down at the pub. He never married. He worked in a bank. Got called up and went back to the bank and I saw him a few times

21:30 after that and then we lost contact with each other.

I just wanted to ask you about the entertainment and whether there was much of that?

I don't remember seeing too many Australian entertainers. Not far from where I was at Vung Tau.

22:00 Not far from the hospital was an establishment called the Badcoe Club [Peter Badcoe Club - the Australian Task Force Rest and Convalescence Centre] and that was a rest and convalescence centre. And it had a swimming pool and they often used to have entertainment down there. A lot of it was local entertainment. There were a few Vietnamese playing guitars and singing

22:30 in Vietnamese English, a lot of pop songs. And I believe a number of Australian entertainers got down there. I only saw entertainment down there a couple of times because of my shift work. It might have been every Saturday that they had the band down there. I did see some entertainment but not a great deal. I don't remember seeing any entertainers

23:00 like Denise Drysdale or Col Joye, or any of those who went over there. I was probably on duty when they were present.

So you weren't really aware of them being there?

No. They could have been on the base,

23:30 but I don't remember. I know I used to show movies a couple of times a week and I used to pack up the projectors, fix up the film and put them away and usually it was time to go to bed, because you were up at six o'clock in the morning. Time to go to work again.

What movies were you showing?

24:00 Oh anything. I remember showing the Guns of Navarone, A Man and a Woman. There was all sorts of movies, movies that just came out at the time. They were 16mm movies.

Where were they coming from?

They came from an American Base, the ASLG [Australian Logistic Support Group Base] would go and pick them up everyday.

24:30 And we'd just get a new movie. It'd come in a box with a heap of reels. I'd often rewind them, thread up the projector. The movie started up at eight o'clock or 7:30 and we had our own little projection area and I'd have to get it all set up. Show the movies and pack it all up and then go home. Might have time to squeeze a drink or a coke from the boozier.

25:00 And that was it.

Was it like an outdoor cinema?

I've got some piccies [pictures] of the outdoor cinema although when I was there. It was an outdoor cinema when I first got there then they build a new building and it was indoors, like a big shed. They had indoor piccies, So that the theatre room and the projectionist room was all under cover.

25:30 Shortly after I got there. It certainly was by the time I'd done my projectionist course. It was fairly comfortable.

Were they popular? Did your get a good audience?

Yeah. Once again depending on who was available. It depended on what they were working and what movies were being shown. Some of them got quite large audiences, others you'd only be showing to half a dozen guys.

26:00 But you still had to do it.

Did you have to advertise it?

No. It was just a routine thing and I'd have to write up what it was and I didn't know what it was til it got there. Usually I had to pick it up late in the afternoon about four or so and by mealtime you'd know what the movie was and you'd write it up,

26:30 just on the noticeboard. They'd have a look and say, "I'm not going to see that." or, "Gee that sounds good." It was just part of my job and part of recreation. Kept them off the streets and gave them something to do.

Flashing forward again, the army reserve, it would

27:00 **be interesting to know what you actually did, what the forestry squadron actually did?**

That was a different corps. I was in the medical corps over there. The forestry squadron was in the engineer corps. So I basically changed from medical to engineers. 91 Forestry Squad, their role in the event of war was to win and mill timber.

27:30 Now there were forestry companies during World War II. There was forestry companies in New Guinea and there was forestry companies over in England and Scotland. And they were preparing timbers in World War II for revetments, for bridging, for packaging, for building and bridgework and so on. The army reserve unit was based along those lines. In fact we'd either win our own timber,

28:00 fell trees and mill them using our own portable saw mills. Or we'd be able to take over assisting civilian mills for military requirements. Whether it would be for house building or bridges or whatever. And that was interesting because a lot of the guys you worked with were in there too. It was good fun. And I did it because I wanted to do it,

28:30 rather than had to do it and I think there's a big difference there. Although some of the training was similar. What it was doing was different and interesting and good fun. I stayed in there for many, many years and we some great annual camps. In fact when 91 Forestry Squadron closed down

29:00 in 1991 we formed an association and we still maintain that association. And we go back to a lot of projects that we were involved in over the years. I'm past president and currently the secretary treasurer of the Woodpeckers Association, what we call ourselves. And for example

29:30 in March we went back to Snake Island in Corner Inlet where we built a jetty in 1982 where it still stands. A few years ago we went up to Walhalla where we cut and milled timber for a bridge up there across the Thompson Dam. It got burnt in the 1939

30:00 fires and we re-decked it to footbridge standards. So we won local trees. Milled them locally onsite and re-decked the bridge there. What other things have we done? We've had lots of annual military type camps, up at Puckapunyal. We've been to the school of military engineering

30:30 at Liverpool in New South Wales.

So you've been trained in milling? That was part of the training?

Yeah. Engineering tasks and milling was just one of them. Towards the end of 91 Forestry I was the

supervisor. I went and did a corporals' course and end up doing a sergeants' course.

31:00 And was discharged as a staff sergeant. I ended up being the mill supervisor towards the end and looked at all aspects of mill safety, mill running, orders that came in and fulfilling timber orders and requests. And it was good fun and really interesting and I enjoyed the guys I was with. We didn't have the pressure that I had previously.

31:30 It was an escape for me.

What would the procedure be if you did have to take over a mill?

I don't know I never had to do it. There were the various acts that allow the military to take over the running of civilian operations in wartime. But we were all

32:00 capable of running a civilian mill or using civilian people. We may or may not operate it. But we'd certainly take over the running of a civilian sawmill if necessary. We had our own saw mills, small ones and big ones and they were all portable in a couple of hours and some were portable after

32:30 packing up after a week or so.

Were they commercial mills or were they army designed mills?

The army tended for mills and they had to meet certain specifications and they were built by civilian engineering companies. The big mills that we bought, the big six inch sawmills were built in Tasmania I think.

33:00 And the forest mills we had were commercially available from small maker in New South Wales. Then we got a mobile dimensional sawmill probably about ten to fifteen years ago. That replaced the forest mill. Now they're looking at anew mill again. Some of my mates are still in there, have got a task of evaluating another mill very soon.

33:30 But they still had that capability. Although the unit I joined were long gone, I've managed to maintain some of the expertise that we had in the sixties and seventies.

So circular saw mills?

Circular Saw mills, yeah. Meaning they had circular blades. You could cut decent size timbers like the bar top their came from timber we milled up at Puckapunyal.

34:00 **That's hardwood?**

Yeah. It certainly had its advantages. Got a bit of timber for private use and we had some fun there.

So how did those projects come about? How would a community be able to get the Forestry Squadron?

I'm not quite sure. Because the unit was made up of a lot

34:30 of officers or men within, in the know in civilian street in the Forestry Commission Projects. A forester might say, "How about doing this?" The hierarchy might say, "That sounds like a good task for us to do we'll put it to the powers that be in the army to see if it's

35:00 a service or project that we can undertake." An exercise. And we'd have to look at he cost benefits of it. Is it related too military training? Is it feasible to do? Can we do it in the timelines? Have we got the manpower and equipment to do it? If all those things answered yes, yes good chance it would go ahead. There was a bridge built down

35:30 at Tarra Bulga National Park not by us but by the SEC [State Emergency Services] unit. Yeah we did some work up at Walhalla. We put bridges up on the River Murray before my time. Various civilian projects. A lot of the training we did was not civilian projects either. It was military training.

36:00 Putting up bridges and pulling them down again. Chainsaw training. Do a lot of in-house training. Train other people how to fall trees and mill them. And we had a lot of army requests within the army for timber requirements. So we'd cut timber for the various unites and uses.

36:30 **Where would you source that timber from?**

Well a lot of the guys in the army would be able to source it for us, like red gum might have been required. So we had a guy who was a forester up at Barmah and he'd be able to say we could cut the timber for that. A lot of it would be sourced basically in house

37:00 within the department. Towards the end we'd have to buy it in. It was probably getting a bit expensive and it probably ended up being the demise of the unit. But we'd recut older bridge decking. There are quite a few bridges I can remember in New South Wales that were demolished by engineers

37:30 out of the army unit. We'd recover that timber and we'd mill it for use on other projects. There's a bridge up near Maldon near Castlemaine that was classified by the National Trust, so it was in need of

repair. So they wanted to make it a going tourist train again. So we milled or recut timber for use up there.

38:00 We milled the timber. Another unit put it together, 16 Construction Squad built the bridge and that's currently being used as a tourist railway. Sourced it from various areas. I wasn't privy to a lot of previous sourcing .But when it

38:30 was my turn to get timber, I'd have to go and get quotes. In the army we used to go out and win our own. But we had to get permission from the Forest Commission to get it. That wasn't too hard to do since they used to sponsor the unit. We had to get our own timber at times.

So does that mean that you had stands of forests that you were allowed to have? State forests or?

39:00 Yeah. We could get timber from a state forest with permission of the forester in charge. For example when we built the jetty down at Snake Island we sourced a lot of that timber from Nooramunga State Forest down there. And it was a particular type of timber that we needed for the bridge. It was resistant to corrosion.

39:30 Trematode, or marine worms attack, things like that. That yellow stringy bark was ideal, it grew down there. Got permission from the local forester to fall some of those yellow stringy barks and mill them. The Walhalla Bridge we sourced that locally. Red gum, we sourced red gum from various areas where there were other bridges.

40:00 **What about the heavy equipment, like bulldozers ?**

We'd have to rely on other units. A lot of planning goes into an exercise. We'd have to plan out what we're going to do. What plant would we require? We'd liaise with other units to borrow their bulldozers and drivers. We'd have to indent or put in a request for various equipment,

40:30 whether it would be bulldozers, forklift, land rovers, and tankers, and trucks to cart the stuff on.

So were you operating just regionally or were you Victoria wide?

The 91 Forestry Squadron was composed of people from all over the state,

41:00 volunteers. Most of our training was done out at Puckapunyal, although occasionally we'd go out and do some training in various places. I did built at Ballarat one year and at Wahalla, Colac we used the mill down there one year. We moved around and a lot of it was

41:30 More so interstate at the School of Military Engineering in Sydney and at Pucka doing military things. They used to try and rotate on a three year basis, that was one of the infantry tactics, I say an infantry camp. Another one would be a bridging camp to do bridge work. Build bridges, things like that. And the third camp would be a project camp.

INTERVIEW ENDS