

Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Jamieson - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 28th April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1994>

Tape 1

00:47 **I'd like to start off by just asking a series of questions before we start the interview proper, about yourself.**

01:00 **First of all where were you born?**

I was born in Hindmarsh in South Australia.

Is that where you grew up?

No I actually grew up in Croydon. In Croydon Park and then when I was ten years old we moved to the Eastern Suburbs, a place called Erindale.

And did you go to school in Erindale?

No, first of all, obviously prior to ten years old I went

01:30 to Croydon Primary School and then when we came up to Erindale I went to Marrickville Primary. After that I went to Norwood High School.

So after Norwood High School did you get a job?

Yes I worked for a company called G&R Wills [?] , in the city in Adelaide. They were importers and I thought I wanted to be an accountant

02:00 at that stage of life so I started off in their dispatch department and then I was the office boy. I moved into the shipping department and it was at that stage that I looked around the office and saw all these glass cages and thought, no this is not for me. I'm out of here but I spent three years there.

We'll come back and talk a bit more about that.

02:30 **What were you doing when you got your call up?**

I was actually working for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] doing sets. Like behind the cameras doing the Seven O'clock news and the Seven-thirty Report etcetera.

Once you got your call up I understand that was 1967?

That's correct.

Where did you go to do your training?

03:00 Yes that was in July 1967 and I went to Puckapunyal. All the National Service guys from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania all went to Puckapunyal.

How long was your rookie training?

That was three months.

And was it at that period, at the end of that three months

03:30 **that you were allocated into B Squadron?**

No, no. First of all you have to do corps training which is approximately three months again and that was again at Puckapunyal because the armoured centre where you do the corps training is there and so was, at that stage, the armoured regiment.

And then you were

04:00 **put into B Squadron?**

Yes after that training. Then we were allocated to a troop within B Squadron.

So you actually joined B Squadron at Puckapunyal?

That's correct.

And what other training did you do then?

04:30 After doing corps training? Prior to going to Vietnam everybody had to do jungle training at Canungra in Queensland so I did that. I also did an aircraft loaders course at Richmond Airbase, which is just out of Sydney.

Combined were those courses about three months?

Oh no. I'm just trying to think. I think Canungra was only a couple of weeks, maybe two

05:00 or three weeks and the same for the aircraft loaders course, it was only a couple of weeks.

Is it correct that you were then on stand-by for Vietnam?

That's correct, yes. C Squadron had already gone to Vietnam in I think it was February '68, so during that period, obviously

05:30 having been trained and then had done Canungra we were on stand-by as replacements if required.

So when did you actually go to Vietnam?

I went in early December 1968.

And when did you join C Squadron?

That's

06:00 what happened when I got to Vietnam in December. C Squadron was still there and they weren't due to come home until February '69, so from early December until February I was with C Squadron and then obviously I went with B Squadron.

So after February '69 did B Squadron come to Nui Dat?

That's correct, yep.

06:30 **Were you then based in Nui Dat?**

Yes. Based in Nui Dat.

This tour of Vietnam that you did was that approximately twelve months or...?

No because I was National Service I was due to come out after my two years in July '69, so I came home to be discharged, so I had just over six months.

07:00 **And you spent all of that time in Phuoc Tuy province?**

Most of it in Phuoc Tuy, occasionally we went out of Phuoc Tuy but not very often. There was just one occasion when we went north of Saigon. I think we just went out of the province then.

07:30 **So you were then home in July '69?**

That's correct.

And when you came home what happened?

In what regard?

How long was it before you were discharged?

It was only virtually

08:00 a couple of weeks. We landed at Mascot when we first came home and then the next day there was a flight from Sydney to Adelaide and we were told we had to report direct to Keswick [Barracks] but obviously everybody bucked up at that and it was just the next day.

What did you do after you were discharged?

08:30 I didn't do anything for a while. I found it very disconcerting when I first came home, obviously because of the protest movement and even one incident at the Adelaide Airport when we came home. This bloke yelled out, "You murdering bastards." And fortunately my father-in-law was there, he pushed this guy away and we just went off and did lunch and I have to just say on that point that my father-in-law was just fantastic to me

09:00 and made me feel really welcome. Probably at that stage he was my best friend and we used to go fishing all the time, so he was great, he really was great but I dare say like a lot of people you just didn't

mention that you went to Vietnam. You just sort of went back into the woodwork, so to speak. Elaine and I were engaged at that time and I thought,

09:30 I've got to get a job, so I got a job with Brambles Freight in the office there. I thought maybe I should pursue this accounting career but it didn't work out. It wasn't my bag. I used to throw my pens out the window and things like that and just walk off. I just couldn't hack it, so I was at the bus stop one day and a guy from the army rode past on his bike and we

10:00 started talking. He said, "Do you know that you can get two years free schooling from the army? I'm doing the welding course." And I thought, maybe I should do something like that but my Dad, being a plumber and at that stage he was an inspector with the EWS [Engineering & Water Supply] said, "Well why don't you do a plumbing course?" And so I did and that year in 1970 I started a plumbing course and I did it as an adult apprentice so to

10:30 speak, so I went right through and did my three years and then I went on and did my Masters and ended up a master plumber.

When did you get engaged to Elaine?

I was engaged before I went to Vietnam.

And when did you get married?

In 1970. May the Second. How could I forget.

11:00 Someone doesn't let me forget.

And children?

Yes. We've two boys. Christopher who's now twenty-nine and Michael who's twenty-six.

What I'd like to do now is to go back to the beginning

11:30 **and ask you a bit about your childhood. You mentioned you grew up in Croydon.**

That's correct. Yes.

To begin with before you went to Erindale. What was growing up in Croydon like?

It was great. I was a member of the scouts, or the cubs in those days I suppose and friends from school we used to ride our bikes down to

12:00 Port Adelaide and go fishing and spend a bit of time in what they called the Pug holes which was where the brick companies used to dig the clay out there at Croydon. PGH had a hole and so did Halletts [both brick making companies] and when they finished they filled with water and they dumped a lot of rubbish in there and kids being kids used to spend a lot of time in there, so I had a pretty good childhood, I really did.

12:30 **And what did your father do?**

At that stage Dad had a plumbing business and we had a house on Day Terrace at Croydon and he also owned the block behind where he had his workshops and he employed about ten guys there at that stage because obviously in the early '50s is when the housing was just booming. Elizabeth [satellite suburb] had started so there was plenty of work, so I used to rummage around in the

13:00 plumbing shop and I just remember one day getting Dad's good snips and cutting barbed wire with it and I can still feel that boot up the backside and things like that, so yeah, that was childhood. Then of course when I was ten, my Dad had actually fallen through a staircase and damaged his back quite severely so he sold the plumbing business and he

13:30 got a job with the NWS or Engineering & Water Supply, which is now SA Water, as a plumbing inspector, so we sold up there and we moved to Erindale on the other side of the city and I went to Marrickville High and yeah, I had a great time there. I had a really good friend from there from school, unfortunately down the track he passed away when he was forty but yeah, really enjoyable.

14:00 After that I went to Norwood High School. Didn't really enjoy high school all that much. It was a shock to the system I dare say coming from primary school where things are nice and easy. Going to high school where you had to perform and I was never academically inclined so I look back on that as probably wasted years, really frustrated with high school.

Did you have any

14:30 **brothers and sisters?**

Yes. I've got two sisters. I've got an elder sister who actually lives in America at that moment. She lives in California and I've got a younger sister who was very academically inclined and ended up being a school teacher.

And where did you come?

An elder sister and then I was in the middle and then a younger sister. I was the middle one. No brothers just two sisters.

And what was your

15:00 **experience being the middle child?**

I didn't think too much about it to be completely honest. It never caused any problems to me. I probably got on better with mount elder sister than my younger one. As I said she was academically inclined and so she was smarter than the rest of us but no, I had a good childhood.

15:30 **You mentioned that the building trade was buoyant in the 1950's when your father was running the plumbing business. What kind of man was he?**

My Dad? Solid as a rock, big guy, big hands, big strong guys. That's all. I always remember him being a big strong guy and even when I was older, when you shook hands with my Dad you always had to be prepared

16:00 because otherwise he'd just about break your hand but I was never really close to my Dad. I respected him and everything but as I mentioned before I was very close to Elaine's Dad. We were sort of on the same wavelength. He never had a lot of great hobbies. He never went fishing or anything like that.

16:30 It was a good relationship but it was never close like I had with my father-in-law.

Who metered out the punishment in your house?

Probably more so my Mum I think, so to speak, she loaded the gun and he fired the bullets. I just remember as a kid if we wanted to go to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon,

17:00 which was obviously the big thing for kids in those days, to go and get five-pence worth of chips on the way. You always had to pick a bucketful of weeds before you were allowed to go to the pictures and of course my sister and I used to cheat: fill it half full and then just top it up and I remember getting the strap for various things but all in all I didn't

17:30 have any problems with my childhood.

What was your mother like?

She was a bit of a control freak and obviously wore the pants in the relationship with my Dad and I suppose again, I wasn't really close to her like I was with my now mother-in-law.

18:00 Yeah. Nothing bad or anything like that, just never really comfortable with it.

Was she stay at home? Did she work at all?

When we were kids she stayed at home, when we were going to primary school but after that when we moved to the other side of the city she worked at a doctor's surgery as a receptionist, Girl Friday.

18:30 Yeah I think she enjoyed that. She enjoyed being out of the home.

Things really started to change after the Second World War, fashions started to change. What do you recall of...?

Not so much of the '50s because obviously in those days I was

19:00 still in primary school then. It was really the '60s I suppose that it changed for me. Going to high school and doing all of it, all of a sudden being involved with music and I dare say the pop era and then the Beatles came along and that was very enjoyable and we used to go to a place called the Princeton Club, which was at the Burnside Town Hall.

19:30 And that's actually where I met Elaine, so that was a big thing and that was a social event where you met. All your friends went there and then of course in those early days we were involved with alcohol and we used to go to the Marrickville Hotel and that was only in the latter years of my high school that I got involved in that and then obviously when I first started working.

20:00 **What about surfing? I understand you were a bit of a surfer as a teenager?**

Yeah, I really enjoyed it. That was the freedom and the just getting away from it all. I really enjoyed that. I had a sports car in those days. I had an old MG TC. I had a Holden first, an FJ Holden and then I had an MG after that, so that

20:30 was great. I always have fond memories of those years.

And who taught you to drive?

My Dad. My mother had an old Hillman Minx and I learnt to drive in that, it was a manual car. Then of

course I used to borrow that and whip the hub caps off and all that sort of stuff that you do when you're a kid and then she had one of the first Minis that came out and

21:00 that was a fun car to drive, so yeah. They were good years.

Just going back to the Holden that you had. Did you get that because you had a job by this stage?

Yes. I had a job and I could afford that. Yeah. The normal thing; you got it lowered and put extractors on it and all those sorts of things that lairds did in those days.

21:30 That was my first car. It was enjoyable.

And why were you a laird do you think?

I think because everybody else was. I suppose it's what kids do and I even see young kids today and you think, why do they have to drive like that? Then you've got to think, well you were like that once. I think it's just a boy thing. You get

22:00 your first motorcar and you think you're indestructible and I suppose on several occasions we were lucky we survived really. Just stupid things we did.

What sort of things did you do?

Oh well, driving fast and unfortunately in those days we were drinking alcohol and still driving motorcars. At that time you got away with it but how stupid it was when you look back in retrospect.

22:30 **How old were you when you got your first surfboard?**

I would have been probably sixteen. I think Mum lent me the money to get it. The big thing was always to have a Barry Bennet surfboard, made in Sydney, I think it was Brookvale. I bought it from JA Surf Shop and we used to

23:00 always hang around there. I just loved the smell of fibreglass when they were making boards down there and of course my friend from school a guy called Robert Keating he had a surfboard as well and we used to take it in turns of borrowing each other's mothers' car and I remember his mother had a black Volkswagen, the one with the little small window in the back and we used to go down to the South Coast, Victor Harbour

23:30 and Kiton and then down to Goolwa and Middleton. He started this. We'd have competitions of coming down Willunga Hill, which was quite steep and quite windy, of how many times you had to use the brake on the hill, so we were lucky to survive.

So was the aim to use the brake less or more?

Less. Yes. Some scary moments.

24:00 But again, we survived.

Who won the competitions?

He did of course.

The beach and the surfing culture that you started to become involved with,

24:30 **did you have a wetsuit?**

Not initially but I did in the end. In winter I got quite cold. There's probably only a couple of surf beaches here and that was the mid coast as we called it. That was Southport and Seaford and probably the northern end of Moana and of course the swell never gets in there on a regular basis, so most of the time you were surfing down

25:00 South again at Middleton, Kiton. Never surfed Waitpinga; it was just too big for us and of course where that swell comes from, from the Southern Ocean there it's quite cold, so in the end you relented and outlaid, bought a wetsuit.

How much did the fashion impact on you?

Yeah. I used to like

25:30 clothes. I used to always buy a lot of clothes from David Jones in those days and of course it was then obviously that culture that came from the UK, especially with the end of the Beatles and the Mod era because it was the surfers versus the rockers or the surfers and Mods versus the rockers. That Mod fashion we obviously all got on to. In the early days when we went

26:00 to the Princeton Club everybody had a duffle coat and all those things. I just can't remember the stuff we had but yeah, there was obviously a certain amount of fashion there.

Did you identify more with being a surfie than a Mod?

Yes I think so.

And why did the two...?

Well mods rode scooters

26:30 and I was more inclined to want to have a sports car than ride a motor scooter.

So by this time your family home was at Erindale. What sort of house was it?

We moved quite a bit actually in my teenage years.

27:00 My mother was never really satisfied with every house she had. The first one we had in Erindale was a big Tudor house and that was great. I always remember that. It had a big back yard and I remember it had a woodshed and Dad built me a pigeon loft on top of that so I had pigeons when I was a kid and that was great and then

27:30 we moved from there I think to Burnside and we lived on Glenburn Road, another Tudor house there. Then from there we went to Tranmere. Hope I don't miss any out here. Then we went to Hazelwood Park, another big house there and then back up to Erindale again and that's when I left home. After I came home from Vietnam,

28:00 that's where they were living and of course they had another couple of moves after that.

I guess maybe your favourite house out of all of those houses. Perhaps the one that you had the pigeons...?

Yeah. That was probably the favourite because it was a big house and it was a nice big Tudor house. We had a big yard and it was central to everything. Yeah I really enjoyed that house and probably the last house they had at Erindale too, that was a nice house, yeah. Should have bought it but there you go.

28:30 **Can you just describe it a bit more?**

I am just trying to think because mainly I think about the pigeon loft that I had out the back but it had a big verandah on the front and it was big inside and I had an enormous bedroom there. I always had a bedroom to myself.

29:00 And again I mention that back yard where we use to play cricket with my mates. Yeah, it was close to Kensington Park, which was just across Kensington Road. We could just go across the road and muck around in the ground over there, so that's why I enjoyed it the most and probably the last house that we had

29:30 at Erindale, after I moved out, was that they had a big sleep out and I had that to myself and that had a door outside and a door into the house so I could sort of come and go as I pleased and I would come home late at night and just sneak in the back door and I remember I used to have my mates up there and we'd have card nights up there and waking up with all these empty beer bottles lying around you on the floor.

30:00 **Well you are describing particularly your teenage years as a kind of rebellion I guess? Why do you think you started to rebel from your parents?**

I suppose to an extent, as I described, the discipline was quite strict in those early days but by the same token I didn't really have a problem with that.

30:30 And my parents were churchgoers and I could never really see anything in religion. It never really did anything for me. We were forced to go to Sunday school and then to go to church services and I would sit in there and they would sit there preaching but it never did anything for me, so I suppose to an extent

31:00 with that discipline and that religion thing, I suppose forced down your throat is not the right thing but I was made to go and I suppose I didn't get anything out of it so I suppose I rebelled at the end of that.

What sort of religion?

Methodist and I'm not a religious person now because I could never see anything in it.

31:30 **I guess it's natural for kids to rebel a bit against their parents but when do you think you started to?**

Probably in the latter years of high school because I was frustrated at school as well. As I said I wasn't an academic. They used to go in A, B, C and D forms and of course the

32:00 A students were the academics. They got the best teachers and the D formers, which I was, we got the guys straight out of teachers' college who hadn't had any experience and so we were sort of left to our own devices to an extent and I was frustrated with that. Thinking, well, hang on. Here we are. Not academics but why don't we get the best teachers that can help us? And so

32:30 I was very frustrated at that. The academics were given everything and we weren't given much at all in my opinion, so I suppose that had a bit to do with the rebellion as well, against the authority of the time and this discipline of my parents and the religious thing again. I suppose I rebelled against all of that.

The discipline that they

33:00 **put in place in the home, were there rules...?**

Oh sure, there were rules. Looking back in retrospect I really don't have a problem with it now but when you're a kid, you do. You look back and you know it was for your own good and I respect my parents for giving me that and even going back on the religious thing again I

33:30 still am grateful that I went through that period because I think the Ten Commandments are a good set of rules to live your life by but the rest of it didn't do anything for me and I suppose to an extent I'm a bit of a hypocrite because when our boys were going to school we sent them to Pedare Christian College. I wanted to give them a religious background so that they could make a

34:00 choice for themselves as to what it was and if they could learn the Ten Commandments and learn that's how you should live your life by, so yeah, just going back I suppose, as you are immature at fifteen, sixteen, you rebel against that. Does that make sense?

And it's interesting to hear about your own struggles.

34:30 **Do you think surfing was a way out for you?**

Oh yes. That was great. You just get out in the seas because I love the sea. I always have loved the sea. Just being out there waiting for a set to come and when you got on you had that freedom on a wave and it was just a

35:00 huge release. I just loved it and still love the sea now and my eldest son's a mad surfer and we've got a place down the peninsular. I'm very lucky. My Dad actually started this; we've got a holiday place at a place called Corny Point, which is down the bottom of York Peninsular and my son goes down there every week and surfs the surf beaches and I know when he come home and he come up here to tell me what he did that day, because he knows I understand

35:30 what he's on about; of having that freedom of surfing and just loves it and I had that same freedom at that same age. To the extent of even when I was working, if I knew that the swell was on I'd take my surfboard to work and straight down there after work and it wouldn't worry how long I had to drive to get there as long as I got there in time for enough light left so that I could at least get a few sets. Loved

36:00 that with a passion.

What about the music that you remember from the '60s and your teenage years?

Yeah, I suppose I loved Rock 'n' Roll. Loved Rhythm & Blues and so I loved all the Americans. I'm not an Elvis Presley fan, I didn't go for that but I went for the Blues. I really liked the Blues music and of course when the Beatles came on everybody liked the

36:30 Pop side of the Beatles and I loved the Beatles but then the Rolling Stones obviously came along, their Rhythm & Blues and then the Heavy Metal stuff started. Especially when we were in Vietnam I was right into Heavy Metal stuff. I loved obviously the Doors, Led Zeppelin, Cream all of those.

Before we get to Vietnam and your

37:00 **surfing, what sort of music went with the surfing?**

Probably to an extent, I'm just trying to think if the Beach Boys were around then and again the Beatles were there but it was Jan & Dean, the whole surf thing that was coming out of West Coast USA. The surf scene was big in those days and we were very influenced by that obviously but you're influenced by it to go and do surfing but then when you got into surfing there was

37:30 that freedom of surfing. That was a great escapism.

Surfing and swimming fashions have really changed. What were you wearing back then?

We were wearing board-shorts. I still remember my red and white checked board-shorts. They were my favourites but yeah. We were into board-shorts in those days.

And were they long board-shorts or...?

Yeah. Not as long as they are today. It was above the knee.

38:00 But mainly you wore board-shorts as opposed to bathers because you'd get chafed on the inside leg if you didn't have board-shorts and then the advent of wetsuits. I couldn't afford a long-john steamer suit to start with so I just had a short wetsuit.

What about your hair? Did you have long hair?

Yeah I actually had hair in those days.

38:30 Yeah we grew it reasonably long. I wasn't over the top with it, more like a Beatles style haircut because that was the fashion then to have a Beatles style haircut and probably on that point we all wished we had long hair so that we looked like a real surfer. I think they might have started in those days with the peroxide bleaching their hair so that they looked like a

39:00 surfer, but I never did.

Why not?

Oh I don't know if I was into it, but then again, I dare say the ego said, "Oh I wish I had long, blonde hair."

Tape 2

00:32 **We were just talking about the surfing culture and hairstyles and stuff. I was just wondering what was it that made you feel really cool about being a surfer?**

Again it was that influence from the West Coast of America, that

01:00 surfing was the in thing and if you were a surfer you were right into it but again, as I said, once you got into being a surfer and you were proficient at it and you could ride the green part of a wave and manoeuvre of the green part of a wave and the confidence grew it was a really enjoyable experience to be out there by yourself in one with Nature, riding this wave and it was just

01:30 an absolutely sensational feeling. Especially if you got a good wave but I suppose to an extent a little bit of aggression came out in that because there were a lot of guys in the water then that wanted to get a wave and of course being South Australia and not having a lot of beaches with good waves you really had to hassle for waves and I used to love getting in there with the best of them, hassling for waves.

And what was the routine for hassling for a wave?

Well, you had to be on the inside of

02:00 the break, so the stronger you were at paddling to get on the inside of the break to get the wave first and you head right away once you're in the wave and of course there was a lot of abuses hurled at each other.

And what if you crashed in or came down on somebody else's wave?

You were told in no uncertain terms that you'd dropped in on somebody and that was against the rules.

02:30 But you got guys that were naïve and didn't understand the rules to start with, so as I said there was a certain amount of aggression.

And did you actually ever experience any fisticuffs?

Oh no. No I never got into that. It was just oral abuse but again, to answer your question it was originally a West Coast influence.

03:00 And then the pure joy and could then, the further you travelled away from the local beaches to go surfing there were less people, so yeah, that was enjoyable. I only had a couple of times when I went over to York Peninsular before I went to Vietnam. Of course there were less people there, better waves.

I guess the other thing that tends to get associated

03:30 **with beach culture especially from the '60s, is girls, so what was your introduction to a social life as a young teenager?**

Well because all my friends were going to the Princeton Club, which was at the Burnside Town Hall and Princeton was huge as far as I was concerned.

04:00 All the surfing fraternity went to Princeton whereas the Rockers all went to the Palais on North Terrace because it was so big. On Saturday nights it was at the Burnside Town Hall and on Thursday nights it was in the Greek Hall in the city and it just seemed to be as big on a Thursday night as on Saturday night. It was compered by Bob Francis

04:30 and the Penny Rockets were the resident band there and they played all the latest music and of course Bob Francis was also a DJ on the radio in those days. He was probably the biggest DJ going around and he obviously had an influence and I think he was responsible in part for getting the Beatles to come to Adelaide and I think I'm correct in saying this, that the

05:00 Beatles' reception in Adelaide was probably the biggest they'd ever had in the World. It was absolutely

huge. The city was absolutely packed with hundreds of thousands of people. I remember being out the front of the old Hotel South Australia on North Terrace there. I couldn't believe the number of people there and of course, later up at the Town Hall people packed every where, yeah.

And did you get a glimpse of them?

Oh yes. When they were on the balcony at the Hotel South Australia.

05:30 I didn't actually go to their concert but my wife did. It was the biggest thing in her life I think, so getting back to your question, Princeton was the in thing of getting back to that era where Beatles music and Rolling Stones music and all the other West Coast American music was played at the Princeton by the Penny Rockets.

And the Penny Rockets were a cover band?

They were a cover band, yeah.

06:00 And big Bob Francis was the compare.

And what was the little red book?

If you wanted to be in Princeton you joined the Princeton Club and you had this little red book with 'Princeton Club' on it and you had to have your signature and I think there was a number or something. That was a precious little thing. Oh yeah, I'm a member of the Princeton and you had to show that when you went in.

And how did you get it in the first

06:30 **place?**

Some mates signed me in, so yeah but it took a while to get one. I don't really remember the total significance of the red book but yeah, I know I had one and I suppose following on from that, the big thing then was, because sports cars were big in those days,

07:00 and you were being pretty cool if you had a sports car and of course at Burnside in those days, where the Burnside Town Hall is, used to be where the Burnside roundabout was. It's long gone now. We all used to hare around the Burnside roundabout in your sports car, you were the in thing.

And you got a sports car after your Holden?

Yeah. I had an MG TC. I really wanted an Austin

07:30 Healey 104 and a guy had one but my Dad wouldn't lend me that much money to buy it. I've always lusted after one since then but I never bought one.

It's still pretty high status to have an MG at the age of what seventeen, eighteen?

Eighteen I was. Yeah. Oh yeah. I wish I still had it today.

Can you describe it? What was it like?

It was black. It had

08:00 instead of the big nineteen-inch wide wheels it had the sixteen-inch wide wheels. Big fat wheels at the back and I used to drive it with the top down and think I was Joe Cool. Yeah. I loved it. I don't know why I sold it. When I did sell it I bought a Mini Cooper, so I daresay that was a thing in those days.

Did you have to borrow some money off your Dad to buy the MG?

Yes.

08:30 **That's a good segue into talking about your leaving school and getting your first job. You mentioned that you got a job at Gen Wheels?**

GNR Wheels. They were wholesalers and importers.

And where were they?

They were in Gawler Place in the city at the back of John Martins there, so working in there was cool too because you were right across the road from David Jones and you

09:00 were in the city and all the girls in their summer clothes, so it was good from that aspect to be in the city. Everybody wanted to work in the city in those days.

And what were your duties?

When I first joined GNR Wheels I wanted to work in the office and I didn't get a job in the office. I was in the dispatch area. I was there for

09:30 about six months or something and then I actually still wanted to get an office job and I was applying for jobs and I'd actually got a job at MS McLeod, the tyre people, in their office and I put in my resignation

and they said to me, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going to McLeod's." And they said, "Look we can get you a job in the office," and they laid out a plan for me to start in the office and what I would do down the track, so they convinced me to stay which I did and then

10:00 I worked up in the office as the mail boy at first and then I transferred into the shipping department.

And what did that involve?

Basic accounting initially, when I was the mail boy, I used to be responsible for the cash sales. It's always amazed me because I was a young kid responsible for all this money.

10:30 After that I was moved into the shipping department and the idea was that I would start studying to be an accountant. I think I was there for about three years and that was kind of enjoyable as well because in

11:00 GNR Wheels there were a lot of different departments, being a wholesaler, so there were a lot of young lads that worked in GNR Wheels, so there was actually a good social environment there as well and one of the guys that worked in GNR Wheels was actually in the same corps as I was in the army. He'd got called up as well, he was in the armoured corps, so yeah, a lot of it was enjoyable but then as I said, I looked around and being in a

11:30 general office you have the general office in the centre and then all these glass offices on the exterior of it and I looked up and I thought, "I could end up in one of those glass cages. I'm out of here and you know, because of this surfing thing I liked the idea of being outdoors and that and I thought, "This is not for me. I'm out of here, so I left. Initially I went to Western Australia. I caught the train over to Western Australia. Didn't have much money.

12:00 **By yourself?**

By myself yeah.

Why did you just up and leave to WA?

I just thought, "Well there's good surf over there and maybe I could go up North and work in the mines or whatever. I just needed to get away. It was escapism again. The train trip was enjoyable but after that, the actually illusion of going up North tended to fade, so I

12:30 was probably only away about a month or something and then I came back home and thought, "Oh well, I've got to get a job and I remember my parents were going to Tasmania and my mother saying to me, "We're going to Tasmania for three weeks. When we get home I expect you'll have a job." And so they came home and I still didn't have a job but then I got a job working for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] doing sets.

How did you find

13:00 **that one?**

I'd applied for a lot of jobs. I think my Dad might have helped me a bit in that actually. He knew somebody. I can't remember the details of it but I know he had an influence in getting it and so yeah, that was a great job really because I didn't have to start until eleven o'clock in the morning, so that meant I could go down the coast and have a surf in the morning and then I'd

13:30 work until after the seven-thirty news, I think I finished about eight o'clock at night, so that meant I could go out and socialise with my mates afterwards and so it just rolled on. That was a good life. Surf in the morning and boozing at night. It was never going to be a permanent position. It was a temporary position and then when I got called up for National Service I remember them saying

14:00 to me, "Well you can't come back here afterwards because this was never permanent."

And what did you have to do as a set man?

Mainly work in the workshops there where they were painting the sets. It was really an odd-jobs man I suppose. You'd go and work with the camera crews when they went on outside excursions. You know, you'd carry their equipment and help with the sets, you know the lighting and they used

14:30 to, behind the news they'd have the camera where you'd change the slides and you'd get the prompts from the director and hopefully you didn't stuff it up.

So you're talking about the rear projection?

Yes. I used to operate that, so yeah. I was just an odd jobs but enjoyable. Of course it was enjoyable because it's television isn't it and television was big

15:00 in those days.

And what sort of new people did you encounter there?

I don't remember a lot of the people there to be honest. I never had any friends there, put it that way. I

just know that prior to the seven o'clock news we'd go across the road to the Walker's Arms Pub and have a bite to eat and a couple of beers and then come back. You couldn't get too smashed because obviously you had to do

15:30 the seven o'clock news. Yeah but never really any friends there.

Was this when you had the MG or had you sold that by now?

I think I'd sold that by that stage and that's when I had my Mini Cooper.

I'm just a bit curious of the image of putting a surfboard on an MG doesn't really go together.

No the surfboard used to have to go in the front seat and then stick out the back.

16:00 So I really couldn't take anybody with me but that was enjoyable because I could just go by myself. Stick my surfboard in the spare seat and tie it down and off I go and then when I got the Mini Cooper obviously I could put my surfboard on the top.

And what was the Mini Cooper like?

I wish I still had that too. It was British racing green with a white top. Fat wheels on it.

16:30 Big exhaust on it. Yeah. Loved it and of course you could drive it hard. It was enjoyable to drive. They were fun to drive.

Why did you sell your MG?

To be honest it was probably getting restrictive with the surfing thing and of course at that stage I'd met Elaine hadn't I, so you know, she wanted to come down the coast or I wanted her to come down the coast, so that was probably the reason

17:00 behind it.

First of all can you tell us the story of meeting Elaine because she was quite a figure in your whole Vietnam experience?

Very much really. I'd had a couple of girlfriends before that. I remember it was a Thursday night

17:30 and the Princeton wasn't at the Greek Hall it was at Burnside for some reason, I don't know why and I just went there by myself actually and I just saw her in the crowd there and I asked her to dance and it went from there. I took her home that night and then I obviously pursued her from there. I just used to ring her all the time and I was probably a bit of a bastard too at that stage were

18:00 I'd sort of tentatively make an agreement that we'd go out on Saturday night and then I'd decide; oh I might go boozing with my mates. Stood her up and that didn't go down too well. I remember my now brother-in-law wanted to punch my lights out for things like that and her father was probably a bit upset with me but that was all forgotten in the end.

18:30 Again I came to this thing when I met Elaine and I felt very, very comfortable within her family. They were just fantastic people. Her father really loved his kids, like her and her sister probably had the best childhood anybody could ever, ever want. Lovely people and he

19:00 had a similar outlook to life as myself and I enjoyed his company very, very much. Just getting back on that with Elaine. I obviously fell in love with her but fell in love with her family as well and that whole thing of their life and their father. You know they were a very close family with Elaine's aunts and uncles and all that sort of stuff, yeah.

Did Elaine become a surfer chick?

19:30 Yeah. She didn't surf or anything but she used to enjoy the beach. She used to enjoy going to the beach but she was never right into surfing because when we actually got married later on our honeymoon we went to the World's Surf Titles at Bell's Beach and so I always get paid out for that. She says, "I can't believe how gullible I was to do all those things."

20:00 **So she was the surfer girlfriend who sat on the beach?**

Yes and pays me out now for it.

Throughout your teenage years the Vietnam War had begun. What did you know

20:30 **of it?**

Well one of the guys in the social group that I move in, in those days at the Princeton, was a guy who had actually joined the army and he'd actually gone to Vietnam, so we all sort of knew about Vietnam. One subject I enjoyed at school was geography so I'm pretty sure I knew where Vietnam was when

21:00 the conflict started, you know, Indochina. Although I didn't know the full history about the French and all that back in the '50s, when Malcolm went to Vietnam and came home we were obviously very

conscious of it and one of the other guys in our group he actually got called up before me and of course Vietnam was in the news all the time then.

21:30 So yeah, we were very much aware of it and I suppose to an extent, I don't know whether we were in awe of Malcolm because he'd been to Vietnam and experienced things but, yeah, so we were aware of it.

When the first rumblings of conscription were brought in how did you react?

22:00 Yeah, I suppose we all thought, "Oh yeah my number won't come up. Who cares? And then my number came up and when it did I thought, "Oh well, I've got to go. I'll go." I suppose at that stage I was a bit aimless in life.

22:30 Really going nowhere so I wasn't really perturbed to that extent and of course you knew that even if you got drafted you weren't sure that you were going to go to Vietnam. Of course my mother was upset and obviously Elaine was as well but yeah

23:00 I thought, "Oh yeah, here we go. Go in and do this. Get it over and done with."

When did you and Elaine get engaged? Was that after your call up?

Gee, memory's fading now. I think it was probably after my call up. I knew then that I'd fallen in love

23:30 with Elaine and was very happy in that whole situation there and so yeah.

It's interesting that you did get engaged before you went away. Do you recall discussing with her why you wanted to get engaged?

I think it was more her than me. She wanted to get engaged.

24:00 Yeah, I'm just harking back on it. It was probably a bit of a joint thing: that we knew that we were soul mates then and we wanted to be together. Just thinking back on it now, it wasn't before call up. No, we got engaged before I went to Vietnam so I'd actually gone into the army at that stage because I had two years to do and it was probably

24:30 twelve months into that, that we got engaged, yeah.

What sort of process was it the call up? Did you just get a letter in the post?

Yes, to say that I'd have to report for a medical and then you would be advised after that. I remember

25:00 going for the medical and there was nothing wrong with me, so I was accepted.

Just before we move on, just to explore that initial surprise or shock receiving that call up. Can you just tell us a bit more about how you first reacted?

Of course the initial thing is when you get it is; oh, bloody hell.

25:30 Done for because then it sunk in that this lifestyle that I was living then of going for a surf in the morning, having to get to work at eleven o'clock and this freedom was all going to end but then when I thought about it I thought, "OK, this is a new adventure in life."

26:00 Yeah. Let's get on with it, so I don't think I really had any things of thinking, "Oh I'll be a conscientious objector." That never went through my mind. I thought, you know, "The Government's called me up. Let's get on with it and get it over and done with," and I suppose in those early years you really don't

26:30 think too much of your allegiance to Australia but I think there was a certain amount there, that Australia wanted you, was calling you up and you had to serve your Country. It was never a great problem. I never recall it being a great problem that I had to go in there. As I said it never crossed my mind that I was not going to go.

27:00 **What sort of involvement if any had any of your family had in World War II? Did you have any family members...?**

Yeah my father served in the air force, although he didn't go overseas. Obviously being a plumber by trade he had actually enlisted and was in the air force and was based up in Queensland and was doing a

27:30 lot of the repair work on aircraft up there and he was prepared to go overseas but was never allowed to go because he was required there to do repair work, so yeah, he'd had I think he must have spent most of the war in the air force but no one else that I knew of, like my

28:00 grandparents hadn't but my Mum's a Scot, so my grandfather had never been in anything. No, sorry, I lied. My mother's brother, my uncle was a tail gunner in a bomber and did I think thirty-two missions over Berlin, so yeah. I always remember mother saying that you know, when he came home I think he was about twenty-one, twenty-

28:30 two when he came home from the [Second World] War. Lost all his hair, so that must have been quite

horrific to me but I never spoke to him about it. That was never discussed, what he went through. It was only what my mother ever told me and it was probably one of my regrets in life, now I look back on it, because he was a great sailor my uncle and he lived at Largs North. That's where my mother came from and all her family.

- 29:00 And we wanted to build me a little sailing yacht. He used to build them and he wanted to teach me to sail but I never took it up and it's probably one of the regrets of my life because I've never sailed and I've always spoken to people that have sailed and as I said I love the sea. Yeah I wish I'd done it. Wish I'd sort of got to know him better.

What did your father tell you of his World War II experiences in the

- 29:30 **RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] ?**

No we never sat down and really discussed it. I just knew he'd done what he did but there was never any great detail to it. I knew he was in Charters Towers, working on aircraft but that's it. He was basically a coppersmith or something. I know it was just repair work on aircraft and maintenance.

- 30:00 **It's interesting hearing you talk about your own motivations to accept your call up. Sentiments were quite different in World War II and King and Country was much more prominent back then than the '60s.**

Yes.

You say that you felt like you had an understanding or a

- 30:30 **sympathy with serving your Country. I'm also wondering if following in your father's footsteps might have influenced you?**

No. I don't recall that being in the thought process at all, about Dad having served but obviously there must have been something in the back of your mind because obviously that as you said, King and Country

- 31:00 during that Second World War. There must have been something that we'd learnt at school about the sacrifices that especially the First World War and the Anzac spirit and again with the Second World War, so I was very much aware of that and of course they'd had National Service in the '50s too.

- 31:30 So it never obviously was a great problem with me. My father-in-law had done National Service but he'd only done the three-month thing, I think, up at Woodside but it was something that as an Australian, you know, if you got called up you went and did it. There were no problems with it. Of course there were guys that were

- 32:00 conscientious objectors and even when we went to rookie training there were guys there that had obviously realised that; well, this is not for me, I'm out of here. If you wanted to you could have got out of it by just jacking up and not doing anything and there were a few guys that obviously couldn't handle it and they just disappeared one day, so they were

- 32:30 obviously discharged but no, I just thought, "Called up, let's get on with it. Let's move on. Let's do it." Never any great problem as far as I was concerned.

You mentioned Elaine had a bit of a reaction?

Oh, of course I think obviously that's only a natural reaction, you know.

- 33:00 Loved one going, being taken away but no, again, she knew that I'd accepted it and at that stage it was two years of National Service. I was going to Puckapunyal. It wasn't that far away, I could still come home, so yeah, she accepted that.

- 33:30 **Would you have ever considered joining the regular army do you think?**

No. It's probably a hard question to answer because I just can't remember that I would have been in for the discipline. Being a surfer and having that freedom and then knowing that a certain amount

- 34:00 they certainly had you under control and certainly now in retrospect I know I wouldn't have joined. Yeah. The army was a great experience and I'm glad I've done it but no. I always remember the day we were leaving Vietnam the CO [Commanding Officer] called us in and asked us if we wanted to sign on and my reaction was straight,

- 34:30 "You've got to be kidding. Me? Sign on? I'm out of here." No way Jose.

Where did you go when you got the letter and you had to report? Where did you have to go?

Down to Keswick [Barracks] as I recall because it did the medical there and then we were inducted in and then told you had to front up at

- 35:00 Adelaide Airport on a certain day and we flew out and I can't actually recall, I know we didn't go into Melbourne Airport, I don't know where we landed. We were taken somewhere and it was the Melbourne Airport. It might have been Essendon Airport or somewhere. I know it wasn't the main Melbourne

Airport and then we were bussed into Puckapunyal.

So you didn't go to Woodside at all?

No. Straight into Puckapunyal.

35:30 What a culture shock.

And what was your farewell from Adelaide like? Did you get any send-offs?

Oh yeah my mates. We had a big booze-up and all my mates came. Yeah. Probably just another Saturday night party really. Party time. Yeah, all my mates came.

And did your Dad or anyone give you a word of advice before you left?

Not that I recall no.

36:00 **And when you arrived at Puckapunyal why was it such a shock to your system?**

All these blokes yelling at us, making us do things, forming a line. Hang on a minute. Get a haircut. I'd already had a haircut. I'd cut my hair thinking, "I might as well get it cut now and then I won't go through it," and then they went and cut it again. Then you had to go and have a dental check and you were pushed from pillar to post. Yeah.

36:30 Shivers, that was a real culture shock. Being ordered about like that and you know I mentioned earlier about the discipline with my parents, God that was nothing compared to these guys but the thing is at that stage when you'd gone there, there were all these other guys who had all been called up with you, so we were all in the same boat and we all whinged and moaned but again,

37:00 get on with it but it was a culture shock because you know, having to make your bed and all that discipline that went in there. The shining your boots and oh, yeah. That took some time to adjust to that and we all did I dare say. Then again, we all looked at one another, "Oh, well he's doing it. Oh, I've got to do it," and

37:30 to an extent you're supporting each other and you start to make friends then. You know, the guys that you like and the guys that you don't like and yeah but you had to get on with it and the instructors there, they were corporals and sergeants. Initially when you went there you thought, "These blokes are right bastards. They love doing this."

38:00 They love torturing us but then sort of down the track you'd sort of be doing an exercise or something and you'd get to talk to them on the side and then you found out they were really just human beings like you were, so that all made it pretty right in the end and you realised that they were just doing a job. They had to get you to conform.

It would have been a

38:30 **really big leap going from surfer to army.**

Oh yeah. That freedom you had to holy hell, all this discipline but we laughed. I suppose we all laughed. I remember the first day we had to do PE [Physical Education] and we all had these big, green baggy shorts on and these little white sandshoes. Nothing like the sandshoes you get today, just a flat sole and you look at all these guys and then you look at yourself

39:00 and you think, "Well, we're all in the same boat. He looks like an idiot as well." So yeah and we all looked idiots. Yeah.

Tape 3

00:31 **Can I just take a step back to your comment about men who made a conscientious point about when they were called up not going? You saw it as your responsibility to a degree. How did you feel about the so-called draft dodgers?**

I thought it was a bit of a cop out at that stage but I suppose when you look back in retrospect everybody's got their point of view and if

01:00 that's what they thought was right, so be it. Go and do it. I wasn't overly worried about it. Didn't have a great concern about it, you know and I suppose my thought processes were very similar to what I think now. A bit like people with religion; they get a lot out of it, that's terrific. For instance my sister's very religious and I think that's great but it doesn't do anything for me.

At Puckapunyal you were with

01:30 **regular army?**

No. There was no regular army. They were all National Servicemen but the instructors were regular

army.

How would you describe their attitude towards the National Servicemen?

Yeah it's interesting because I think the word that went around was Nasho bashers. We probably thought because we were naïve to an extent about how the military worked that they were probably too harsh on us but when you look back in retrospect now

02:00 they weren't. They were just doing their job but you know, you get all different personalities that would do that and there were some guys that were vindictive to an extent and others, when you got to know them were really nice blokes and they were just trying to help you through it. I remember this one guy saying when we went for a meal, "Just try and eat something of everything, even if you can't eat the whole lot." And I thought, "Oh yeah, he's human after all. He's just trying to

02:30 help us." So yeah, I didn't have a problem with it.

There was also a lifestyle change and a lot of discipline now. Did you ever feel like rebelling?

I dare say we did to an extent.

03:00 But then, as I said before we were all together. We were all in the same boat. We all talked about, "Oh bugger this. Let's get out of here." But then you thought about, "Let's get on with it. Let's get a move on," and I'd been in the Cubs and Scouts as a kid and I knew that there was a certain amount of discipline that was required, so yeah I, no, maybe in the thought

03:30 process way back there but no. Nothing that really came to the forethought and thought, "I'm going AWOL [Absent Without Leave] ." No. Get on with it.

That point that you raised about being with other National Servicemen, you gelled. Who were your mates when you got there?

To be honest I haven't got any friends from these days. Even on Anzac Day when we march I can't even recall anybody that I was in rookie training with.

04:00 It was just at that time you just got on with it as a group, so yeah. We all knew we had to get through it and we did and you know, there were some parts of it I enjoyed, you know. I really enjoyed the physical challenges and the physical side of things, like the cross-country events. I really enjoyed those. Like the running. Just all that marching and

04:30 saluting and stuff, that didn't go down with me but anyhow.

One of the basic parts of rookie training is learning to fend for yourself. How did you cope with learning to iron and taking care of yourself and keeping everything really pristine?

Yeah, again, that discipline of doing it I didn't really like it but

05:00 bearing in mind that prior to me going in my parents had gone away on holidays and I had to fend for myself, so I didn't mind cooking and I didn't mind ironing and that. I quite enjoyed being independent, so although it was a chore in the army and you had to have it absolutely spot on, it never really was a great concern to me. Just this polishing of the boots, of getting a

05:30 spoon out and heating it up and then rubbing it in so it came up spot on shiny. I thought it was just over the top but if that's what they wanted we did it.

I've never heard of shining boots that way. Can you explain it?

Neither did I. These guys that had obviously been in CMF [Citizens Military Forces - the reserve] knew how to get the toecap really shiny and they liked to have it really shiny and what they did is heated up a spoon with a cigarette lighter and then put the polish on and then rubbed it over so that it melted

06:00 it into the leather obviously and then you got a really shiny finish. Like a patent leather I dare say, so yeah, we did it and of course once somebody does it and sets the precedent then of course they expect everybody's got to have done it, so yeah, those guys did it and they had a bit to answer for, anyhow.

With that relationship, that

06:30 **bonding that you had at that stage, I'm just exploring that because you were complete strangers but thrown in under the same circumstances and then you said that one of the guys that came up with the spoon idea copped it later. What kind of things would you do to kind of...?**

Well again, it was just verbal. It was never anything physical. You know, "You wanker" or something. "You buggered it for the rest of us." And he probably felt

07:00 bad. I don't know. Just talking about that, there was once incident I had which became physical. There was a pommy guy, his name was Grimes and he was an ex-boxer. Anyhow I forget what we were doing, we were in the barracks one day and something happened. I can't even remember what the occurrence was but he threw a knife at me and I did

- 07:30 my cruet and fronted him and he upped and head-butted me right across the bridge of my nose. Broke my nose and with that, I just grabbed him and had him on the ground because obviously he was quite small but he was obviously very quick, so I just had to use my physical presence and I had him down on the ground. Then I was strangling him until his face turned blue and there was blood pouring out of my nose all over him but I didn't care, I was going to kill that bastard. Well I thought I wanted to kill him.
- 08:00 because I just did my cruet and they just pulled me off him and it was all sorted out and if you can believe that. That was actually our first leave that we had in rookie training, so I came home with a broken nose and two black eyes and we were good mates after that. We became friends, so it was so stupid but that was just one incident.
- Did you get any repercussions from that? Was there any**
- 08:30 **discipline?**
- No. It's like on the footy field. Kept on the field. Kept in the barracks. They asked me the questions. I said I bumped into a door. No.
- And the other guy?**
- Yeah. He was cool. That was probably why we became friends, you know, no one was going to dob on him, you know and he was probably grateful that I didn't you know and incident that happened on the spur of the moment on both sides. Get on with it again.
- How**
- 09:00 **were some of the other National Servicemen coping in rookie training?**
- Yeah there were guys that found it obviously very difficult to adjust but again that camaraderie came through and we'd go and help guys and say, "Come on. Come on. We're all in here together. Come on. We'll help you do these things," and that and we got them through it and there were other guys, as I said you just knew that they were never going to make it. They were just bucking
- 09:30 against the system. Well if they didn't want to help themselves so be it. You just had to let them go and as I said, they were there one day, disappeared the next, obviously discharged because they couldn't hack the system.
- When you say they were bucking against the system were they rebelling or just unable to cope with it?**
- I think there was probably those tow different types. There were the ones that just rebelled against it and
- 10:00 others that couldn't cope, so yeah, I think probably in the main the ones that couldn't cope we tried to help them through but at the end of the day if they really couldn't cope well, there was nothing much you could do and the others that just didn't want to be there any more. That was their choice but I can't recall distinguishing between the two. They were just there one day. Gone the next.
- 10:30 **What other types of training were you doing in rookie training? Aside from basic taking care of yourself?**
- Well the main thing was obviously marching. God and we'd go around and around the parade ground trying to get us into step and that was a big thing. This discipline thing and of course the physical things and we had this thing called, just outside
- 11:00 of where we were was this little knoll more than anything and they called it Tit Hill and if you were a bad boy you had to carry a sandbag up on the top of Tit Hill. I think I carried quite a few up there to be honest, so yeah, the main thing was trying to get us into shape for the discipline of the army, of the army way. You
- 11:30 were never going to beat the army. They'd break your spirit before you won and there were a couple of incidences where guys bucked the system and they were down in the slammer. "Watch your fingers," clang and they spent a few days in the slammer and they sorted them out there, so yeah and you had to do guard duty but you soon learnt.
- Was there**
- 12:00 **any rifle training?**
- I think there was. Yeah there must have been rifle training. Yeah and we'd go out in the Pucka' [Puckapunyal] Range. Again there was that discipline of how to handle a weapon.
- Just going back to the slammer incident. What constitutes being put into the slammer? What would you have to have done?**
- If you were abusive towards an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] or, you know. Said
- 12:30 you weren't going to do something. I remember this guy that was in our unit, he was actually in

armoured corps. This might have been after rookie training. His name was Roger Scales. Scalesie was always in the slammer. He was always protesting about something and even in Vietnam I remember he was the driver of a tank like me and he sat on his road wheel and said, "I'm not driving this tank any more." Anyhow a couple more days in the slammer

13:00 and Scalesie got sorted out again, and was back to driving again.

You also mentioned that you had some leave during this rookie training?

Yeah, about half way through we got leave to come home yeah.

And you came home with a broken nose and two black eyes. How did that go down?

Elaine was obviously concerned but I said it was just an incident you know, things happen and of course my parents were probably concerned because

13:30 their dear little boy... I don't know but it wasn't a great concern for me.

And when people asked you how things were going at Puckapunyal what would you say?

Oh, "Mob of bastards," you know. "All this bloody discipline and this marching." Marching, marching, marching. They loved to march and keep us in line you know. Mainly, that's all I can recall about rookie training.

14:00 Was just the discipline and the marching. I remember about going out on the Range but again I don't recall the details of it.

How was your physical fitness?

Yeah I enjoyed that side of it. I really did enjoy that physical endurance. I used to win the cross-country runs.

14:30 I used to really like the run and even when they said you had to go up the Tit Hill with the sandbag it never worried me. It was always a challenge for me, I could always get it up there.

Rookie training was for three months and then you were allocated a corps or did you volunteer?

No you had a choice. They asked you to nominate

15:00 two choices or it might have been three choices that you had and the word went around, no I think a mate might have told me, that if you put infantry down for any one of your choices you were guaranteed you were going to go to infantry, so I never put it in and of course I was probably influenced by him. He was in armoured corps and at that stage the tanks weren't going to Vietnam, so I nominated armoured corps tanks,

15:30 because I really wasn't that keen to go to Vietnam, so I put that down and I had signals for my second choice. I can't remember what I had, might have been artillery, for my third choice, so yeah and I got put into armoured.

What was the negative stigma about infantry?

I suppose I always thought it was better being in a tank than having a green shirt on: a

16:00 bit safer, or so I thought. I suppose there was riding around in a tank was a bit more romantic than walking through the scrub, easier to drive around than walk around.

When you got into armoured corps, there are various roles within the crew of a tank so how did that get

16:30 **allocated?**

I think you had a choice of where you wanted to go. The big test if you wanted to be the driver of a tank was that you had to be able to push in the clutch. I always remember that because they had Borgan Bat triple plate clutch to put in there and it was quite an exercise to push your left foot in. There was actually a road test in one of the Wheels magazines. They said you could always

17:00 tell the driver of a Centurion tank by the over developed calf muscle in the left leg. There were a couple of guys that couldn't push the clutch in. Obviously they were put in to be gunners or radio operators.

So what was the training to be a driver?

Obviously you had to be able to push this clutch in and you know, just to learn to

17:30 drive the tank because there was a crash gearbox in it. Double de-clutch all the way up and all the way down the box. You had to have a certain amount of endurance to drive a tank. It was quite strenuous really, to drive it, but obviously once you mastered it, it just became second nature. I remember it took some time to master it and even in those days when we did that it was always stressed

- 18:00 that all the crewmembers of the tank had to be able to do the jobs of the other members of the crew, so we had to do the radio operators' course. We had to know how to fire the gun. We had to know how to load the gun. I know the emphasis was on driving for me, being a driver but then we did spend a certain amount of time on the range knowing how to fire the gun and knowing how to operate the fifty-calibre gun because the way that gun fired was
- 18:30 that you had the main arm to it and then you had a thirty-calibre machine gun and a fifty-calibre machine gun co-axially mounted with the gun and what it used to do is every third round on the fifty-calibre would be a red trace, so if you were looking at a target you would fire three bursts with the fifty-calibre; you know, one at what you thought was the target, one above and one below.
- 19:00 And the crew commander, he would then fire that with the trace rounds and then say, "Right, number two burst, fifty right, up one." bang and usually you were spot on your main arm of it. Yeah you had to master that.
- So that's three rounds going at once? Was that simultaneously?**
- No, no. One after the other so you have three bursts. You go one, two, three; three bursts and then he'd select which burst was the closest to the target.
- 19:30 And then nominate say, fifty right, one up, fire and you'd let the main gun go and then you'd adjust again for the next shot if you had to, so that was a bit difficult to master.
- But did you enjoy it?**
- Yeah I enjoyed it. I remember one time we were on the range and the troop sergeant was taking us for gunnery practice and I had the thirty-calibre machine gun on the top on my cupola and
- 20:00 it was target practice at certain targets, taking a turn and when I finished my burst he said, "You're an aggressive little bastard aren't you?" and I said, "Oh I enjoyed it."
- It was quite loud. Did you wear earmuffs or anything like that?**
- Yeah because you had intercom inside the tank you had a headpiece with earphones on it so you could listen to what the crew commander was telling you.
- So the training you were doing on the range was within the**
- 20:30 **tank?**
- Yes and then of course afterwards the whole time after we finished corps training was probably spent mainly on the Pucka' range doing manoeuvres.
- What exercises would you do to practice driving the tank?**
- Obviously from armoured centre, the armoured regiment was just
- 21:00 over the hill and they had a concrete tank track, so we started learning on that first, on the tank track. Of mastering how to drive it with the gears and then after we mastered that we went into open terrain situations. I don't remember great detail about it. It wasn't a difficult thing for me to master. I never had any problems with it.
- And how were you steering the tank?**
- You steer it with two levers. One locks one track,
- 21:30 one locks the other track, so you'd pull on this track and lock it and then that track would turn on itself with this crash gearbox. It was fun mastering it yeah, but you got used to it in the end.
- How big was the space that you were able to drive in?**
- It was fairly confined but you had your head sticking out probably a metre by under a metre wide.
- 22:00 **So you said your head was sticking out. Was that where...?**
- You had a seat that you could adjust. Most of the time when you were driving you'd just have your head sticking out so you can see where you're going but you did have lids that closed down so you would be in a lock down position and you'd have periscopes. A lot of the time you'd be guided by the crew commander then.
- 22:30 **When you first got into the tank and you were sitting in that area, how did you feel?**
- Yeah I didn't have a problem. I wasn't claustrophobic or anything. I've got a problem being claustrophobic now you know. In later life I used to travel quite a bit within the company that I had and I was virtually flying every week and I always had an aisle seat in the aircraft and I always wanted it so I could get out.
- 23:00 And once they put me in a window seat, ohhh. I really had to talk to myself to get through that flight but when I was there it never worried me. I was never concerned about it.

You also did some gunnery training? But then you were also signals was it...?

I was radio operator. I wasn't very good at that but you had to know how to operate it just in case

23:30 you know, the operator got hit or anything. You had to know how to operate that radio because that was the big thing with the tank, especially when you're working with a troop, you had to be in contact. Although the crew commander was the main one who was operating the radio but the loader operator needed to obviously have radio contact and of course then you had to learn Alpha, Bravo, Delta, Tango and I've

24:00 forgotten most of that. Just one incident when we were in Vietnam (UNCLEAR with me mate) Jenky [Jenkins] . He didn't go through the procedure because we'd had a contact and we were in the shit. He's called up on the radio, "We're in more strife than Flash Gordon here." And he was hoping that the Nogs [sl. Vietnamese enemy] didn't know what that meant.

So you had a turn at gunnery and loader operating,

24:30 **which did you prefer out of those two?**

Oh driving obviously because I suppose the main thing is, I said I wasn't claustrophobic but I felt probably a little bit with the gunner, because the gunner sits down in front of the crew commander. The crew commander's behind him, so for him to get out of the tank the crew commander's got to get out and then he can get out. The operator has another hatch to get out but the driver has his hatch.

25:00 And the driver can see what's happening. You know, you've got a visual of what's happening; whereas the gunner and the operator to an extent they don't have a visual, they're guided by the crew commander if they contact anything, so to me it was like if the shit hit the fan so to speak, at least you could leap out a bit quicker and you knew what was coming, so I felt a bit more comfortable there I suppose.

25:30 **How fast were you driving the tanks?**

They're quite slow, I think a tank on bitumen, flat out could do twenty-five miles an hour and at twenty-five miles an hour with the road wheels going around on the track it felt like you were doing a hundred miles an hour. It vibrates quite a bit, so probably most of the time you were only doing ten or twelve miles an hour.

26:00 But it depended on the terrain of course too. If you're on a flat road of course you can go a lot faster.

And what terrain were you training on at Puckapunyal?

Mainly because it's all undulating countryside we were all over the place. The Pucka' range has got some flat areas but then hill areas and a lot of wooded areas as well. I'm getting ahead of myself, but I remember when we were on manoeuvres one day and something happened to

26:30 my tank, it had broken down, so I was on another person's tank. We were just on manoeuvres and I was sitting on the front of it. Of course you're only doing ten or five miles an hour. We were going up a steep incline and as we came to the top on the incline there was an outcrop and we had to get over that. Well in the gearbox in the tank, to get right down to first gear you had to go through a gate in the gearbox and then into first.

27:00 Well, as we came to this rocky incline the driver who was driving it missed first gear and so we started rolling backwards and I should have jumped off the tank then but I didn't. I stayed with the tank, so the first tree we hit, and I'm on the side of the tank thinking, "Where the hell am I going to go?" The first tree hit the cupola, smashed all the cupola, bent the barrel of the gun and so I couldn't get in with the crew commander so I ran around the front and I was trying to get in with the driver. Get in and squash down and then the second tree we hit that smashed down over

27:30 the top of the tank. Then we rolled down to the bottom of the gully and then slowly came to a stop. I think I had about three or four cigarettes in about three seconds, so that was quite an experience. One of my nine lives went then.

Back at Puckapunyal, how were you finding the armoured corps?

28:00 Yeah. I started making friends there obviously. I didn't have a problem with it. I quite enjoyed it. I was enjoying it then. As you come out of rookie training and then you go into corps training obviously the discipline, there's not as great an emphasis on it as to what it is in the training, so mainly they're trying to teach you in armoured corps how to operate

28:30 the tank, so that's the main emphasis. Obviously there's a certain amount on marching, yet again but mainly on operating that bit of equipment and obviously going along with that is the maintenance of the vehicle because it's a big thing. It's like any vehicle, you've got to maintain it, so obviously learning to lubricate all the road wheels and adjust the track and all that.

29:00 Watching and changing your oils. You don't realise it until afterwards, it's a very, very expensive bit of equipment. You know, it had a V12 Rolls Royce motor in it and the gearbox itself was a phenomenal bit of equipment, so yeah. One thing I've forgotten to mention too, on the physical side of it with me

pushing this clutch in. You had to be able to lift the covers to the engine.

29:30 Of course they're all armour-plated, so you've got all these steel covers you've got to be able to lift up, so when you're going along, you're flicking these covers up. You've got to be able to have a certain amount of strength to lift them up. Fifty kilos? Forty, fifty kilos. I'm only guessing now, I wouldn't know. I think a tank fully loaded, a Centurion, would have weighed something like fifty-five tonnes, so

30:00 it's a big chunk of metal.

And you'd been driving around quite small compact fast cars.

Mini Cooper.

How was your new vehicle shaping up?

As I said it was a bit daunting to start with but you know it's just like when you get something new and you're a bit over awed with it but you work it and then you're right into it.

When you were being instructed on how to drive the tank,

30:30 **where was the instructor sitting?**

He'd be sitting on the top of the tank there. I just can't recall. Yeah, I'm pretty sure he was just above me there, just giving us the directions because it was all slow stuff to start with and then of course once you mastered it he would be in as the crew commander.

31:00 **Were you were allocated to a squadron at this stage?**

No. It was only when you finished corps training that you went over to the regiment that was just over the hill from armoured centre. Then you were allocated a squadron and a troop, so yeah, I went into B Squadron and at that stage

31:30 it was C Squadron, they were just preparing to go to Vietnam then.

So when you completed your driver training did you get a licence?

Yeah I think we did. Yeah I did have a tank licence. I don't know where it is but yeah we did get a tank licence.

And was there any ceremony attached to the completing of the armoured corps training?

No I can't recall that.

32:00 Come to think about this licence, it wasn't khaki but a brownie coloured thing folded over three ways and you had to sign it, yeah.

And did you have to carry that licence every time you drove the tank?

I probably did, I can't recall it though.

You said you had to train multiple roles within the tank.

32:30 **Were the loader operators and the gunners learning to drive a tank at the same time as you?**

No because obviously their emphasis was that we were going to be, our main role within the tank was going to be driver, so we had obviously an extended period but they learnt obviously how to change it. To an extent they could drive it but never got obviously as proficient as what we did and vice versa. We were never as proficient at firing a gun

33:00 as they were. Like a good gunner when they got on it, they were excellent. Fire those three rounds and they were virtually bang, straight on target. Same with the radio operators, they were spot on. It was a good training in armoured corps. It was first class. I remember thinking I was a bit over awed by it, by how much training you did get and

33:30 again with these instructors, to start with you thought they were vindictive bastards I suppose to an extent but they were human beings and I suppose we realised once we got to the squadron is that in a day's work you did your day's work but to an extent the NCOs would drop their guard a

34:00 bit and they weren't your mates but you knew they were good blokes. That they were there to help you not to be a bastard towards you.

What qualifications did a crew commander need?

Well in a troop you had a troop leader who was either a lieutenant or a second lieuy [lieutenant] and then you had a sergeant and then you had a corporal

34:30 and then usually a lance corporal and each one of those was a crew commander, so they'd obviously come up in the ranks of being a driver operator or whatever and then progressed to that but it was never going to be that. National Servicemen were never going to have as many opportunities to get

rank as regular soldiers were because they knew you were only going to be there for two years but there were obviously guys that showed initiative and that

35:00 wanted to get rank and maybe they thought down the track that they wanted to be in the army full time. I know that guys that showed initiative and went to Scheyville that did officer training, most of those guys signed on but in my case, no way Jose was I going to stay in there. I didn't want rank. I was going to get out of there after my two years.

35:30 **So when you were doing your armoured corps training you were still at Puckapunyal but had you moved tents now?**

Oh yeah, we were out of the rookie training area because that was over the hill again, so we moved into the barracks up there and then afterwards when we moved from armoured centre we went, or were we? I can't think. Maybe we were down in the armoured centre, with the regiment I would say and then walked up every day to the armoured centre.

36:00 It wasn't very far away. I just remember the armoured centre was very old. It was galvanised iron painted maroon, so they were quite old those; whereas where the regiment was they were all buildings with brick barracks. I think we may have been down where the regiment was. We would have been in a designated area, you know for when we were doing corps training.

36:30 **The armoured regiment area that you were staying in, you were all in training together? I'm trying over there establish whether the armoured corps training it was all the same people that you camped with.**

Yeah it was all armoured corps people who were designated to armoured corps and when you were doing your corps training you worked there together and the guys that had finished theirs and were with the regiment, they were obviously in other barracks and had other things to do.

37:00 I think we were isolated to an extent from those guys. When I say isolated I think we probably ate in the same mess. I just can't recall but to an extent we were separate from them until we had finished. Then you went into the regiment and into a squadron.

So you were still at Puckapunyal when you joined the regiment?

37:30 **By now are we looking at Christmas 1967?**

Yeah it would have been Christmas that we went into the regiment. I'm only guessing now but it would have probably been during that Christmas break we would have been and then after that we were straight into the regiment. Or pretty close to it because it would have been three months, three months.

So did you have leave over Christmas or did you spend Christmas in

38:00 **Puckapunyal?**

No, I went home for leave. I'm pretty sure I had leave for Christmas because I just remember that I had that leave because the following Christmas I didn't. I was over there [in Vietnam] . Yeah. I'm pretty sure I came home. We used to get regular leave to come home. Like when we did rookie training we used to get one leave I think.

38:30 But when we were in armoured centre we used to get fairly regular leave and when we were in the regiment we used to get leave on a regular basis; most weekends and I used to come home to Adelaide. It was a common occurrence that everybody would hear in the mess who's going home to Adelaide. I think it was eight dollars return trip for the weekend, so there'd be six in a vehicle, home to Adelaide.

39:00 On a Friday night, get into Adelaide about one o'clock in the morning and then Sunday afternoon you'd meet at the GPO in Adelaide at about one o'clock in the afternoon, back to Pucka.

When you were on leave did you wear uniform?

No. The only time I wore a uniform was when I couldn't get a lift home for some reason.

39:30 Or maybe I had extended leave and no one else could get it. I wore my uniform and hitchhiked home because if you didn't have a uniform on no one would pick you up. That was about the only time. The rest of the time, no, you were in civvies and you'd go up to the Princeton Club and people would say, "Where did you get that haircut?"

I was going to ask how your new haircut was fitting in with your surfie look?

One of the guys,

40:00 it might have been a couple of them had wigs that they used to wear. No, my ego didn't require that because obviously I was with Elaine then.

And how did you find leave at home at this time?

Yeah I enjoyed it because most of the time I would come home in the morning, sleep, grab my car and

head down to Elaine's and I'd spend that whole weekend with her and then come back Sunday afternoon.

Tape 4

00:31 **And once you joined the regiment, when did you start your jungle training?**

It was probably three or four months after that. Probably three months because obviously what they wanted for National Servicemen was their twelve months of training and then the last twelve months of your training was to be spent in Vietnam.

01:00 I'm only guessing now but I've got the funny feeling that it was something like February of '68 that I did my jungle training at Canungra and it wasn't long after that that I did the aircraft loaders' course up at Richmond Air Base in Sydney, in preparation to go to Vietnam, obviously. Then other guys had gone ahead of me

01:30 to Vietnam, like my room-mate, so yeah, I spent the rest of the time supposedly doing jungle training on the Puckapunyal range in mid winter in the freezing cold.

Well what was jungle training in Canungra?

Yeah everybody that went to Vietnam had to do jungle training at Canungra to familiarise you with what sort of terrain you'd be

02:00 in and obviously the idea of being in the tropics because Canungra is pretty close to Brisbane or Surfers [Paradise] my recollection wasn't that it was all that hot up there. It was quite mild actually when I was there from memory but jungle training was quite an intense training course.

02:30 And very much pushing you to the limit, but again I quite enjoyed those physical activities of that. I remember you had to go around and do the obstacle course where you'd crawl under the barbed wire and into what they called the kangaroo pit, because you'd jump over this wall and then there was this pit full of dead kangaroos

03:00 with filth in it and you'd get through that and in the last bit when you did it you had to climb up this tower and jump off. It was only probably twenty, thirty feet I suppose and it was by the river and a lot of guys wouldn't climb up it: guys that were scared of heights. I remember when I jumped off it the first time I went belly up and did a big bombie. "Right you. Up

03:30 here. Do it again." So I climbed up. I didn't mind doing that. I liked jumping off heights into the river and they had diver and all that there to grab you but I remember one guy died when we were up there. We did a river crossing for some reason and I remember we had to have a full pack and rifle in getting across this river. I don't know whether he had a heart attack or something but yeah, he drowned.

04:00 But again I just remember that the discipline there was pretty horrible and they were right on you. That was the only time I ever got a charge [legal charge] when I was in the army. 'Put on a fizzer.' There was this sergeant called Sergeant Plum and he put me on a fizzer for a dirty rifle even though it was spotlessly clean. They just wanted to, you know, be bastards and charge a certain number of guys.

Going back to the guy that drowned crossing the

04:30 **river. Was he a National Serviceman as well?**

I don't recall because there were regular and National Servicemen going through there as well at that stage.

Do you recall your response to that accident?

No I don't to be honest. Again it was known that people did die at Canungra, although there wasn't a lot, a high percent.

05:00 But there were guys that had accidents there. Some had bad accidents and they fired live ammo at you, over your head of course as you were going through this course. So there were accidents where guys had broken legs and there were some guys that had actually got half way through Canungra and then had broken a leg or an ankle or whatever. Broken an arm.

05:30 So they had to go off and then they had to wait again to go back and do it again and I forget the duration of it. I think it was something like three weeks I don't know, I can't remember but guys that hadn't passed Canungra so they kept them on for another week and they went on to the next lot until they could get through it. So it was quite physical but again I enjoyed it from that physical aspect of it.

06:00 And I remember one time, they had us on full pack and marched us, like we were trotting to the limit and if you got ahead of that pack and you were looking good, you had a bit of stamina, bang, you had the M16 machine gun with all the ammo. You went from the front of the group to the back of the group

before someone else got far ahead and they were brought back again but yeah, I got the M16

- 06:30 a couple of times and then there'd be guys that were just dropping out because they just pushed you and pushed you and I remember when we stopped I was knackered. I was absolutely near exhaustion. I think I was exhausted.

And where were you camped in Canungra?

On the base, we were in tents there from memory. I don't recall a lot of it.

- 07:00 I know one thing. The food was really good. It was really good food because I just remembered from what it was at Pucka' to the food there. Obviously if you were doing that sort of endurance you had to keep your stamina up, they had to make sure they fed you good tucker but it was a good variety of food I remember that. I always loved my food.

What challenges did Canungra bring to you?

- 07:30 Again it was more the physical and the endurance of it that you could sustain the push. The discipline wasn't a big thing because we'd already been through that discipline thing. It was mainly the endurance of getting through it but again, as I said before, I was really fit then. I was the fittest I've ever been in my life and to an extent I reckon I thrived on it.

- 08:00 I just liked that stuff.

When you finished up at Canungra where did you go from there?

Back to your unit, so we'd caught the train up there and then we just went back to... We had a break actually. We went down to Surfers Paradise for a day, got on the grog down there. They gave us one day's break. That was the first time I'd been to Queensland in my life: Surfers and being a surfer you always thought

- 08:30 you'd go to Surfers Paradise and I was so disappointed, it was just a concrete jungle. Awful. I thought, "Who'd want to come here?" Not my scene but yeah, so it was good to see that and the [parking inspector] meter maids. Yeah we liked that, yeah in their bikinis. Follow them down the street because the Gold Coast City Council used to have these meter maids,

- 09:00 obviously for travellers that were there, for tourism. They'd put money in your meter if you were parked there, so they had these bikini clad girls called meter maids, so we had a bit of a perve.

And then from Canungra it was back down to Puckapunyal?

Yes.

How long before you were off to Richmond?

I don't recall really. I remember going to [RAAF Base] Richmond. I was just told that I had to report to Richmond. I had train

- 09:30 passes given to me. "Right, you're going up to Richmond." "What am I doing?" "I don't know." Got up to Richmond Air Base and I said, "What am I doing?" They said, "You're on the parachute course." I said, "No way Jose. I'm not doing that." "Yes you are." And they were having me on. I was doing the aircraft loaders' course.

And what was the aircraft loaders' course?

It was mainly knowing how to put a load onto a C1-30A Hercules [aircraft]

- 10:00 and onto the Caribou aircraft and securing it, you know distributing the weight on the aircraft. We did a bit on choppers [helicopters] but not a lot on choppers and of course you'd fly around a lot, so you'd do the load and then you get up, take off, fly around and see Sydney, land again and unload it all. Yeah. Well, that's about all I can recall of it.

- 10:30 And the other thing too I thought, "These guys in the air force they've got it made." Because I remember going into the mess in Richmond they had four or five [menu] choices you could have. They had all these spicy Mexican foods and ... wow these guys live it up. Ice creams and the whole bit. I even remember in Pucka, I don't eat sweets now, I remember the first time I had sweets at Puckapunyal

- 11:00 it was just hard biscuit crust with a bit of jam on it and then custard with lumps in it. When you cut the lumps in half they were full of powder and not very appetising and even in the morning if you wanted eggs for breakfast they used to cook the eggs about three o'clock in the morning or something like that and they were just like rubber. You used to smoke in the mess and everything then and this guy opposite me, he hadn't eaten his eggs so he

- 11:30 just butted his fag out in his eggs. Ugh, put me right off it. So yeah, going up to Richmond I thought, "Oh these guys have got it made. What a life. [I] should have joined the air force."

Why were you doing an aircraft loaders' course?

I don't know, I was just sent up there just out of the blue. Just said, "Right, you can do an aircraft loaders' course." As I said even when I got up there I didn't know what I was doing, what I was there for. Hell it was a ride in the train up to Sydney. Break the

12:00 boredom I suppose a bit.

You were there for a couple of weeks. It's still quite some time before you were off to Vietnam, so what were you doing in this six months of waiting?

Well the rest of the time we obviously went back to the regiment and then B Squadron were training to go to Vietnam because they were going to replace

12:30 C Squadron in February of '68 and everybody knew that they were going to need replacements. We got reports back that tanks had been hit and they'd need replacement crews and guys were injured and whatever and I know that I thought, "Oh well I'll be up as a replacement," so

13:00 my room mate, Mick Hannaford, he went up before me for instance. He went up about three months before me, so we were spending the whole time virtually on manoeuvres out in the Pucka' range and it just seemed ironic that here we were training for jungle training and if you've ever been to Puckapunyal in the winter it is absolutely freezing.

13:30 And I just remember we were sleeping in tents virtually on palettes and on camp stretchers and I remember I had this horrible long-john underwear they used to give you. I had my tank suit on, my over suit on, my greatcoat over me and my sleeping bag and I was still cold. It was freezing and I remember we woke up this morning and Mumbles [?] Squadron Sergeant Major

14:00 came out, "Come on you bastards get out of bed. People pay thousands of dollars to go camp and you bastards are getting it for free." Of course you know how enthused we were about that and when it rained, and it really rained in the Pucka' range, the water would come down and the seat on the tank had a curvature on the front of it and the water would dribble down there and your backside was sopping wet.

14:30 The other thing, we used to do night manoeuvres as well and I've got to freely admit I'm hopeless when I'm tired. I just want to go to sleep and on the side of the tank on the turret there's a cable that you can have a line run out and we all had to take it in turns to go out on this thing and if you were going to be attacked you were an observer to see something.

15:00 There am I out on the mobile phone so to speak with this cord with my over suit on and they're calling me and I'm sound asleep. I got paid out big time for that and then another time, so that the enemy supposedly couldn't tell how many tanks were there, you'd all start up and I don't know why two-thousand-five-hundred revs comes into play but anyhow we'd all be set on the same revs.

15:30 Then you would all move off. We were all sitting, all the tanks lined up and the next minute they're all off except our tank. I'm sound asleep and so is the crew commander.

What manoeuvres were you doing?

It was mainly tactical manoeuvres. I think we worked with some infantry at some stage too.

16:00 I've just remembered too, a lot of closed down areas. We were closed down too for that and then we simulated air attacks and things like that. I don't remember the tactical manoeuvres but you'd come up to a hill and you wouldn't expose the top of the tank, you'd just observe you know, and you'd do all this tactical stuff. I just drove the thing, I wasn't great at all that [tactical stuff] ,

16:30 I wasn't really interested. I suppose I should have been but you're controlled by your crew commander and to an extent you're left out of the loop of what's actually happening. In business later on in life you know everybody's getting informed of what's going on. In the army you weren't, the officers and the senior NCOs knew what was going on, but you [the troopers] were kept in the dark. What's the old saying? We were mushrooms. Kept in the dark and fed on bull shit, but

17:00 that didn't really worry me, I was there to do a job.

B Squadron were on stand-by for Vietnam because you were getting reports that tanks had gone down?

Yeah we knew that.

What other information were you receiving about Vietnam?

One thing they did do us was we were informed that we probably would go to Vietnam. They gave you a little booklet on Vietnam and the customs and stuff like that.

17:30 But there was limited information of what was going on because even when you were in Vietnam again you were kept out of the loop. You didn't know if you were working on an operation, what all the details were of that operation, you just did a certain amount. But to answer your question we were given a certain amount of information about the Country of Vietnam and you know, what areas you'd be manoeuvring in in Phuoc Tuy Province.

18:00 The Australians are responsible for security within Phuoc Tuy, and Nui Dat was the main base, and Vung Tau was the port. Etcetera, etcetera.

What do you remember them teaching you of the customs or this booklet saying about the customs of the Vietnamese or describing the Vietnamese?

Not much, just to be courteous to the local population.

18:30 It was a fairly significant issue as I remember, them describing to us the differences in the Vietnamese Army with the NVA, the North Vietnamese [Army] Regulars and the Viet Cong and [how] to distinguish the Vietcong from the local population. [That] was always going to be very, very difficult, so you had to be on your guard all the time, so we were very much aware

19:00 that it was a guerrilla warfare. As I said be on your guard and be aware of everything that moved, but by the same token you had to be courteous to the local population because we were visitors to that country.

You're hearing that tanks are being hit and that guys are getting injured. I'm

19:30 **just wondering what your reaction was to that?**

Yeah. It's unnerving obviously when you hear that, and it's probably not too dissimilar to what you hear now that's happening in Iraq. Every time I see it in the press you know, you think; "Jesus, those poor bastards."

20:00 But you couldn't let it affect you too much. You just had to think; well that's part of what happens in war but at that stage you're still isolated from it because you don't really know what it's like. All you do is hear these stories or read it in the press.

20:30 **You're becoming aware of what kind of war zone you're walking into were you mentally preparing yourself?**

Yeah. How was I? Difficult question to answer that. I don't really know. You knew you were going to go there and you knew you had all this training and you knew that you weren't the only one that was going to be there.

21:00 But you realised that there was an opportunity that you were going to get hit or something could happen over there, so I suppose there was a certain amount of reluctance, thinking about [it] . You were going to go but as far as preparing myself mentally, again I keep coming back to this thing, you were trained to do this job, you're going there, just get on with it.

21:30 I do say this mental preparedness wasn't as good as it could be by the army. It was probably at that stage or that period in our life was that's all they knew and they did the best they could with what they had, or the information that they had, so that's about the best way I can answer it.

Do you remember receiving news that you were leaving?

Yeah.

22:00 That I was going to go and that I had leave first because I was going to Vietnam. Of course then I came home to a bit of hysteria obviously [from] Elaine and even my parents. My mother didn't want me to go and it was a bit difficult at that stage and that sort of didn't help the situation but, I mean, that was a natural reaction.

22:30 I didn't take a lot of notice of it. Or I probably didn't think too much about it. It's only later in life when you have children of your own that you realise the shit [feelings] . They must have gone through hell but again, you just went off and did your thing, so yeah, a bit of hysteria there.

Did you have to sign any kind of agreement that you were happy to go to Vietnam or anything like that?

I don't recall it.

23:00 I don't recall that at all. Maybe I did. Of course the worst thing about it was we knew we were going to Vietnam and so we came back from leave and we were sent to Sydney and we were up at Watson's Bay on the [south] head of the harbour up there and we thought that we'd be going straight away but we were up there for three weeks or something. It was a bit unnerving,

23:30 knowing when you're actually going to go and waiting, waiting, waiting and you know, they put you on parade every morning and issue out services [?] . We used to hide most of the time and come out afterwards and nick off down to Sydney and spend time going to the movies and stuff like that but it was a bit disconcerting. They said you were going. You just wanted to go and be done with, so anyhow we were there for three weeks and then finally we did go.

Do you

24:00 **recall any personal belongings that you took with you?**

A photograph of Elaine. That's about all I really can recall. I just had a photograph of her. Nothing else. Never had a lucky charm or anything like that.

Did you fly out from Sydney?

Yeah. I didn't go on a domestic aircraft. I flew

24:30 on a C130 A, so we flew out of Richmond Air Base to Darwin. Actually had the night in Darwin and we were supposed to have gone to Butterworth in Malaysia but in the end they changed their mind and we went straight into Vung Tau.

And did you arrive in uniform?

Yeah. We were in greens. Just remembering that flight over in the C130 A,

25:00 it was obviously a cargo plane with lots of stuff and we were sitting in webbing seats and it got cold so we climbed up the top of the cargo because it was a bit warmer up the top where the heaters were. Yeah it was a long, drawn out flight. A bit boring.

And how many of you flew over?

Probably about a dozen of us, no more I don't think, plus the crew of the aircraft. Might have been more but I don't think so. About a dozen.

25:30 **What was the feeling or the mood of that flight?**

Oh here we go, here we go. What are we going to expect? What's it going to be? Yeah you were apprehensive, nervous, shit scared.

Did you share any of that nervousness with the guys that you were with?

I don't recall it. No. We probably did. We probably just talked about it. Again, if you went by yourself and you're going

26:00 by yourself it would be fairly daunting but because to an extent you're going with other people and they're all in the same boat, that shared it a little bit I dare say and being a long flight too. It just seemed to drag on, you know; whereas if you'd gone on a commercial flight... But I dare say when the infantry guys went over, because they went over by ship, a whole regiment would go over by ship, they'd have quite a long cruise to get over there, so we

26:30 were probably better off. Mind you, the guys that went in the regiment they were kept pretty well occupied I think by the officers. They would be doing exercise programmes and all that on the ship to keep their morale up I dare say and not let them brood too much on it. Whereas on the plane they probably didn't have that and we were replacements, so you're going from where those guys went together as a group we were going as replacements.

27:00 So we were going to people we didn't know or have any bonding with prior to. That was probably that little bit of difference for a replacement.

How long was the flight?

I couldn't honestly say. A bloody long time that's all I know. Well I know like on a commercial flight it's seven hours I think from Adelaide up to Singapore, so it was a good deal longer than that because it was slower. A

27:30 propeller aircraft not a jet.

You arrived in Vung Tau. What were your first impressions?

I wanted to crawl across the tarmac like a snake. The first thing [I thought], when I got out of the plane, are they going to shoot me here? You felt like this is it. They were going to start shooting at me now but that wasn't obviously the case because Vung Tau was quite secure actually.

28:00 It's afterwards that you realise that but it was scary. You're scared. You don't know what you're heading into.

And Vung Tau was that...?

It's a seaport in Phuoc Tuy province.

....And was it a commercial airport or a military airport?

No. It was a military airport.

28:30 **And what was the climate like when you got there?**

It was hot. It was quite warm when we got there. Of course when you realise that Vung Tau is actually where you went for R&C; Rest in Country, it was quite a secure place Vung Tau but obviously I didn't think it was secure when I got there, so yeah and we weren't there long because we were moved straight on to

29:00 trucks and we went up to Nui Dat.

And what was it about Vung Tau when you initially stepped off the plane that you were expecting over there be shot at? Where did this anticipation come from?

Well you knew you were in Vietnam and there was a war on. They'd told us obviously that Vung Tau was secure and all that but in a war country nothing's secure. People were shot at in Vung Tau even during the duration and you

29:30 knew this but the more you got into the country you acclimatised to it. I remember further down the track when we were out in the bush and that and you were sitting there contemplating things, having a cigarette and then it would dawn on you; this is a bloody war here. I could be shot at any time. Who knows that someone's not up there pointing a bloody gun at me? A sniper's pointing a gun at me? So you'd have to snap out of that.

30:00 And not be complacent but then by the same token. If you're on edge the whole time thinking you were going to be shot at you would have been a nut case in the end and I dare say maybe there were nut cases, I don't know. There were certain guys that probably were on edge the whole time.

Can you remember when you got off the plane any

30:30 **smells or sounds that stood out?**

No. I just remember being shit scared and wanting to crawl across the tarmac like a snake and I laugh about it now because it was absolutely stupid. You were overawed by it because here's this young kid that's twenty-one that's never been out of the country [Australia] before and he's in this foreign land.

31:00 And you're pretty apprehensive about what is going to happen. That's about all I can recall of that.

When you were trucked from there to Nui Dat... what can you remember of the landscape and any civilians that you saw?

31:30 Probably the first impression was the poverty of the country. How backwards it was. You know, like because when you go up from Vung Tau you go through Baria and it's like a shanty town. Although they've told you and you try to get yourself prepared for it, you can't really prepare yourself for how these people live.

32:00 And you mentioned about the smells. I know when we came to Baria it was always that time when you went past the fish market and the stench was just unbelievable and you think; "Shit! How could these people live like this?" Because you're used to living in a house, with the lifestyle that we had, having all those creature comforts, how do these people live like this? So that was a bit of a shock and of course when you're going along and you see them in the black pyjamas

32:30 and hats and you think; is that Viet Cong or is...? Are they going to shoot me? So yeah, that was a bit daunting I suppose. Very daunting.

I'm just wondering about that reaction to being trained previously that the VC [Viet Cong] were amongst the civilian population and now suddenly you're becoming a part

33:00 **of that population to a degree? That paranoia that must set in?**

Oh yeah, you do get paranoid about it but then down the track you get acclimatised to it, so that was going from Vung Tau to Nui Dat. That's only a short drive, about

33:30 twenty minutes, a half hour or something. Once you're inside the wire again, although you're still apprehensive, you feel safer that you're inside the wire of Nui Dat. The whole Australian base is there, so you feel a little bit more secure I suppose.

What was Nui Dat base

34:00 **like?**

It was probably like a big scout jamboree. There were all these tents every where. The only thing was there were all the choppers flying over, choppers everywhere. That's one thing that was sort of the instant impression; choppers everywhere. That's what it appeared to be and dust because it was dry, dust everywhere.

34:30 And again you're daunted because you haven't gone up with your mates. You're a replacement so you don't know anybody there, only the guys that went before that you knew about but of course they're not there. They've gone out on operations because the tanks seemed to be constantly out on ops. I had a week to acclimatise to it and

35:00 then I got sort of put in a troop.

What did you do in that week?

I did mess duties I think. Yeah I was in the mess I think.

Can you describe the layout of the camp?

Well, where we were,

35:30 we were responsible for a certain portion of the perimeter of Nui Dat. When you first go into Nui Dat you see all these different corps of the army in there, so I went around to where armoured [corps] was. There's the outside

36:00 wire and then you've got the inside wire and all the tanks were between the outside and the inside wire. Initially I was inside the dual wire, I was camped inside there during in this early part of it. Then when I joined the troop you had to go through [the inner wire] and you were allocated a tent within a troop, so there were four of you in this tent and your tank was virtually next to you there.

So when did you meet your crew?

36:30 After that week, I can't remember a lot about it. I was very lucky in the crew that I was in; we all got on well together. There was never any animosity, I don't recall any animosity to one another and again, I come back to this same thing, we were

37:00 all in the same boat. Fortunately my crew commander then, Sleepy Tragenza, this was his second tour, so he was a very stabilising influence on us. You could turn to Sleepy and he was a great guy, a really nice guy. Only one problem, he was a Queenslander but we never held that against him and he knew the ropes and we became friends.

37:30 I was very lucky to get into that troop with those guys, with that crew.

So what troop were you with?

I can't honestly recall. I can't remember all the details. I can't even remember the troop leader because that was a C Squadron troop leader. I can't even recall who it was. I honestly can't. A lot of that's still pretty blurred. I suppose I was in shock

38:00 to an extent. I don't know but I just remember those guys in the troops, in my crew.

So you were now part of C Squadron? Unsure of the troop. Can you remember meeting the crew for the first time?

No I can't. I can't really recall that. No.

And what had happened to the previous

38:30 **driver?**

I don't know, I can't recall that at all to be completely honest with you, I don't even know the involvement. I just remember the main crew that I was with in my tour but I don't recall the absolute details of how one left and one came

39:00 and whatever because there would have been times when that happened but our crew was together for the main part of the time, except when I was injured once over there. Then I went to another crew but then I came back to my crew again, so they must have had another driver replace me. There were guys that were floating around from crew to crew as replacements as required.

So this crew that you

39:30 **initially were with in Nui Dat you were with them until you were injured?**

Yeah and then I went back to them afterwards.

Who was in this crew? It was Sleepy...?

I don't even know Sleepy's first name? But he was regular army and he was a corporal and I remember he was starting to go bald. He was losing his hair and we used to pay him out something chronic.

40:00 If only he could see me today, he'd have the last laugh, he's probably still got some hair. Then there was another guy called Tony Ralph and Tony was a Taswegian [from Tasmania] and he was our gunner and I can't even remember the other guy's name that was the loader. I can see his face but I can't recall his name to be honest.

40:30 **Do you remember where he was from?**

He was from New South Wales.

00:42 **Initially you went over to Vietnam as a replacement for C Squadron. How did C Squadron receive you as a replacement?**

There were no problems there, I didn't perceive any problems anyway. There was no animosity

01:00 that way. It was just everybody was there to do a job and get on with it, so yeah and I felt myself that I fitted in A-OK and obviously this was an ongoing thing where the National Servicemen were going home to be discharged and so there was a change over period. There were plenty of guys that had come before me that had been replacements so there were no dramas.

What was it that

01:30 **you liked about Sleepy? Why did you click with him?**

He probably made me feel welcome as if I was part of the team straight away. When you go overseas with your unit it's completely different over there to what it is in Australia. All that discipline seems to not disappear but it's far more relaxed atmosphere.

02:00 We're there to do a job and we're going about it the best way we can so we've all got to get on. We live and sleep and play together, so that's how I was treated and Sleepy was just a mate at the end of the day and he just eased me into it very well. I would have found it more difficult if I'd been a troop leader's

02:30 driver for instance. Not that I didn't respect authority but these guys were lieutenants, second lieutenants and to an extent they were relatively inexperienced; whereas Sleepy was an old hand. You know, he'd been in that army quite some time and so he knew the ropes, so easy.

Just to clarify again what his position was?

He was the corporal.

03:00 The troop corporal, so he had two stripes.

What was your first operation that you went out on?

I don't really remember much about the first operation. I just remember the first time going out through the wire. [I] had my nine-millimetre pistol there and thinking, "Do I get it out now?" And seeing

03:30 again, black clad pyjamas with the hats on thinking, "Are they them or whatever?" And even when we pulled up in the bush well, "Where's it going to happen? How's it going to come?" Very, very obviously nervous and that's about all I can really remember of that. I just remember the first time going out through

04:00 the wire and very, very scared. But after a while, obviously [we became more relaxed] . I think we only went out for a day manoeuvre that first time because it was acclimatisation. It was in the dry and coming back the unbelievable thing was the dust. When you come back through the [Nui] Dat, of course a fifty-five tonne tank

04:30 chews up the soil quite a bit. Our teeth used to be black with soil from the dust coming up everywhere. Breathing it all in and you had to stay well back from the tank in front of you because of the dust. It was different to Australia, let's put it that way. Different to the Pucka' range: different climate, different terrain and of course the rice paddies.

05:00 And again being so surprised that this was a backward country, so backward it was... I know I knew it was a backward country and that it was Third World but when you got there and saw it and saw how these people lived it was just... anyhow.

Was it in C Squadron that you got your 'Colonel Klink' tank

05:30 **and you stayed with that tank?**

Again I can't remember because we may have changed around a lot. I really can't remember. I just remember this thing sticking in my mind; Colonel Klink [from the TV Show Hogan's Heroes] . It may have been just something that clicked in my head about Colonel Klink. I don't know because they had various names. I can't remember any other name so that just sort of sticks with me. I also used to watch Hogan's Heroes so...

06:00 It stuck. It's probably where the boozer went too because that was called the Ettamogah Pub, had it blazed across the roof of the corrugated iron and that just sticks in your mind. As I said to you before, a lot of things I've forgotten about. Thirty odd years ago and maybe in the dark places back there but I can't recall it.

Sleepy obviously is a nickname. Colonel Klink is

06:30 **a nickname. Did you have a nickname?**

Mine was just Jammo. Everybody called me Jammo and same with Tony Ralph: Ralphy. It just stuck. I suppose Sleepy came about, he already had it when I got there, because I don't know if he had a lazy

eye or his eyes made him look like he was half asleep,

07:00 but he was far from that. He was quite an astute character: he was a professional soldier, simple as that.

Let's talk about the weaponry that you would take on your body, yourself when you went out on operations. What were you personally armed with?

I had a nine-mil [nine millimetres] pistol.

07:30 When we first went in to National Service the main armament was obviously the SLR; [self loading rifle] and when we got to Vietnam a lot of guys had the American Armalite but obviously being a tank driver you couldn't, in this confined space, put a rifle, so all the drivers had pistols. Nine-mil pistols as a personal armament but in a real fire fight it wouldn't have been much use.

08:00 It was just if it was close combat that you had some sort of defence.

And where would you keep it when you were out on ops?

I had a holster with a sling on it, so it was always just right there. I remember the first time out through the wire it was out, sort of, "Do I [put it] out here? Am I ready?" But no, it was back in there pretty soon. As far as personal armament the other guys had,

08:30 I think the operator had an Armalite and I think Sleepy might have had one too. I can't remember.

I'm not sure what sort of tanks you were using in your training but now you're using the Centurion tanks...?

Yeah, the Australia Army only ever had the Centurion when I was there.

09:00 The ones that were taken to Vietnam were upgraded to, I think I'm right when I say this, to Mark V's. What they had on them was infra-red [night vision equipment] . They had an extra fuel tank put on the back. I think from memory that was a hundred-gallon fuel tank that used to sit on the back of the transmission and there were probably some other subtleties but I don't recall them all but maybe the co-axially mounted [guns] . I don't know if the

09:30 original tanks had both a fifty-calibre and a thirty-calibre machine gun.

Most of the time you were driving. Were there any other times you swapped position or was it all driving?

I spent all driving there. I don't recall ever being in the gunnery seat or the loader's seat at all when I was in Vietnam.

10:00 **Perhaps you could just take us on what a typical operation was from getting the briefing to going out?**

A lot of the times when I was there we worked out of Fire Support Bases, so they'd have an operation and then secure an area and they'd have it wired, barbed wired, so we had a perimeter fence for the Fire Support Base and then they'd

10:30 come in and they'd dig a hollow for the tanks to go into with the spoil that they've taken out of the hollow up the front, so the tank could just drop in there and just have the gun pointing over the front, so we'd spend obviously a bit of time in those but then we'd work out on operations with the infantry. Now when we first were there, the infantry weren't real keen on tanks to be honest. They thought, "Well what use are they this great lumbering

11:00 thing," because when you're moving around in a tank, which has this thumping big V12 Rolls Royce motor in it, it makes a lot of noise and you can hear a tank coming from miles away and I dare say the infantry didn't like that because the VC would be disappearing quick smart. So a lot of the times, in the early part we didn't get a lot of contacts because of they were obviously scared of them and didn't have fire

11:30 power to come up against them, so a lot of the times the only way to stop them [the tanks] was obviously mines. I remember just one instance where we went down one of the fire trails, I think they used to call them. Americans used to come through and use the [de-] foliants and kill off that portion of the jungle and they'd come through with bulldozers and then they'd bowl the shrubbery over, and there

12:00 used to be a track going down the middle of it. Well this particular day we're going down but we didn't go on the track, we were going along the side of the fire trail. There were obstacles everywhere and it was pretty difficult, so the infantry commander who was commanding this operation said, "Look, we're going to slowly here. We better get back on the track or we'll never get anywhere." So we turned back on the track and then they got the engineers and cleared the road in front of us for mines, so we must have gone about

12:30 ten miles down the track then we cut in and we were doing some scrub bashing, looking for hide-outs and scrub bashing was unbelievable because this jungle was virtually impenetrable. A lot of the times I used to have to drop my seat down and rely on Sleepy to tell me where to go because the trees and

foliage and the stench of the greenery it was just overpowering. It was just so strong.

- 13:00 and you'd have ants' nests falling down on you. I used over there, to keep a spray can of stuff and you'd be spraying yourself because these ants would get on you and they'd bite the hell out of your neck. Anyhow we'd done all this and we hadn't found anything, so we're coming back out of it and we wanted to get out of there before nightfall. I was in the lead tank. Well, we were I should say and we were going back along the track to get out of there, so we're coming to where
- 13:30 we'd turned onto the track and I went to turn off and Sleepy said, "No, no, you've got to stay on the dirt road they want to get out of here." And I said, "Yeah, but they haven't cleared this." "No," he said, "It will be OK." So we roared down there. We only went a couple of miles and boom, whammo. We went up on a mine. I thought, "That's it!" And I just pinched myself, I still remember myself pinching myself to see if I was still alive because I just got this red flash.
- 14:00 We're still there and we'd blown the track off: the road wheels, the suspension unit. I think the suspension unit weighs a tonne and a half: that was all gone. [We were] told not to get off the tank because what they do is, if they put a main [tank] mine there, they put anti-personnel mines around there, [so] if someone comes off, so I had to stay on the tank. Then they fired canister rounds into the scrub because the
- 14:30 VC [Viet Cong] would sit there and clip the two wires to get it. Or it might have been a trip. We don't know but anyhow the infantry spread out and we spent the night there. The RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] came out and they replaced that suspension unit out in the field: road wheels, track. Next morning we're gone again but it was quite a daunting experience because
- 15:00 prior to that my room mate from Australia, a guy called Mick Hannaford, (We used to call him 'moving pictures' actually because he had tattoos all up his arms but a hell of a nice guy.) I was in country only for about three weeks and Mick went up on a mine. He was killed, so I never saw him over there but obviously when you
- 15:30 hear these things... yeah. I thought the same thing would happen to me obviously, when we all went up on that mine.

And did the tank roll over?

No. No, there was a hole in the ground about a metre I suppose: bloody big hole.

Did the tank lift up into the air?

Oh yeah. It lifted up about, I can only guess, about a metre, a metre and a half and went bang. There was just a God

- 16:00 almighty red flash in front of my eyes and I thought, "Oh, that's it, I'm gone, I'm history now."

And could you see immediately?

Oh dust and shit everywhere and of course Sleepy, "You right Jammo? You right Jammo?" And myself, "Yeah, I'm still here."

What about the loader and ...?

Oh yeah they were all right. "You right Jammo?" Because we were all pretty close and I'm saying back to them, "You guys OK?"

- 16:30 **That would have been an absolutely horrendous experience to drive over a mine but then even harder to stay put and not be able to get out of the tank.**

Yeah well, there's two schools to thought there isn't there? You want to abandon it if you think it's really badly damaged because you don't know what they're going to do. They've

- 17:00 planted that and then there's going to be an attack, but you're better off same old thing sticking with the tank.

What was your first impulse?

I wanted to stay put because you're trained to do that; to stay put and of course Sleepy's screaming at me, "Don't get out. Don't get out." Because of the anti-personnel mines obviously, you won't get out. I didn't want to get out.

Did you

- 17:30 **know or were you able to find out what sort of mine it was?**

No.

What did you do then? You said you had to stay?

Well engineers come in to clear you around the tank. Once the infantry secure the whole area and then we feel there's no VC or NVA there. Then the engineers come in a clear the whole area and then of

course you pull the tank out of there. We just pulled it out with another tank so we could get it on some solid ground

18:00 so that they could do the repair work and those RAEME guys, they're just incredible. What they did. I remember the night I blew a motor, they did a full engine replacement overnight and just not to show any light they had a canvas cover or tarp over the whole top of the tank and changed the complete engine during the night and it's as hot as hell in there. It gets hot.

18:30 and these guys, unbelievable and you're mobile again. What they did in the field is incredible.

Going back to when your tank ran over the mine because it blew up from underneath, you said there was a hole...?

In the ground, yeah.

So does that mean the tank was sort of stuck in the hole?

Well, it had fallen into that section there. Obviously, because the road wheels are gone and then it falls down on that side, so we just needed to

19:00 pull it back and get it out of there so RAEME can get underneath and jack it and then mount the new suspension unit and everything under it.

And where did sleep that night?

In the tank. Always used to sleep in the tank anyway.

Why was that?

When we were at Fire Support Bases and things like that I always slept in the tank and the other guys slept in their seats or slept on the back, just so you're ready to go.

19:30 Elaine was always amazed that I could have a ten minute kip and then be revitalised when I came home here because even when I was sleeping there they'd wake me up in the middle of the night because on the tank, because you've got infra-red on it. It had a little Morris Minor four cylinder motor there that they'd start up to recharge the batteries on the tank.

20:00 So they could traverse the gun with the turret. Where I laid my set back I'd be inside the turret, so they'd just say, "Jammo, just lift your seat up. You right?" Traverse the gun. "Right we're finished. Go back to sleep." Bang and then go back to sleep again because if I didn't sit my seat up they would have cut me in half but you get used to that. Obviously you're trained for sleeping like that.

20:30 And just about sleeping, we were in this Fire Support Base one night with these Yanks and they had these big mobile guns, big ten-inch guns and they were firing all night and they guy said next to me, "God, those bloody guns. Weren't they loud?" I said, "I didn't hear much." So I just have been just zonked. You just condition your sleep I suppose.

21:00 **Well it's a way out and a way of switching off and escaping.**

Yeah.

The noise of going over a mine. You said there was an explosion and you saw a flash of red light. What about the noise?

We had headphones on but the noise was deafening obviously when it went off. It's the same when you fire the main armament.

21:30 When that gun goes off. Especially when you're firing AP [Armour Piercing] rounds; armour piercing because we fired those into bunkers. The North Vietnamese had bunker systems and tunnel systems everywhere and we used to fire AP rounds in there to break them up. The front of that tank jumped up about a metre because that's a solid projectile when it goes with the firepower behind it.

22:00 It's quite horrendous but we were used to firing that thing when we were in Australia, so you get used to that sound. It's probably why my hearing's not all that flash these days, so yeah, I suppose the explosion when it happened was quite horrific but it was all plenty of noise and that going on all the time. We probably didn't take that much notice of it really.

22:30 I suppose those headphones protected it a bit. I think maybe at that stage I had one of those American helmets because the Americans had these, they weren't a steel helmet they were like a fibreglass helmet and they had a bit that went around your head and they had a mouth-piece on it because they used to toss a lot of their stuff and we used to go and rummage through their rubbish dump and get these things and use those.

And you wore yours when you were driving?

Yeah I had one for a while

23:00 and then I tossed it. I didn't use it after a while and the crazy thing about it. We used to wear our black

berets with our armoured corps badge on it and I've still got mine and the one I wore in Vietnam and you think how stupid was that? Here's this silver badge right there as an aim pointing right through your head but we probably didn't think of it at the time. I don't know. When I look back

23:30 I think what a stupid thing to do. Why would you have a big silver badge there as a marking point?

You would wear that out on ops [operations] ?

Yeah. Most of the guys did because armoured corps don't have a slouch hat. Just have a black beret and all the guys wore them in Vietnam.

You had to spend the night while your tank was being repaired. How long

24:00 **did it take to come back down to earth and get over the shock of running over a mine?**

I come back to this thing again, I don't remember really dwelling on it all that much. I remember it made the papers here in Adelaide because there was a photograph in the paper of one of the American generals, General Abrahams [?] I don't know if I've got it right. He

24:30 was there in the photos; here's an Australian tank and my Mum was obviously cutting out all these things out of the paper. [She] said, "Oh that's our tank there." So this mine blew up and of course other guys were going up in one. This mine I think was aimed for an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier] because, on the tank the driver's on the right hand side, on an APC it's on the left hand side and if an APC had hit that mine, he might have been history.

25:00 Might have been. I don't know.

What do you think was the Centurion tank's weak spot?

It was slow and it made a lot of noise, so to an extent it scared a lot of the VC off that maybe the infantry wanted to get into. The other

25:30 thing was in the wet, you couldn't move much in the wet. We got one in a rice paddy one day and couldn't get it out. It was down to its belly, so in the end they brought the engineers in and they broke the track off and then they put explosives underneath and blew it up out of the mud so that we could pull it out because the suction had obviously caught it in there. I always remember when we were doing it, every time something happened to the tank, the drivers

26:00 would get out and obviously be helping. I remember we were slogging around in this rice paddy and the stench was unbelievable because they use human excreta to fertilise and all that. I was saying, "When I get out of here I'm going to get myself a nice cushy job." And six months later, I always remember, I was in the Barr-Smith Library in the Adelaide University laying a drain, up to my knees in mud saying, "You idiot."

26:30 So yeah, so it wasn't much fun in the wet when you got stuck and that.

But still it might not have been completely indestructible but still it could withstand a mine.

Yeah but I suppose. In the case of Mick, when he was killed on a mine. What they used

27:00 to do was, in the bottom of the tank especially where the driver was, there was a plug underneath. It had a lip on it and it screwed into another lip. What they used to do was, over there, take the plugs out and have them on the inside so that when it rained and sweep the dirt out and all that: just take the plug out and all the water would run out and they'd screw them back in. Well what invariably happened, because of the humidity and moisture content, they'd corrode so

27:30 you wouldn't get them the full way in; they'd only be in by a couple of threads. Well what happened when Mick went up, the plug came out, took his arm off, and then of course the blast came through the hole. So I just remember, we were out [on patrol] and it came up on the radio. "Everybody get out and take their plugs out and put them in the right way," because that's what had happened. Then there was another guy, he was a regular army guy

28:00 and that was later in my time there. I think it was Michael Kerr. Sticks in my mind. He went up in a mine and was killed. I wasn't there when it happened, [I] just remember Tom telling me that he was bits and pieces every where. Said they looked up in the tree and there was his beret with half his head in it, so they made mines that could get underneath a tank because he would have had his plug in at that stage, so you were always conscious

28:30 that there's always going to be a bigger mine.

Was it the mines as a tank driver that you feared most?

Oh yeah of course, in those early days, we used to get a few contacts but very spasmodic. Then in the end of my time there that's when they had the RPG-7's [Rocket Propelled Grenade] , the Russian made things, which were a heat round [armour piercing] .

29:00 When they hit the side of the tank they would burn a hole through the turret and then you'd have this

projectile coming inside with hot, molten metal spinning around inside the turret. Fortunately in my tank we never got hit by any but one of the other guys in our troop, Geoff, I can't think of his surname. He was a corporal. They got one through the side of the tank and it went underneath and got

29:30 him in the fleshy part of the underneath side of the thigh, so how lucky is he? Hugh Chapman, he was a loader operator, not in my tank. [An RPG] hit the front of the tank and he got molten shrapnel on his face. Sullivan, the crew commander I remember him, the troop leader. He saw one fired at him. He just leant forward and the fins on the back just went past and ripped his shirt open. Kept going.

30:00 How lucky is he? But yeah. A lot of them got hit in the head but I was going home then. I was so glad I was going home then.

Tell us a bit more about the tank and generally where the tanks would be positioned in relation to the infantry and how you would move out in formation?

Well,

30:30 we'd be going slow with them as we'd go scrub bashing and that and we were so lucky in the tank. For instance we used to carry all our water on the back platform of where the heat was from the motor and everything, so you wouldn't want to drink the stuff because it had chlorine in it. Hot water, condensed in chlorine wasn't very pleasant to drink but what we could do at night because we had so much water is we used to have a shower that we put on the

31:00 barrel of the gun. Just canvas [bag] with a thing [water nozzle] on it. We'd fill it up with this hot water and have a shower. We had the big ready bins on the side of the tank and we'd have clean greens in there so that we could have a shower and put clean greens on and these infantry guys obviously they're still in their stinking greens and some of those guys were in there for weeks and weeks on end, so you felt pretty sorry for them. We could brew up [make a cup of tea] in the tank. We had a little

31:30 kettle that you could make a brew up. Of course we'd be brewing up for these guys and handing it out to them as they walked along so that they could have a brew and that and that's about all you could really do for them and probably to an extent I dare say the National Service guys in infantry were so grateful when you had a tank sitting alongside you, scaring VC away. But then

32:00 we used to go scrub bashing as well with them, trying to find hide outs and that. A lot of those were futile. We did find some of the time but when you come with a tank they would have gone.

And on average how long would you be out for?

We'd be out for weeks and weeks at a time. I didn't spend a lot of time in Nui Dat. Most of my time was all out on ops, at

32:30 Fire Support Bases or whatever. The only time I came back to Nui Dat was on the front of the tank you have a glide roller that adjusts the track and they're cast iron rollers. When you used to go over the rice paddies all the time because they've got the bungs in them and you used to go over them bang, bang. They'd crack around the top, so I was in a Fire Support Base to take the track off and replaced this roller.

33:00 I had taken it off and had got a new one from the store that they had at the Fire Support Base. I'm wheeling it back there and of course it hit a stone and fell on my foot and crushed, my second toe's quite flat actually, so we finished off putting the guide roller back on and my toe's thumping away there and we got it all back on and they said, "Well, you better take your boot off and have a look at that foot." And of course there's blood

33:30 everywhere and they said, "Right, you're medi-vac [medical evacuation] back to Nui Dat, so they brought a chopper and I went back and I remember going into the hospital there and he said, "Well that toenail's got to come off." He just pulled it off, and I can still feel it coming off. Then I was on light duties there for a couple of weeks back at the [Nui] Dat and then they said, "Righto, you've done an aircraft loaders' course. You're on refuelling tanks. You're the next one on the stint." So I

34:00 did it for three weeks I think. Flying in the choppers every day and what we used to do was sling two forty-four gallon drums of fuel in a net underneath it. I'd get the drums ready and roll them into the net and they'd bring the chopper in and hook it underneath and then I'd drop in the chopper and off we'd go and fly at treetop level through the rubber plantations, where ever. They'd drop me back out where the tanks were. I'd jump out and unhook them. They'd fly off and then I'd just pump,

34:30 refuel all the tanks there. Empty, call the chopper back, hook it back on and off again.

How far into your six month tour did that happen?

Probably half way, something like that. I did that for three weeks and that's when one of the troop leader, Sullivan, Lieutenant Sullivan, his driver got hit in a contact.

35:00 So he got medivac off and they flew me in and I jumped into his tank. They'd just pulled back from the contact and the jets were coming in and dropping the Napalm because there were NVA there entrenched in a tunnel system.

There's a lot of thing there that we'd like to explore, so we'll just make a note of that Napalm dropping. I'd like to rewind a little bit and go

35:30 **back to let's go through again when you are on light duties. Doesn't sound like very light duties to me to be jumping into a chopper...?**

Oh no. I'd had a couple of weeks in Nui Dat before I did that and the toe was getting better. Obviously it was better by that stage because I could get my boot back on and that.

While you were recovering in Nui Dat did you get

36:00 **to go on leave or have a bit of R&R [Rest and Recreation] during that time?**

I can't remember. I may have gone down to Vung Tau at some stage but that would have been for a couple of days but I remember I was working in the sergeants' mess helping the cook? Or I might have been the steward at that stage for them? Just for a couple of weeks relieving because I couldn't walk very fast obviously because I remember this guy, because the

36:30 officers' mess or the NCOs', the sergeants' mess were together. They had one kitchen and this guy was a Nasho [National Serviceman] and he was a chef that had trained at the Menzies Hotel in Canberra and he could make magnificent meals out of nothing, so that was quite good being the steward there. I don't mind eating at the sergeants' and officers' mess because as a steward you could, so that was good form because as I said I like my food.

37:00 At one stage, even when I campaign out of the army my name was 'Fang' because I like fanging food I suppose. Yeah so I only did that for a couple of weeks and then I did the thing on the chopper for three weeks and then I was back in the tanks again.

So you didn't get an opportunity to go on leave to Nui Dat and have a look around...?

No, this was at Nui Dat. I was at Nui Dat. The only time I went

37:30 to Saigon... I'd landed in country and had acclimatised for a week and then I was acclimatised with tanks and then I was out on ops, so I came in just before Christmas and I got called in to the CO's office, Major Smith. I thought, "Oh shit. Something's happened. Something's happened to Mum or Dad or something." They said, "Right. You're on the next plane down to Saigon. You're going down to

38:00 spend Christmas with your sister." My sister had married this guy who had a degree in excellence and he was pretty egotistical, he wanted to go to the States and they'd got a green card and gone to the States and he got a job as the manager of the foremost milk company in Vietnam, supplying the American Forces with milk, dairy products. He'd obviously wangled it through the American Army to get me down there, so I got on a

38:30 Caribou and flew down to Tan Son Nhut and he picked me up in a white Morris 1100 and we're driving back to my sister's place and he said, "We're in a bit of trouble up here. You better get that .45 out of the glove box." And he handed me this .45 pistol. I just remember it. It was huge because I had a nine-mil thing, it was a piddley little thing compared to this huge bloody thing but we never needed it.

39:00 And I spent five days down in Saigon with my sister. Boozing.

Tape 6

00:33 **I was wondering if we could go back a moment and you could define for me what scrub bashing is?**

As I said the jungle, when you get out of the fire stone trails, is virtually impenetrable; it's thick and green. They maybe got certain information that there was NVA in the area

01:00 so they would be looking for a base camp. I can only surmise because I was kept out of the loop. I don't really know but they'd surmise that maybe there was a tunnel system there. They used to survive in the tunnel systems and they'd operate from there of course and they'd get resupplied up there, so we'd go in looking for those tunnels. Of course you'd find camps and they'd be looking for smoke or whatever, so we'd just go ploughing through

01:30 this jungle looking for them and I call that scrub bashing. Only a tank could get through those things. Like an APC was too light, that's what the tanks were used for because they were heavy. I dare say if you went in there with a bulldozer or something you haven't got the firepower protection that you've got with a tank, if you'd encountered something.

Can I ask a few things

02:00 **about Colonel Klink?.... How much space was there inside the tank for the four of you?**

Well, where the driver was, I'm only guessing now, probably a metre by less than a metre but then there

was a space inside the turret that as I said before

02:30 I could sleep in and lay out through there, which was virtually beneath the gunner's feet but as I said the turret moves around like that, so there's only that portion when it's in that position. Then inside the tank, it's fairly confined because where the gunner and crew commander sit, because they go through the cupola lid, that's fairly tight in there. As I said that's probably why I never wanted to be a gunner. The loader's side, he's

03:00 got a bit [of room to] manoeuvre. You could probably get a couple of people in there but he needed the room obviously to move up so he could get ammunition out of the bins and whatever.

That's my next question. Where ammunition and ...?

Under the floor, he would have two bins that would slide around on rollers inside the turret there where he could put two lots of shells out, so he'd pull a certain number of shells out

03:30 and have them ready there and on the side of the tank was a hole where he could discharge the spent shells, so as he's fired he's loaded another shell in there and while that's being fired he's under the floor getting another replacement shell and when that goes... So yeah, it's all under the floor.

And petrol? Would you carry spare petrol with you?

No. The original Centurions had,

04:00 I'm only guessing here, I think it was one hundred and twenty gallons of fuel and then when they upgraded to Mark V they put another hundred-gallon tank on the back, which was an armour-plated rectangular tank just bolted on the back and I was always amazed that we never ever got hit in one. I survived. They did [lose some] in the end, past my time but and RPG going through the petrol tank on the back would have been

04:30 catastrophic I would say but I never saw that so I can't comment.

When you'd be out on patrol you'd be out for quite a while. Where would the rations be stored in the tank?

We had them in ready bins on the side of the tank. We had ready bins as we called them on the side where we'd have all our clothing and stuff and we'd have our

05:00 rations in the side, hard rations. But when we went back to the Fire Support Bases they had a mess there that they'd cook for you and some of the times they used to bring out hot rations by chopper. They'd bring them out in a heat container, like and esky I suppose reversed, except it would take heat and we used to get the American ration packs. Which were

05:30 just big cardboard boxes and they'd be full of rations and cartons of cigarettes and things like M&M's I think they called them. We used to get all that sort of stuff. They were quite good but the Americans amazed me when we worked with 7th Cavalry, they would have rations packed on the back like cartons of, cans of Coke and whatever.

06:00 And when we were out on ops, this big caravan came out one day and I couldn't believe it: the next minute they'd opened up the side and it was a hotdog stand. We were all getting hotdogs. I can't believe these guys.

Before we talk more about the Americans and being out there with the Americans. Was there any daily routine that you had to go through with the tank?

Oh yeah. Every day you were constantly checking oils. Out with the grease gun greasing the road wheels,

06:30 greasing the suspension units and it was instilled into us obviously right from the days at corps training at armoured centre; if that tank's not serviced and maintained you're not going anywhere. I don't remember it happening but if you hadn't serviced a tank and it had broken down where it was really happening you could be on a charge if you hadn't maintained your vehicle.

07:00 But you were crazy if you didn't do it, so yeah, maintenance was a big thing on a vehicle like that, so every morning, and the crew used to help because I couldn't do it all as the driver, although it was my responsibility, everybody used to help and then we'd clean the gun as well. Scrub the gun.

How long would it take every day?

I'm forgetting now.

07:30 You'd spend at least an hour I'd say and there were times that you couldn't do it every day because you were on ops [operations] and you were required to do something but when you'd have a break somewhere at sometimes you'd say, "OK. Go and grease the road wheels." But the main thing was checking those oils all the time, so you'd have to lift the engine covers and make sure that the transmission was right and the engine was right.

08:00 **And where would you access the oil from?**

Out of the ready bins on the side again, kept the grease gun up there as well.

Carrying quite a bit inside this very small area?

No. That's on the outside of the tank. The ready bins on the outside of the turret.

How could you access the engine?

You had to lift the engine covers on the outside. You've got the front of the tank where the turret is and the gun and at the back you've got a flat section, which is engine covers, transmission covers.

08:30 So you'd need to lift those and they're all armour-plated and they'd not only concertina but one would lock into another so you had to lift it in a sequence because one would have an angle like that the next one would have an angle like that and lock into it. Make sense?

You made a comment before about the Americans and their rations but what

09:00 **were they like in the field?**

What the Americans? Well in the troop I was in we didn't work a lot with the Americans. We only worked with 7th Cav, they were APCs and where we used to work, four tanks to a troop and even in the end we were three tanks to a troop. They [US 7th Cav] used to work with twenty APCs to a troop, so they were a sheer firepower unit. And they used

09:30 to have mini-guns mounted on the front of their ... [?] , with the seven barrels, you know, like the old Gatling gun. The firepower they used to put out is unbelievable, they'd just line up and shoot the shit out of everything. APCs - armoured personnel carriers. Of course the Australians had APCs there and they were what they called the cavalry units; Cav units.

10:00 But they used to work four [?] but these Americans, unbelievable, the firepower that they had. When you saw those mini-guns let fly it was frightening.

So what was the op you were out with them?

I can't remember the details to be honest. I just remember we were out working with them. We worked with them once in one operation. When we were on op

10:30 north of Saigon, right on the top end of Phuoc Tuy province and we were away for a month or so. We'd been driving every day and the tanks were taking a bit of a bashing mechanically, so when we were up there they decided that when we'd finished the ops instead of driving them all the way back to the [Nui] Dat we'd come down on the river barges through the Mekong River delta. Overseas we loaded on these American river barges and came all the way back by river.

11:00 So that was a bit scary too because you can get shot out of the water.

What was it like going down the Mekong?

A lot of traffic during the day, but not much at night. There was supposed to be none at night. Yeah but again that was an experience because it was different to what we'd done before; not having to drive but it was scary because you thought they could open up and shoot [return fire] especially in those latter times. You were very vulnerable,

11:30 I thought we were anyway. Anyhow nothing happened.

When you were describing the American's artillery...

Oh, the firepower?

They have a reputation of being quite gun-ho and trigger happy. Did you see much of that?

Yeah. I was about to say the Americans were known for being gun-ho.

12:00 I suppose the thought process is that they think they're the biggest and the best and they've got the most firepower and I think that was the strategy that they thought they could win the war in Vietnam purely by the amount of firepower they had and they would just blaze away at anything. Even,

12:30 you know the bombs they dropped from the B52s. We went into a bomb crater one day, I couldn't believe how big it was. We were crashing through the jungle, the next minute, whoosh. The whole tank was down in this hole; a B52 crater. It had all overgrown with scrub and everything but yeah, scary. It scared the shit out of me when it happened. We got out of it OK though. It was widely known by the Australians that

13:00 the infantry, and I don't know all their tactics, they wouldn't use any of the trails; whereas the Americans would use trails through the bush. You know, they were booby-trapped and you can be vulnerable when you do that sort of stuff, so the Americans seemed to want to take chances, you know? Because they think they've got that firepower to get out of it; whereas the Australians were a bit more reserved.

- 13:30 I always thought we were smarter [in] how we operated than what they were. Didn't take the chances they did.
- The Americans are also known to have quite a few problems with friendly fire. Did you see any of that?**
- No we never encountered any of that. We weren't working with them that much. Only that instance with the 7th
- 14:00 Cavalry Unit because most of the ops we were in, [it] was the Australian Artillery that we were working with and the only time that I was involved was that time I got called back after I'd been in Nui Dat after I'd done my toe. That time they came in with the Napalm and thank God they were on target that day because when
- 14:30 you see Napalm go, it's awesome. Again it's... how anybody can survive through something like that? Anyhow they did. They were still there.
- You were tank refuelling...?**
- No, no, no. I was on tank refuelling and then I was called back to Nui Dat and they said, "Grab your gear."
- 15:00 I was on a chopper and I was dropped out in the scrub there because they'd medivac the troop leader's driver off and I was straight into his tank and just at that stage as we were pulling back from that op, that's when the jets came in dropping Napalm.
- And what warning was there that there was going to be a Napalm dropping?**
- I don't recall any. All I know is just the jets coming screaming through
- 15:30 and we were quite a ways back when it happened obviously. We'd pulled back and they'd obviously called them in because they [the enemy] were fairly well entrenched in there. We'd pulled back for that night yeah.
- And how did they drop the Napalm from the jet?**
- Virtually at treetop level it felt like. They had so much firepower they would have come to there and dropped it and [be] gone before the fireball.
- 16:00 But they [the enemy] were still in there but obviously they were in a tunnel system to have survived that because obviously it sucks all the oxygen out of the air when you drop a bomb through the air like that. It was just absolutely devastating to see it.
- I was going to ask what the aftermath was like?**
- Well it was all burnt and everything but we were back from there and that was
- 16:30 at night. Obviously we were set up for the night and everybody was at the ready, we had infantry with us as well and then that night, I'll never forget it, there was a blood-curdling scream and then machine gun fire and then we were at the ready and of course the troop leader, "Get ready. Get ready. They're going to mass attack."
- 17:00 So we just get prepared and everybody's at the ready and of course you're shooting yourself because you can't see in front of you, it's pitch black. What it was, one of the infantry guys had fallen asleep and had a nightmare and pulled the trigger on the machine gun, so it was a false alarm. Still scary, anyhow.
- So what position do you take in that situation where you're**
- 17:30 **actually becoming prepared for an attack?**
- Because I'm sitting in the tank ready for start up and I've got my nine-mil pistol there. Not that it's going to do much, in case someone's right above me here but we're ready for start up and if something happens we're on the tank and we're going and I'm just guided by what he's telling me up the top.
- And were any of the operations a part of ambushes?**
- Only once when we went down to the Mekong [River] .
- 18:00 We had one, one night. Nothing happened. I just remember we went down by the river there one night.
- With ambushes you're supposed to be quite stealthy. How do you discretely take a tank through the jungle?**
- You don't really. You'd have to be set up quite some time
- 18:30 during the day but on the river of course, when you set up on the river for an ambush you're waiting for a boat to come from twenty miles so he doesn't know that you've moved in there twenty miles away. Hopefully he doesn't, anyway that was the idea of it. Fortunately we weren't involved in a lot of ambushes because of that very reason. You can't virtually put a tank in there.

And when you're out on these ops you're out for quite

19:00 **a while. When you actually do get time to stop how do you relax? How do you unwind?**

We used to play cards. Our crew used to play cards virtually every spare minute we got. We'd even play on the cupola lid in the moonlight. I hope Elaine's not going to get a copy of this.

19:30 I thought when I get home, if I can get a job and I can earn fifty dollars a week, I'd be laughing. I remember losing four-hundred bucks one night at cards. Thankfully I won it back.

So what card games were you playing?

Canasta, Euchre, Poker, anything. Poker mainly though.

20:00 And it mainly used to be in our crew because if you lost it one night you knew you were going to pick it up another night and that's why again, we were so close. There were never any blues about money over cards or anything like that. It was just escapism I suppose.

I'm sure when you're out in the field on ops it's quite difficult to take any

20:30 **relaxation. How would you relax when you got back to camp or got back to base?**

We used to go to the Ettamogah Pub, which was in our lines there. Of course you could only have two cans a day but guys used to sneak stuff in and guys used to have 'Crown and Anchor' card games and these guys used to own those games and they'd make quite a bit of money out of them actually and then when they left to go, they'd sell the game to somebody else.

21:00 But guys used to go and bet on them and bare their backsides. I just remember this pub. All it was, was like a pergola with a roof on it. It was all open on the sides. It had wooden benches in it and they used to have these big jars of olives on the end of the table. The first time I've ever got into olives and I've loved them ever since. There's nothing like eating olives and drinking beer.

21:30 And we had movie nights, open air movies. Can't remember much about them but we used to go to the movies if we got the chance. Everybody would take their deckchair, sit out there and watch the movie. Yeah and of course then there's reading because when we were back in our tent we used to read. All the girlie magazines and stuff that was sent

22:00 over.

Who did you share your tent with?

With that crew because you'd have your tank right next door. You had the outer wire and you had us as a tank where our tanks were and our tents and then you had the inner wire, which was quite thick and it had a zigzag thing throughout it so you couldn't run straight through it and the showers and all that inside and mess tent and all that in there.

What was your tent like?

22:30 Home away from home. Everybody had a bed with a mosquito net on it because you inherited these things from the guys that had been there before you. A central table in the middle where we had all our reading magazines. A bookshelf thing with my own personal stuff there. A bit of a mat on the floor because in the night you'd have all these things scurrying

23:00 around. The local animal population used to go running through our tent but I remember waking up one night and I had all these little ants all over me. Little, tiny ants that had come through the mosquito net and they were all over me, so I jumped straight out of bed and I went out back through the second lot of wire into the showers and showered myself off. Got them off me. Went back there and they were gone. I'll never forget that. Tiny little things and they were biting the hell out of me but had moved on in the

23:30 space of fifteen minutes. We'd have furry things scurrying through and if you were on watch that night, because everybody used to have to take it in turns, and outside of the wire they had trip flares and a trip flare would go off, "Contact." It wasn't. A lot of it was wild pigs. Plenty

24:00 of wild pigs got shot.

Where did you get the girlie mags from?

They got sent over by mates or I don't know where they came from. There were plenty of them I know that.

There is this kind of romantic vision of Vietnam and a lot of it has come through from films and that and this great Rock 'n' Roll party that was going on. How much of that was real?

Yeah, because we had all the music

24:30 obviously. Sleepy was right into Country music, so he used to play that all the time over the intercom. We used to jack up every now and again, "Christ, we don't want any more of that shit." Because he was a Queenslander and they were right into Country music but we used to get all the Pop music came over

and we were getting all the stuff in the '60's. You know, all the current stuff was coming over the radio.

25:00 We had our pairs of little Beatles' glasses and when you went on R&R they brought a lot of stuff back. We were sort of up with it then. Of course music was a big thing for us to keep us going too. We had constant music, all the time virtually. I suppose it's different in a tank because you can do that because we could play it over the intercom.

25:30 But when you got back into base there was always music on I remember. Everybody had tape decks and they recorded stuff.

It is the late '60's, early '70's and Pot was starting to get more popular. There is also another view of Vietnam being

26:00 **entwined with drugs. What did you see of recreational drugs?**

A guy bought up a shoebox full of Grass for five bucks. We had fun smoking all that.

Where from?

I don't know where he got it from, a local? A shoebox full; five bucks US, so we smoked all that and we used to have,

26:30 I just don't know why it was there. It was underground. We used to go down there and smoke a couple of joints.

So you actually had an underground tunnel?

No, not a tunnel. It was like a bunker. I just remember that, vaguely remember that. We used to go down there.

And how did you keep being stoned away from officers?

You'd do it discretely. They can't be with you all the time.

27:00 Probably they were on it as well. I don't know because they're inside the wire and you're outside the wire a lot of the times you're not left to your own devices because they can come out any time but they weren't over your shoulder all the time, so there were plenty of times you could do it. Not a problem.

Was that a popular thing to do amongst...?

No I didn't see a great amount of it. Obviously people

27:30 have difficult instances of drugs but there was never heavy drugs like I know the Yanks were, especially when I went down to Saigon and I'd spoken to these friends that had come to my sister's place, Heroine was quite readily available in Saigon if you wanted it but I never saw it in the [Nui] Dat. Certainly not in our section. Might have been later, I don't know but it wasn't in my time.

28:00 **I have heard of Vietnam Vets coming back with Heroine addiction. You never saw it in Nui Dat.**

Could have been down at Vungers [Vung Tau] but I wasn't into that shit anyway, so I never pursued it because even where the Peter Badcoe Club [a soldiers' club in Vietnam] was, you could go our through the wire and go into the township and I never did. It wasn't my scene.

28:30 Anyway, I'd rather stay in the Peter Badcoe Club. Especially when we went down there to surf and I used to always try and get a surf because there were surfboards and all that available. I used to do that. That wasn't my scene anyway but I know there were guys that were chasing girls in Vungers.

29:00 And the guys in our crew weren't. We only had that Pot that time. No. Not that I was aware of anyway.

And then you had alcohol when you didn't have that. How did you cope with hangovers?

Just took it easy. I think when you're young you're more tolerant to that because I remember when I went to

29:30 Taipei, I was just smashed out of my head for four days and I bought a camera. I remember the first photo I took because it was the bar; all the bottles on the bar. I don't really remember much about it to be honest. It was just, "Let's get smashed," at that was the end of it. Grog constantly for four days. I didn't want to come home, I know that.

30:00 **When you say come home you meant back to base?**

No. Come home to Australia. You had the option, I wanted to go to Hong Kong but for some reason I couldn't go to Hong Kong so I went to Taipei. I knew that I was coming home in that short period so it was only ever going to be a short tour, so I knew if I came home to Australia and I saw Elaine I wouldn't want to go back. I thought, "Don't do it. Don't do it."

30:30 Just go somewhere else and we'll get over it." So I suppose just to get away from it you would try to blot it all out.

And how easy was it to blot it out?

Easy to get smashed. No, it wasn't real easy because you knew you had to go back.

31:00 But everybody needs escapism every now and again. Even now we need escapism. People need to get away. I was just grateful I was able to get away because I think that some guys that only had short tours didn't get R&R but it came up and I grabbed it with both hands. Everybody would. Just over there, to get away.

31:30 **What was the surf like in Vung Tau?**

Pretty ordinary. It was only a beach break. It was fun. It was something to do and it was something to get away and I always remember the Peter Badcoe Club sitting around the pool, this magnificent pool and just having a few beers there in the sun. Yeah. That was good down there.

Did you mix with the American soldiers

32:00 **socially?**

No. Only sometimes in the Fire Support Bases because they just had everything. I remember the first time drinking cold tea in one of their Fire Support Bases and how refreshing it was because it's stinking hot and this was icy cold tea.

32:30 I remember one night we were at stand-to. It was an old British tradition, attack would supposedly come at dusk and dawn, so we're at stand-to this night. We were right next to this American Fire Support Base and this big Negro

33:00 sergeant came over and said, "Hey you guys. Do you want some ice cream?" And, "Be quiet. We're at stand-to, we're at stand-to." "I don't give an 'f what you're doing. Do you want some ice cream?" and they were just so blasé about things I suppose but yeah, he came over afterwards and we had a pile of ice cream. If that was the Australian Army we wouldn't have had ice cream or anything. I suppose one thing that comes to mind

33:30 is, I'll never forget this guy as long as I live, he was a major in the Salvation Army and he used to come out in this truck, by himself to where it's all happening with this cold cordial in these big, stainless steel containers. And packets of chewing gum and things like that and you'd think, why would you come and do that? He was just there to support, so I

34:00 will never stop donating to the Salvation Army because of that guy. I'll just never forget that. By himself, he would have been so vulnerable out there.

And what moral support did that bring?

Great. Just for him to come out and think of us. To get us a cold drink when you're out in the Donger was something just

34:30 unbelievable. You didn't expect it and you wouldn't expect it but he did it. Never forget him; short, stout little guy. I'd think, "God you take some chances!" But he did it for us.

Did you run into him often?

Oh yeah. We'd see him a lot out there but I haven't seen him since obviously, but he on a regular basis would be out there in

35:00 his truck with cold cordial for us guys. Amazing.

That point about him being vulnerable is very true. How would you describe your enemy?

The unknown enemy. You had to admire them. Really had to admire them.

35:30 It's pretty hard for me to make comment, no, I suppose it's not about them because when you look at Vietnam now, in retrospect what an absolutely waste of human life and endeavour that went on for an absolutely lost cause. You've got to admire the Vietnamese for their tenacity to forge on under some just terrible conditions.

36:00 I'm not a Socialist or a Communist but you can understand how, if they were down trodden, they were fighting for that cause and you've got to admire them for their belief in that cause and to keep going, especially when they were bombing their supply lines with the B52s and

36:30 develop those tunnel systems that they had. I really admire them, what they did. I never want to go back there again though.

You were talking about the Americans and this great firepower that they had and yet it was a lost war. What do you think gave the VC that edge?

It must have been the belief in their cause.

- 37:00 Well, I suppose they had two things going for them that they were able to win a war; obviously the terrain, and their guerrilla tactics. I suppose it's not dissimilar to what is happening in Iraq today is the guerrilla tactics. Who knows what's going to happen at the end of in Iraq but my opinion is they're heading right for another Vietnam.
- 37:30 You've got to admire the Vietnamese for you know... All that firepower that those Yanks had and they still couldn't beat them. Terrain was a big thing but obviously the guerrilla tactics of the VC too but to get those people to join the cause and
- 38:00 their dream of having a better society, you've got to admire them for it. I only hope they achieved it at the end of the day but I think they're a long, long way of it yet.
- And the NVA, did you have much to do with them?**
- No, not a lot. Only those few contacts that we had because they were a pretty well organised group but even the VC, you've probably got to admire them more than the
- 38:30 NVA because they were left to their own... Resources were very limited for them and to keep forging ahead, you've got to admire them.
- Did you ever see any of the tunnels that they'd built?**
- No. I heard about them though. A guy I used to work with used to be a tunnel rat and how he ever survived amazed me. He had a nervous breakdown in the end, the last time I saw him.
- 39:00 **When you're out there in the field, despite being in a tank you're still quite vulnerable... When you first got to Vietnam and you saw the black pyjamas and the hats and you immediately thought VC,**
- 39:30 **when you were out in public or out with the Vietnamese communities how much did that paranoia play on you?**
- All the time. We had a contact. Only a small contact and it was gone and we were coming along this creek line.
- 40:00 We said, "Right, we'll go through this creek line and then we'll head off and we'll camp up there for the night," So we'd gone through and we'd pulled up and there were four of us. The first tank had gone through a track, so I set the other three tanks up. All the drivers got out and we broke the track off, got him back on, realigned it and got the other tank on the other side. OK. Second tank came through and he threw a track as well, so we broke that
- 40:30 and got that one back on. By that time it was just getting dark and so I'm over this side of this creek line and I had to get back to that creek line and I'm the only driver over there. It was probably about three or four hundred metres to get across this creek line and I'm going through there by myself at night. Now I really sympathised with the infantry then because
- 41:00 I really had a bad experience with that. Now when I walk the dog there's a creek line that goes behind the back of the Banksia High School. Every time I go through that creek line that reminds me of that! We had this contact up there and I don't know if you're aware, but the VC used to go through the creek lines at night and I'm thinking I'm imagining voices. It was only probably ten minutes,
- 41:30 even less than that, moving through this creek line by myself, in the pitch black with this Armalite and I'll never forget that. Nothing happened but I was by myself and imagining that something was going to happen.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **We were talking about the enemy and the difficulties you had with the enemy and your feelings about that. How frustrating was it, in many operations you would go out and not see the enemy. How frustrating would that be?**
- From my point of view [it]
- 01:00 was the noise of the tank and then not seeing anything. I was glad I suppose not being in that conflict but on the other hand, you're there to do a job and you can't find these guys and when we'd obviously been in training and we'd heard about tactical warfare, and conventional warfare. I remember seeing film clips of the Seven Day War
- 01:30 in Israel and here we are in this war where you can't find the enemy and you can't see him and he comes out at night. It was frustrating I dare say from that perspective of it because you had this imagination of what war's all about and hang on, you're not playing the right game you guys. You're supposed to be out there and we see you, so that to an extent was frustrating.

- 02:00 But at the end of the day, to me personally, I suppose I was glad that we didn't see a lot of them. We had a certain number of contacts but obviously being in this big tank, they can hear you coming, you don't have them. The main concern as I said was the mines. They were the scariest thing for me and,
- 02:30 especially towards the end the RPG-7s, especially when you saw the other tanks coming back in with these holes in them and guys being wounded like they were. You knew the next time you went out, there was a fair chance that they were going to hit you with one because obviously they knew how they could stop one then, so that was scary.

Vietnam was guerrilla warfare...

03:00 How did you identify the enemy?

In a tank you're working with the infantry, so they're the ones that were really more so identifying the enemy and I dare say you identified the enemy when he starts firing at you. I suppose I had a pretty lucky war in respect that we had only

- 03:30 limited numbers of contacts but there's always obviously the chance that every time you move outside the wire that you're going to come into a contact or you're going to get hit or something's going to happen. So I dare say this expectation that something's going to happen is the thing that plays on your mind and you know, your reactions that you have. But
- 04:00 I was pretty lucky to an extent that I had limited actual contacts that we had but the guys later on were right in the thick of it, especially with these RPG-7s. They really made a difference. That was a whole new change of tactics as far as VC and NVA, about how they'd combat tanks. As I said, initially nothing
- 04:30 happened because, well not that nothing happened but the main way to stop it was with mines. Of course when they had these anti-tank weapons it was a whole new ball game then.

Can you tell us how it did make a difference? Can you explain?

Well, obviously when you're working with your infantry and you've got tank backup

- 05:00 and you've got this firepower, then the enemy's got to have something to combat that. If they haven't got the firepower to combat that why would they get into an engagement where there's a pretty good chance that you're going to come off second best and that to an extent gives you and the other guys a bit of confidence when you're going out there, you've got this big bit of equipment moving around with you.
- 05:30 As I said the mines were the main concerns but then when these RPG-7s came into play, then shit, there's every chance that we're going to get into a real fire fight here because their campaign [can] knock us about. We discussed before that the Americans had all this firepower and of course the Australians had a certain amount of firepower with the equipment that we had there.
- 06:00 And then all of a sudden to come up to something that can combat you, so that was unnerving.

Did you actually see any enemy dead yourself?

Yes.

When did that happen?

I remember the first time but I didn't see them.

- 06:30 We went over some shallow graves and obviously the stench as the tracks went over these shallow graves and I immediately vomited. It was just unbelievable, so that was the first thing I got because the Vietnamese were very much of dragging away the
- 07:00 wounded and the dead, they didn't want to confirm kills or whatever and obviously [they] buried them in these shallow graves. Then of course, when the infantry would call you in after they'd had a contact but when you get into the contact a lot of the times they would pull back as soon as the tank would come forward. So there'd be
- 07:30 dead there, so yeah, I wasn't in those things like the guys in the infantry were where they were up against it in those fire fights like they were. You'd just see the remnants of what had happened.

Did you ever get out of your tank and take a look?

- 08:00 Yeah but I suppose the first time that you do it, you know you've seen dead bodies and I've seen dead bodies since then, it's not something that I want to go and look at. Even now I suppose it's a bit like watching football.
- 08:30 Some people like to go to the football to see someone get clobbered and a bit of blood and guts spilt. No, I wouldn't. That's not my scene. I suppose you've seen one dead body and at the end of the day I don't want to go. Not if I don't have to. I wouldn't get out to do it again. No.
- 09:00 **Not that you're all that keen to see a dead body but it is from your position you're not**

necessarily seeing the results of your contact or your actions, so I wondered if sometimes you were struck with a need to get that tangible evidence?

No. I'd seen the tangible evidence and I didn't really want to see it all the time. No.

09:30 **You mentioned that you threw up when you went over those shallow graves, so you think there was any shame for you about doing that, with your other crewmembers?**

I suppose

10:00 to an extent yeah. It was something that happened. You can't take it back. You wouldn't intentionally want to go and do it. It was done... Can we move on from there?

10:30 **One of the other things that I guess one of your tactics that was used in Vietnam was a term; shredding the jungle. What was that?**

In the rounds that we had in the tank...

11:00 You had three different rounds. You had an AP - armour piercing round. Then you had an HE - high explosive round. And then you had a canister round, which basically when it was fired, the canister came out of the barrel about ten feet and then it would break up and it was like a shotgun blast with small bits of re-enforcing rod. We used that a lot, you just fired those in the jungle and shred the whole thing.

11:30 You'd just wipe out everything that was there. No. We had a contact and there were these two guys, ran through the jungle. Just fired that, I don't know what happened to them. They just disappeared. Shredded.

And were you standing up driving them or were you...?

No. I was sitting. Visor up. I had my pistol out actually because we could see them.

12:00 And obviously they realised that they needed to get out of there fast and they didn't make it.

And did you ever fire your pistol?

No. I don't recall firing it because one that main armament goes off there's no need for that. It's just a little toy.

12:30 **Talking about ambushed along the Mekong River. I understand you successfully sank a sampan?**

No, we didn't sink one but one of our other ambushes had. Yeah. We were there for an ambush on there but one of the other troops had sunk one. Yeah. I only got the story second-hand because I wasn't there for that one.

13:00 And you've got to admire them again for it. You know, bringing arms down there and knowing that there were ambushes along there because it had happened before. Tenacious they were.

13:30 **You were telling me that unfortunately you broke a couple of toes and had to get medivac back to base. I can't imagine what it must have been like to watch someone rip your toenails off. Were you given any anaesthetic at all?**

No. It bloody well hurt. That's what I will tell you.

I'm very surprised that there was even a need to rip your toenails off.

Well it was just hanging there.

14:00 I was partly hanging there where I'd crushed it, so he just got a pair of pliers and pulled it out. Another time too, because I was medivac off a second time. Sleepy's Mum had sent over these boiled sweets and I broke a tooth with it. It wasn't too bad so I sort of hung on and when we got back to the [Nui] Dat I went to the dentist and

14:30 he was an American dentist. No anaesthetic or anything and then he dropped the drill on my tongue and he cut all my tongue and there was all this blood pouring out and they couldn't stop it, so I didn't have a lot of faith in medical people in the [Nui] Dat.

15:00 **You then... assigned to the tank refuelling chopper unit. How dangerous was that work?**

Well you'd really need to speak to the chopper pilots. Of course that's why they fly at treetop level.

15:30 But they used to get shot at all the time and of course constantly thinking, "You're going to get hit again." Even though we didn't get hit. Especially when you think we've got two forty-four gallon drums of fuel underneath you. If that goes up then you might as well kiss it goodbye.

You did explain it but I'm just wondering if you could take us through again a bit more slowly, what the

16:00 **routine of slinging these tanks underneath the chopper was?**

You had a cargo net OK? So you've got this cargo net laying flat on the ground, two forty-four gallons of fuel, petrol. Roll them into the thing. Hook them up and then you've got a hook on the top of it and they've got a hook underneath the chopper and as he drops it down you click it in and then you give the thumbs up. He would come down. He would just hover and I would climb up on the bar

16:30 and climb into the chopper and he'd say, "Right." And off we'd go and it always amazed me how the suction keeps you in the chopper because when you're flying and he's flying and he's got to be conscious he's got this thing trailing along above the ground and you come to a corner of the rubber plantation and he just does a forty-five degree turn like that and of course they swing out at the same time and you think you're going to fall out but you don't because the suction keeps you in there. That's

17:00 a bit daunting because I'm hanging on the first time I do it of course but there's that constant thing of thinking you only have to have one VC and if he can hit it and cause a spark in that fuel, goodnight Dick! So I suppose those guys lived with that constant fear all the time, as every chopper pilot did I suppose in Vietnam. As we all know,

17:30 "Thank God for the Hueys [Iroquois helicopters] ," because although when I first came home it was probably a big thing with hearing the choppers. I remember, again, I was working in the Barr-Smith Library doing the underfloor plumbing and I was actually using one of those whackers to compact the trench and I think; chopper. Until I realised what it was.

18:00 Even now when I hear that Channel Seven or Channel Ten chopper go over, the hairs go up on the back of your neck.

It is a very iconic sound and symbol I guess of the Vietnam War. Those choppers that you were using for the refuelling...

Iroquois. Hueys they used to call them.

18:30 **Why did they get the name of Huey?**

I don't know.

And were you tempted ever to stand on the payload, on the drums?

No way. I was never that brave.

Not necessarily out of being brave but out of Boys' Own adventure?

19:00 No.

That's a very heavy weight to be carrying for the chopper. How far would it normally have to go to get to the drop off point?

Sometimes we'd obviously go quite a distance. I'm just trying to think. I'm only guessing now. You may go twenty, thirty, forty miles maybe. Maybe

19:30 even further to come back and resupply again.

That's quite a trip.

Yeah, especially flying at that treetop level because you've got all your faith in these pilots. Who's got to manoeuvre through the vegetation that he's bringing it through but also you're hoping when you come down in the scrub there that

20:00 he's got it right when he drops you in that drop zone. Of course you're feeling pretty vulnerable when you're sitting there with your pump fuelling the tanks for them and then waiting for him to come back and get you because you're not sitting inside your tank you're standing out there with your green shirt.

Was that a one-person job?

Yeah. I'd do it by myself. Obviously when you got to where the tanks were the guys would be helping you roll the

20:30 drums over there but yeah, I was the only one. I'd be hooking them on and yeah.

And did you have your trusty pistol on you then?

Yeah. It wouldn't have been much good for anything if we'd got into a fire fight but obviously on the choppers they had M60s [machine guns] on there but it was still, let's put it this way, an experience.

21:00 I certainly wouldn't want to do it again.

So then the chopper would come back and get you?

Yes.

How did you arrange that?

I would send a call out from a tank to say he's ready but they'd be in radio contact the whole time. I know that I won't get on another chopper again. Just recently, a friend of my brother-in-law's, he's bought some choppers and

21:30 they had a day when I was up there where people were going for rides on the chopper. No way. I don't want to get on that thing.

What does it symbolise for you?

Vietnam. Every time I hear that thing it just brings back that memory again, when you hear those rotors going.

22:00 **You have talked a bit about your coping mechanisms. We've talked about the music and the Dope.**

22:30 **Also just the regular cigarettes. Were cigarettes readily available?**

Yeah. In the American rations you got cartons of them. I used to smoke those Winston's. I probably used to have two packets going at a time because you were constantly smoking. Well, I felt I was. When

23:00 you're out there and you just needed... I don't smoke now. I gave up when I came home but it was just something to steady your nerves. I felt like I constantly had one in my mouth.

And did you have a Zippo lighter?

Yeah. I think I've still got it. It's got my armoured corps badge on it. My son wants it but he's not getting it.

23:30 I think everybody that went to Vietnam had a Zippo lighter and a Seiko date, day, watch, you know open-spool tape deck. If you didn't have that you didn't go to Vietnam I don't think and a single [lens] reflex camera.

So there's four things there: a lighter, a tape deck, and

A Seiko date, day, watch.

Let's talk about the Zippo lighter first. Why was a Zippo lighter

24:00 **such a thing to have?**

Because guys could flick it open and flick it in one hit. I don't know. People used to like to do tricks but Zippo lighters were in. You had to have one. Everybody had one. Well obviously guys that didn't smoke but I don't think there were too many that didn't smoke.

It's amazing that you've still got the one you had and you didn't lose it.

And I didn't throw it [away] . I don't know why because I threw a lot of stuff.

24:30 **Did you have a special place for it?**

It's in my drawer in there and so is my Seiko date, day watch.

But when you went out on ops where would you stash it?

Oh, in my pocket or in my fags.

And the Seiko...

Date day watch. It had the date and the day on your watch. Like I just have the date on here now and I don't know why I even bother having a watch because I can't read it without my glasses but everybody had one.

25:00 **Any particular reason?**

I don't know. Everybody would say, "I've got my Seiko watch." They'd bought it in the PX [American canteen unit] or something and of course you, "Oh he's got one. I'd better get one." Except some guys would have a Bulova or something but most guys would have a Seiko watch. I just remember it.

So these things they were army issue obviously?

Oh no. You bought them at the PX [Post Exchange Store] .

And did your Seiko date day watch come

25:30 **in handy?**

Not really. It was just thing that you had to have. You had to have one. Not everybody had one but we had those little Beatles' glasses, you know that John Lennon used to wear. They were absolutely useless.

These rubbish things.

And the tape deck that you mentioned. What was

26:00 **that?**

I don't even know where it is. Probably didn't last very long. I'm just trying to think what brand mine was but everybody had one because we used to tape all the records. You used to buy these records and they were all different colours. Obviously they were copied stuff but the Chinese obviously did them. Instead of the traditional black vinyl they were orange and red

26:30 and green and all different colours. I remember I had the Beatles' white album on it and put that on the tape deck. Everybody had one. You'd better get one.

And where did you get it?

The PX.

And the camera? What sort of camera was it?

Minolta and I bought it in Taipei and the first

27:00 photo was the bar with the bottles on the bar but again, everybody had one and of course everything we had developed was developed in slide form. Unfortunately I've thrown a lot of them away and I dare say that a lot of the photos that are in that book My Vietnam are all slides. Just, everybody had slides.

27:30 **It's an interesting picture that those things put together. An image of the Aussie... I guess did you identify as a trooper?**

Yeah I was a trooper. It sounds a bit better than private doesn't it?

And what about turret head?

That was us tankies but all privates or equivalent were troopers in armoured corps. Whether you were in tanks or

28:00 whether you were in the cavalry units, which was the APCs.

So you've got your Zippo, your camera, your tape deck, your sunglasses. You've got the complete outfit. Did you ever share your Zippo...?

Oh yes because everybody smoked. You know, if someone didn't have theirs you'd just throw it to them

28:30 and then back to you and then you'd pocket it again and that was a big thing. We all used to share things too. If that was one good thing I could always remember about Vietnam was the comradeship you had with those mates and if I can move forward into the future now.

29:00 Now I go to the Heart Health Programme and all they guys that are there are Vietnam veterans and that same camaraderie comes back with those guys. I feel comfortable with them because we all know what we did and we've become very good friends through that.

29:30 It's probably the best I've ever felt was to feel that when I had that camaraderie.

It is an interesting point to talk about because many soldiers say the same thing. That when you go into a war zone you have a particular language that you speak

30:00 **to each other and you have particular duties that only you understand. Do you think that's what got you through your tour?**

Oh, there's no doubt about it. If you were left there on your own to survive without the support of those guys. It's just like, from word go, when we went into rookie training and everybody's in the same boat and everybody's trying to do things.

30:30 And you know you're only going to survive if you support each other and it's as simple as that.

But what about the flip side of that when you're out in stressful situations and you're getting worn out and you're tired. Sometimes you can lose your cool, get a bit narky with each other. You're in a tank crew of four. Were there times when your crew ever lost their cool or got upset with each other?

Oh yeah there were

31:00 obviously times but I don't really recall them if I can put it that way. I don't really remember those times. There obviously were times when we spat the dummy, when someone had the shits on about something or something happened. You'd never say that didn't happen but you only remember the good times and that's all I remember. I don't remember having a dummy spit but I obviously did. As I said about Sleepy,

31:30 he was an excellent crew commander and he kept us in line and I'll always admire him for that. I don't remember the actual incidents but I just remember he was the leader and we would have done anything that he told us to do. He was a pro.

And what about your sense of humour and jokes?

Oh everybody always had to have a joke. I can't remember them.

32:00 Even now today, at the Heart Health Programme, someone's got to joke about something and we all laugh at it. It might be the stupidest, weakest joke out but we all will because someone's lightened the air with something. I'm only guessing now, I don't know, but in every conflict there's been there's got to have been that camaraderie between your mates.

32:30 There has to have been. You wouldn't have survived otherwise and we all had our little stories to tell and even a guy that would get a 'Dear John Letter [letter informing that a relationship is over] , ' you'd support him. That was the biggest thing for me. It was a big thing for all the guys to get letters from home. You'd look forward to them and of course Elaine used to spray hers with perfume like all the other guys and you'd get your letter and of course

33:00 they'd smell it first before they threw it to you and there'd be some comment made about that which I'm not going to repeat here. But when someone got a 'Dear John Letter,' jeez you felt for them because you knew how important it was for you to get your mail and if they weren't going to get their mail anymore Jesus, that would have been tough. If Elaine

33:30 had decided that no, that was it. Shit. I don't know how I would have coped with that. You would have coped but it would have been so much harder. [It was important] to know that you had that support and those letters coming every day.

I've heard stories from World War II where letters were heavily censored. What was the case in Vietnam?

Yeah. We were only allowed to write certain things and they

34:00 obviously censored them. They told us that you weren't allowed to talk about operational issues and you didn't want to do that anyway. I didn't want to tell her about op things that made her worry, that wasn't going to achieve anything. So we were very conscious of that and Elaine's still got those letters and I'd hate to even read them. The crap that must be in them. I haven't been game to read them

34:30 since, I honestly haven't, they must be terrible. You just wrote something. What the countryside was like or what the boys were doing or whatever.

I have sort of seen in movies where there would be notice boards

35:00 **and sometimes, especially the 'Dear John Letter' would get posted on the notice boards. Was there any sharing of letters at all like that?**

I don't recall it if there was. I just know that obviously when that 'Dear John Letter' came to those guys I've never seen guys so broken. You'd just

35:30 Think, "Jesus, you poor bastard. Why would she bloody do that? Why couldn't she wait to do that?" But no, I don't recall anything being put up on the notice boards. There may have been but I don't recall it.

You mentioned that you were taping songs off your records and things. Was there a particular favourite song

36:00 **or one that got played over and over?**

Yeah. Not the 'Yellow Ribbon' but it was 'Buttercup Buttercup' but we played that I think until the tape wore out. I don't know, I was just a real feel good song. I can't even remember the name of it now. Obviously they

36:30 don't play it on the radio any more now. It will come to me. It's probably back there somewhere.

And what about the heavier anthem songs of more heavier Rock 'n' Roll?

I think it was probably instigated in Vietnam but we were right into Heavy Metal, like Led Zeppelin and the Cream first. I was a real Cream fan and

37:00 I liked the Rhythm and Blues stuff that came out of the States and I just can't even think of that and I wasn't a big Jimmy Hendrix fan. I don't really like Jimmy Hendrix all that much. It didn't appeal. It was more so the British bands that got you going. The Doors, Jimmy Morrison.

And this song that you played over and over what was the sentiment in that song?

37:30 I don't know. It was just a feel good song. I wasn't deep into music like getting to know the lyrics. It was just the music. The constant music. Music to me is like a summer's day when you have a clear blue sky and you feel good. As opposed to when it's cloudy and raining and you feel down. It was just music

38:00 to get you through and anything that made you feel good you just kept playing it.

Even if you'd already played it ten times?

Yeah but mind you, that's probably why I'm off Country and Western music because Sleepy used to play all that Chad Morgan and all that crap. Oh God, if I ever heard that again and I haven't seen Sleepy since we came home and hopefully I'm going to Melbourne next year and hopefully he's there.

38:30 **How did you know your tour was coming to an end?**

We were counting down. We had our calendar. Fifty days to go. Forty days to go and as soon as that came down to that last leg... Of course you're really packing it in the end. In that last couple of weeks.

39:00 Don't. Don't let it happen to me because how many times did you hear it; that guys had a couple of days to go and they bought it and to me it was always we're out on ops and it's; don't let the RPG get me today. Not today, so you were probably a bit on edge. More so than what you were previously when it wasn't so close and that was probably the worst thing we did, was counting down the days.

39:30 I can still see it on the calendar on the wall. Counting the days off.

Tape 8

00:34 **We were mentioning some Hearts and Minds work you did in Vietnam. What was it that you were doing?**

I don't actually recall it being Hearts and Minds but I just remember that we were very conscious of making sure that we were keeping the local population on side. Especially in some of the villages,

01:00 outlying villages in Nui Dat. We would go there and just show support and I dare say the infantry were much more heavily involved in making sure there were no VC there and they were being intimidated. Of course we'd take the tanks down there and have a show of strength to support these villages and I think on this particular day we were in the back streets of Baria, which was one of the main towns. Anyhow

01:30 I was the second tank in the group as we were going down and it was all like, not shantytown but little shops with verandahs on them and probably where they used to market them, so we're going down this street there and we get a contact call. So OK, we've got to go. So there's a little gap between these, so the first tank goes around there and of course then I just follow but Ralphie's got the gun hanging out the

02:00 side hasn't he! He forgot to turn it and as I pulled the stick I took the whole row of shops out with the gun and all we can hear is all these things crashing and Sleepy said, "We're in deep shit here boys. We're in deep shit. Keep going." Well with that, we came over the crest of this hill and this guy has got his motor scooter hasn't he and he's walking across the road with it and when he sees these fifty-five tonne tanks coming towards him he drops the motor scooter.

02:30 So after four fifty-five tonne tanks have driven over this motor scooter there's not much left of it, so as a PR [Public Relations] exercise we had to go back and compensate these people. We were actually told to go back with the tanks and pay these guys and I can just remember seeing this motorbike in the road and the crankcase is just absolutely crushed and embedded in the road with all this oil that spilt around it and these shops. It was funny at

03:00 the time but then again we had to do the right thing, so that was one incident that I remember. I know it was a bit funny at the time, but tragic really to the population. Yeah the hierarchy obviously were very conscious that we'd need to go back and do the right thing and compensate these people for what we'd done, although it wasn't intentional. We got a contact and we're going and when you go, you go, so that's my

03:30 story, so Hearts and Minds it really wasn't.

That's an interesting point, a show of strength. Who were you...?

Well it was mainly to the local villages that VC used to come in and obviously intimidate these people and supply them with food and whatever and to show that strength that we were there to support them and

04:00 if they were supporting VC I dare say there were two points. There we were, we could be called upon to help them out. Or if they were supporting them, hang on if I get caught supporting VC these guys could come back and sort us out big time. I never heard that officially from the hierarchy I just assumed that's how it went.

And how were you treated by locals in the various areas that you travelled through?

04:30 To be honest sitting in a tank you really don't observe that. You know, there weren't any flags waving

around or anything like that but I just remember the villagers used to come out and sell stuff to the guys. Like I remember one day we were pulled up on the side of the road and they were selling ice creams and it looked like a bit of frozen slime on a stick and guys were buying them. There's no way I was ever going to eat one of those things but guys did and I suppose

05:00 they're still alive but yeah, there was never any flag waving or things like that. Again, you really didn't know who was who and that was always very difficult.

Before we were talking about coming to the end of your tour and that anticipation of counting down the days. What were you doing in the last few weeks of

05:30 **your tour?**

I think we were still on ops. I know we came in on that last week and we were still in the [Nui] Dat. I know on that last night that our squadron sergeant major, I can't even remember his name, we just knew him as Mumbles, had invited us into the sergeants' mess as a farewell for us because we were going home.

06:00 That was great. I'll never forget that. The squadron sergeant major, when he was in Australia we all thought he was a right bastard but when we were in Vietnam again he showed that he was a human being and to invite us into the sergeants' mess on that last night to wish us all the best, I thought that was fantastic you know, so you really knew he wasn't a bastard at heart he was just doing his job. The same thing when we left, the CO Major Smith invited us

06:30 in. If you served six months in Vietnam you got your two medals. Since then we've got other service medals but there was this one guy that hadn't done his six months and the CO asked him if he wanted to sign on so he'd get his second medal. I can't repeat his response.

07:00 The same with the other guys. He asked us if we wanted to sign on. "You've got to be kidding. We're out of here. We're going home." I just remember it. I thought it was a bit strange that he'd ask us that and I just remember the day we left. We left from Nui Dat airport and I think it was a DC9.

07:30 It was the biggest heap of junk ever, this aeroplane. Hardly had any windows in it and when we arrived there on one side was the co-pilot and on the other side was the flight engineer. Both aiming fire extinguishers at the motor while the pilot starts it up. Just in case it catches on fire, so that didn't instil a lot of confidence, so you got inside. There were no seats in it. Just straps across the fuselage where you put your bag in because we had those big, green bags

08:00 with you gear in it and you sat on this bag and you hung on to this strap as we took off and as I said there weren't a lot of windows and you thought, "Oh my God. Let's hope we don't get shot down on the last day going up to Tan Son Nhut Airbase [Saigon] . Anyhow we made it up to Tan Son Nhut airport, which is Saigon airport, now Ho Chi Minh City. We got up there and we were on the big Qantas jet. They'd obviously contracted them to fly us home.

08:30 Photographs all around. We're finally down to our last minute and we get on the plane and I remember sitting in the seat and they handed us a can of beer and we took off and that was the greatest relief I've probably ever experienced in my life. It was like it all just drained out of you and you drank this beer.

09:00 And I remember looking down through the window and I've still got a photograph of it. You could just see through the cloud the shoreline of Vietnam. I'm never going back there and we drank the plane dry and we got in to Mascot or where ever... I don't even remember getting through customs with our tape decks and all out gear. We went up to Kings Cross that night and got absolutely smashed. Not that we weren't smashed before we got off the plane.

09:30 And then the next day we caught the flight into Adelaide.

Before we talk about landing in Adelaide. You were still in uniform when you left Vietnam?

Yes. We were in dress uniform not in combat fatigues or anything.

Australia was now starting to really turn with the whole Vietnam protest and debate. When you

10:00 **landed in Mascot how much did you know about the backlash?**

Because we used to get newspapers from home, so we knew the protest movement had gathered a huge amount of momentum and I don't honestly recall there being any hostilities at Mascot when we landed

10:30 there. Mind you we were pretty well charged up at that stage from drinking the plane dry. I just remember one guy got pinned at Mascot for trying to smuggle in some Grass he had in the bottom of his powder tin. Silly bastard and we just went up to the Cross, so that wasn't an issue but it was the next day when I got in to Adelaide.

11:00 **How were you preparing yourself for coming home to the protesting?**

I don't think to be honest at that stage I thought too much about it. We were there doing a job and although you knew it in the back of your mind that there was a protest movement. I didn't really think

of the ramifications of that when you got out to Australia.

- 11:30 It hadn't really sunk in I don't think, that it was such a strong movement as to what it was and I can understand where it came from too. Now when you look back in retrospect.

Just describe for me what happened when you arrived at Adelaide.

At Adelaide airport we got off the plane and there was a

- 12:00 guy from Keswick saying, "Right you guys, you've got to report to Keswick today." We said, "Hang on a minute. We're not going to Keswick." And I remember there was a bit of heated argument between everybody saying, "We're not going to Keswick. We just got back from Vietnam. We're going home to our families." "Oh, OK, well come down tomorrow." And he relented quite easily. I remember obviously all the wives and girlfriends were sort of waiting for us.
- 12:30 And we were, well Adelaide's still the same, we were out on the tarmac and they were told that they weren't allowed to greet us, that we were going to Keswick and the next minute this girl broke ranks and everybody just followed it and ran out to the tarmac and Elaine ran out there and was just hugging me and it just felt like the best thing. Anyhow we were coming back in the terminal and my Mum and Dad were there and Elaine's Mum and Dad were there and
- 13:00 her sister and my sister and all that and I came out there and there were protestors there and this guy yelling out, "You murdering bastards." And Elaine's Dad grabbed me and said, "Come on, come on. Get out of here." And I don't think I'll ever forget that it was him that said, "Don't worry about those dickheads."
- 13:30 And I suppose the main thing, he was very good to me when I came home because he knew what was going on. The friendship he offered me, he sort of took me under his wing but he was just so supportive of me when I came home and I used to go fishing with him virtually every second weekend. Yeah. I don't think I'll ever forget that and of course
- 14:00 the protest movement was quite large then in Adelaide and it seemed to be to me an ongoing thing, moving every day and I don't know, it just seemed to be gathering momentum, so you didn't readily let people know that you'd come home from Vietnam. You tended not to.
- 14:30 For want of a better word, you crawled back into the woodwork again and of course some people when they found out you went to Vietnam, you know when I went for a job and that, they wanted to ask you but I didn't want to talk to anybody about it, so you just, yeah, yeah and they soon got the message that you didn't want to pursue it

- 15:00 any further.

The protest is gaining momentum and you're trying to find your place again.

That was hurtful. We'd gone over there to do a job and that was the way I looked at it. We were conscripted, went and did a job, did it to the best of our ability and then came home. You felt

- 15:30 like you just wanted to crawl away and hide and I found it difficult for some time and of course I was probably drinking a bit heavily then. You just wanted to try and forget about it if I could, the best way I could and then of course I went back to surfing again. I used to go down and try and have my escapism and I used to go with Bob out in his boat and that was good.
- 16:00 Again he was terrific for me to try and forget all about it. I thought, "Here I am engaged and Elaine wants to get married and I really haven't got a job," because when I worked for the ABC they wouldn't take me back and so I said, "Well I don't want to go back there anyway if they don't want me back." But I thought, "Well I've got to do something."
- 16:30 So I got a job with Brambles Freight, working then at Mile End and the guys were nice enough down there but it wasn't me. I just hated it. I used to throw my pens out the window in frustration, so I'm waiting at the bus stop. I don't know why I'm waiting at the bus stop.
- 17:00 We must have been married then because we had a flat down on the corner of Marion Road and Henley Beach Road, so I must have been going up into town and I remember this guy that was in our unit, Hector Suvide [?] . What a name. I said, "What are you up to Hector?" He was riding his bike. He said, "I'm being a welder. You get two years free schooling. They're teaching me to be a welder." I thought, "
- 17:30 maybe I should do that. Anyhow I spoke to my Dad and he said, "Why don't you go and do plumbing?" So I said, "Well how do I get into this? What do I need to do?" So I went and found about the free schooling and I was fortunate enough my Dad helped me get this job as an adult trainee for a company called Western Plumbers and so I went to night school and we were married and I was going to night school three nights a week
- 18:00 and working during the day as a tradesman's assistant so to speak. So I did that and got through it and then I topped my class and got my masters. I enjoyed that, so I worked in that industry for twelve years.

You talked about settling back in when there was a lot of commotion and objection going on

around you but army had also been a part of your life for two years. How

18:30 **did you settle back into civilian life out of army routine?**

It was probably pretty difficult for Elaine. In those early years, I honestly don't know how she coped and I was probably a bit of a bastard because once you went to Keswick and you got discharged well, that was the end of it. You're on your own now, except for that training they gave you.

19:00 There was no debriefing or anything like that. You're on your own, so I suppose my surfing thing was a kind of escapism for me. I was down the coast on a constant basis. Had my Mini Cooper. No, had the Mini Cooper first and when we went to the World Surf Titles for our honeymoon it gave up the ghost on the way home, so we bought

19:30 a brand new Beetle in 1970. I'll never forget it, best car we ever had. Surf racks on it and down the coast. Take my board to work and I'd be late home at night, so that was probably difficult for Elaine and we've talked about this since. She moved out of home and this solid family unit, married to this bastard who can't find himself and

20:00 taking off surfing and probably drinking too heavily. Anyhow we got through it.

What did you talk about with Elaine about Vietnam?

You'd have to ask her that but not a lot. When I first went and saw, this is only in the last few years, Marty Ewer the psychiatrist,

20:30 because I wasn't coping with work. She came and she said, "I never knew a lot of those things that you talked to him about. I learnt so much just in that couple of hours with Marty." So yeah, it was just swept under the carpet I suppose and I just tried to get on with it. I had a few problems obviously, with nightmares and stuff when I first came home and I thought,

21:00 "Ah well. I'll get over it." Get on the booze a bit more but my surfing was my good escapism.

I was going to ask you if you had any nightmares. Do you mind if I ask what the nightmares were?

I was back there. You know how I said to you Sleepy did two tours? I would always constantly dream that I was doing a second tour and I would wake up in a hot sweat. "Oh fuck. Why would I want to do a second tour?"

21:30 And then of course it was just things that happened over there and then I'd wake up and I'd be covered in perspiration. Get out of bed and walk around for a while. Yeah.

You also mentioned that choppers give you a feeling of being back in Vietnam. Was there anything else that would pop up and you'd get a flashback?

I remember we went to the

22:00 First Royal Adelaide Show after I came home. I'll never forget it and we were in the kids' nursery with the little lambs and all that. We were with friends of ours actually, he was Best Man at my wedding, John Mason and the fireworks must have gone off. Bang! I'm on the deck thinking contact.

22:30 Everybody's looking at me and I just felt such an idiot but anyhow, they took me outside. "Of course we understand, we understand." They probably didn't. Anything with a sudden bang or anything and you know, you react to it and the other thing I suppose, and I tried to divorce myself from it, was

23:00 the protest movements. I got quite narky I suppose because they were university students and I'd think, "Here's the future brain's trust of Australia and they don't fucking understand what happened."

23:30 I used to get a bit of the shits on about that but then probably I didn't understand their point of view and it's only when you look back in retrospect and you look at the big picture and think, "What a bloody waste. What and absolutely bloody waste. Mick lost his life for what? Fuck all."

Another thing that you mentioned earlier on was

24:00 **the claustrophobia. When did you first realise that you had a problem with confined spaces?**

I suppose when I was plumbing one of the first places and I was again very lucky, I had a great teacher. A guy called Brian Johnson who was my boss and he knew that I was going through this. He was a really understanding guy.

24:30 And it was very difficult for me because here I was as an adult, expected to be a tradesman because everybody expects you to be a tradesman but here I was, I didn't know shit from clay so to speak and I'm trying to learn it and Brian was bloody terrific to help me through it. Anyhow we're in this service duct in the Adelaide University and we had all services coming from the service duct underneath the unit like a big concrete tunnel. The more I went down there the worse it got

- 25:00 and Johnno to his credit said, "Come out mate. You don't need to go down there any more." And he put me on somewhere else, so I knew then that I didn't like being in tunnels and we were in the dark too. Yeah it was a bit unnerving for a while but again, Brian was terrific when I explained it to him. I was lucky to have a boss like that. Probably if it hadn't been for Johnno maybe I would have tossed it in and said, "Oh well, this is not for me."
- 25:30 **I've also heard Vietnam vets talk about post-traumatic stress that may come on twenty, twenty-five years later. Have you ever experienced the post-traumatic stress?**
- I've been diagnosed with chronic PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] and that only happened, probably it was a gradual thing that started coming in
- 26:00 again. I started experiencing nightmares. "What the hell am I getting these for again?" I was trying to hide it and trying to put it out of my mind. "Why am I going back to this again? Why am I thinking about these things again?" You know, it would be stimulated by the chopper or something that happened and I thought, "Jeez, I thought I got through this?"
- 26:30 And I started having problems at work, I wasn't coping. One time I'm in my office and I'm bawling my eyes out. "Christ, what's happening to me?" And that's when I met Malcolm and Malcolm started to explain things to me. This is a mate of mine and he said, "You better go and see somebody." And that's when I first saw Ron Coxon and he said, "You better go and see Marty Ewer."
- 27:00 And I was seeing Marty for about two years before I gave up work but the big one for me was Deborah.
- ...In that time you didn't want to mention Vietnam. At what stage did you actually want to start talking about it?**
- 27:30 I think it was when I spoke to Deborah Richards, who's a psychologist and once Deborah got me talking and started explaining to me why I was getting these things and drew the graph. I just can't thank that woman enough for explaining it to me and talking me through it. We had quite a few sessions and
- 28:00 I thought, "Terrific, I'm right now. I can get on with work and can cope with this." So I kept working and it just felt like it was collapsing down on me in the end. I thought, "Deborah's got me right and then work was just getting too much." As I said I was in my office crying and I spoke to my boss about it. "Look, I'm having problems. I'm just not getting (UNCLEAR through)." But fortunately in my role,
- 28:30 which was State Sales Manager for Vinidex I done this job for fifteen years. I'd built up the clientele. I could have time off work and I was having plenty of time off work if I just couldn't cope and he said, "Just go." And the sales figures still just kept rolling on, so they weren't really upset that I was taking all this time off because the business was still generating but then it was;
- 29:00 I don't want to go and see these people any more. I don't want to go and talk to anybody any more and you can't not talk to everybody and you've got the mobile phone and the bloody thing kept ringing and people wanted you to do things and all that and so I used to switch it off. Then I'd switch it on and I'd have twenty or thirty messages and that's when at the end of the day I just said to him, "Look Jim, I just can't do it any more."
- 29:30 We were running a twenty million dollar business and it started to slip a bit. I said, "Mate, I can't do it." To their credit they were absolutely fantastic to me and I just can't thank Jim, my old boss, enough for getting me through that but in the end I just couldn't do it. Elaine started to really panic there because I just didn't want to go to work any more and the day I walked out of that
- 30:00 office it was just like a huge relief but the only problem I've got with it, I thought I could still cope with it. When I finished work I thought, "I'll be A-OK, I'll take six months off because Elaine said to me first, "Just take three months long service leave." And I said to her, "I've got this awful feeling I'm going to have the three months
- 30:30 off and I'm not going to want to go back." So I said, "Look, let's finish it here. If I feel right after six months I can go and get a job somewhere else. I know I'll find it difficult around fifty-seven years of age but that's the worst case scenario." So I had my six months off and that's when I started the Heart Health Programme and this was just terrific, me talking to these guys and I had all these plans of all these project I wanted to
- 31:00 do and I was still finding it very, very difficult to even get started on the projects but thankfully, again Deborah's come to my aid. She said, "Just break it down into little bits. Just start doing little bits." But even now, here I am, a plumber by trade. I think I've got a certain amount of intellect and I've got to put a sprinkler system in here. I've got all the stuff out in that shed. I've got all the pipe, all
- 31:30 the fittings but I can't do it. I can't bring myself to do it. I don't know why and I've just got to keep plugging away, chipping away at it but I'm finding it difficult. Elaine's talking about putting an extension on the pergola and I said, "I don't think I can do it." I built that pergola, I built a whole pergola. I didn't have a problem with it and I can usually turn myself to anything but I can't see myself ever doing it. I just can't
- 32:00 get motivated.

The Heart Health Programme sounds like it's been quite significant in helping you get through this. You've met up with other Vietnam vets as well and you've spoken about the camaraderie. There's this belief that no one really knows what Vietnam's like unless they've gone there. What's it like with the Vietnam vets?

I think

32:30 we speak about how we have this thing that comes back to us and a guys says, "I get that too." So you think, "I'm not the only dickhead that's got this." I'm trying to think, "What's happening to you Peter? Why is this happening to you? It must be only me and I'm scared that I'm not talking to anybody to start with. I'm trying to hold it all in there."

33:00 But then when you talk to them and they say, "Yeah, I've got that too." Then you think, "Oh, shit. It's not only me." So that's been a revelation or something. To think, "Oh yeah, that's not only me," and of course the big thing was: why? Why am I having this now? I've been there. I've put it in the back of my mind. I've got on with life and here we are thirty

33:30 years down the track and it's all coming back again. Why? But thankfully, as I said Deborah's been terrific and explained that to me and then that just re-enforces it, when you speak to these other guys. So we don't go into a lot of detail. We don't dwell on the fact but we just feel good together for some reason. I don't know, it just... And then, I never wanted to march but I go and march.

34:00 And probably Anzac Day is a big day for me because you meet the guys that you went through corps training with, even though there's only one that I served in Vietnam with. They all went to Vietnam later than me. I feel good with them, so that's probably the only way that I can explain it.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

It probably,

34:30 because initially when we first came home I didn't want to be involved with it. I'd heard all the stories about the RSL [Returned and Services League] and Vietnam Veterans [Association]. The Vietnam War wasn't a real war you know. You couldn't join [the RSL] and you don't ever want to be a part of that, so you just went back into your shell. And Anzac Day, I never really wanted to know anything about it, but when you start thinking about it and you're thinking about, not what we did, what those guys in the

35:00 First World War did and what horrific time they had. We had it bloody easy compared to what they had, especially when you start reading about these guys in France who were in the trenches. [They] had been there for years, been in the mud and the shit and they couldn't hack it any more and so they pulled back and these officers put them against the wall and shot them for desertion. You think,

35:30 Holy shit and you think if they went through that for our country, to have the way of life we have now and the Second World War, we could have been speaking German or Japanese or whatever. It would have been a totally different world and then when you try and keep that whole thing in perspective and think what they did for us, that's what Anzac is about. Vietnam was an absolute disaster, let's not kid ourselves. It was an absolute total waste, it didn't achieve a bloody thing.

36:00 But I try and keep it in perspective in as much as I got called up, I went and did it. I went and did a job because the Government said so and I came home and now when you look back on it... but I can't change that. That's ancient history. It happened, we did it but what a waste.

Well, how did

36:30 **National Service change you?**

Probably on some points it was probably one of the things that was good for me in as much as here I was, going through life aimlessly, really not knowing what I wanted to do. I feel for young kids today, we were immature to an extent. It made me grow up.

37:00 And to an extent it gave those disciplines in life and I don't know where I'd be having not had National Service. I could have been a complete dero [derelict ~ hobo], I don't know but from that aspect it was good for me. I just wish I didn't have the shit in my head, that's all. There was one thing I was going to say earlier.

37:30 Because a lot of guys cling to religion or whatever to cope with that and it's terrific if they do. I'm not a religious person. There was only one time and that was when I was in rookie training. After ten rounds around the parade ground with full pack in the pouring rain I thought, "Being a Methodist might be a better idea," but I'm not really religious.

And how

38:00 **did your six months in Vietnam change you?**

I think it really makes you appreciate life. It really makes you appreciate the lifestyle we have in Australia when you see what other people haven't got and how lucky we are. We are really

- 38:30 so lucky. We're just so, so lucky and sometimes I have guilt thought processes about that as well. You feel guilty about that because you see in life sometimes a lot of the haves and the have-nots and you think, "Jesus, don't bitch about it. Look what other people haven't got," and that's why I'm probably not religious because, if there's a God, why does he let this happen? Why
- 39:00 does he let people starve and live a horrible life when we've got this life? This fantastic life and I suppose I've got to say I've had one really good life, apart from the shit in that head. Yeah. I'm in a flash house. I'm happy, to a point.
- 39:30 I've got a place. We're lucky. My Dad left it to me, the legacy that my Dad has [left] and I'll always remember him for that. We have a place down Corny Point, right on the beach and that's just the best place that I can go when I want to escape.

Your story that you've shared with us today is going to go into the archive for future generations to refer to. What advice would you like to leave for those future generations?

- 40:00 War's not going to solve any problems. I suppose I saw something the other day when it was actually a minister that said about war, "If there were three Christians and they were sitting there and there was a woman being raped and the first Christian prayed and the second Christian called the police but the third one got a big stick and
- 40:30 went down to deal with it." So I hate to think we're going to have more wars and I hate to think about what's happening in Iraq because I've got this awful feeling that it's going to turn into another Vietnam. Which is just going to be God damn awful for those guys over there, but what I've got to say is, "Thank God for those guys that did that in the First World War and the Second World War
- 41:00 for us," because we would be a totally different country today if they'd come in here and imposed their lifestyle on us and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

INTERVIEW ENDS