Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Stewart (Charlie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **Whereabouts were you born, Charlie?**

I was born in Lilydale in Victoria. Up near Mount Dandenong.

What sort of community is that?

Was a small rural community, isolated really, and there was a time in 1946, it was quite a distance from Melbourne although the electric train stopped at Lilydale, we lived out Mount Edward, a place a bit further up in the hills from there.

01:00 And we had a steam train that ran past that area, so I was born in that area and we stayed there until I was about four years of age.

So you had your choice of steam or electric?

The steam train was great, because we'd belt from where we lived and run down the road and sit on top of the cutting and watch the steam train go by, and while we're talking about it I can smell the smoke from the steam train going over the hill.

What was your family doing there?

My mother and father had been married about twelve months,

01:30 he was a builder, retired farmer, virtually, and my mother was a personal assistant to one of the wealthy people – driver, chauffeur if you like – to another wealthy family up there. And she had been a nurse in her time.

What are your earliest memories of Lilydale?

Just bush, bush and a vacant block next door, and then there was

02:00 the Dean family across the road, or across that block, and they had ferrets and goats and things like that. That sort of rural type thing, putting the enamel milk jar, billy on top of the post so the milkman could give you a dip in, you know, your two dips. Or your pint or whatever it was. Those sorts of things, yeah, a lot of fun thought.

Did you spend a lot of time in the bush?

Yeah, at this age, we had a very big block, like a couple of acres, and the back

02:30 part of it was just real bush. And I'd wander off down there and, I mean, I was only there till I was about four years of age, but that's what I recall, those sorts of things, yeah.

What kinds of things would you do in the bush, wandering around at that age?

Just walk around and have a look and then I was there and I'd go across the paddock and see the Deans across the corner, have a talk to them and all that sort of thing. And yeah. That was it, really. I didn't go to school then.

03:00 **So you were only there until the age of four?**

About four or five, it was transitional then until I was about six, when we moved to, down the hill into Mordialloc, which is a suburb on the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay.

Why did your family move?

Mainly for work. For my father, he was a builder and he got more work in – he was working down in the suburbs and he'd be commuting backwards and forwards with his truck and all that sort of thing,

03:30 so it became more necessary for us to move down there. I don't really know but that – at my age now,

I'm saying, well, he was 45 when I was born, so I'm talking about 52, something like that, my logic would tell me I'd have to move where the work was. And especially in that trade, rather than commuting back and forth.

Had any brothers or sisters come along by this stage?

Yes I had a younger brother, he was born in 1950, but he was born in Mentone. That

04:00 was after we moved to down the hill. So it was, it almost took us about two or three years to get ourselves down into the city by the time we got houses sold and things like that there was other property, my grandfather had – maternal grandfather had a property not far from where we were. He was alive when I was born, although I don't have any recollection of him, he died not long after I was born. And he had a rather large property

04:30 not far from where we lived in Mount Evelyn. And there was a sale of that property and that house where we lived in the block where we lived, to fund the house and the block in the lower, in Mordialloc.

So Mordialloc was suburban?

Yeah, yeah. It was suburban and it was sort of like a beach suburb. You know they had – in the early '20s the railway line stopped at Mordialloc, then

05:00 they extended it on to Frankston, which is another suburb further out, which virtually doubled the distance of the rail line from the city – from Melbourne to Frankston. But it was tradition, if you like, for people to go on the train from the inner suburbs to the beach, and they'd get off at Mordialloc and they had a carnival and a rotunda where the band, you know, the Salvation Army Band or the Mordialloc Pipe Band or whatever it was, would play music on a Saturday

05:30 night. And there was as carnival with a big Ferris wheel, and what do you call them with the horses?

Merry-go-round?

Merry-go-round. A huge one, a really big huge one, and had mirrors and lights and everything like that. And there was all of the festoons of the party, like red, blue green, yellow and all that around the edges, there was dodgem cars and there was a boatshed, and you put a penny in the slot and you turned the thing to look at the pictures, like a movie and that sort of thing.

06:00 Whole heap of things, and there was a really nice – the carnival would have a part of a circus come to it during the summer months, and you would be entertained by all these, you know, you had to put money in, a shilling or two shillings or whatever it was, to go to those sorts of places. But there was, I remember there was this woman that was in ice and it struck me that – I thought, that's silly. She's in a block of ice. And what it was, was just a con job because what they'd done is go to the local

06:30 ice works, because ice was a commodity then, where you didn't have refrigerators as such, you had an icebox. So they had an ice works, and the ice works would make these huge blocks of maybe a metre by about half a metre, and they would be about that thick. And they broke that up and you put that into your ice box. This woman was lying inside this in a bikini, she had a

07:00 piece of ice as the base of it. Then a piece on the side and a bit on the top. And she was supposed to be frozen in ice and all this sort of thing. So it was just one of those sort of snake oil and, you know, the little travelling doctors' show, sort of thing. But they were, you know, come and see the hairy lady or the bearded lady or whatever, those sort of things. Again, I was six years old. Six, till I was about 20 probably, no, fifteen, sixteen I lived there.

Sounds like a great place to grow up.

Oh, there was a creek and

07:30 every summer I spent on the beach with about ten or twelve other blokes, kids and then the girls that were in the class, and all that sort of thing, and be riding our bikes and jumping off the end of the pier and you'd – I was always a kid that was on the go, out, you know, I had to be going somewhere. On my bike and just down the beach, take my towel and maybe a couple of bob [shillings] or something like that to get some chips for lunch, sixpence worth of chips for lunch or whatever

08:00 it was, and a coke if you had the dough. And you just spent the whole day. You got there at nine o'clock in the morning and you went till, you know, you could hear the dinner bell in your head or your rumbling in your gut to go home and see Mum and see what she's got on for dinner.

What did you find school like?

School was pretty interesting for me. Pretty interesting to me until I got bored.

What are your earliest memories of school?

08:30 Big, with lots of kids. Big place with lots of kids. And gravel playgrounds, asphalt, big areas of asphalt and a – the girls' was asphalt and the boys' was gravel. And we played cricket and you'd pick your team and you know, you'd dob in him and then you'd pick on him and that sort of thing, and we'd have that at morning play, if that was the right word,

09:00 morning recess and then lunchtime, and you'd throw your sandwich in your face or in, most times at that stage I rode my bike home, I'd go home for lunch because I didn't live that far away, two ks away from the school. So I'd belt home on the bike and come back, and then when I was getting picked in the cricket team or the footy team whatever the school, not the school team but the play team, then I wanted to take my sandwiches to school. So that was – those sorts of things. And probably my Mum

09:30 doing the tuck shop. And I thought it was Christmas, "My Mum's in the tuck shop". And I'd get a pie and a – whatever, like that for my lunch on Monday whenever it was, and yeah. But school was fun, lots of other kids. Funny kids at that time too, because with the post-war era, Second World War era, we're talking about 1950, '54, that sort of range of time, when there was a lot of influx of migrants.

10:00 And of course Mr Curious wanted to know everything about that, so there were Carlo Schiffenberg, who'd come from Poland or wherever that was, and his mum and dad, and then there was a group of Italians and they all lived in the same house, there were three or four families that lived in the same house, and my mother thought that was dreadful. And so all that sort of thing. Aussie Rules, played Aussie Rules for the Mordialloc local side and then we got promoted into the association of VFA [Victorian Football Association], which is the one run by

10:30 the VFL [Victorian Football League, later became the AFL - Australian Football League]. So played football, Aussie Rules for them and so on. But yeah, swimming at the surf club, well, the lifesaving club, it wasn't a surf club.

How did you find study?

I didn't really do any. I just found that I could do it. I was never a startling academic at all, no one ever said, "Oh, look at him." But I got by, 'cause I have a pretty good

11:00 memory. A retentive memory, and yeah, I mean, things like algebra I loved. Geometry I loved. The straight mathematics was boring as far as I was concerned, it just didn't get with me. Sciences and languages were – really keen on languages. Really enjoyed them.

You don't hear too many people saying that about algebra.

I liked it because it was a curiosity, it was a puzzle, it was a puzzle to work out what it meant. And

11:30 I liked that side of it. I suppose that's incongruous when I say I didn't like mathematics, but I did like algebra, but there was a puzzle, there was a – you know, that sort of thing, that's what got me.

What about your family life?

Mum and Dad and a younger brother. We didn't have a lot of dough. The – my father was a builder and worked by himself and my mother was home duties, Mum, just Mum, and she had a few little charity things that she'd go to and so forth,

12:00 so fairly – very – happy family life. As far as I'm concerned I was happy, but my brother's the same, he contends that it was a happy family life as well and we weren't – as I said, we weren't, they were country people who'd been put into the city by necessity. And they lived a country lifestyle, if you like, I mean, it was purely, Mum was at home and Dad went to work and Dad was in work, as far as I can recall, for all the time,

12:30 although I do remember things – tight times, you know, you'd have bread and dripping on Sunday night for tea or something like that, done on the fire – wood fire stove. Because he had all the wood, all that sort of stuff. Peculiar things like that. And she always made her own jam. And we'd go up into the hills and pick cherries or plums or something like that. And we'd come home and she'd be putting them into the like a

13:00 Vacola jar, you know, the preserving the fruit in the vacuum jars, which the name was Vacola, but in fact after she died, we moved when I – Liz and I were married, we had this whole cupboard full of preserved plum jam, it was the best plum jam in the world, but plums and cherries and peaches and all that sort of thing, there was scads of it. She could have fitted out a Vacola shop, we could have started a Vacola shop with all this stuff. So

13:30 yeah, that was full. Full life. There was school, oh, we hated the Catholic kids up the street because we had to go through the Catholic kids' school ground – the Catholic, St Brigid's, Catholic school, and we were Proddies [Protestants] and we had to run through there and belt through there to get – "Bloody Catholic dogs, (UNCLEAR logs)", and all that sort of thing. So yeah. And your mates, there were mates, we were then, I went into the Cubs and the

14:00 Cubs, Boy Scout Cubs and then into the Scouts and into the rangers and all that sort of thing. Senior Scouts and so forth. So that was a way in the main school holiday breaks, camping with them or marching through the scrub or whatever it was, so I was very occupied, I was not able to get bored virtually any time. I didn't have a lot of time for a lot of things.

What was the discipline like at home,

14:30 **what were the rules of the house?**

Discipline? Oh yeah, there was a dirty great big razor strap hanging on the back door, and if I got into strife, I'd get a whack with that. That was – but I recall, my father only belted me probably five times in my life. But I was a bugger of a kid. The story that my mother told was that she was laughing when I was sort of 21 or something like that and she said that she used to dress me in overalls,

15:00 so that she could catch me by the straps and hang me up like that and give me a whack, because that was the only way she could catch me, you know, just get behind me and grab me like that. 'Cause I'd belt off and out of the road. But yeah. No, I didn't get, you know, I never had any trouble with the police or anything like that. And neither did – oh, my brother did something, he dropped some school – or threw out some schoolbooks,

15:30 on the side of the road and the coppers came round and said, "These are yours, you've been littering. Lift your game up." And everything, that was the only thing that – and that was very minor that ever, we ever had between us on the police, sort of thing so there was never any trouble like that. And my father was in the Freemasons and the sergeant of police, Mick Shields in Mordialloc, was one of his mates, so I knew them well, that if I'd played up it'd go straight into my Dad's

16:00 ear and I'd get the whack. So tempered some of my actions. Tempered some of my actions, I think might be the best way to say.

What kind of relationship did you have with your brother?

About as alike as chalk and cheese. I'm heavy built and dark, he's very finely built and fair. But if he was sitting in the chair behind you, and he answered a question it would be difficult for you telling the difference between the way in which we speak,

16:30 very similar in our actions, which I think is a product of our father as well. 'Cause he was an imposing fellow, he was a pretty big, six foot one, something like that. But it was just the way that I think we grew up as the family, his speech patterns and laugh and all that sort of thing, came onto us. Because we were in that close-knit area of family

17:00 for most of our formative years. That's what I think. In, psychologically we're much the same, same attitude, stubborn, stick the chin out, dig the heels in and say, "No." And that then means that our wives, respective wives would say, "Okay, that's enough", I've gone too far.

Ever any conflict between the two of you?

My brother and I? Oh yeah, we have had our conflicts, yeah.

As kids?

17:30 Yeah, yeah, we had our roughs over that. Yeah. Do you want me to expand?

Any barneys in the backyard?

Oh well, again, adventurous type things, and we were mucking around with shanghais, you know what a shanghai is? A – with the firing rocks at each other and I belted him, he – we were behind 44-gallon drums and trees and so forth like that and I'm left handed,

18:00 so I could go, "Bang!" Sorry, I'm ambidextrous, so I could – I was using it left handed, and I pick most things up left handed. Anyway he stuck his head out as I went, "wang!" like that, just got him right here, and oh god. You know, march the guilty bastard in and got the whack, and could have put his eye out, all that sort of thing. And not – I don't recall ever a fist fight

18:30 but a wrestle, push, that sort of thing. And I – it wasn't much because he'd squeal. He'd cry to his mum, or to Mum or Dad or whatever it was, that I was pushing him around. So therefore it wasn't worth it after a while.

Apart from roughing him up, what sort of influence were you on him as the eldest?

He's very independent. As independent as I am. And we – as I said, both different people, but we've

19:00 become closer in our age if you like. We were separated probably for about ten years, fifteen years, over a dispute over an incident, and a combination of effects, of different reasons came together and just caused that and then we started to get back together in about ten years ago and more than that, probably twelve years ago.

19:30 I moved away, which I was busy. That was something, oh, but always there'd be a card or a phone call or something like that, for your birthday, yes, that sort of a conflict, it wasn't isolation completely. And I knew where he lived and he knew where I lived. We never lost contact, if we never lost each other, in that way. But I think as we matured, we came back close together again. And

20:00 one of the things that started it, we were both very interested in genealogy, 'cause our parents told the stories of Uncle Doug and Uncle Dave and Uncle Robbie and Uncle this and that and those sort of stories, and we were quite aware of our family history, if you like, in an older sense, and that figured in both of us the urge to go and find out a bit more and all that sort of – and it was actually genealogy that brought us back together again, because he'd ring me up and say, "I've found this,

20:30 what do you know about that?" Or there's a question we don't understand. Such as, when we were going through my mother's effects after she'd died, we found the marriage certificate and she was a divorcee when she married my father. I didn't know that, he didn't know that. It was shocking, horrible, shocking thing to happen in 1939, '40. Yeah, dreadful.

What were the family values when you were growing up?

Oh, again, both parents were older,

21:00 my mother was 39 when I was born, and my father was 45, and I have a younger brother by three, four years. Father was born in 1902, so he'd be 102 years old now, my mother was born in 1907 so, she's going to be close to 96-8, something like that. They were both from big families. My father came from a boy – male-orientated family

21:30 my mother came from a female-orientated family, there was daughters everywhere. And my father had four brothers. Two had gone to the First World War, one died, was killed in action in Dieppe [Ypres?] in Belgium and his brother came home, and I'm trying to get to the point where you asked me what the values were, then there was the 1920s, after the Second World War, soldier settlements,

22:00 so forth, farming land, because my uncle was killed in the First World War. A soldier settlement block became available for the family. So the fella that came back from the First World War, my grandfather and them put a block together, up the back of Narraweena, which is in north-western Victoria. Wheat farming. Then the 1930s came, and it was just the Depression. And so therefore

22:30 it became not viable, there was droughts as well. So they just walked off. My mother, my grandfather and -mother, paternal grandfather and -mother, stayed on the place, and he died there and she died there as well, so then the property was sold off, the house and so forth. So we've got the Depression over, then the Second World War starts. So they've had a tumultuous time in their first 40 years, if you like. And I can

23:00 quite understand why they didn't get married before that, because Dad wasn't an itinerant but he was in isolation – he was on the farm by himself and all that sort of thing. And just getting work and money to live, I guess, were the main urges for him to do that, and my mother was married and, as I said, I don't know anything about that marriage at all. She was married to this fella for about twelve months, I think

23:30 and I've got something in my head that one of my aunts told me, that she had been married to this bloke and he was a bigamist or it was something of that nature, or something quite serious, or she'd found out that he was having an affair, I don't know, but it was some tumultuous thing that said, "Right, that's finished". And yeah, so they were straightforward Australian people and they

24:00 were, you know, had the values, you just had the values of you go to work, you get your money, you spend your money and you save your money. And that's – you make your life by earning and keeping, I mean they would never, ever have anything on the HP [hire purchase] or on lease or hire or anything like, hire purchase. They paid for everything by either saving it or getting the money together and, you know, doing it. So whether it was saving or

24:30 they had a windfall or something like that. So those values were passed on to us, if you like, but it's a good sense of right and wrong.

How do you think they were passed on?

Example, by example, I mean, we saw them every day, doing the things that I've just talked about. They would discuss things, as a husband and wife, and

25:00 oh, there'd be an argument, I mean, "You silly woman!" And then he'd go out into the shed and sharpen a saw or something like that. But generally it was a – was just sort of, an agreement came between the two of them. And I think that my Dad was always a fella that, as I said, was a Freemason, so he put into the community as a volunteer in a way via that. And my mother volunteered for

25:30 things as well. At the local hospital, pink lady or whatever you want to call it. That she did those sorts of things. And she was on the parents' committee for the school and on the tuckshop committee and all that sort of thing. So she put in. Also you've got to take into account, at that time we were 1954, '56, '58, '59, it was a very affluent time in Australia,

26:00 but it was also still family time. And where we lived, we had I think nine or ten children of about the same age, so we were all post-war born children and all of those people had either been – oh, there was a person that had been in the air force, he was a pilot, she was an air force nurse. Moon, he was in the – in New Guinea, Frank Stringer across the road, he was in New Guinea and the Western Desert as well. Come back from the western desert, Tobruk and all those

26:30 sort of places, and then he went into New Guinea. The Stringers were older people, but they were country people – they were – the majority of them were country people who had come to the city. Because they'd seen, probably, what could happen during the Second World War, and thought that was where they could make a quid. But those values were replicated all through those families. Neighbours and that sort of thing, if we went to Mrs Stringer's place we weren't allowed to swear and anything like that 'cause we'd get a belt round the lug, because

27:00 they might – the mum and dad had an agreement with them, that if Howard came across and he opened his gob, he got one as well. So it was sort of there all the time, it wasn't even just in the home but it was – the home discipline was good. As much as they could discipline me, I suppose that was really what it was about. I mean, I was a fairly headstrong sort of a fellow. And did really want to do what I wanted to do. And I

27:30 didn't find any restrictions as far as, "No, you can't go there". Because there was no real problems, it was sort of, I always told them where I was going, those sorts of things. And I think the discipline was learned from not only at home but the families around the area where we lived as well. And the kids that we knocked around with, 'cause we all played together. The girls and the boys, we'd have, in the Olympic Games we'd be running up and down the street with a bit of broomstick and a paint tin

28:00 full of a rag with metho [Methylated Spirits] on it, that was the Olympic Torch, and we'd all have a turn running that up and down the street. And then we'd have the jump over the gutter puddle, sort of water jump, and then we'd have the whatever, bows and arrows, because somebody knew how to make a bow and arrow. And those sorts of things. High jump, low jump, all that sort of thing, over the backyard fences or whatever.

Why do you think you developed such an interest in your genealogy or family heritage?

28:30 Curious. Curiosity. They were quite interesting people. My grandfather, maternal, was an engineer and helped build railway lines in south-eastern Victoria, and my grandmother and my mother lived in tents whilst that was being built. And he had a family crest came in with that, and we still haven't quite worked out where that family crest fits into,

29:00 but it's – it's just Pete and my curiosity. And it's never been a serious, really serious, like I don't sit there and pore over these things every night, they're – it's just something will just trigger something and I'll go and look for it or whatever and so forth. And with my paternal side, they were Scottish immigrants in the 1850s, early 1850s they came to Victoria and set up in Castlemaine, in central

29:30 Victoria, mainly because their daughter had been advised by the family doctor that she would be better off in a drier climate than living in Port Bannatyne in Scotland, so that was where one of the reasons why they came, but that was again, an enterprise thing as well, yeah, he set up a shop, a transport business, basically work was there. And I was just interested in it.

30:00 'Cause you go – like in Victoria, you can go to Ballarat or you can go to Castlemaine and go to Newstead where they lived and see their graves and see the farm, and my Dad would take us there for holidays. And the stories, we would stand by Grandpa David's tomb and his wife's tomb and then his father's tomb so, and we would then walk down the road to their farm and see where they'd built a flying fox across the river,

30:30 still standing there, was built there in 1860s, 1870s when they took up the land. Which they used to traverse their – they'd put their cattle in this thing and shoot them across this Lodden River, and I mean, it wasn't a huge river, it was only sort of, ten, fifteen metres wide, something like that. But they could move their cattle from one part of their property to the other part instead of driving them round, so those sorts of things, these stories are ingrained in there. And then we'd go on, our holidays were

31:00 based around people that he knew when he was a kid. And we would go and stay on a farm somewhere and they'd have a camp – tent, whatever, they'd have a house and if it was relatives we'd stay within the house, but if it was friends we had this tent and we'd put up this tent and we'd sleep in that. And, but part of those journeys would always take in the house at Narraweena or Kalang or wherever it was,

31:30 and that would then be – said, "Oh, this is where I slept, and that fourth brick up from the corner there on that doorpost, there's four coins in there, sorry, five coins in there, because that was the idea in Scotland, that you put coins of the year the house was built for good luck in the doorjamb, left hand side". And those sorts of things, you know, you'd see bottles in books and bits of papers, things like that in the

32:00 place, just little things that are around me that remind me of them.

Was the age difference between yourself and your parents larger than in most families?

Much more so. Much more so. Yeah, most of the families in the street were in their late 30s. Like the mums and dads were in their late 30s, whereas my Mum and Dad were in their 50s.

32:30 So there was a ten- or twelve-year age difference between them and the people that we were living with, lived in the area with, yeah.

I get the impression that perhaps your father was bridging that age difference during your childhood, making sure that there was no gap – don't know whether you'd ever contemplated it.

I've never thought about that. No, never thought about that. I suppose – I sort of, in a way, if you could

33:00 take it that he had had a quite difficult life, if that was the case, I mean, your elder brother killed in the First World War, you taking up his selection, having to walk off it – he worked on the road, he dug as a

navvy, they called them navvies between, in the ’30s when they actually, infrastructure in Victoria, was built by people, road gangs going out and building, and the government paid them money and fed them and they lived on the road,

33:30 and built roads. And I can recall, I have photographs of him in that time, and but not a great deal of – not a great deal of memory about it, just a photograph, and the story, “That’s what I did.” Then when the Second World War came, he became a builder, and he started building hangars, got a job, construction company, and they were building hangars that – aircraft hangars at Tocumwal in Victoria, northern Victoria, southern New South Wales. The border.

34:00 And that’s how he got his expertise to become a builder and so on, and so yeah.

You have great connection to that past.

So I presume, to answer question, probably I didn’t answer it then, did I? That perhaps he had had, as I said, a difficult – not a hard life, but a difficult life, and perhaps when everything was stable he was able to enjoy it more and relax. Plus he had the experience to do it. And…

34:30 **And you’ve benefited by having such a great connection with your family’s past.**

Is there benefits to me?

Well, the knowledge that you’ve been able to share with me is great.

I think that that’s part and parcel, one of the breakdowns in society is a lot of people don’t know where they came from. Don’t know who their, I mean, if you say – if you ask them what your grandfather’s or your grandmother’s maiden name was, what’s her maiden name, for a starter, and then those sorts of things, I don’t think that’s,

35:00 “That’s Poppy,” or, “Nanna”, or whatever and it just doesn’t – it’s not taught. It’s not sort of dealt with. I’ve dealt with these things standing listening to my father by an open fire and talking with his mates, and telling the stories about what they did when they were kids and all those sorts of things, and my father and my uncle John were

35:30 very close as well. Not really close, but they lived in close proximity so it was – they would come to our place and we would go to their place for a meal. Uncle John was a favourite because every time he came he came with a 20 – two shilling tin of cool mints, which was a round cardboard tin of mints with a soft middle. So he was always a favourite, and that’s what we got when Uncle John and Aunty Ethel came over. But we knew they were coming because there’d be a chicken or something like that in the refrigerator and

36:00 probably a bottle of Coca Cola, so we knew that we were getting visitors because it was pretty tops to have a chicken for lunch or dinner or whenever it was.

How important were the Cubs and the Scouts to you when you were growing up?

That satisfied a great sense of adventure that kept me – my wanting to go out and do things. And just do things, I mean, be occupied on the – and I hear kids of today say, “I’m bored”. I don’t know how they can be bored, there was so much for me to do. So many things to do.

36:30 And again, I suppose that you know you get protective of your children, and perhaps that’s part and parcel of what goes on today too. But we went everywhere, and we were climbing the sides of volcanoes in south-eastern Victoria in the Dividing Range and we’d go up to – up to – and we camped inside the middle of a – the inside, the what do you call it, the – not the – there was a lake in the middle of this

37:00 volcanic cone. So we climbed up the side of that and inside it. And I’m looking for dinosaurs’ bones and all this sort of stuff, and that was just great fun. The water was cold as charity and don’t fall in ’cause it’s never ending and there’s a bottomless pit and all that sort of thing. Freezing, but it was as fresh as anything. And we would go, probably 30 blokes or something like that, 30 kids and carry all our gear. They’d bring them in, get the local fire

37:30 volunteer fire brigade to bring all the tents, the heavy stuff in. I didn’t even think about that, but yeah, we’d just turn up with our packs and our sleeping bags and whatever and just camp out for two or three weeks and go navigating around the place, exploring or whatever, botanical type things, looking at the flowers and the trees and whatnot. Gumnuts and whatnot, yeah.

How much time was based on bushcraft, all those kind of skills?

Oh, with the…

38:00 **I just asked you about the bushcraft in the Cubs and Scouts.**

That was fun, that was good fun. And you know, you had your navigation, which I enjoyed again, geometry and doing that sort of thing, arcs and all that sort of jazz and the success at getting to a place, I enjoyed that. I mean, being away and then

38:30 being free enough to, they’d say, “Well there’s your map and you’ve got to get to there”. I enjoyed that part of it and navigating and, you know, being self sufficient and independent in that, and being able to

– and then to have the ability to do those sorts of things without sort of, although there was adult supervision it was up to you to do it. And I got more pride out of being closer to the mark every time I did it.

39:00 So it was an achievement.

How were your achievements measured in the Cubs and Scouts, did you get awards?

Oh, you got a little, circular badge with a compass on it for navigational, the first aid badge or – I think there was something else, there was another one, oh, languages and things like that, yeah. So yeah, there was all sorts of different things that you got. Actually, I can't remember whether you wore them on this side or that side, but it doesn't matter.

Did you demonstrate an ability other than any of the other young blokes that were doing the Cubs and Scouts?

39:30 I was good at navigation, yeah, very good at navigation and those sorts of things, and I enjoyed the bushcraft. Yeah, there were other guys there that were not as good as me, but there were other guys that were better than me too. So it was sort of, I wasn't the middle one, but I'd put myself in the upper end of certain areas like navigation and so forth, but other areas like cooking and all that sort of thing wasn't really my forte.

40:00 End of tape

Tape 2

00:31 **At what point did you actually leave school?**

When I was about sixteen.

Was that third year?

Third year, yeah, I worked in a garage, the petrol attendant, wiped the windscreen and check your oil, madam. Take the money, get the change, bring it back to the car. That sort of thing.

Well, considering the fact that you said that you got bored with your school, going to a service station and doing that sort of stuff isn't

01:00 **exactly intellectually stimulating.**

No, it's not, but it was people. And dealing with people, and that was money. Jobs, if you like, and it was just, I went for the job and got the job, so it was okay, and I only did it for twelve months 'cause I went into the army when I was seventeen.

Were you always considering going to the army?

Yes.

How old were you when you started considering it?

01:30 Probably fifteen, sixteen, something like that, and I knew that was sort of a good way for me to get a life, if you like. Or interesting.

What sort of research into it did you do before you actually signed up?

All of the people that I knew, the people that I talked about before were all Second World War veterans, my uncle was a First World War veteran, stories that they told about the fun times that they had had, and also the

02:00 rough times as well. But it was always the fun times. And you could see the camaraderie that they had. Which I then took to be the Scouts' camaraderie. And I thought, "Well, that's good. It'll be like being in the Scouts. Except she'll have a rifle". So it was good.

How much do you think having that background with World War II vets actually influenced your thoughts about joining the army?

02:30 I think it had a great deal to do with it. Great deal to do with it, and there was also a freedom that they seemed to have, to impart that there was – they did their work and they had their time. Their free time and so forth, so they had freedom as well. And, if you like, it wasn't an inside, desk-bound job. Because I wanted to be outdoors, that's probably one of the reasons why I took the other job,

03:00 I mean the first job – the job at Momson's in Chelsea. Momson Brothers, Holden dealers in Chelsea, 'cause I was outside. And I was dealing with people and I was very interested in people and that. With – and with the Scouts and so forth it was totally different, but it was a similar thing and I think it was a lead-in. Yeah.

So how did you go about joining up?

I spoke to my Mum and Dad and my father drove me in there, we went in,

03:30 signed the papers up and the fella said, “Do your medical and all that sort of thing”. I think I was seventeen years and one month or two months old when I went into the army. Like, my birthday’s in December the 8th and I was in the army on the 10th of February.

What was your parents’ reaction to you deciding to go into the army?

I really don’t think there was a problem. I mean, I don’t recall a problem,

04:00 and that just harks back to what I said before, I was never, ever really restricted in what I wanted to do. If I wanted to do that then that was what I was to do. And guidance, yes, but no sort of, on the back of the collar, pulling you back sort of thing. No.

So you said that it was a pretty quick turnover as soon as you signed the papers. What sort of a medical check-up did you need to do?

Was just

04:30 a – well, as far as I can recall, you fronted up to a doctor at the recruiting centre in St Kilda Road, and you did a hearing test and an eyesight test, they looked at your teeth and turned right and cough and all that sort of stuff and, “Have you had any operations?” “No.” “Have you had any broken bones?” “Yes.” “How many times have you broken your arm?” “One, two, three, four.” Whatever it was. Those sorts of things, and they’d look at you physically, I suppose, and say, “Well, you know,

05:00 you’re okay”. I don’t think it was sausage machine. It wasn’t that sort of a thing. If I remember, there were probably about 30 blokes there at the same time, so it was dental checks and, you know, those sorts of, just the general physical examination that you would have. I didn’t expect it but I understood it, why they were doing it, because they were saying, “Right, well, we can’t have you if you can’t walk up a hill or can’t carry a pack or something like that”. So yeah.

05:30 **So what happened next? After you’d had the medical?**

Well, the paperwork came through the mail and I’d been accepted and so that was good fun and, you know, hooray. And again, my Dad and Mum bought me into the recruiting station we were put on buses and we went to Watsonia Barracks in McLeod in Victoria, which is the signals corps headquarters in Victoria, where we were given overnight accommodation, but

06:00 prior to that we were given a haircut – over the top and fed and watered and bedded and so forth. And the next morning we were on the bus to the news that the Voyager had been overrun, run over by the Melbourne. And I thought, “Well, that’s pretty good”. I didn’t join the navy, I thought that was good. So that was pretty cool. But yeah, so – and then that was just a bus, the bus went up to Wagga,

06:30 Kapooka, which was the 1 Recruit Training Battalion. And then I think it was three months there, twelve weeks, something like that. Yeah.

Just asking a few questions about Kapooka, what did the actual barracks look like?

There were some buildings that were in brick. But we had Nissan huts, which were those igloo style, or half of a water tank if you like, buildings which were

07:00 probably from the Second World War because there was a – the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] had a base at Forrest, which was in Wagga too, but another suburb of Wagga and the army, I think that had been at Kapooka had been a recruit training for the Second World War as well. Yeah, there were some new buildings like headquarters and stuff like that were brick, and a lot of them were

07:30 just as I said, I mean, timber walls, fibro cement iron roof, that sort of thing. Group showers, you know, like the long line of showers and laundry and all that sort of stuff.

What were you sleeping on?

Beds. Proper, you know, wire spring mattress where the mattress – a wire spring base with a mattress on top. Sheets and blanket.

How many blokes would be in one room?

It would

08:00 probably be our platoon, which would be 30. They’d all be in that one building, and we had our lockers in the middle. And you slept heads to the wall, down near the side.

So what was the training like?

That was, again, arduous, but it was good fun. I mean, I enjoyed it, that was part and par – well, the first thing they taught you was how to get around

08:30 together and not look a shambles so you can march and do things as a group. So a group mentality

going. And that I enjoyed, it wasn't anything different from what I was used to, and I suppose marching, if you like, in the Scouts was much less drilled into us, but it was still marching. But then you had to learn to do the orders and so forth.

How much of an emphasis was there on fitness?

09:00 There was PT [Physical Training] every day and a sports afternoon on Wednesday, where you were expected to play Aussie Rules or rugby or cricket or whatever it was at the time, or a sport of some sort. And with that – there was also recruits were meant to double march, which was normal march and then there was a double march which was a sort of a, not a run, but it was a half run if you like, so

09:30 that engendered fitness as well, you had to go from a lecture point to another lecture point at the double or whatever it was, and classrooms and outdoor…

What sort of things were you learning as part of the classroom element?

Well, classroom, there was sort of like first-aid type things, we didn't do any military law type things, but they were also educational style of things, you'd have a lecture on that, and then navigation, and then you'd go out and then do the practical side of it,

10:00 reading maps, map reading, that sort of thing. Rifles and so forth, had to learn how to strip the rifle and put it back together again. And all those sorts of things.

What sort of rifles were you training on?

We were training with the SLR [Self-Loading Rifle]. We didn't have the 303 at that stage, it had been phased out.

What was that like as a gun?

I never,

10:30 I had a great deal of faith in that weapon. In fact, I think we had – when I was there, on my first, no, that's not right – that was the accepted weapon at the time was the SLR, and they had another one called an Owen gun, which is a Second World War vintage weapon, it was a very good one. Which they then changed to an FN [Fabrique Nationale], which was a lesser type of

11:00 weapon if you like, nine mil round, and yeah, I just liked the SLR. It was a big one, made a big bang, made a big hole and was very effective.

What other sort of weaponry were you taught to use?

Hand grenades and things like that. And then there was, that was why – how it worked and why it worked and so forth. They were percussion at that stage, not chemical set off

11:30 as we had later in Vietnam. But yeah, pull the pin and hold the pin and all the drill sort of thing, you'd go through it with the dummy grenade first and the instructor then would have you go into these blockhouses that were cinderblock, concrete block, with an opening and the instructor would be in there with you and you'd be in, all your compatriots, the remainder of your platoon, group, whatever it was, would be in another room waiting to come through, and then the armourer would give,

12:00 the instructor would give you the hand grenade and say, "This is what you've got to do with it". Well, you knew that already because you had been trained with a dummy, but you had to physically throw one and do the – do that job, and I remember that we had a steel helmet on, and as I was to do it, was bend over like that and pull the pin,

12:30 and my helmet fell off. So I thought, "Oh well, I better", and I could see the instructor going like this in the corner, 'cause I had the hand grenade in my hand, I wasn't going to let it go 'cause I knew it was going to blow – burnt me, I put my helmet back on again, and he was face was completely white and I'd probably done the wrong thing but he wasn't too worried about balling me out in case I let it go, and he said, "Just come and chuck it over the wall now". So I went and threw it over the wall and then he said, "Well, we're going to do the helmet up next time, aren't we?"

13:00 That sort of thing, so that was – that's just something that came from it.

Were there any accidents as part of training in that way?

Injuries. There were only sort of ankles turned, or there was no one killed or maimed seriously maimed, no. Because I think the instructors that were there at the time were all Second World War or Korean veterans or had been in – I mean, I'm talking about 1964,

13:30 ten years, they would have joined the army in the '50s or something like that, so it wasn't uncommon for people to be in the army for twenty years at that time. So they could have been Second World War, and I can't recall, 'cause I don't ever recall seeing them with their medal rows or anything like that, although I would have. No, there was – they were good people, you know, good military people. They were – I mean, I was astounded at

how much control. You weren't given any time in the day, there was no idle time, there was always something until, after you got out of bed there was something to do until you went to bed, sort of thing. Usually you fell into bed asleep. Tired, worn out. But the army way, the army way of doing things, like having a shower and having a shower at the beginning of the day and having a shower at the end of the day and shaving and cleaning your boots and putting things away tidy and all that sort of thing, making your bed properly, those sorts of

disciplines were ingrained into you. The discipline of marching and saluting and all that sort of thing was a bit overbearing in my thing. But you did it. You did it, so that was the sort of thing that was expected so you did it.

What was the food like?

Again, I mean, it didn't worry me, I was happy, I had my – at that time in the army there was three meat meals a day were the,

and that was good. I was happy with that. As you can see I've never been out of a real good paddock in my life. So…

Did you have any time to – any free time at all?

Yes, we did. Probably on a Sunday. Maybe on a Friday night or something like that. But it was structured in that there was a canteen there, a soldier's canteen, where you could

buy beer and all that sort of stuff, but for the first four weeks, course was broken into three parts, with two leaves in the middle. Two breaks in the middle, you had a weekend off or something like that. For the first three or four weeks you were not allowed to go to the wet bar, you could go and buy your milk and your lollies, sweets, chips, whatever you wanted with part of

your seventeen pounds a week, for our wage we got. Fortnight, sorry, seventeen pounds a fortnight. You could use that. But it was then in the second, at the end or the midpoint that was used as an incentive. So that if you got to this level, right, you can go to the wet mess this Saturday night or something like that. And I don't recall

there wasn't – there were girls there, women, but not significant, there was blokes, and you just went to the thing and had a couple of beers. And I was seventeen years old, I thought, "Well, this is alright, really". I'd already had beer anyway 'cause my father was, like, open about that and would have – and gave me beer. I didn't particularly like it because it tasted funny, and yeah, so because you could have one, I went and had one. A couple of beers, and it was New South Wales beer and it tasted funny and

all that stuff, so that was alright. So yeah, so a couple of beers and then back to the thing. Back to the lines.

What was the third part of the training about?

That was more – you became more proficient at things. And so they added more subjects in and you're taxing my memory now about it, but it was things like a 20-mile or a ten-mile march, 20-mile march or something of that nature, and physical fitness went up and your

endurance went up and the tasks became more and more difficult, like night navigation and patrolling techniques and marching, sort of laying an ambush and all those sorts of general soldiers' knowledge, the infantry, basic knowledge that you should need to be a soldier and who to salute and who not to salute and all that sort of thing. How to do it, how to march, that was basically what it came down to.

How did they go about teaching you things like

ambush skills?

Well, it was a bush thing. A bush thing. I mean, you'd go and do it on a – had a big sand model which was of the terrain of the area and they would say, "Right, well, this is what you've got to do, you've got to move to this point and lay up an ambush". Then you'd go out and do the drills and there'd be like withdrawal, just general drills, like withdrawal drills and so forth so they had how to break a contact, how to initiate a contact, how to break a contact, all that sorts of thing.

How do you do that?

How do you do it? Well, in an ambush situation you have to lie still. Really, that was basically what it came down to. Getting into the place and getting out of the place was a part of the training, and just move into the area and wait. And then, if there was a contact, then you had to form into groups of, say, two or three and then break the contact by moving back, this group would stay and lay down covering fire, you broke and could move back and so forth.

So how much…?

I don't really recall that, that's melding into other things.

But it started to get a lot more specialised, in other words, towards the end?

Yeah, at a greater professional level. I mean, you were expected at this time, in your – after your eight

weeks that you were well and truly on the way to becoming a soldier, passing recruit training and so on. And then that started to become more corps orientated. Like, medical corps, signal corps,

19:30 transport corps, infantry, whatever, those sorts of survey and all those sorts of things. Some of the fellas joined just specifically to do a job like survey corps fellows, something like that where they wanted to be – learn how to be a surveyor, I presume. Mapping and all that sort of thing. Whereas I had this nebulous idea about nothing. And I didn't care. It was – and as we came toward the end

20:00 you had to make a selection as to what you wanted to do and I thought, "Well, if this infantry business is marching up and down all the time", and I didn't really like that, I thought that was – it was alright, part of what you do, but I didn't want to do it every day. And as I came from Victoria and the recruit – the corps of signals, the school of signals was in Balcombe, which is just down from Frankston, which was not far from where I lived anyway, I thought, "Well, I'll go to signals school".

20:30 Which was pretty good. So that was fine. We didn't have a lot of marching there 'cause it was sort of in the truck or carry the radio and get to a position, sit down and wait. I thought that was alright.

Was there anybody who didn't pass the course?

There were those that, yes, they did, they didn't pass the course. I'm not really sure of the reasons for it, they were probably attitudinal problems, physical problems that had manifested themselves because of the

21:00 training, sore knee, sore backs, whatever. Attitudinal problems which, in other words they just couldn't cope with the discipline. Or they didn't fit in. And I think really that's another part of it too, it was sort of the group mentality if you like, but it was also other – some of those people just couldn't fit in. It wasn't to exclude, I don't recall whether it was to exclusion, I don't recall ever

21:30 saying, "Oh, he…" We had one bloke, that's right, he was a Dutchman. And he wouldn't wash. Or he didn't shower. He wasn't used to it, obviously. He still had a very thick Dutch accent and he hadn't had a shower for three or four days so we ganged up on him, grabbed him and took him down the showers and we gave him a bass brooming which, with Solvol soap. It's a,

22:00 you know what Solvol soap is, a gritty soap which is made of feldspar like pumice stone, in a soap and you used it to wash your hands to get the dirt off, ingrained grease and so forth. And a bass broom is a very wide broom with very stiff bristles, and we gave him a bass brooming, in the shower, threw him under the – stripped him off, threw him under the shower and gave him a bass brooming and said, "Now, you shower every day". And that was how he learnt how to clean himself.

22:30 **And how was that viewed by the instructors?**

It was unbeknown to the instructors.

Would they have supported that?

If the person wasn't clean then it wasn't up to them – sorry, yes, it was up to them to make sure that he was clean, or clean – that was part of the – hygiene was part of the personal hygiene, and particularly if you were in a group situation, one stinks and the others don't.

23:00 So, I mean, I don't recall it ever happening and I don't recall anyone ever asking permission to give this bloke a bass brooming. No. So to answer your question, no, I don't believe that it was a – no. The instructors didn't know that that happened. They might have heard afterwards, because if something happened and, yeah, don't know.

But would it be just, you know, put a little blind eye to it even if they did find out?

I don't recall anything ever happening about it. But I would presume that with

23:30 the knowledge that they had of people they were there, not in a – they were overtly – they weren't overtly there but they were covertly there, so there was a knowledge about what was going on and if someone was playing up then they'd sort of pull them aside and have a talk to them about it or whatever. Yeah. But no, I don't recall anything – there was never anyone who said, malicious, you know, "You must go and give him a thumping", or, "You must go and

24:00 give him a bass brooming". Or anything like that.

So with the signals training what sort of things were they teaching you as part of that?

Morse code, radio work, etcetera, etcetera, and that was like high school. Was bliss. Had a room with a mate of mine, a fella of mine who'd joined up in the troop before, the intake before me, we

24:30 had a two-man room. That's all you had. A communal shower still. Didn't have to march anywhere, didn't have to double anywhere, you had to move in the correct manner, but you didn't have to march as such. I don't recall sort of groups of us marching down the road doing this sort of thing, although it must have happened as in the moving from class to class. But it was much more relaxed. There was girls there,

What were they doing?

25:00 Oh, there were – in the signal corps they had – at that time they had telephonists and so forth, people that answered the telephone and worked the switchboard and did all that sort of thing, because it was a plug job, someone'd ring in and you'd say, "Yes, I'll put you through". And you'd plug them into the thing. And that was a night duty, if you like. You rotated through, you can do that, and it was good fun because the girls from Telecom and, would ring up, or sorry, PMG [Postmaster General] Telephones would ring up and they'd connect you through to someone else or you'd be talking to some girl in – or bloke in America or somewhere, 'cause it was on the

25:30 International, and you could go, loop, loop, loop like that and you'd end up spending half the night – even though it was midnight here you were talking to a girl in England or a bloke in America or whatever, or in Sydney or Melbourne or whatever. Or if you wanted to talk to your Mum. Pretty good, you didn't have to spend your money to go and – your sixpence or whatever it was to make a phone call, and I can't remember. And just down the road from us at Mount Martha was the WRAAC women's – the Women's

26:00 Royal Australian Army Corps, which was the army females, if you like, and that was their school. They had their school down there as well. So that was like their recruit training. I think, I'm not sure. So that was good, you had a bundle of a hundred girls down there and a couple of hundred of us up there and the Darba Hotel [?] down the road and, you know, just, it was just good fun. And of course the lack of

26:30 physical, if you like parade ground discipline, every day and you could amble somewhere to get to breakfast instead of running and all that sort of thing.

The hotel down the road, was that the meeting place of…?

Yes, in effect. Yeah. That was weekends. I – at that stage, I thought, well, I'd go home and then of course you get bundled in with a bunch of other blokes, "Oh, we're going here." Or, "We're going there". Or whatever. And it was, yeah. But I was more restricted then

27:00 because I didn't have a driver's license. That's a story I should tell you about Kapooka. In the latter stages of my training there I was given a weekend duty to look to things and the bloke said to me, "You've got to take this across to the other mess". There were three areas, there was A Company, B Company, C Company. And I was

27:30 working in the mess, Dixie bashing, cleaning, whatever. And they had to take some, like a load of potatoes across to the other side. And the bloke said, "Oh, can you take them over there?" I said, "What, in a truck?" He said, "Yeah, that's right". So I took off, I drove the truck over there, I didn't have an army license, I didn't have a driver's license. And he got hauled over the coals as well as I did. Because I'd breached military discipline by driving a vehicle without – dada, dada dada. Hadn't been

28:00 on an open road anywhere, that was just, you know. But they didn't – that was just. Those sorts of things happened. Yeah.

You'd think with a private road you'd be alright.

Yeah, I mean I didn't bang into anything. I didn't wreck it, I changed gears, at the time. Because I'd stood and watched my father do it, and yeah.

And the potatoes got from A to B.

They were there on time and the vehicle came back again, and there was a bit of – yeah, a bit of, "Ohhh!"

28:30 **What sort of things were you doing as part of training to be a signaller?**

Again, it was, I was never really good at Morse code, I'd never – that was something that just didn't gel with me in my head, so I went to a lesser level if you like and became what was called a rigger. A rigger, sigs. Which was climbing towers and things like that. So again, outdoors and at

29:00 heights and doing stuff like that so – which was – so I got through the corps training and was posted to Rockbank, which was the – there was Rockbank and Digger's Rest, sort of two separate bases which were the receiving and sending stations for the military signals. There'd be, so – at this place there was, at this receiving place there were all these aerial fields, long – sorry, towers, quite high, and I mean

29:30 100 metres tall, those sorts of things. But maybe not, 50 metres tall, something like that. And with long wires, and they were set up in direction so they were aimed at Vientiane or something like that so you could receive from Phnom Penh or from England so you could receive from that and those sorts of areas there, so what I did was there was the rigger sig, so if the wire broke, you had to go out and string new copper wire, climb to the top and get the thing down, lower it all down so we could get it and join the wire up

30:00 again or replace it or whatever and then wind it all back up again and so on. Those sorts of things. But it was outdoor, got the best mushrooms in the world. Huge, dinner-plate-sized mushrooms, they were good. Because the local farmers just did the sheep on the property which kept all the grass down. So we didn't have to mow. And then we started to do demolitions as well. Because in that part of Victoria it

was

30:30 volcanic, you had about twelve, eighteen inches, twenty centimetres of topsoil. Then about ten centimetres of rock. Basalt – blue basalt rock. And then you'd go down for more earth and then you'd go down for more, into some more basalt. So if you had to dig a hole, and you can imagine, if the tower's 50 metres tall, you've got to put a fairly substantial base in there. So we had to break

31:00 through that rock, so we were drilling and blasting and so on, so I learnt demolitions from that as well. And that was fun, outside. Up it'd go, the big rock or whatever, yeah.

With having all the signal towers in that area, was that because you had so much volcanic rock, was that good for signals?

More than likely, yes.

I was wondering if that was the reason.

More than likely, yes. It was quite an interesting thing I did in the last part of my

31:30 stay there, this fella came up with an idea and had to use chicken wire, no, it wasn't chicken wire, it was like sheep fence wire. Big squares like that, big rectangles like that, and we laid it out about a kilometre long and just a boffin, we've got this job, here's the plan, and you do that. And we had these great big long lengths and we linked them all together and we had to solder them together so that the pieces of wire were

32:00 interconnected. And what this bloke was building was a – the beginnings of an over-the-horizon radar. And this long carpet or mat of metal would then come up into a screen and it would be shaped like a V shape, there were three poles, one here, one here. And then one midpoint, but it would come back in a slight V. And it was aimed off and what he was, I think now, I didn't ever know at the time, just building this

32:30 "What's that?" "Oh, it's some sort of a radar, we think." But it was pointed in the direction of where aircraft would come into land at Essendon Airport, because Tullamarine wasn't built at that time. And I think it was an over-the-horizon radar this guy was setting up, like he got the – like the boffin would be given the money to develop this and we were the ones that put it all together. And that was years later, it dawned on me what it was. So yeah.

33:00 When they started talking about this Jindalee over the horizon radar in about ten years ago, I thought, "Oh well, that could have been what that was". So it could have been part of that.

So experimental sort of work? Was that area used for lots of different experimental communications?

No, not to my knowledge. It was just generally the standard receiving station for army radio traffic. It was a small

33:30 place, there was probably no more than twelve or fifteen people on the base at all, there was an OC [Officer Commanding] who was a major from the Second World War. Happy Hammond was his name. He was either a captain, he might have been a captain, may not have been a major, but he drove an MG Magnet – a burgundy MG Magnet which was a very nice little car but peculiar, because it wasn't an FJ. Had a very bad limp

34:00 and walked with a cane most of the time. But there was a warrant officer, a staff sergeant and a couple of sergeants and a few corporals and that was it. And then the rest of us were just soldiers. Cooks and whatnot, the cooks ran the restaurant up the road, between the two cooks, they worked three days on, four days off. So they bought a restaurant up the road and they then worked three days on four days off, in the restaurant and four days off. It was quite fun. Quite fun really, and of course then you got a job

34:30 working up there, doing waitering, waiting on tables and all that sort of thing over the weekend, because I never had enough money, always needed some more money. Yeah.

So the food must have been alright?

Oh yeah, good food. Yeah, good food.

How would you be tested on your knowledge of what you were picking up during that time?

There were examinations, there were sub – there were courses you had to gain further, you had to – I mean, I used to learn

35:00 about aerials and the way they were constructed and di-pole aerials and all those sorts of things and why they worked and directional aerials and how you laid them out and all that sort of thing. And then there was other trade type things as well. You know you had to know how to put the bolts in the bottom of a – or check the bolts on the bottom of a tower and then check the stay wires and (UNCLEAR matink) and you could tell if it was fraying or tighten it up and all do – you know, using terms

35:30 like it was those sorts of things. Different gauges of wires, insulators, all that sort of thing. That was

part of your trade training, you had to know those sorts of things. And then there was vehicle licenses, because you had to drive a special vehicle to do this type of work.

So you finally got a license?

Yeah, I finally got a license. Yeah.

Did you do the license on the base?

Yes, yeah. Was taught by one of the corporals how to drive, and virtually that was

36:00 outside of the sight of anyone that had any knowledge, was just to drive it round these paddocks. And that was really what it was and then he said to me, “You’ve got to go and do your driver’s license”. and the transport corporal at the place took me and we drove out around the back and down along the road, and then we took him up to buy a bottle of milk for his wife or he had to take something home to his wife and come back again and he said, “There you are, you got it”. So that was right.

No parallel parking on the side of the hill.

No, none of that, I don’t recall any of that anyway.

What would an average day

36:30 **entail?**

For me at that place was again, up in the morning, go to the – go to breakfast and shower, shave and whatnot, got to breakfast, and there may be a morning parade of some sort. For a particular reason, say, like Monday morning or something like that, there might be something special like the weekly parade. But generally we went to our own area and there was a corporal and myself and

37:00 oh, that’s right, you had to do like, you’d check your roster, not the roster, the nominal roll, tick the roll off, that was – yeah, that was done and then we’d just go to the get into – if there was something that had to be repaired, inside the area where we had, like our store and our workroom we would do that as a repair. And then we’d go in the vehicle out and we’d go on check the fields, check the aerials and just do a circuit around

37:30 to have a look and see what was there. Back in for morning tea, or we’d take it with us. Depending where we were going. It wasn’t a huge place, was quite big area but it wasn’t like miles to the end or anything like that. So we’d go back and have morning tea or something of that nature and then go back in, and of course in Melbourne, sometimes it was bloody cold, it was freezing, so we had leather jerkins, they were

38:00 sleeveless, button up at the front but they were not fur-lined, but they were like woollen blanket-lined things. Which they had had in the Second World War, but they were terrific. Was sort of like the bomber jackets that you see guys, but they didn’t have any arms in them or that sort of thing, so. Yeah, so sometimes you’d come back in and have a coffee or a tea or whatever it was and something warm for your mornos and then go back out again, was a good idea. But sometimes in Victoria can be

38:30 quite bleak. The wind, and especially where we were was between Melbourne and Ballarat, so Melbourne, Ballarat cold – Ballarat’s probably the coldest, so they say is the coldest place on earth but the – yeah, you’d just get those north-westerly winds – westerly winds, southerlies in Melbourne were bad. It’d just be cold. So we wore gloves and a beret and sometimes even wore a balaclava to keep your head warm,

39:00 especially if you were up and the climb – course climbing, couldn’t climb with gloves so you had to go with your bare hands. Then we’d go back in for lunch. Lunch was again a meat meal, hot, sit down, have a wash of the face and hands whatever it was and go and do that. And then back out in the afternoon. And then knock off at four o'clock. Shower, change, put your civvy [civilian] clothes on.

39:30 You know, jeans and a shirt or something like that. Or slacks and a shirt, or you stayed in your uniform if you chose to, you didn’t mind it. But then we had a small bar there – one bloke, he ran it, and you’d have a can of beer or coke whatever and watch TV for a while, and then dinner would be on at five thirtyish or something of that nature, have your dinner and then watch television again or go back to your room or go out somewhere. There wasn’t that many places to go. So it

40:00 wasn’t a big social area, no.

So you wouldn’t really go out every couple of nights?

No, generally not there, the fella that I roomed with at Balcombe when I went to the school of sigs, his name was Glen Taylor, his mother was the matron of the Apollo Bay Hospital and she had been involved with the Apollo Bay Surf Lifesaving Club. And he said, “Oh, look, I’m going home this weekend, do you want to come?” So we jumped in his car and we went down

40:30 and we stayed in the nurses’ quarters in the hospital, because the nurses were all married and went home anyway, but we just slept in there and yeah, we had the weekend, and I reckon I fell in love with that place after that, you know, it was fun, and in the pub, it was good stuff, yeah.

A decent social life finally comes to you.

Absolutely, we'd be out of the door with one of these at four o'clock on Friday afternoon, and in the door with one of those at eight o'clock, "Sorry I'm late", sort of thing. Getting disciplined for being late

41:00 on Monday morning. That sort of fun, we had all of the same age groups, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-something like that, so again, it was a surf club type thing, swimming and all that sort of jazz, yeah. Which was harking back to the youth, and of course the girls were fun as well, and the pub was there.

41:30 End of tape

Tape 3

00:31 **...bank for, Charlie?**

I joined the army in '64 and then I went across to Perth in February, March of '66, so with the recruit training, corps training, and then at Rockbank probably about twelve months, I wasn't there much longer than twelve months.

What developed your interest in the SAS [Special Air Service]?

One of the guys that was there, he was a corporal and – or lance corporal, and he

01:00 had been across and done selection course and failed it because he had a – he pranged his back, hurt his back. And he said, "You have to go to there", 'cause he knew I wouldn't survive in the place where I was with my personality and the way things were going. And I just got into strife a bit and I had grog in me locker and, you know, just little things, I was disciplined, and I'd have

01:30 charges and so forth brought against me, so it was the rebelliousness or the free spirit, if you want, that was getting me into strife and he said, "This is the place for you, you have to go". And fortunately a selection board came round in late '65, I went to that, which was, a selection board is where a group of the hierarchy of a squadron of SAS would come over and they would do interviews

02:00 of people. Interview people and then they would do a selection from that, so there would be people culled from that interview process, if you were then given the right to go and do the selection course then you went and came to Perth. And did that, so I passed the selection board and then went to – came to Perth.

Before I ask you about the interview, can you elaborate a bit more on the rebellion that proceeded?

It was more

02:30 or less being a teenager, I think. And in a place where there were 30-year-olds and 40-year-olds of that time and the 50-year-olds, and they were just long-term soldiers and the rebelliousness of the time was, don't forget that's rock 'n' roll time and that was, a rebelliousness was part of being a teenager and I was no more, I was seventeen, eighteen, really I was, that's all I was. I was seventeen, eighteen, and just those things

03:00 I mean, I had a car, I bought a car and all I wanted to do was get out and go to the surf club on the weekend at Apollo Bay or go and see Mum and Dad or whatever it was, do family things, and if the army got in the way of it then that was sort of, I had to think of a way of getting around it or just wheedling my way through the thing to get what I wanted to do. I never, ever shirked any of the work detail or anything like that, but to get done

03:30 what I wanted to get done, I had to be – you know, sail close to the wind might be the right word, yeah.

How out of line did you get?

Well, the charge sheet shows that there's a few things on there. I think I probably got into charge three or four times that I was there and this is what this Johnno, Johnson, I can't remember his first name, proper first name. Said to me, he said, "You're not going to survive here". He said, "You're far better off going over there, it's much more fun. A lot more things to do."

Were you bored?

Yeah.

04:00 It became mundane, although it was outside work and everything like that and I liked that, but it became mundane again and I thought, "Oh well, I can't see myself doing this for another four or five years", and I had to go cause I'd signed on for six years. So I thought, "Okay, this is coming, I might as well have a go". So I had a go and was successful at getting through the selection board, yeah.

Can you tell me what sort of questions they asked you during that interview?

They were attitudinal things.

04:30 And I think they were psychologically based things as well. Really, mainly attitude. They were looking for a style of person, that was really what it was, and I think that that sort of fitted in with – my personality fitted in with what they were looking for.

What style of person would you describe it as?

An independent person. A loner, really, in particular. But with the ability to work in with a team. You

05:00 had to be an individual. An individual was probably the most important thing that I can recall. But you were still able, then, to work in a team, you had to be independent but team spirited as well, if you like.

It's an interesting combination, isn't it?

It is. It is. And that will be born out later on, we'll talk a bit more about that, sort of the down there, but that was my initial reaction to them. Humour, too, was part of it. You know, they sort of didn't ask you to tell a joke or anything like that, but they

05:30 could tell by your responses, you had a humorous outlook on how to deal with things and so forth, so yeah. I think that played a part as well.

How long was that interview?

If I recall, it was about an hour, an hour and a bit maybe. Some fellas were shorter than I. But it didn't really matter, I was set up at a time and had to be there at a time and that's when the appointment went ahead and I remember when I came out there were other people waiting, so

06:00 that was that. Yeah.

Was it confronting, that interview?

Not that I recall, I recall it as being fun, you know, I just thought, "This is exciting, I'm going to have a go". And I would have been really disappointed if I hadn't have been successful.

What kind of approach did you take, were you just yourself or…?

Yeah. Yeah. I'm no good at telling lies because my memory's not good enough.

So what took place between passing that interview.

06:30 Selection. And then going to selection, the selection courses are called, now then we called it a cadre course.

What does that mean?

That was mainly finishing up what I'd been doing there and taking leave and then going to Perth, from Melbourne on the train.

What was that journey like?

That was another adventure. I'd never – hadn't been to Perth before and on the

07:00 train and with other blokes that you didn't know but you know that they were going with you so there was an army contingent, if you like, on the train. And if I remember rightly it must have been ten or twelve of us on the train at the time. And so therefore we got to know a few of the people that we were going to be doing selection with. And they were not all signal corps people. There were some signal corps people in there, and there were fellows that I'd in fact gone through recruit training with that were on the train had come from infantry,

07:30 so they went on the train from Sydney to Melbourne and we picked them up in Melbourne and went on, and I think we picked up a couple of blokes in Adelaide as well. And then we arrived in Perth, two and a half or three days later, or whatever it was at the time and –

Did you spend that time in uniform?

Yes, yeah. No, you travelled in, no, yeah, well, you had to, I think, if you were on an army movement at that time you had to have – go up in your uniform, but when you got in there, you got your jeans on and your shirt and did all the things that

08:00 you had to do.

How were you greeted in Perth?

We were met at Perth station, the train came into Perth at that time, the interstate trains came into Perth Central Station as it is now. We were met by a group of sergeants and corporals and just in vehicles and put in the back of the vehicles and it was late, evening. And we were then taken to Swanbourne, which was a short ride in the train from Perth, in the vehicles from Perth, and then

08:30 I think a light, sort of like sandwiches and coffee or something like that, and then shown where your

rooms were, have a shower and go to bed and tomorrow morning, the next day, I think it might have been a Sunday, so we had a church parade or something of that nature, and then they then saw it that, sorted you out into where you were going to go in within this, and I think it was on the Monday that we started. Monday morning. It was sort of quick time, it wasn't sort of hang

09:00 around for a week and enjoy the beach or anything like that, it was sort of quick time, straight into it. And at that stage, they weren't too keen on that anyway 'cause there was, afterwards I learned that there were people that would go and go for selection and have a week's holiday with their mum and Dad or their girlfriend or whatever it was. And then they'd fail the course and go back to where they were before. So I wasn't cognisant of that before it started, but afterwards I learned about that.

So how

09:30 **did the training commence?**

I think it was with a three-mile run. In boots and full equipment. With rifle, and you had to do that in fifteen minutes, I think. So that was a sort of, it was a physical sort of elimination, and the first week was physical, you did ten-mile run, nine-mile runs, those sorts of things. And probably do a

10:00 three-mile every second day or something of that nature.

How gruelling was that course?

Very. Very gruelling, it was a bit of a blur really because it was, some of it was done in Perth and then we went to Colley and worked around the Wellington Dam area around there. In the bush, that was February, March, so the weather was good, it wasn't raining, cold at night but not raining.

10:30 Physically demanding, like you had to move from that point to that point navigation and get there. Then you had to go from that point to that point navigating again and get there in a timeframe. And those were the sorts of mental and physical examinations, if that's the right test, achievements mainly to do that. You worked in groups, and mainly in groups of ten or less. And

11:00 they sort of whittled it back until you got sufficient with them. And then there was instructors with you all the time, who made sure that nothing went wrong and it was very reassuring to see the attitude that the instructors took. Mainly because the instructors were the patrol sergeants or the troop commanders or the like,

11:30 lieutenants and captains were the troop commanders of the squadron, that we were being recruited for ability. The instructors were the patrol sergeants and troop sergeants and so forth on that course, so they were, in effect, selecting you for your position within the troop, A Troop, B Troop, or C Troop.

12:00 And that in turn, said, "Right, well, we'll get you into that patrol because you'll fit in with this group" and so forth. So that was what it was, it was a selection within a selection if you like, you still had your physical and your – and your mental abilities stretched. There was also – long days.

12:30 You're out at seven thirty on your way to doing something, and some of the exercises wouldn't finish till two o'clock in the morning, but you still had to be up at seven the next day and all those sorts of things and we went on for three or four weeks like that with – maybe a fortnight, ten days with less than an hour, two hours' sleep at night. You had to finish the exercise, the better you were at it, you got back in, but sometimes they were just extended or intended to be that run you to your limit,

13:00 if you like, and ability, so you worked daytime and night time.

How challenging did you find it personally?

I found it very challenging. Yeah, I've never been much of a runner, and it was good. There was, my memories of it are purely exhaustion and wanting a good sleep. But

13:30 I was happy. I was happy in it. And there were tasks, you know, like you had to bring a wounded guy, you had to make a stretcher and bring a wounded guy out, a certain period and get him from that point to where your next checkpoint was so he could be taken out and all that sort of thing, but they were – he wasn't injured or anything like that, but it was just a matter of the exercise, said that, you are the injured person or the instructor would say, "Right, you're at this point, he's got a broken leg, what're you going to do?" And that was an individual's choice,

14:00 because the leadership roles changed and you had to do those things and then take charge and sort that out and get that task over and done. Physically. Yeah. Demanding, very demanding.

You mentioned that you weren't a very strong runner, did you have any other difficulties during that training?

No, no. Mental abilities were all there and, you know, the other navigational, that sort of thing, I was really enjoyed, I just enjoyed those things.

14:30 **What about some of the other blokes? Did you see them struggling?**

Yeah, there were blokes that would – we started out with, I think, 70 and we ended up with 30. So more

than two thirds of the group were whittled away by the end.

How confident were you during that elimination?

The last part, the last two or three days I was most disconcerted about. I knew I had done the physical and

15:00 the other things but my weight was, you had to go to parachute school and I don't think you could be over twelve stone to do the parachute course, because parachutes, plus your equipment, you plus your equipment, the weight was, you had to be that, which would be acceptable to the parachute at the time. So yeah, for the last two days I didn't drink any water. I had a

15:30 big drink after I got on the scales though and yeah, so to get under that twelve, I think I got eleven stone, ten or something like that and so I got through that part of it.

What kind of equipment were you carrying with you during that course?

You would carry what we classified as a Bergen or an A-frame pack. Bergen was the word, SAS word used for a big hiking pack. Which was sort of, you know, that tall from your shoulders

16:00 down to your hips and they had an A-frame, metal frame with a canvas or leather strip which sat on the back of your hips. And that was what you carried everything in, you just had your sleeping equipment, which was inflatable mattresses and a blanket and that was about it really. And then food, if you needed it, change of clothing, so and so forth, yeah.

So it was based on endurance and stamina?

16:30 **Physically, emotionally?**

Determination too. To see whether you give up or not. And how you encouraged other people to come on. Your ability to overcome setbacks, calculated and not calculated. Just ended up just to see what sort of bloke you were, whether you were fitting in to what they wanted you to be. Whether you fitted in to what they were looking for.

17:00 **You mentioned that the instructors were very supportive, but at the same time they were testing you.**

Assessing, all the time. That was, part and parcel of the whole deal was total assessment, you had to be seen at your best and your worst or your most debilitated if that was the right way. And what your attitude was at that point. And whether they thought that that was going to make them happy, or you would fit in with the others that were being, the area we were going to be put.

17:30 **Were the setbacks deliberately contrived within the course?**

Yeah, that could be done. Like the fellow, as I said before, he's got a broken leg, make a stretcher, carry him out. Working in groups of five, you had one bloke on a stretcher and four blokes carrying it out and then you had to navigate in the dark or whenever it was, whatever the time they chose to do that. And get blisters or something like that, or get bloody, heels are sore or you get sore

18:00 knee and you think, "Oh Christ, if I don't do this, I'm going to not be able to come back or pass the course". Which was the mental thing – the whole thing was to pass the course. And yeah, they were contrived, as you say but it was purely – it wasn't bastardisation but was in a way, if you like, because they just say, "Right, well, this has happened now, you've got to do that".

18:30 And yeah, but physical and mentally draining type of exercises.

It's interesting that you mention that, while they were supportive the course is still really make or break.

Yes, it is. At any time. They would say to you, "You can't go on". You finished and you go back to your unit. And that happened, 40-odd blokes, 44, 45 fellas, I don't remember exactly how many passed the course, but

19:00 I have in the mind it's between 25 and 30 people passed out of about 70.

How did you take on that challenge mentally?

I just was myself. And I drew support from the other guys around us as well, I mean, we were shaping out into a patrol but again that uncertainty, you know, you could say, "Right, well, I've got to go, I'm finished", someone would say, or they wouldn't be there the morning. You'd go out and do an exercise, they wouldn't be there in the afternoon when you came back, they'd either – something had happened, and they'd just

19:30 put them in a vehicle and sent them back to Perth.

Did any of the blokes nominate themselves to drop out?

Some did. They were, you know, not able to carry on.

What was your reaction to passing the course?

I was elated. I thought it was good, because that was really the start of the adventure. Because the next step was to go and go to parachute school in Williamtown in New South Wales, do a medical aid course at Healesville in Victoria, and then back again to do what we classified as

20:00 build-up for deployment. At that time, although I didn't know it, there was an – we were still involved in Borneo and the Malaysian confrontation, SAS was particularly involved in Borneo, and there were two squadrons and there was, 1 Squadron had been deployed and it had come back, I was going into 1 Squadron, and 2 Squadron was still deployed in

20:30 Borneo at that time, in early '66. But June of '66, the confrontation with Malaya, Borneo and Indonesian confrontation was completed they signed an agreement but within about – sorry, that's not true. We were on the parachute course and they announced the fact that Australian soldiers were going to be deployed to Vietnam. And yeah, that's part of the story.

21:00 Unbeknownst to me that this was all going across in the background, they obviously knew that there was going to be deployment to Vietnam and so they were building up – what had happened was, the SAS was a company from 1957 through to about 1964. They then called – made it a regiment because of this expected Malaysian confrontation, Indonesian confrontation still going on, and the particular expertise of SAS in those sort of conflicts was needed. They also must have known that

21:30 Vietnam was coming up and they had either a) signed an agreement or was anticipating being asked to become involved in it. And on the – about I think it was June also. That they made the announcement in March that in June there would be an SAS deployment to – no, there were Australian Army involvement in deployment to Vietnam, there would be a taskforce set up. And that an SAS contingent would be included in that

22:00 build-up. So we found out about the February, no, the April, May, something of that nature, that we would be training to go to Vietnam.

What did you know about the SAS when you completed the selection course?

I was still very green, but I knew that I was on the way to becoming an SAS trooper. Yeah, and that was again, part of the training was the history of the place, you dealt with people that had been there since 1957, you dealt with people that

22:30 had come there two years before and been to Borneo and you dealt with people that had been there four and five years and hadn't been anywhere, but it was still the difference, and of course it was an elite unit as well and, you know, it was pretty exciting to be involved in it.

What kind of dealings did you have with those experienced men?

Oh, there was interpersonal, you know, like friends and instructors and physical – PT instructors and all that sort of thing. It was discipline, but it was a learning process the whole time and that was one of the beauties of it, you were never bored, never, ever bored, there was always something

23:00 on to do.

Can I ask you to describe the parachute course?

Yeah, we left Perth again, on the train. Over east, and we arrived in Williamtown, which is an RAAF base in New South Wales, Newcastle, New South Wales just north of Newcastle, which is where they ran the army parachute school at that time. PTS. Parachute Training School.

23:30 And there were 30 of us. Yes, of course, there were 30 of us, it was on that course, and a couple of other blokes that hadn't – there were civilians in there too, CMF, Citizen Military Force people that were in, say, like the 10th Light Horse, but they made the application to do a parachute course. So they were included in it, and there were other corps as well. But probably 40 on the

24:00 course, total. Anyway, we arrived there, and there was again, physical things to do, to learn how to land in a parachute, so they had harnesses swung that were attached to the ceiling and they'd swing you out and across and out and across, and then the ropes would lower you down at the appropriate speed and you had to turn your feet and roll and learn how to roll and all those things, and it was learning how to do those things just from a standing

24:30 position for a starter. And then going, progressing onto the swing, and then we had another one called the Polish, not the Polish tower, the fan tower. Which was a, probably height of a lamp post. Ten metres, fifteen metres, something like that. And you had a parachute harness and a wire rope which was attached to your harness at the back, which was wound around an axle.

25:00 And on the end of the axle was a two-bladed fan, the blades on the fan were about like that. One on either end. And you jumped off. The fans allowed you to fall until they got to a velocity, but it sort of slows you down so you stay at the right speed, landing whatever it was, eighteen feet a second, twelve feet a second or whatever it was. So that was the fan tower, that was quite a bit of exciting because I thought,

25:30 “Oh crikey, we’ve got to jump off here. Only that little thing’s going to hold me up or stop me from crashing to the earth in small pieces”, and yeah, so that was fun. And there was elimination on that too. There was eliminations on that as well, because people a) couldn’t do the jump, the height, they couldn’t do it. Done the training, everything like that, or they’d fail or they’d, you know, twist their knee or break their knee or something like that. I don’t recall anyone really physically hurting themselves on it, but there was sprains and strains,

26:00 some were bad that they just couldn’t go on with it and they didn’t make it through the parachute course. And then we got to the level where we were doing the ground training, aircraft exits and all that sort of thing, and you had to learn how to walk the right way and do a ritual, if you like, a ritual of checks that you had to hook yourself on, when you were doing static line jumps, so you had to, there was a cable, ran the length of the aircraft and you had to hook your hook on, which then led to a – to the strap that led into your pack

26:30 which deployed the parachute. So you had to make sure that you were hooked on and you had your equipment done and your belt buckle, your turn buckle, which is a round buckle on your stomach area, that was all, your harnesses that came up underneath your legs, around your waist and over your shoulders was all clipped into that little four points, and you had to make sure that was right, and it had to be turned and locked and, you know, they – someone would come along and give you a thump on the buckle to see if it was open, if it sprung open you hadn’t locked it properly. Then they’d do the tug on the,

27:00 so you did all of those sorts of things inside an aircraft on the ground before you – it was a mock up aircraft mock up before you even took off. And I think we did, it was three weeks – 21 days or something like that. The first week was entirely ground training. Then they took us up in an aircraft just to give you a ride, and I don’t – no, they didn’t do that, no, they didn’t, because yeah, there’s a story I’ll tell you later on. But yeah, we were then in plane and went. Your first jump was just,

27:30 was out of a Caribou, aircraft straight over the back and it wasn’t operational level but it was around about probably 1000, 2000 feet, something of that nature. And we just lined up and you go off, step down and walk down the back and you had to do right foot over the back of the lip, and of course there’s the whole world going past, whizzing, and underneath your nose and you’re looking over the edge and the instructor’s saying, “Hold back”. And doing this, and then they’d time you off the

28:00 back. And you put the right foot over and then sit down. And go. And by the time you put your right foot out, the aircraft had moved away and you just fell out of the bottom of it and you’re sitting like this in the slipstream and the parachute, you can feel all this, “chicka-chick-chick,” noise at the back of your head. And then there was complete silence, the aircraft flew away and there was complete silence and that was – that experience was quite thrilling, to say the least,

28:30 eye-opening, and what a joy to feel your parachute opening, for a start that was even better and then the landing worked as well, so you’d land and everything and you didn’t hurt yourself. And you’re pumped up and you’re yelling out to each other when you’re in the parachute, of course the aircraft’s gone away and you’re floating down, you’ve done all your things that you’re supposed to do, and you start talking to the bloke, you know, there’s a bloke about 50 metres away and we could be talking in this tone and he can hear you and you can hear him. At

29:00 that distance without any raising of voices – you didn’t have to yell or anything like that. So it was quite a different experience, it was total silence almost around you, and then this feeling of flying, you’re whizzing through the air, it was top stuff. Had the bug after that. Yeah.

How many jumps did you do in total?

Oh, probably 100, no, more than, you know, total military career, but no more than that.

In the training?

Oh, in training, 20. 20-odd, there was sort of one a day for the

29:30 remaining – or there might have been two a day because there was – it was a three-week course, we’d done a week and then we had a fourteen days, yes, so we would have had two a day or something like that for that next two weeks to get the number up to give you the qualification, and I think it was 20 jumps that you had to do to be qualified as a parachutist.

Were you jumping under different conditions during that time?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, there was wet and windy and high winds, low winds, yeah. All that sort of stuff.

30:00 Although that was in April, May, it wouldn’t have been that bad. Weather-wise, I mean, you know like rain and so forth but I do recall it raining on a couple of occasions, yeah.

After the parachute course you mentioned that you did a medical assistance course. Was that something you elected to do or selected for?

It was part of the training. It was part of the training, everyone had to do that and that was a specialised course, called the SAS Med Aid. The Special Air Service Medical Aid

30:30 Course, and that was conducted at the army school of health, which was at Healesville in Victoria, was like a – was an old golf club. You know, the golf club had gone broke or whatever, and the army bought it and had all these stone buildings and very nicely set up, but they had all the training tents, tents and so forth for accommodation were set up on this bloody

31:00 putting green. Could have been a putting green, might have been a flat piece of fairway. But it was high on a hill, and everything went down or up or round and then there was just barrack blocks. Like four to a room, something like that. Yeah. And that was Healesville, but that was cold, I remember that being cold, and we would more than likely be May time in Victoria and Healesville, which is fairly high up, I think you only had another

31:30 ten, twenty miles or something like that, to go 40 ks to go to the snow. You could go and actually see snow. And it felt like it snowed a couple of times, it was really cold. Yeah, so that was intriguing, you know, first aid course and all that sort of stuff with the Scouts, but this took you a bit further. A bit further than that.

So SAS-style first aid.

Yeah. And that

32:00 then, I really liked that, I really liked that, that was good fun and –

What levels of first aid did you reach during that course?

Rudimentary stuff. Rudimentary stuff, but it was also tropical diseases, talking about that diagnosis of tropical diseases and things like that for the – how to treat people and, you know again, physical exercises where you had to bandage a bloke's leg and put a splint on it and carry him back on the stretcher and all that sort of thing,

32:30 night exercises and day exercises as well. But classroom stuff. Mainly classroom stuff. Anatomy, physiology, those sorts of things, how the alimentary canal works, vitamins and eating and rations and what you should do, cleanliness, hygiene, etcetera, etcetera. Teach you how to dig a latrine or whatever, those sorts of personal and group hygiene that you could –

Sounds like you were learning yourself inside and out.

Oh yeah. That was really what it came down to in the end. It was fascinating.

Were you being

33:00 **instructed how to treat wounds or something like that?**

Yes and no. Yes and no, keep it clean and put a bandage on it, shell dressing or whatever. Close – stop the bleeding, whatever, those sorts of things. Rudimentary stuff.

How long was that course at Healesville?

Again, I think it was a month. It wouldn't have been much more than a month, 'cause if I remember rightly we were back in – yeah, we must have been, we were back

33:30 in Perth, because there were guys in that group that went into 3 Squadron, which was deployed in June of 1966 to Vietnam. And there were blokes on our selection, med aid parachute course that were in that group that were deployed. So we would have been back in the late May, early June of 1966 for them to be deployed. But that was an exciting time too. I was going into to 1 Squadron, which was the next squadron that was going to Vietnam

34:00 in the March of – February, March of next year, of 1967.

So what did you do during that time, entering that 1 Squadron?

It was patrolling with the patrol. We were – sorry, what did you ask me there?

I think you've mentioned that you were entering 1 Squadron, waiting for your deployment. What was that entry like and what did you do?

That was because on the selection course, I – it was rather a surprise that 3 Squadron was going to be deployed, I think to

34:30 the army or to them in particular and so they scrabbled around and got enough people, they actually formed 3 Squadron because there was only 1 Squadron and 2 Squadron when I came there in the February, they formed 3 Squadron and were beginning to bring their people up to that training, to that level of training that they needed to deploy to, to Vietnam. I knew that I was going into 1 Squadron and I knew which patrol I was going into because that had sorted itself out. And so then

35:00 we spent the time, bush time and in-barrack time, learning where I was – I spent the time learning where I was going to fit in, what my job, I went in as the patrol medic because I enjoyed that, I was good at that. I wasn't really good at signalling so I couldn't be the signaller, and I was so green that I couldn't be a forward scout and I wasn't any rank so I couldn't be the patrol commander or the patrol 2IC [Second in Command], so that was my spot. Fortunately the fellows that I was with were all Borneo

experience, mostly with SAS,

35:30 and others with other, like infantry battalions in Malaya, so they were experienced people, I was the green..

What was it like entering a patrol, totally green, with such experienced men?

It was good. The other blokes had actually worked together before and I sort of fitted in with what they did. I mean, I just learned that that was the way that they did things, or this – we worked as a group and we worked to

36:00 achieve a goal, and right, "Don't do it that way, do it this way. If we do it this way, we can all get to that." So the logic was there for me to follow, so yeah, just weapons training, rifle range, close-quarter battle stuff. Again, ambushes and all those sorts of things going back through the training and specialising, as I alluded to earlier, on the way in which you broke a contact and preserved yourself

36:30 and what happened if…? And so on.

Like to discuss all of those things in more detail, if you can indulge me.

Yeah, well, that – it's –

The weapons training, the hand-to-hand combat, I don't think –

Oh yeah, that was part of it but it wasn't a big part of it, that really wasn't the – unarmed combat was taught but it wasn't a huge part of it, you just knew it

37:00 if that was there. But the patrolling techniques was, say, for instance, if you were moving through the bush, you a) weren't allowed to make any noise. So all of your equipment had to be dampened or muffled, you weren't allowed to have a spoon rattling in your – in a bottle or something like that or a piece of chain clinking around, you had to be absolutely silent. You had – never had the sling on your rifle, because the sling

37:30 is the thing that you put over your shoulder with. You never used that, we took the slings off because it was just another piece of equipment weight. And you really didn't want to put your rifle down anyway, you want it in your hand all the time. The method, then, of moving through the bush, so you move through the bush and you're looking down and making sure you don't stand on that little twig that's going to go "pop" or "crackle, wallop". Or whatever. Or fall down the hole that someone else has missed. And

38:00 then that combination of searching your area ahead of you. So you started your looking at the trees at the top of the trees and then you moved down the trees and left and right and then down to the middle point of the trees and then left and right and then down to the ground and left and right and then to your right and left and that's how you – one step, you took another – and you did all of that as well. Patrolling with SAS at that time was not achieved on a matter of getting anywhere really fast, it was a matter of getting there without being detected

38:30 or notifying the enemy by noise that you were there. You had to be completely undetected, so that was the major part. Later, in Vietnam, we would, a good day, we would travel 900 metres in a day. So it was the stealth that was required to get you from point A to point B without stirring up the ants, the bull ants, if you want, or stirring up the enemy,

39:00 attracting the flies, those sorts of things, were taught. So I was lucky because they had all of those bushcrafts and it was mainly teaching one bloke how to do it. Which was me and follow the leader, that was really what it come – I learned quite well and quickly I felt and was accepted.

That acceptance must have created a lot of pride in you, to

39:30 **be accepted by those kinds of blokes.**

It did, because again, I go back to the fact that I wasn't nineteen yet. I was still eighteen at this time. No, that's not true, I was nineteen, I was nineteen at the time. I was coming up to my 20th birthday in December of 1966. You weren't allowed to be deployed unless you were over the age of nineteen, so those sorts of things were there. But

40:00 there was two of the blokes were married, the others had girlfriends and, you know, it was just sort of – we grew into a group, into a circle and there'd be dinners at someone's house or parties at there, and we'd go to there and you'd bring something and you'd bring your girlfriend, if you had a girlfriend, or if you didn't you just turned up in the hope that there might be one there that you could run away with.

Was it a slow acceptance though? I imagine these guys had to have been quite critical of you.

40:30 They were all over me like a rash when I got there. That's quite true.

But they'd have had to have been quite critical.

I was the bumbling bloody green nineteen year old, but it was a – you were – you've passed your selection, you've passed your para course, you've done your med aid course and passed that, you've

done all of the rudimentary things that you need to know to be – now it was just finessing, it was finessing and smoothing off that little rough edge and knocking that lump off that corner and just smoothing it off so that you fitted in. And

41:00 it was the techniques of – as I've just described before, moving through the bush, navigational skills, taking responsibility for that, treating someone, for Christ's sake, the first time someone cut themselves in the bush and you think, "Oh crikey, I'm the medic, I've got to do this". Out there, yeah, right-o, that'll, yeah, put that on. Done. So that was good. And there were other things too, that you had to learn, you had to learn to say, right, the patrol was going to be seven days. So you had to cater for yourself and carry your own rations

41:30 for yourself. And those sorts of things, that was a learning curve as well. Weight was always a problem. Weight, carrying weight was always a problem. Because if you took everything you'd be buggered, you wouldn't be able to get up a hill, if you took too little you starved. Because that was generally, you have to have rudimentary things, something to sleep on, something to keep you warm, change of clothes, socks, pants, shirt, jumper…

Tape 4

00:31 **Just talking about the sorts of things that you had to learn as part of the patrol course, which I'd imagine would be one of the central learning curves that you're doing as part of training with SAS. Maybe you can go into a bit more detail about the kinds of things that you were learning.**

We were talking about the way that we moved through the bush, and the stealth with which we had to move, and that had to be learned. That had to be learned, because we didn't know

01:00 one, a) – oh, we had an idea of what the conditions we were working on. Going to be working in, flat country, etcetera, 'cause we'd already heard that the terrain where we were based, the province we were going to be working in, was a relatively flat one, but it had mountains in it so we had to cross in that area as well. Learning, as I said to you before, before the amount of rations or food that you had to take. What you liked, what you didn't like, and eliminated that.

01:30 The army gave you a ration pack, and you knew that nutritionally you had to have that sort of thing, so I learned off those other blokes and say, well, "What do you take out?" And they'd say, "Oh, I take, this, this and that and the other thing" And, or they'd come with me and go through my stuff and we'd go, "No, you don't need that", or, "Why were you going to take that?" You know you haven't got enough water or – water bottles or whatever it was and the basic weapon, we had a harness

02:00 over the shoulder, a belt, with – to which that harness was attached, and then you hang off that pouch – ammunition pouches, water bottles ,compass, etcetera and you attach that in different places on your webbing, personally, where you wanted it to be. And that had to be comfortable, so if you lay down, you couldn't sleep with a water bottle stuck in the middle of your back. So logic says, you move the water bottles around the leg yourself,

02:30 enough for your hips, and your back to lie down on when you sleep. Similarly when you lie down on your stomach, if you're in a firing position you don't want to be sort of arched up over a packet of magazines, three or four magazines. Then there was the ammunition, the rifle that you had and the amount of ammunition that you had or carried. And that eventually came down to a personal choice. But it was sort of an accepted personal choice by the others in the group. You knew that you had to have enough to

03:00 get yourself out of strife. So that was a process of elimination as well. Then, still, firing a rifle, doing the live firing exercises as I was talking about before, the extraction from – withdrawal from a contact and those sorts of things, the things that you did in a contact, why did you do that, you know, so like the contact front or contact – we worked in groups of five, so what you would do was you would go in to a diamond

03:30 shape with the patrol commander in the middle, one, two, three, four, at the, virtually the compass points round him. And he would direct whatever from there. So if at any point you had the ability to put down live fire from three different places in whichever angle or department, the area that they were coming at you or your contact had been made at. Then, with the withdrawal, you then had the ability

04:00 to – the first thing, you couldn't leave that bloke sitting out there, so he had to withdraw back through while the two on the sides were providing covering fire, so he withdrew back through there, they would then fall back some metres – 20, 30 metres depending on the conditions that you were in, like line of sight, you could see where the others were, or cover, etcetera. So they would then start firing and you would then withdraw back along straight lines, until you had broken the contact, you know that could take four, five, six movements, ten movements

04:30 whatever it was. And depending on how determined the enemy was. That was the part of the training too. So it was all to do with what you did, how you worked together and your ears and the signs and the signals and the whistle and the – click your fingers or whatever it was, that was a peculiarity of the

person or the group in effect, we would say, right, we would do that. Or whatever it was, the particular noise and that was

05:00 to draw your attention. And we got to a stage where we didn't even converse, didn't speak. You would converse with your eyes or your head or minimal movement or whatever, those sorts of movements, hand movements, hand signals, you know, the enemy, "over there," or something like that or, "listen up," or "smell." That sort of thing, that sort of sign language, I suppose, if you like.

05:30 It was just a language without using words. You learned that as well, so there was this intense pouring in of learning and absorption of what was going on, and as I said, I was lucky to have the other four blokes there because they had had all the experience, but it was, for me it was a real learning curve and I made my mistakes and those sorts of things too, but it wasn't sort of, belt the living daylights out of you to get you into line or anything like that, it was bring

06:00 you along and you're in with it and you learn. And as I said, we socialised, so we knew each other's personalities, and that then became more or less like a family. A real close – or it's more than a family, you would not be without them for four or five days at a time, seven days at a time, depending on how long and where you were, you were with them the whole time, day and night. For the five, six days for that particular exercise that you were on. Be it an

06:30 individual patrol or a troop or a squadron, a troop was made up of five patrols, 25 blokes, plus an admin sort of, four people, and that would be like the troop commander – troop sergeant, and then there would be no administration in that, there wouldn't be a clerk or anything like that but that would be the way that it would be set up so you'd have five patrols, so we could go and work as a troop. Then

07:00 they'd say, "Right, we need a squadron", So we'd do a squadron exercise where several patrols would be going out at a time from a central headquarters. And we'd work on that and do the reconnaissance and come back and report and say, "Well, there's a track over there and it's been used in two days, two days ago or it's, right, live now". "We saw a group walking along". And then the other squadrons would do – play the enemy, or we'd have 10th Light Horse doing their job and we'd have to sneak up and watch them and watch what they were doing

07:30 or lay a pretend ambush or whatever it was on them. Those sorts of things, so we learned all of our techniques with, in virtually live situations. Not live firing, but live situations. So there was rifle shooting, targeting, target practice, all those sorts of things.

Was there a lot of target practice?

Yeah, yeah, you did – live firing was part and parcel, because you had to be attuned to it if you like. So – well, I did anyway, because I hadn't

08:00 done it before. Yes, it was quite a lot.

Were you the youngest bloke on…?

Yes.

What were the age – what was the age gap?

Frank Sikes would have been 24, he was the patrol sergeant. Mal Roberts would have been the same age, or even a year older, 25, he was the patrol second in command, the corporal. John Delgado was about 21 or 22. I think at that stage he was the forward

08:30 scout, Sam Macdonald was in 22, 23. So they had had their experience in, before they were about 25 years of age. And I'm in there at 19 or 20 as I was. I was basically becoming a 20 year old.

What had they done in Borneo prior to meeting up with you?

SAS type work in Borneo, it was cross-border patrols, reconnaissance, those sorts of things, yeah.

What did they tell you about their time in Borneo?

That it was hard. And Borneo

09:00 was either vertical, nothing else but vertical, and sort of straight up and straight down. Very hilly country. They were – the techniques were to be inserted by helicopter and then they'd go and do their work or they would do what was classified as, hearts and minds, they'd go to a village and the medic would put the bandaid on the little kid and put the powder on or the mercurochrome on the cut or help to pull the tooth or help to

09:30 birth the baby if there was a problem, those sorts of things were what you were taught. What they did, so forth. Stories, really, I mean it was, again, it all came back to patrolling techniques, way in which we worked, why you – you know how you – well, you took clothes, you always took a couple of pairs of socks, 'cause you had to look after your feet, so on, and your boots had to be in good condition, you couldn't have a broken shoelace jumping off helicopters, all that sort of thing, you had to be cognisant of that.

10:00 Yeah, so it was yeah. Those – they had the experience and it was just sort of absorbed by me, by them

teaching and also me learning by sight, watching what they were doing, you know, monkey see, monkey do.

What did they find the most difficult thing about Borneo?

I think the weather conditions were probably – and the physical conditions, topographically. Geologically, if you want, but topographically, because it poured

10:30 with rain and it was very steep, it was a wet jungle situation and they were never sort of – I would imagine dry, depending on when they went, if it was a dry season patrol or wet season patrol, yeah. They slept in hammocks. We always slept on the ground. They slept in hammocks because the ground was like that, so they linked it between two trees and slept on a level ground. Pack was underneath, you know, that was sort of, you rolled over and came out of it and

11:00 grabbed your rifle and went sort of thing. I learned from them that that was hard, arduous and they would travel distances, you know, they talked about 10,000 metres over the border, which was a long way. 10,000 metres, you're talking, if we equate back to my 900 metres movement in a day, that's a hell of a long way and that could be up to 14 days, so they've got to carry everything,

11:30 food, sometimes – no, they were never, ever re-supped [resupplied] on the other side of the border because that was not allowed, it was a secret operation to go across the border, because they were tracing Indonesian soldiers or looking for things or looking for movement and so forth, yeah. So that was probably – that was more like the true SAS as I was being taught by them. They were also in Borneo, deployed with

12:00 22 SAS, which is the British SAS, and New Zealand SAS as well. So there was a melding of ideas and a cross pollination of ideas and learning, and they picked up a hell of a lot because the Brits had been a variety of different places, the Kiwis not so much, but they were on mountainous things, being close to their terrain and so forth, so they had that sort of knowledge. And they came back with bits of equipment

12:30 that were different. You know, they had the British Army shirts were better because they were long, they came almost down to your knees. So if it was cold at night that was an added warmth, but they were in a better cotton, they were in a better-woven cotton material than our plain cotton shirt. One, because they absorbed more wet, two, because they had more pockets, the pockets were deeper and more voluminous. And just a better material. So we forsake those in the bush

13:00 gear, you could wear anything you liked in the bush, you could wear anything. Army issue things, yeah, if they were what you wanted to wear, boots, etcetera, etcetera. Standard, basic equipment like rifles and water bottles and all that sort of thing. But your own clothing was your own choice, you know, whether you had, whatever hat, what you wanted to wear, if you wanted a floppy one or one at the front, peak at the back and all that sort of thing, so those sorts of – were individual decisions, what you wanted, scarf

13:30 and so on. Camouflage was another part. You had to learn how to camouflage yourself, you're using the green and black and so forth, and that was made by Elizabeth Arden, and it came in a little compact with your green and your red – green and your brown and your black and a little mirror so you could sit there and put your lippy on, it was nice.

What sort of configuration do you have to stick it on your face?

Again, an individual way, to break up the line. The line and – you might drag it across

14:00 your green and brown and black and you go like that and you go like that across your face. And then colour it in, in between and do the ears and the backs of your hands, so forth, so that – some guys started to wear gloves, but I never, ever liked that because it's, a tactile feel of what you were doing was more important to me than having the gloves for the camouflage, so I used the camouflage on the back of my hands.

It's interesting that it was made by Elizabeth Arden…

Yeah, it was something that I sort of stuck in my mind too.

14:30 There wasn't your glossy compact, it was just a piece of bifold plastic, like that. And there was just two or three – three actually, there was the green and the brown and the black. And a wee mirror on the top of it.

You must have gone through quite a bit of it, though.

Yeah, yeah, you did. Yeah, again, I don't recall exactly what it was, but you just needed another one, you went and got another one, that was really what it came down to. Yeah, so that was part of the training in

15:00 Australia, and then we deployed off to New Guinea.

I just wanted to ask you – you mentioned before that you got to know the personalities of the different members of your patrol, what were the personalities, was everybody really an individual?

Yeah, yeah an individual. One bloke had children, Mal Roberts had children, so that was there. The remainder of us were single. And we went sort of, Cobble's Nightclub and

15:30 to around the countryside and went to this pub and went to that place for a party or whatever. Or someone else within the squadron or within the – would have a party, so we'd go there and there'd be 20 or 30 people and so on, maybe more, 50 people, and then there were squadron dos as well, and you just got to know them after a while, and Frank Sikes was the leader, he was a Brit and he was the sergeant and he had a very determined but placid personality. John Delgado was a

16:00 little short bloke, he probably only came up to my, about my shoulder, and he was the forward scout. He was a very determined bloke as well. Clever, you know, there's none – none of them were dopes. They were all clever people. And Sam Macdonald was a whiz, he could get communications at the most impossible times with the least amount of equipment. I recall once that we were in strife and

16:30 he had some wire wound around a super eight reel and we stopped and we sort of chased – this is sort of later on in direction, and he just sort of lay on his back and threw this reel out and got coms [communications] and got us away from the problem, got us extracted out of the place. So he was just a whiz at that sort of thing. And he was a good bloke, but again the sense of humour was there, well, maybe I picked up their sense of humour but

17:00 we laughed – all laughed in the wrong part of the movie, if you knew, if you go to the movies, we'd all be laughing at that part and everyone else is sort of looking at you and saying, "What're they laughing at?" You know, 'cause something struck us as funny.

So your sense of humour melded into the same…?

Yeah, yeah, we were – really. we were almost the same sort of personalities in the end. It was a learning curve for me, as I said before, but I don't think my personality changed,

17:30 they didn't change to me, but they – we were accepted as – my personality was accepted into the group as such.

Is that what would happen with all groups that would get together?

Yeah, that basic unit of five men was the – is the basic fighting unit of the SAS at that time. In Borneo they worked in groups of four but they found out that it was difficult, because as I said before, when you had an injury, who was going to carry the – one person had to – sorry, one

18:00 person had to carry the injured person out while the other two looked after him. If you had four, you had four pairs of eyes working 'cause you could make a stretcher or whatever, whereas before, you had to share him between three. And that was hard, because one end of the stretcher, if he was immobile enough to be stretchered, that's heavy work. Going up a hill and down a hill. All those sorts of things, so yeah, so you had, it was better,

18:30 they worked in fours in Borneo, then we worked in fives in Vietnam, and basic unit was a five man patrol.

So when did they change that configuration, was it after Borneo?

I think there was a realisation after they'd come out of Borneo. There were other sizes of patrols because, I mean, five, ten-man, seven-man, fifteen-man, or could even be troop-sized into deployments, say, four or five patrols. But generally we worked in – we were more confident in our own five

19:00 man group, 'cause it was – you know, we were used to working in that way.

Were you following what was going on in Vietnam when you were doing this training?

Yes, we were brought up on a daily basis as to what had happened to our people. What was happening to our people.

Were you told anything about the political stance of where the SAS was?

It was part of the – your political…?

Well, would they say, "Here is what's going on"? And would that be

19:30 **a certain amount of propaganda in it to actually increase your morale about…?**

I don't think so, I think that – at that time, remember we're talking 1966 and 1967, was fairly early, although the Australian troops had been there since 1961 as advisers and so forth, our real deployment was not until – the war didn't really kick off until the year before, which was '66. '65. That was really when they first put their, 1 RAR [1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment] went in, was '65, I'm pretty sure.

20:00 And that was a hard task. They had a hard run, because everyone said, "Oh, we're going to get rid of them before the rest of them come". You know, and 1 RAR had a real hard time by the time our blokes got there, there was taskforce in place, so there was a bigger group of people plus support, there weren't a real lot – they weren't relying on the Americans as such. There was an Australian logistics support base that they'd – at Vung Tau, and they brought food and mail and stuff like that up.

20:30 What was the question?

I've forgotten what it was as well. We'll just go back to New Guinea. Why are you going to New Guinea?

That was tropical acclimatisation. To get us into a jungle-type situation. With the hills and with, again, endurance type thing. We did, you know, we do a three mile run to get – just to get your body into – the feel of the tropical – get used to it raining at four o'clock,

21:00 get used to the funny noises in the night, the different animals, the different beasts and so forth that you'd come across. Be aware of the dangers of – dangerous animals like wild pigs and so forth, and see different people, like natives that lived in the bush or whatever it was, or the villages, or whatever, yeah, just so much, you had to become acclimatised to tropical water too, otherwise you'd become depleted very quickly. And that then taught you – taught me in particular about

21:30 how much water to carry, what sort of food to carry and so on and so forth. Those sorts of things again.

What did you find most difficult about the tropical aspect of that training?

Again, hot all the time. Sweaty. Tiring, because you know the perspiration was going out of you. So that had to be, you had to be aware of – put food and water back into yourself to keep yourself going. And endurance.

22:00 Really that's what it was. And New Guinea is similar to Borneo in that it is straight up and straight down. And the natives there don't know how to go around the mountain to get to the place, they go straight over the top and down the other side. So consequently you're wearing the heels out of your socks going up the hill and the toes out of your socks going down hill 'cause you were moving down – I mean, we were there probably six weeks.

22:30 The mid latter point of the thing was what we called a long stomp. And we did on the ground things, troop movement, you know, in the bush, that sort of thing, go back to the base and have a meal at night time, have lunch and all that sort of thing. Then we had to do what was called a long stomp. And that was where we traversed an area to another area and we went from – we flew from Lae my

23:00 pack weighed 90 pounds at the airport when I weighed it, and I had taken everything out of it that I didn't need. There was not a thing in there that I wouldn't use, twice, thrice or whatever. Apart from food. We got off the plane at Gurayna [?] and traversed the Owen Stanley Range across to a place called Elsie's Pines, which was called Bulldog during the Second World War. It was a jungle airstrip, fighter airstrip. And we went from there across again to Wau,

23:30 and we were extracted from Wau and flew back to – we did that in ten days. I think it was about 100 and 200 miles, 150, 200 miles or something like that on the ground. On the map. You're downy, uppy, downy, uppy, downy. That was a cultural thing too, I learnt a bit of pidgin English, how to face different situations and deal with people that had a different mindset from you.

24:00 Those sorts of things, yeah, it was good.

What sort of contact did you have with the locals?

Only really in that they were there, if we were walking, say, in the streets of Lae, we'd be shopping, they'd be shopping, that sort of thing. I was curious about them, yeah, I was curious, 'cause they were very strong people and, you know, muscular builds and so forth. Not tall, not all that tall, but yeah. They were

24:30 just different people. They smelled differently. That was a bit of a – you know, you'd smell a musky, they smell musky, that was that. We smell to them too. So. I didn't have any problem dealing with them at all, I don't recall any untoward situations that occurred. Mainly because we worked in Lae which was a big expat [ex patriate]– Australian expat – oh, Brits too,

25:00 population. And Australian Army had been there virtually from the end of the Second World War, so we're talking 20 years or so of Australian Army people being there, and yeah.

Did you manage to have any time off on leave when you were in New Guinea?

Not really. Not really, no, we had sort of Saturday off and Sunday off, and you might go to the one of the clubs or something like that or

25:30 go and do a bit of shopping, but no, it was full, pretty well full time.

And where was the actual base as far as New Guinea was concerned?

We stayed in Lae.

Was that a barracks?

No, we actually stayed in the showgrounds. In the buildings at the showgrounds, and we weren't allowed to wear – walk around in bare feet because you could get hookworm, which is a worm that gets

in the cracks in your feet and burrows up through your body and all that sort of stuff. So you had to always wear shoes or

26:00 something like that. Night time you had to wear sleeves down because of the mosquitos for malaria. Those sorts of things. Yeah, it was a learning experience every day.

Any other things that you had to be aware of as far as bugs and nasties were concerned?

Yeah, virtually everything was going to bite you. No, it was fun. Just so different, you know, eye-opener. I'd never been there before, it was just an eye opener to see all these different things and it was fun to

26:30 me to say, "It's four o'clock, it's starting to rain". Or, "It's raining, it's four o'clock". More or less at the end. Earth tremors, I didn't – I been in an earth tremor in Melbourne, something, you know, "eh-eh", like that. But here, about three or four times day you'd be going, "Eh-eh-eh". Like that. But it was just a very young country geologically and it was just moving still. Becoming used to all those things was, suddenly the trees would start shaking down the road from you, and

27:00 next thing you're shaking. So yeah.

That's a bit alarming.

Yeah, it was in a way, disconcerting on the first couple of times and then you think, "Oh well, it's going to happen again, that's alright".

Did you have to take anything extra because you were part of – you were the medical side of your patrol?

Yeah, I had a medic's pack, which was a US-developed one, and it had a main part and then another part that folded up, so that part came down and that part

27:30 came down and you just carried scissors and scalpel blades, morphine, etcetera, bandages, antibiotics, aspirin, rudimentary stuff that you could use, proper bandages, everyone carried their own big – what we called shell dressings. Field dressings which were attached to their equipment somewhere on the outside, so that you can just grab it and put it in the wound if there was a wound. Those sorts of things, yeah.

28:00 But tweezers, forceps, all that sorts of things. Artery clamps. Of course, if you had to stop the blood or something like that. Suture material to close up a wound, something to clean it out with, you know, like a Savlon or an antiseptic solution, those sorts of things.

Did you have any training in that, you know, like a really..?

Yeah, on that medical aid's course. Part of the training.

But you wouldn't have had your hands on anything that was in a real situation?

No, no – did the simulated wounds and on sort of, mannequins and

28:30 so forth, yeah.

So it was just mannequins that you'd be training on?

Yeah.

How interesting did you find that?

I thought it was pretty good. And of course then there was tropical diseases to talk about and you'd go and see the people at the hospital and there'd be this old man sitting there shivering his shirt off and he's got his malaria, or out in the bush you'd see him sitting under a waterfall or those sort of – they used to go and sit under a waterfall if they got hot and they'd move out if they got cold. Yeah, just different, different.

Was there a lot of malaria

29:00 **around New Guinea at that time?**

Not that I was aware of, I think the native population were immune to it. Maybe a baby might get it or the older people might have had it or something like that. I don't recall that as a – we were wary of it for the simple reason that if you got malaria you couldn't go, and that was why everyone was super careful about what they ate and what they did and, because you knew damn well that if you broke your leg and couldn't got to Vietnam

29:30 on the deployment your hole in the patrol would have to be filled by someone who was even greener than you. And they had to learn all of those things that had been ingrained in the last six months in your head. So that was a – I was cognisant of that fact. Yeah.

With the malaria, did you actually have to take any drugs to..?

We took a product called Palladrin. That was the commercial name of the product, it was an under-the-tongue or an in-your-mouth thing every morning, you

30:00 actually had a Palladrin parade and when you lined up to have your – the roll call, the sergeant came down and he'd issue the Palladrin out and that was it, you just got a little square with a plastic and you just got the little square, you took it out and took your Palladrin, yeah. But that was a constant thing, you had to take that every day, if you stopped you could have had malaria, and malaria would come up if you didn't take that, so that was part of it, yeah.

So you're pretty…

30:30 It was strict. If you didn't take it then you were letting yourself and the patrol down, yeah.

What did you find to be the most exciting thing about being in New Guinea doing that sort of training?

Again, the reality of it, the proximity of it to where we were going. My first deployment in SAS, that was exciting as well. The diversity of

31:00 the areas we worked. We worked on the flat, we worked in the hills and worked at cold and it was hot and tropical and wet and all that sort of thing. It was just – not overwhelming, but it was just a big intake, a really big intake. And I enjoyed it for the simple fact that it was – that was what it was all about. It was just to learn and get more and more and more

31:30 enmeshed in the other blokes and learning where – in the end we could sit down and say, "Oh, he's over at…" if the person wasn't there with you. He'd be there, 'cause you knew the blokes that well.

Did you find that you actually got even closer during that time in New Guinea?

Oh yeah. Again, you're putting your hammock up in the middle of nowhere and there's no one else to talk to, and that was it.

32:00 **Would you have to keep silent the whole time or could you actually have conversations?**

Yeah, yes and no. We would practise that and then we'd just have – you know, be just a normal thing. Normal walking through the bush sort of thing.

Because theoretically there's nothing out there that's going to attack you.

That's right, but then you had to be able to still practise those skills, so we might, say, practise them all day until we stopped and then we would talk about what was going on.

32:30 We also had a New Guinea police boy. That was the word they used, police boy. He was, in fact, an interpreter guide, if you like, to take us on this long stomp. And that was his job, so we had to talk to him, you learn things, you ask him, "What's this?" Different fruits and different things to live – how – you'd say – you'd learn in Pidgin, "You can eat that one". Or you'd find someone who'd say, "How far is it to the next

33:00 village?" And they'd say, "Oh, one cigarette. Two cigarette maybe". We learned very quickly that they got a twist of tobacco about that long, they then wound it out and skerrited [?] it out and rolled it out in a newspaper on an angle, and they were cigarette ended up about that long. So that would be a day. A second cigarette would be a second day. So you got about two days to go to the next village. "And what's the terrain like, what's it like?" He'd say, "Oh, be, be go up, up, up

33:30 and then he go delick, lick, then he go up, up, he go down, glick, glick, glick, glick, glick, long way, long way water, then go up, up, up the other side". And that's how they'd describe. They wouldn't say, "You go up the hill." Or something like that. You know they describe it in that sort of a language. So it was quite an entertaining, to learn what – figure out what they were talking about for a starter, but the way in which they talked, you know, like the helicopter's a "mix-master-blongum-jesus-christ". Yeah, those sorts of

34:00 bits of things that still stick in my head, I think one of the funniest things I've ever heard is the Lord's Prayer in Pidgin. Just to get it all together, what it's talking about and they're saying the words and the words are logical but it's got a little bit of a different meaning, when you tie all the words together you understand what it's saying. So cultural differences were quite a lot. And the way they lived in villages was primitive,

34:30 houses, yes. Fire, yes, water was close by. Food, they grew in wee gardens, little, they were slash-and-burn type gardens, so they had bananas or those sorts of quick growing tropical vegetables, they had pigs or something like that, they had chickens, those sorts of meats were used, fish if they were near a river. Cassowary, all those sorts of different animals were eaten. Crocodile, etcetera,

35:00 if you were down by the river. The smell. The pungent smell of a building that's been there for 50 years. And the fires have been underneath to keep the mosquitos out so you can sleep at night and the artefacts that are up there, I mean, I don't recall ever seeing skulls on the top of things like that, whether they were there or not, I don't know, but all this, all the, like, smoked meat, you know, like you see jerky now,

35:30 how that's really black. That was sort of like the inside of it, but the smell was in there, it was the smoky smell, like smoked meat, smoked fish, that sort of thing. That was there, only it was much stronger. It

must have been a type of wood that they burnt, whether it was green or whatever I don't know. I've only ever smelled it once again and that was in a restaurant, pizza restaurant that had a – the fella must have got a piece of wood from somewhere and he burnt it and that

36:00 smell came out of that wood-fired oven and I've gone, "Bang!" Straight back to New Guinea, and thought to myself, but pretty country. Water was clean as a whistle, you could virtually just drink it straight like that, there was never any question about having to – unless it was a pool that was laying there, you didn't have to put chlorine tablets in it and de-tasting tablets in it and all that sort of thing. Just went, scoop and had a drink.

Going up and down the

36:30 **Owen Stanleys did it give you a bit of an appreciation for some of the fellows who were part of the Kokoda Track?**

Yeah, because that was a – we were there in October and that was the dry season, the wet season and the end of the dry season – the wet season hadn't started properly. Even though it rained at four o'clock, it wasn't the wet season. Everything was moist, you know, it wasn't just dried out or desiccated or anything like that. One of the hardest things that we found, oh well, I found,

37:00 was the fact that in New Guinea you're going up and you're physically moving up a slope on an angle like that. It felt like that, but you went up and you could see the top. "Oh good, not that far, so we'll just hurry on a bit". You get to that thing, it's a false crest, you go down a little bit, you go up another one. And I think that we came to one place called Mount Comeback, which was 13,000 feet above sea level, and on that

37:30 we had something of the order of ten false crests. And that was heartbreaking. Really, really heartbreaking. We got to the top and laid down. It was dusk. Moss on the ground. We couldn't see too much. Had a brew and dinner and ate and that sort of thing and we lay down and I woke up in the morning and there was the heel and sole and the little

38:00 arch part at the back of the heel of the boot, Second World War soldier's boot, hobnails and everything like that. That was all that was there. Just that was lying on the – I'd sort of laid my head down and put my pack down on that and my eyes opened in the dawn and that was the first thing I saw, was this mossy ground with the sole, heel and the arches on either side of the heel of this boot. Been there since 1942, '43 or whatever it was, or whatever. In another part we found a section of road, Macadam road with blue

38:30 metal surface, and off to the side was a Chev [Chevrolet], what we called a blitz wagon, in the bush. Just off the road, it had broken down, obviously, and been pushed out of the road. Logistically they must have had it really hard, 'cause I know that I carried 90 pound when I got on that aircraft. And it got lighter as I got further away from home, of course, 'cause I was eating it, but

39:00 the trying conditions, the false crests, the – and we did it without any knowledge of an enemy. I mean, you couldn't stick your head up when they were there, so, and you know the memories that you see, the pictures that you see of people with the mud and the wet. I didn't see that part of it, but you could appreciate how hard it would be. And

39:30 the difficulty when you knew that there was an enemy just sort of waiting for you somewhere ahead, and yeah. So you appreciate what they did then. Yeah.

So how were you assessed during this time that you were in New Guinea as part of this training?

I was assessed?

Were you assessed as you went?

I don't believe so, I think it was still, I was already accepted, so still a learning for me but it wasn't an assessment as to, you know, "He's got to go", sort of thing. Unless

40:00 I did something really stupid.

Was there a debriefing as part of what you went through?

Yeah, we did a – that was part and parcel of – you knew what you were going to do, you were told what you were doing while you were doing it and you were told what you'd done after you'd done it. That's the military way.

And how did the debriefing go after you…?

We were fine. Everything was good. We didn't really have anything that we had to be worried about or anything like that, there was nothing glaring

40:30 that had come out of the, think everybody worked well, everybody went along, you know, no one starved, no one broke their legs, no one got bitten by any beasts or anything like that.

Did the experience make you more trepidatious about possibly going to Vietnam or…?

No, no. If anything more confident. More confident in the fact that I was learning and coming up to or approaching the standards of the people that were teaching me.

41:00 **Did you fly back to Perth from New Guinea?**

Yes, we did, yeah, we flew back to Perth and flew in C-130s. And that was something, was quite exciting because I'd never been across the centre of Australia and you could look out the window and see the red earth and the little green dots where the trees were, and that's how I know the Aboriginal paintings are maps, sort of thing. That was just very, very easy to pick out. And that was different.

Did you

41:30 **get some leave after you came back to…?**

Yeah, I had leave – trying to remember exactly when, but I'm pretty sure that it was in week, we were October, November or late October, early November in New Guinea, we came back early December or something like that, it was that late in the year. And I went over east to home and we had a home leave, and I went to Apollo Bay and came back to Mum and Dad and all that sort of thing.

Tape 5

00:31 **…from there you were going to Vietnam?**

Warning order came to us – a professional term for, "You've got to go", sort of thing. And so we were given the warning order, I think in late October, oh no, when we came back in early December, on the way, we knew we were going but the warning order came and when the warning order comes you can't go back on it. You have up until that time to say, "I don't want to go", or anything like that. So

01:00 yeah, so a bit like a parachuting exercise, when you go onto the tarmac and they give you to say, "Right, we're going parachuting now, if you pull out that's real trouble", anyway, there it goes. So that was – we knew it was on, but I had the final, sort of the last post if you like, before you got the winning post if you like, before you actually took off. So yeah.

How much did you know about the Vietnam War?

Only what

01:30 we'd heard at that stage, which was mainly reports from what was going on inside the country at the moment and affecting our troops in particular.

What reports were they?

Oh, just intelligence reports, like where actions and reactions and so forth. What the patrols had been doing, what they'd been seeing, what they'd been encountering, how they were being inserted and all those sorts of things, so yeah.

Were you receiving those reports in briefings?

Yes. In a briefing, but it wasn't sort of nitty gritty, it was

02:00 just a general patrol report.

And were they like part of your weekly routine or something?

Yes, yeah.

What was your routine at that stage?

Well, there was still – after, coming back from New Guinea was mid-December, early December, we went on leave then, two or three weeks, then came back again to Perth and that was just final preparations, getting weapons and all that sort of thing, making sure everything was working right, getting issues of equipment and

02:30 packing stuff up for it to be sent, transported over, those sorts of things.

What was that build-up like?

Oh, that was not a flurry of activity, but a controlled, typical military organisation thing, there were – where everything was there, the order – the equipment came in and it was checked and packed and repacked and unpacked and repacked and so forth.

What was the atmosphere?

It was, well, for me it was tense excitement if you like, you know, everyone was looking forward to it, there was

03:00 no question about that. I don't know of anyone that was – had any trepidation about going.

No butterflies?

Oh yeah, that, but it's – was sort of in preparedness, yeah.

What did you know about the politics of the war?

Well, we knew that the communists had been insurgent – after the separation of the country, that the communists from the north were in – becoming insurgents in the southern

03:30 Republic of Vietnam, and that they were causing trouble and civil war was under way and we were going to stop that civil war.

And what was your role in stopping the civil war going to be?

Well, it was going to be that we would stop the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army in practising their sabotage or their attacks on the South Vietnamese Army and on us and the Americans. As we – that was what we were doing. But restricted into our

04:00 province of Phuoc Tuy.

How were you going to operate to achieve that objective?

In a similar manner to what they had in Borneo, in the way that there would be five-man patrols which would be in a variety of tasks, like reconnaissance or search and destroy or those sorts of things. Cordon and search was another method that was used as well. You'd cordon the village and you'd search their – send people in and they'd search through it looking for a

04:30 variety of different things, whether they were trapdoors or weapons or explosives or whatever.

Would you say the approach was more disarming than aggressive?

No, I couldn't say that, no, it wasn't that – it was – the Vietnamese, North Vietnamese were quite keen to have the country unified back into what they wanted before, under their political ambition, under their political way, the

05:00 socialist way or communist way, whichever's the right word to use. And they wanted that to be done as quickly as possible, so they were pushing, putting North Vietnamese Army troops in, they were then creating cells and within the villages or within areas, and they would recruit people from the local area to become a Viet Cong, which was the word for the local militia, if you like.

05:30 **This may sound naive, but were you going in to operate quite aggressively?**

Oh yes. It was a war, it was a declared war, and yeah.

What else happened before you left?

We had all that preparation, and then we had what's called pre-embarkation leave, which is about seven days. And so I went and did that. Went over east, came back, said goodbye to my family and was preparing

06:00 to go over, that must have been, I can't remember. No, I don't remember. Pre-embarkation leave, no, I don't recall that I had that, but it might have been tied in with my annual leave which I'd just had. But I came back to Perth, it must have been 20th of January, something of that order and my father died on the 26th of January so I had to go back over east to help my mother to

06:30 settle up his estate and finalise building contracts to the – he actually died at work, so there had to be things that were organised for his mates to come and finish off the work, 'cause I had no expertise at being a builder, but I had been his offsider and was all on school holidays, things like that. And yeah, so he died suddenly and my brother had left home at that stage and he was living in a flat somewhere, I can't remember exactly where, or living with his

07:00 girlfriend, one of the two. No, can't have been, but he had a girlfriend and he was in and out of home, he wasn't there all the time, sort of thing. So we did the final things for Dad, got the business side of it tidied up, sold off the equipment, and all those sorts of things, saws and planes and all those electronic devices that builders use and so forth and general tidy up, "Goodbye, Mother, see you later".

07:30 So it was quite a traumatic situation for both me and for Mum, and of course for my brother too. It was very traumatic for him, he was a bit younger and I think he felt it more than I, whereas I had a purpose, I had a – a step plan, I knew that if I didn't get back then I'd miss the load and I'd be in – not be in strife, but I felt my responsibility to the other guys that were in the patrol and they felt sorry for me too, and

08:00 what a shame, everything like that, but the focus was focussed and that was it.

How did your mother feel about you going away to war in that instance?

Oh, she was 88 [65?], her relatives had been in the Second World War, and she'd lost a couple of them

through the Japanese and prisoners of war and so forth, and so on, that sort of thing.

Did your family circumstances make it any more difficult on your mother?

Yes, it did. I wasn't there all the time.

08:30 So it wasn't as though it was me missing that was going to be a problem, it was actually the pairing of the father and the mother, because he died. Then the trauma of, I'm going away and all that sort of deal. So she suffered fairly badly. Well, she never made it known to me, but she would have been in dire straits – not in dire straits, she was financially okay, but just day-to-day living, and

09:00 you turn around and look, where's your partner and – not there, "Oh, I was going to do the washing today, I'll have to wash that", those sorts of little memories would trigger off, I presume. When you wrote to each other regularly, I only got two letters off my father which said to me, "Please write to your mother, she's driving me crazy". And that was about the context of the three letters that I got from him. But I wrote to Mum, I then consciously put

09:30 pen to paper on a weekly basis, so that she knew that I was around. And we also had a voice tapes where I'd record for her, half an hour, voice letters, rather, I'd record for half an hour and twenty minutes or whatever it was and send that back, and then she'd record for on the other side of the tape and send it back. So we were passing tapes backwards and forwards so it was like speaking and hearing each other's voice, which was nice too.

10:00 In fact I've still got a couple of those, or one of those tapes here, with a – and I haven't played it for 30 years, so probably the voices are gone, but who knows. Yeah, so that was – I suppose in effect I suppressed a lot of my emotions over that – not at the time but in the aftermath, getting back to Perth and getting, on the load and going. That was sort of, overrode, those emotions. And the other emotions then were excitement and

10:30 awe, you know, they've got eyes like mad cats and looking at everything and wondering about everything and then we got on the aircraft and the hundred of us, we got on a 707, Qantas 707 and we flew direct from Perth to Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon.

Can you tell me any tales upon that flight?

Yeah, we had some food and some beer, and that was basically what it was, and we were joking, looking out the window and said,

11:00 "Oh, it's actually Collie, we're not really in Vietnam at all, they're pulling the wool over our eyes and it's just a – it's a myth and we're not going anywhere at all". And that was all, but the flight itself was relatively uneventful and just reading a book, and there wasn't such things as in-flight movies and all that sort of thing. And a few beers and that was that. We got off, landed at Tan Son Nhut, got off that and were put onto a C-1 – no, Caribou, and flown to Nui Dat, which is the headquarters where the

11:30 Australian taskforce was at that time.

What were your first impressions of Nui Dat?

Nui Dat was flat and was in March, so it was sort of wet season so it was sort of hot and wet and, you know, just that sort of wet season type thing. Very flat, we were in a rubber plantation so that was relatively undulating and round, really, if you like, it was flattish, but we didn't

12:00 see anything else and that's what we saw out the windows of the aircraft, was just a flat tree-covered plain with a few hills in the background and a few hills in the background over there.

What were the perimeters of Nui Dat?

Oh, it probably was around about four or five ks square. Yeah, wouldn't be much more than that.

12:30 **How was it marked?**

Oh, barbed wire, barbed wire entanglements to the perimeter, two or three sets of barbed wire, lines of barbed wire. With various devices in them to give us warning if they were coming, like cans full of stones or that sort of stuff.

What was your first impression when you landed on the ground, boots in the dirt?

Well, we sort of stuck out like sore thumbs, 'cause we had our dress uniforms on and all, everyone

13:00 else was still got around in a pair of shorts and boots and bare-chested or shirts on with their berets on, they'd come to collect us from the airport which, it wasn't far, it was only a couple of ks or something, a couple of ks and a bit from where we were going to be slotting in with 3 Squadron. And we saw some blokes as they were exchanging because we were going into their tents, some of their blokes had withdrawn so they were going home that day. so yeah.

13:30 That was 2nd of March, 1967.

Did you have some kind of personal exchange with those blokes?

Yes, we were in – on the flat and down behind the headquarters at Nui Dat was where 3 Squadron were billeted, they had their area and they were living in tents, of course, everything was under canvas virtually, because they'd only been there for six months as a taskforce, so they were

14:00 building the administration-type buildings and those sorts of things for the headquarters, rather than doing anything for the other people. Showers and all that sort of thing were hard standing stuff, but no, the rest of it was just sort of tents.

So they hadn't been on any patrols?

No. Well, what we did, we slotted in with those people and then we started to cross information across. Like their intelligence sergeant would come out with all the weapons and we'd have a lecture on the weapons that were there and what to look for in, you know, what the rounds looked like and

14:30 how it sounded when it fired and all that sort of thing, so you could know who was, or what it was, and where it was coming from and what weapon it was, so you could tell whether the group that were coming to you or nearby you, whether they were heavily armed or not. So if that was the case, yeah.

Talking about the enemy weapons?

Yes.

What was the actual SAS headquarters part like at Nui Dat?

Well, in that state, that point it was – 3 Squadron

15:00 was still in control, if you like. That was like a big bush camp except it was right in the open, there was virtually no shade, there was some rubber trees there, but this is obviously an area that had been cleared for some reason or other, I don't know why. But they were in the back riding behind the task force headquarters, I don't know why that was the case, but we were there for about two months and then we moved up onto what's commonly known as "the hill", and in particular

15:30 SAS Hill. Because of the fact that we had secret information that we didn't want anyone else to find out about and or, weapons or tasks or whatever, we didn't need that to be publicised because we were in an area where there was a lot of traffic going on and so forth, so we moved up onto the hill. When we got up there, there had been some people in there before so there were tents established and messes and shower

16:00 and laundry facilities and so forth. So that was all there, it was just a matter of tidying it up, if you like, and making it more to our style, which wasn't anything really different, it was still a tent with a fly over the top and sandbags and you bring the sandbags, instead of being up there, you feel a bit insecure so you want them up there. So, and then it was, then doing our perimeters, like making sure that the weapons pits facing out were serviceable and not flooded with water and

16:30 not full of snakes or whatever it was or bities or beetles or whatever. And we had to create some more of those so there was some demolition and sandbagging and putting revetments around it and putting overhead cover on top. Yeah.

What kind of artillery did you have in those weapon pits, or weapons?

We didn't have any artillery but – sorry, in the taskforce there was big ones that made big bloody noises. In the middle of the night, yeah.

Why did they make big noises in the middle of the night?

'Cause they'd fire off what were called

17:00 H and I tasks. Harassment and Interdictment tasks. And they would pick a, say, for instance there'd been intelligence in the VC [Viet Cong] had been seen in an area or they thought there was a camp in that area. They – say, two or three o'clock in the morning, fire off ten rounds into that area where they thought they'd be. To harass them so they didn't get a sleep or whatever.

What kind of range from the perimeter of the camp?

Oh, four or five ks.

17:30 **So is it correct that SAS Hill's in kind of the middle of the Nui Dat camp and –**

It was on a perimeter. But it was a very steep hill. And shale, loose rock, bit of vegetation but not a lot. Yeah, it was very unlikely that we would be attacked on that side. Plus there was a very level plain out the front, which was paddy fields originally, and they shifted the – I think it was called Route 2,

18:00 which went from Vung Tau, to Saigon. They shifted the road out another k and a bit, and then put in three or four roads above or in between there, so that gave us a bit of buffer if you like.

Did you expect an incursion at all?

It was on the cards, yeah. We'd get word that something was happening, our intelligence or the American intelligence would pick it up from somewhere, yep, and that'd be passed around and there'd

be some nights we would have what would be classified as

18:30 a brownout. Which was no lights to be shown, minimal lighting, you know, you'd use a handheld torch or something to read a book in the – no lights as such in the task force.

So would you say that security at Nui Dat was fairly volatile or vulnerable?

No, it wasn't vulnerable or volatile, it was there, it was just a matter of you were on picket, you were in a wartime situation and you had to stay awake to do your job to make your – make sure that your

19:00 mates didn't get knocked over.

How long was it before you entered the patrol work?

We began when we were still on the flat. Before we moved up onto the hill. But they were what were classified as tactical area of responsibility patrols. And they were, if you like, probes or just information gathering within a short distance from the task force. They weren't long distances from the task force.

19:30 When we got more intelligence and so forth we then were given tasks more at the distance, so we were then inserted by helicopters and so forth instead of vehicles or APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers].

How long were you doing those initial patrols for?

How long were they?

How long were they, the duration that you were doing them?

Five to seven days, it depended on the task. Usually five days.

And for what period were you doing those before you started

20:00 **the…?**

What period?

How long was that period of those?

I don't understand.

You said that you were doing those short five-day patrols initially.

The general average patrol was a five day patrol, it could be seven or it could be ten depending on the task, but that was it was probably – now I understand – it's probably in the first month, so that people were just getting the grip of the country and what it sounded like and how it worked and all that sort of thing. And then we were

20:30 given specific tasks, like intelligence would come and it'd say they need to do it to get that track and sit on that track. But we'd sit on it here and in our grid squares, and another patrol would be up a bit further on, another one would be down there. And the information that came in from the three or four patrols that were in that area watching that track would give us or the headquarters the information that they needed to say, "Well, we can forget about that, we saw no one". Or, "There was 50 went past it lunchtime and 50 went past at

21:00 evening time", or 25. Or whatever it was, and the cook came down that track with all of his pots and pans clanking off him and so on. Those sorts of things. That was the sort of thing that we looked at.

When did your operations start to expand?

Was in about, just after that first month, and we were then tasked to go on a variety of different things. Variety of different things. Although we – in my patrol, had a bit

21:30 of a rough trot with it because we had very little time on the ground. We were compromised within 20 minutes on eleven out of fifteen occasions. That I can recall. So that meant that we were inserted, got into a fire fight, were extracted and went back to base. And you couldn't be inserted then for another two days because you – that was the standard, you had two days off in preparation

22:00 before a patrol and two days off to sort of calm down after the patrol. And we'd go for twenty minutes or an hour or so or whatever it was and be back again.

What kind of briefing would you get before one of those insertions?

That was – we were given the latest intelligence that they had on the particular grid squares, we worked in an area of nine grid squares, one kilometre, a thousand metres. Square, so we had nine of those, three across, three down.

22:30 Nothing else was to come in, no other patrols, no one else was in there except us. And we had, as I said, a river or a creek line or something like that to look at or a suspected encampment or a track or those sorts of things that they wanted us to watch because there were getting word of a build-up, because we were building up we were getting word that there was a build-up by the North Vietnamese and they

were getting stronger, and

23:00 they were taking more people into the Viet Cong, the militia, if you like and we knew that because there were less blokes in the villages when you went through and those sorts of things. And sometimes they'd work at home during the day, they'd go home and work the field and then go out at night, and they'd do their Viet Cong raid or whatever it was and then they'd go back home for a couple or three days and then go back in the bush again. That was what they were doing. And so therefore, just yeah, it was a variety of

23:30 tasks.

Just during those briefings, can you describe the setting at SAS Hill when you would get the briefing?

Yeah, well, we were given a briefing by the intelligence sergeant and he would come down and say, "Right, well this is the patrol area". We knew where we were going. And the reason why we were going to that specific area, he'd just tell us what had been found there, "3 Squadron saw in this area in October of last year, such

24:00 and such. We've had a, 3 RAR [3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment] have gone through there and they've seen or heard something. And there's a report from Suon Mok [?] that there's something there as well", and so on, so all of that would come together and bring us to focus on that particular point and the task would be then to, a) sit on the track and watch, look for people, etcetera.

What was the setting on Sas Hill during those briefings, were you seated around in what

24:30 **formation?**

Oh, usually in the patrol sergeant's tent and there would be the troop sergeant, troop commander if they were available, and we would go to the patrol commander's tent and sit in with him, the five of us, and we would have the 2IC, he lived in the same tent. I think. Yes. And so we'd go down there and get the brief, that was it. That usually

25:00 took an hour or so.

What kind of approach would you make for an insertion?

It was a standard procedure, in that we had the two days off beforehand, that two days was spent collecting ammunition, servicing your rifle, making sure that everything fitted, drawing your rations, drawing your – making sure you had the food that you wanted and ditching stuff that you didn't want. All your gear, your ammunition, hand grenades, if there was a specific task, you might (UNCLEAR) or

25:30 CS [ortho-chlorobenzylmalononitrile] gas or something like that. You had to rig your DT, your coloured smoke and all that sort of thing that you used for extraction or signalling to people if you run into strife, those sorts of things.

Were you always inserted by air?

On one occasion, two occasions I recall, we were inserted by APC which I didn't like at all.

What's insertion by APC?

Too noisy. The armoured personnel carrier. A tracked vehicle which

26:00 carries ten, twelve soldiers inside it. Yeah, I didn't like them at all. They were very noisy and we were used to being put in and left off at a place where you know, admittedly there was noise when the helicopter came in but that noise was muffled and masked by activities of other helicopters in that area, so it wasn't specifically, that's where they are. 'Cause if with an APC they'd do it – they'd drop you off

26:30 slowly, drive slowly, and then the others would all make a bit of racket and so on, the back door would open and you'd get out and the vehicles would go and move away and you sort of moved into a resting up position to see if anyone was on alert, to see if anyone was following up.

Did the other blokes feel uneasy about those insertions as well?

I don't think they were very happy with them because the helicopter was the way. That was

27:00 the way that we were used to doing it.

Can you describe the helicopter approach for an insertion?

Yeah, well, you would leave from – a warning order on our last intelligence brief on the hill on a track, we would be driven to Kangaroo Pad, which was the secondary airport for the helicopters, mainly, the Luscombe Field was the one where fixed wing took off and came in to land and so forth, landed. And

27:30 that was, the Kangaroo was close to the headquarters and the intelligence fellas would come down and give the final update as of, hot off the press this minute. The RAAF helicopters and, or Navy or US Marine gunships would be there. There'd be a – what we called "albatross leader". That was a person who

28:00 oversaw the insertion. And his helicopter would sit up high, thousand feet, 2000, 1500 feet something like that, and we would be loaded into a helicopter that was just a – not a gunship or anything like that, wasn't – it was armed, but it wasn't heavily armed. There would be a gun – a door gunner on either side of the helicopter and us in the middle. Then there'd be a second one that was off that, standing, which was

28:30 if the first one fell over and we were alive, they could come and get us out. And there were usually two or three gunships. And the gunships were heavily armed with 40-millimetre cannon, mini-guns in some cases, twin-barrel M60 machine guns, those sorts of rockets as well. Those sorts of weapons, so that they could create a diversion

29:00 or knock over anyone that was coming after us or, you know, stop someone advancing on us so we could be extracted. Generally protection.

Did you blokes have any kind of personal rituals on those occasions when you were…?

No, I don't recall any personal rituals if we did. The only thing that we'd do, we'd yell out as we were going past the theatre, we had a theatre there where they showed movies, recent-made movies, American stuff,

29:30 every night. And we'd yell out, "What's the movie tonight?" And they'd say whatever it was, and "We'll be back, it's good." So, and that's what would happen. Well, not on eleven or so occasion out of the first fifteen anyway. We would then mount the helicopters, we would mount the helicopters, put all our gear on and be ready to go, and the helicopters would

30:00 warm up and off we went. In the – just normal level, and then we'd come to the area we were working, the albatross leader would sit up high, the – us and the gunships would be going, dropped down to treetop level, and we'd go for a period of time at treetop level and that was done to confuse the enemy, so they didn't know exactly – unless we flew straight over the top of them, which direction we were going.

30:30 And it was taken as a lengthy period because we thought, oh, they couldn't hear anything, and if it continued going in that direction then that was okay and sometimes they'd change and move right and change to a different degree of heading or whatever. And then we'd get to what's called the gate. And the gate's a position, imaginary, where our helicopter and the slick helicopter, called a slick, followed us through that gate,

31:00 the gunships then went to the side and set up. We were then approaching our landing zone, which was a space in the jungle, could be big, could be small, whatever, and our insertion point would have been that if it was a big one, where we were going, and the albatross leader would then direct traffic. He'd say, "Right, heading left or heading right". Or whatever it was, or, "Change to degree such and such". And we'd move – the pilots would move to that – our patrol commander was in communication

31:30 with the pilot at that time, so we knew everything that was – he knew everything that was going on, and we'd be right, or we're getting closer and he'd go, "Five." You know, we'd be 500 metres from the shot. So we're still at treetop level, belting along at probably, I don't know, 100 knots or something like that. And LZ [Landing Zone] would be approached, we'd get the tap on the shoulder, two of us would put our legs over the side of the, on the skids and sit on the floor of the helicopter, on either side,

32:00 then another two would get down, ready behind them, and then the patrol commander would be still hooked up to the middle of the – to the middle of the communications within the helicopter. We then went and we'd land, come over the top and the helicopter pilot would do a 180-degree turn and just let the tail go. And the whole helicopter would just do like we were going that way, we'd end up coming, facing this way to wash the speed off, he'd lay it down, the two gunships would come around

32:30 the side and do a circle. The slick would fly over the top of us and then the – then our chopper would take off and join in behind and then they'd join up and go again. And that was if it went very well. But it's usually what happened. That was the planned way, in that it created – not a diversion, but there was a diversion in – would have been the noise, so that the noise was difficult for them to pick up where we were. Of course, it was noisy when we got off, so we belted for the scrub, the edge of the bush, wherever it was,

33:00 and sat down and waited till the noise went. Till we could hear. So those helicopters then left the area. After flying on for another two or three ks or whatever it was, they then left the area and went back to the gate and hovered around there or did something else, and waiting until we gave them the all clear that we were on the ground and, you know, no problem. If we were in strife and that happened on, as I said, a number of occasions, where we got into a firefight

33:30 with somebody that was there or they were firing at us, whatever. We got into a contact situation, we would then use our emergency beacon, which had voice coms with the albatross leader, and he'd bring them back in again and they'd come back in and get us. And that was then a withdrawing situation. And, you know, you just waited until the helicopter's around, throw your smoke, red smoke – "I see red smoke." "What smoke did you throw?" "Red." So on.

34:00 Then, "Where's the enemy?" All in this time you're telling them where the enemy is in relation to us,

and we're at such and such a point, and they'd say, "Throw smoke". And then they're, "Right, enemy a hundred metres, fifty metres to the north or west or south". Or whatever it was. And then the gunships would come in and start to work on that particular area. We would then begin to withdraw. We would withdraw back to the edge of the landing zone, our helicopter would come in and we'd sprint for the helicopter, get

34:30 back on again, and "Whoosh." Off we go. Whilst this is – the gunships are doing circuits around and just blasting into that area or to come back and go. If it was hard, then, it was a real hard fight, if it was a big one, they'd call in the Phantoms, or whatever it was, the jet fighter aircraft, to come down and just blast the shit out of them.

Can you tell me about those experiences in more detail, please?

35:00 The first one I was in, as I said, you heard me say nothing else but, "I'm green." My first patrol where we actually got into a gunfight was quite an experience for me. We got off the helicopters and got into the J [?], they'd gone, and everything was fine and we were just about to move off from where we were, just sitting at, watching, listening, and two or three came out of the jungle and

35:30 out of the undergrowth and everything just opened up. All the others saw them and I'm looking around, looking, "What's going on?" Then I see them. And I think to myself, "Alright. What am I going to do now? And I might as well join in." So I opened up as well. And I knew that if I didn't fire my weapon I'd be in strife, because the others would see that I wasn't cleaning it, they'd know that I hadn't fired it and they'd know that, you know. Yeah, anyway, that was alright, but

36:00 it's just, "I better fire it, because they'll know that I hadn't fired it". But yes, that was quite exciting, and you go back to what we call IAs. Instant Actions, really, that just happens. And you get – I suppose you're running on adrenaline, you get that metallic taste across the back of your tongue. You know, you put your tongue on a nine volt battery, you get that little tingle at the back of your tongue. That's was adrenaline. That's really what adrenaline

36:30 tastes like, you can physically taste it. And you just run on that, you run on that, and 20 minutes, you put magazine changing, looking for your tracer, the last third. What I used to do was I'd load one, two or three, mine was always three, shots from the bottom would be a tracer, so you'd get a little red projectile would come out with a red fire coming out the back end of it, red fire coming out the back of a projectile. So

37:00 that I knew that I was down to my last two and I'd go, "One, two, three." And then take that off and put a new magazine on. So I was able to be ready and not suddenly go, "Bfft." And there's nothing there, I can't do something. And it was part and parcel of what we did. So that was virtually what happened, and I went through a couple of magazines and we went and got on the helicopters and went back. We withdrew – none of us were injured. And we're sort of laughing, you know, I was laughing

37:30 because I thought, "This is bloody", 'cause I didn't know whether to shit myself or shit or go blind, was, what was the words, I didn't know whether to shit myself or go blind.

What about the rest of the blokes?

Oh, they were pretty much on edge as well. They weren't. I wasn't the only one that was bouncing off the walls, I can tell you that right now, 'cause it was – it was different because they'd been in Malaya, and they'd been in Borneo, and in Borneo I think there was only about

38:00 four or five contacts over the twelve months. Whereas in Vietnam it was sort of on a daily basis, if a patrol was out they could get sprung and be in a fire fight. We hadn't – that was the first one that I can recall where we – my recollections of our first contact. And I think that our blokes, the other blokes in the patrol weren't far ahead of me in their excitement either. They were – we did everything that we were supposed to do. We were withdrew, we

38:30 were looked after ourselves, we backed up and formed our protective areas. Did all the things that we'd trained to do, which was real good, and I think that was relief, was we got on the choppers and went back to Nui Dat and we had our own helicopter pad for landing, which we called Nadzab. If we were inserted from Kangaroo we were always disemplaned at Nadzab. So there couldn't be anyone seeing what our clothes were, what we

39:00 were wearing and what had happened and so forth. So yeah, it was just an added security step, that was all.

What happened when you got back to Nui Dat from a hot extraction?

Then, depending on how good it was, you'd go straight into the CO's [Commanding Officer's] tent or the inter-officer's tent and you'd say, "Right, we sprung ten, we killed four. Two wounded, didn't have time to look for a blood trail or follow up." "How many rounds have you go left?" Etcetera, etcetera. And

39:30 so we'd individually told them what we each saw. So I just said, "I saw two coming from the east", or whatever it was, so, and then the others would do the same thing, and then the patrol commander would give an overall – then that would go in as a patrol report. That was done after we had a shower, but virtually straight away. Into your tent, drop your gear, have a shower, go straight down, whatever. Get a drink

40:00 of water or cup of coffee or whatever it was and go down and then do the debrief while it was still hot in your head. And that was basically what it was. Then it was hand all the gear back in, unload your magazines to ease the springs in the magazines, always had two or three loaded just in case, then hand in the excess ammunition that you had, hand in your hand grenades and so on, so forth. Hand back rations if that was the case, that you had extra that you hadn't broken apart. Then go down the pub.

40:30 **Was all of the ammunition and rations all listed and accounted for as you were exchanging it?**

Not really. Not really. No, it wasn't. It wasn't – there were just, say, something specific, we had a device called an ERCD10, which was Emergency Radio Communications Device, which you put the blip and it, that would then send out a blip to any

41:00 aircraft in the vicinity and that would give them, that would show up on their screen as an emergency warning. Then they'd come on that frequency and we could talk. So you had to hand that back in, because that was a very important part of the business. There might be some other things that you used that were, you know, like warning, track, listening devices to count people on tracks or claymore mines or stuff like that, that you didn't use so that there was

41:30 no point in keeping them there. So you handed it all back in with the dets [detinations] and the tit pushes [again slang for detinations] and yeah.

Was there munition people that would be collecting that stuff?

That was done in – yeah, yeah. That was done in a controlled style, yeah.

So what would happen when you got to the pub?

Well, usually it was a ten cent Foster's lager followed by another ten cent Foster's lager, very quickly. They didn't have pop tops then. We had either a can opener, which was in a…

Tape 6

00:32 **…about how after you would come back from whatever patrol, and you were talking about the first patrol that you had, you, just getting to a debriefing session, would you have to go back and try the same thing again, the next day or would you still have that two days?**

No, we still had the two days off, which got up the troop sergeant's nose because there were other tasks to do. So we had had two days off, getting prepared, then we had two days off getting de-prepared, if you like. Just rest

01:00 and so forth. But there were other tasks, like digging the – putting the overhead cover on gun positions and so forth, and then there were night watches, you'd go up and sit up on top of the hill to a gun emplacement and keep watch for the night. So just do that area of responsibility that we had for visual. So that was done as well, and so

01:30 that came around, so – but we weren't involved in that, because we had to have the two days off.

Would it screw up the schedule of…?

Oh, he had his rock painting to do and we had our resting to do.

Rock painting?

Well, I classify it as that. It was menial tasks round – like knocking over, trimming back undergrowth that had grown in and just tidying up and all that sort of thing. Or mess duties, going down and washing the dixies and cooking the – helping the cooks and so

02:00 forth.

So you'd still get jobs like that to do?

After the two days, yeah. They used to line up some goodies for us.

Like what?

Cleaning the toilets or whatever, those sort of things, yeah.

How many of you SAS blokes on SAS hill?

A squadron would have been a hundred. And there might have been some plus, it might have been another four or five on top, but we carried everybody that we needed within that

02:30 hundred, there was the three Sabre troops and then there was a – like a headquarters troop, which had the officer commanding, the major that was in charge, then his 2IC and then adjutants and so forth, people that were in the hierarchy, the clerks and that sort of thing that ordered the food and the

ammunition, and the quartermaster people that looked after stores like

03:00 tents and clothing and shoes and hats and boots and all that sort of stuff. Rakes and shovels and fire equipment, those sort of things. And the cooks and so forth, there were those sort of – that was classified as a base squadron. Headquarters, base squadron. They were the pay clerks, or those sort of people that did those sort of clerical duties. Although they were qualified equally as what we were, for some reason

03:30 or other they were – had injured themselves or something like that, but they could go into that position or that was their expertise. They were a pay clerk and that was their job, and so they were employed as that so they didn't generally go onto patrol work, no.

Would you actually mix with other platoons, or would you mostly keep to yourselves?

We'd sit with troops, our – A Troop, B Troop, C Troop, that was what it was all, and

04:00 yeah, because that we had known each other and been working with each other, for that, at least six months prior to us going to Vietnam, and then – and in New Guinea as well. And you knew the blokes in the other troop, maybe not as well as you did your own – blokes in your own troop but you had your mates, and didn't matter whether they were C Troop, A Troop or whatever it was, but yeah. You mixed. And generally it was sort of 50-odd – 50 odd-soldiers and

04:30 50-odd other ranks, which were corporals and above and so forth. Sorry, sergeants and above and that sort of thing. No, be probably more than that, 60 or 70, with 20 officers and sergeants, yeah. Which were – they had their separate mess. They had the officer's, sergeant's mess and they ate in that area, we ate in an other rank's mess which we ate in.

Was the food alright?

Yeah, it was, it was

05:00 eggs from 1942 that had been chloroformed. Bulk egg, like in a kerosene tin, and they got the egg pulp, the yolk and the white, that I presume after an egg, I would guess that when they're making eggs and putting them in little cartons and they crack one, so what do we do with that? Oh, we'll put that into a tin and we can sell that to the army. Was

05:30 still, but it was World War II stuff that was getting rid of. And the other thing we had was, what we called, pre-chewed steak, which was beef, but it was about that thick and square, about that square. And it was steak, beef and they cooked it like a steak, flipped it like that, or you could cut it up and make it into a stew or whatever you wanted. Was a multi-purpose piece of meat, really, beef, and we called that pre-chewed steak, because it was actually

06:00 small pieces that were gathered together and frozen and probably held with a binder or something like that, bit like a rissole or a meatball or something like that, but it wasn't finely cut like that. Bread was American bread, and it was sweet. And toast with vegemite was either just very light and there wasn't anything in it, but we had eggs and bacon, sausage, we had meat meals all the time. So it was supplemented

06:30 with those things, yeah.

I like that pre-chewed steak. Kind of demonstrates the Australian sense of humour under fire. Going back to some of the patrols that you were on. Your first patrol was pretty heavy duty, so…

Well, that was in amongst the first ones, that was the first one that we actually had a contact on, yeah. There were others that were just insertions and wander round in the scrub and do

07:00 your task or do whatever it was that you were tasked to, look at the river, look at the road, whatever it was.

When you mentioned that you've got this nine grid – nine squares of this grid that you're doing, how do you know that you're on the edge of the grid? What's the navigation with it?

You navigate it, you navigated. Everyone carried a compass and a map of the area. We had an air photo of what they called, air photo maps. They were covered in contact, clear plastic. And the grid,

07:30 the map was always folded, you knew exactly what your grid was. But it was folded in a way that it wouldn't show it if, say, if it dropped out of your pack. They wouldn't know that you've got to walk in this area, and there'd be no markings on it as such. That would be carried in your head. And no writing on the maps at all, nothing like that. We knew our insertion point, and one of the jobs that I had was a little, what I called the clicker,

08:00 and it was a device that was a counter, you pressed the button and it made a click. So every pace I made, I pushed my thumb down. And that would then tally up and come up and you say, "Right, well, that's 300 or 100 or where are we now? How much have we travelled from this morning to this point?" And then we'd readjust ourselves on the map. And we'd try and tie it in with the local terrain. Like if there was a bit of a hill or a creek line or something like that you'd say, "Well, we've come

08:30 nor’- nor’-east on that bearing and we’ve travelled 100 metres, then we should be within 20 metres or 50 metres of that feature”. So we could prove where we were by map reading. But in some cases that was pretty difficult, for the simple reason it was exceptionally flat, also you could find clearings, so that you’d move from one place to another, and you know that there’s a clearing over there or there’d be a track of some sort.

09:00 There were a variety of different ways in which you could get yourself, know where you exactly were, well, within ten metres of where you were anyway. No GPS [Global Positioning System] or anything like that, but that was what we worked on. Prismatic compass. And a map, a photo and me clicking.

That’s got to be pretty relentless, having to click every step that you make.

Didn’t think about it. Every time I put my left foot down, that went,

09:30 the thumb went. And that was it, just did that. Probably why I’ve got arthritis in this thumb.

You mentioned that before you go out on a patrol that there was intelligence that would – up to date intelligence of what was going on in that area before you actually lifted off and up in the chopper, was that intelligence coming from the SAS and previous patrols?

Yeah, it was coming from everywhere. You’d get it from task force headquarters,

10:00 intelligence, there would be probably infiltrators within, get it from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], get it from the American intelligence group, they had their own people inside the country. People in villages that were informers, etcetera, etcetera.

How much contact would you have with the Americans and their intelligence?

Directly, not, I didn’t have anything like that,

10:30 there were Americans that came to visit with us, they came from American special forces, and they came and they would, we would say, do an exchange. We’d have, one of our blokes would go up to their base and do a patrol with them. So the SEAL teams that were in the delta, we had people go down them and do a change and we’d have a SEAL team bloke go up and do our work. Or US Special Forces, we’d have blokes go out with them and they’d come down. Because at that

11:00 stage they were, Americans in my opinion were still running on Second World War tactics. Throw a big noise, throw a big lump of blokes and then run the tanks in and we’ll clean up afterwards sort of thing. Whereas we were operating in a different way. We never walked on tracks, we never, ever used a track. If we came to a track we would sit down for something like 20 minutes before and after crossing it to hear if anyone had seen us or anyone was

11:30 following up. Just to move away and move away far enough so that they couldn’t see us. But we never used the track as a movement, because they could come up from behind you, or come round the corner, and there’s 50 blokes here on the track and you’re suddenly, or you know there’s a big pile of people going, “Bang, bang, bang!” So we would approach a track with caution. We’d sit and watch it, listen out. One would go up and then look up and down the track, or we would approach it as

12:00 five in line abreast and then we would all cross at one time. If we thought it was going to be a – if we were in a hot area, that could be the way. Other times we’d cross individually. So you’d have – you didn’t want to be exposed by having four on one side and one on the other side, just in case you were followed up, and then you were in strife. So it was usually twos and ones or one altogether, or so on, or one at a time so you had

12:30 one, two would go over and then, so on. So you were kept always together with another bundle of people. So you had enough support, if you got over that side and suddenly someone popped up, then you’ve got someone to back you up as well.

Do you think that with what you said that the Americans were using World War II tactics, do you think that actually caused them a lot of casualties?

I didn’t ever work with them, so I don’t know that – this is hearsay evidence that I had, I mean, they were using tracks as far as we

13:00 were – the ordinary soldier was using the tracks. The special forces and SEAL team blokes were more professional than that, however, I don’t know that they weren’t doing that. They came to learn from us, an instance that sticks in my mind, was we had to teach these blokes how to map read. Because within their patrols they had – the officer had the compass and the map and the others just went where he said, sort of thing. Whereas we were more

13:30 reliant, if we were split up, we knew exactly where we were, we knew that – had the navigation skills and the map to work our way back to – and we always had, where we’d stopped. So if we’d stopped overnight, we would put our gear together and then move off and have our meal. That would be the place that you would go back to if something happened between then and lunchtime. If something happened after lunchtime, you went back to where you had lunch. You broke your contact if you got separated,

14:00 you went back there. If you were by two or by one or by three or whatever, and that was what, you worked your way back to that point. And you stood and watched that place to see if there was anyone there, and that's where you met and then you worked out what you were going to do next, from that point. Whether you go and call for a extraction or whatever. Usually would be extraction, because there'd been a what we classified as a contact, then we were compromised. Our whole aim was

14:30 to work through that area without being seen or known about. And that was one of the reasons why we didn't wash, one of the reasons why we didn't shave, for the two days before we went out. Because the Vietnamese, Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army knew that Australian soldiers shaved every day. So if they got a glimpse of Charles Stewart, with his beard and his camp and his sweat rag and all that sort of thing, dirty and smelly, he'd think, "Oh Christ, he's been here for two days, he's been in my backyard for two or three days, or

15:00 maybe even a week, and I didn't know about it." So they're on their toes, even more so.

That's very interesting piece of psychology.

Oh, there's a psychological side on a lot of it.

What other sorts of psychology would you use?

That was the one that was most up to me, or closest to me, but there were leaflet drops and messages on them saying, "If you give up we'll guarantee you – carry this with you and it will

15:30 guarantee you freedom", etcetera. Or that sort of thing.

How often would you come across villages while you were on this patrol?

Very little. Very rarely. We would avoid the villages like a plague, for the simple reason that we couldn't control it. They knew then where we were, we didn't know who was in the village and they could be off on their treadley down the road and see the local VC headquarters and say, "Oh there's a bundle of blokes just walked into Hat Dich ". Whatever it was.

16:00 Or Dat Do, or whatever. So yeah, you had to avoid those. We avoided absolute contact with any…The other thing was important was that there were curfews that no one moved after dark away from villages. So if we sprung someone in the night time moving, then – and there were also no-go areas, there were people, like woodcutters, who would cut timber for the fires and whatever, woodcarving or whatever, and they had designated areas

16:30 and if they were outside those areas they were fair game. And so we had that sort of an understanding with the people and that was given, the information was given to them. And we knew that the woodcutters would be in that area, so we'd skirt around it or our area wouldn't put any – it might come up against them, they may have got game and come across the border, but they may not done it twice.

With your grid system, with your patrolling, does the grid change every patrol that you do?

Yes. Or you

17:00 might go, yes, but you might be in the same area, same part of the province, but you might be in on the other side of it. Or if it's, say, like a lead-up to a big battle, like they know that there's someone there, next week they're going to have a battalion go into that area and they're going to clear it out, because they know that there are people there or they've heard, they would put us in, listening all the way around that, and we would be listening out for movement

17:30 and so forth. And then we'd be withdrawn and the troops would come in, either while we were there and being extracted, or the day after, or the morning after, we might be extracted at night, maybe inserted in the morning. So yeah. It does vary, because different areas needed to be taken and you responded to the intelligence that you got. If you heard someone was in the bush and they heard gunshots at a certain degree, angle from where they were, compass bearing from where they were,

18:00 that would be heard by another patrol, they'd give their cross – then you'd be able to pinpoint approximately where that sound was. And what the Viet Cong would do, would fire shots to mark midday, and everyone would stop. Or they'd go back and have their lunch or whatever it was, they would fire shots at certain times in the day and you knew that that was the case then if you knew that – you heard that and then you'd cast your bearing, you were looking for

18:30 a camp, couldn't find it. You cast your bearing, and by your hearing, and three or four of you could sort of work out where the camp was, and by the noise or the strength of the noise you could tell approximately how far away it was. And then you'd hear chattering if you were real close and then you'd know there's more than one, 'cause they don't talk to themselves. And so on. So you just deduced a lot of things from hearing and odour and sight. You could smell the fires

19:00 or something like that, yeah.

If you found one of those sorts of camps, would you ambush them?

Not if it wasn't on our task. No. One, because what we might do is sneak up and watch them for a day, withdraw at night time and sneak up and watch it again for the next day. And then in our radio

schedules we'd report back, say, "Camp at grid reference such and such". They then might come back and say to us, "Activity?" Whatever we'd tell them what we'd seen.

19:30 Washing line and bloody all that sort of stuff, or we couldn't find it, or we could smell it, we could hear them. That could be an underground hospital or they could have dug an underground – been an underground headquarters or something like that or a bunker system or something of that nature.

Was there some of that going on, that underground?

Oh yeah, yeah, that's right, we had a couple of places where that happened. I was never involved in it, thank God, 'cause I never liked going down holes, and not

20:00 really good with close areas, anything like that's alright. A couple of patrols that I – blokes that I know of actually had to assault bunker systems, yeah, where they'd sat and watched them for a couple of days or so, sometimes what had happened would be you would be told, withdraw, and you go back to a point on your map further – far enough away, and they'd send in an H and E task on it, night time or something

20:30 like that.

What's an H and E?

Harassment and – H and I task.

So the –

They'd put an artillery shell into it or a couple of artillery shells into it or something that – or they'd call in a aircraft and just fly over and just give it a brass up.

What would be going on when you're watching one of these camps?

The people inside? They'd be doing their washing or having a

21:00 lecture, the political lectures and all that sort of thing would be going on. Cooking, cleaning weapons, getting ready for that night's work, whatever they had to do, yeah.

It doesn't seem to be very stealth-like on their part.

They were in their own backyard, they felt comfortable, like you in your own backyard. You go down, sit under the clothesline and put the clothes out in your frilly nightie and your pink slippers, you feel comfortable there. But you – if you've got Mr Stewart over the fence, who's got a hole

21:30 in the fence, you don't know that. You dress differently the next day if you see, "Oh, there's a hole in the fence there, I wonder if Mr Stewart's perving through there at my little pink slippers". Disconcerting. Throws them off.

Going back to some of the patrols, what were some of the hot situations that you got yourself into as part of being on a patrol?

The first one we had was an instance where we were all prepared to go, we'd gone through the gate

22:00 and I was looking out the side of the helicopter, we were at treetop level. Scooting along, good – we weren't that far away from the landing zone and I look forward and there's this grey trunk of a tree sticking up above the tree line, and we went, "Bang!" And hit it. Crashed into it. The two blokes on the side had their legs out over the side, the forward scout had his leg over the side, the tree branch

22:30 came around, the side of the – a piece of Perspex came up from underneath where it all broke and the windscreen didn't break, but the underside of it broke. And it hid, mid, right mid point. Which was fortunate, and I'll explain why later. The branches broke off and came round the right-hand side of the helicopter, and Johnny Delgado was sitting with his feet on the skids ready to go out, 'cause we were ready to go out. And the branches came round and whacked him and broke his leg.

23:00 He was disappearing out the door, so the patrol commander and I were going like that and dragged him back in again and then I – we laid him out in the middle of the – 'cause he was singing a bit, couldn't hear though cause there was helicopters. Gave him a whack with morphine and the chopper just – pilot just said, "What was that?" Sort of thing, I boarded it and we went home, that was it. Brought him back to Nui Dat and put him on a – he was confined to Vung Tau, to the hospital there, and treated in hospital, and

23:30 the next weekend we went down – the day after we took off, went down there and visited him. Yeah, that was one situation. The next one –

So you said, when the Perspex?

Oh right, yeah. We were lucky because the tree was hit midpoint by the helicopter, if it had gone to the right or the left it would have hooked onto one of the skids and spun us around and we would have gone base over apex. For sure. We would have been killed if that had gone that way, and it was a dead tree

24:00 so it was probably hollow, so it snapped apart and everything like that, but the rotors didn't hit it, we were high enough, well, either that or the pilot said, "Oh, bugger!", and gone like that and lifted it up. But that's what I recall, was just these pieces of Perspex, piece about that big came up through the bottom as I was looking back and I got hit straight in the chest with this bit of Perspex. That was from the bottom in the helicopters, they had the main windscreens, the side windscreens, and the pilot had, and the co-pilot had

24:30 a plexiglass plate with which they could look between their feet while they were doing their controls and all that sort of, they could see down when they were landing. And that was that. The side door gunners didn't see it because it was directly in front. Grey sky, wet, you know, going to rain. Grey sky, dead tree branch, dead, I try and recall now, I've got the picture of it in my mind, how big it was. Looked bloody big to me. But there

25:00 you go.

Well, when it's coming at you it's looking pretty big.

Yeah, well, it knocked Johnny, nearly knocked him out of the chopper with it, but that was okay that was one instance of it. The – what was the second one? We had walked into an ambush. We didn't get ambushed, but we had walked into an ambush. We sprung them before, we saw them before they saw us. So we withdrew, they then woke up to the fact that we'd seen them, and they, we

25:30 weren't anywhere, they – we might have walked into a camp. They might have just had their laying up or not done anything that day, had a lazy day, I don't know. You know, had a Ho Chi Minh's birthday rest day or something like that. They were all quiet. And we thought it was an ambush. We broke the contact in the normal manner, two, two, two, two, so on and broke that, but they followed us up. This must have been about two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was dry season as well. And we

26:00 kept breaking the contact but they kept following us up. So we ended up, we thought we were going to be in strife because we would have been followed up overnight, getting into five o'clock, six o'clock, is around about dusk there. And helicopters are not allowed to fly after dark. So we were in sixes and sevens as to what to do. Then they made the decision that they would ring up and get us out, so they made the decision to come and extract us, the people were still following us up. Aggressive

26:30 firing as well. And we were still evading, we found a place where we thought we could get extracted but we weren't too keen on that because we didn't know how many were there and whether they were coming around and trying to encircle us and trap us in. So what happened in the end was that the helicopters came to get us, they were then – we were guiding them, the patrol commander was guiding them by his little ERCD10 device, saying that the main contact is that far away and at that distance

27:00 and we had our little…We had pencil flares and we just put a little, looked like a normal biro but it was a spring and you had the little flare and you pushed the spring down and let it go. And that spring popped up and it fired a little flare, little red flare or little green flare straight up, and it'd just go "bsst". Straight up in front of the choppers, he'd say, "Oh, okay, you're there".

27:30 It was getting darker and darker, and dusk, and we were right on the edge of it. Didn't want to go into a clearing, 'cause that would give them an open chance of seeing us while we were going, so we decided that we would stay where we are and have a winch out – be winched out of the, with the helicopter hovering, and that happened, so the helicopters came and started to winch as I said, we were five so it was two, one and five. Two, one and two. Two went up, myself, patrol commander and the

28:00 forward scout were on the deck, forward scout went up and the patrol commander and I were back to back in horse collar harnesses. You put your arms through like that and you're there, you're okay, you're not going to fall anywhere, oh, sorry, that's not true, you go back like that so it's behind your back if you get – you're not going to throw your arms up so you be rescued as well. So we're back to back and there's gunships going around, the two door gunners are firing, our

28:30 blokes that are in the helicopter, they're firing down as well. We're firing. They're firing. Was quite a bit of noise in the kafuffle and dust going on, and I omitted to say that the winch could not quite get to the ground, so the helicopter pilot had to lower the chopper into the tops of the trees and cut the tops of the trees off with the blades of the helicopter, so there was all sorts of shit. There was trees and branches and probably birds' nests and all sorts of other rubbish, plus the

29:00 dust and everything that's going on. And that's going on all whilst this is going on. We got it down low enough for us to get that and we then were winched up. I was – we were back to back. I'm a left hander, he's a right hander. And every time I fired, we'd go round this way. And every time he fired, we'd go round that way and we were giggling. We were laughing because we were – it was funny at the time. You know, I'd fire and we'd spin around that way, he'd fire and we'd spin around that way, so,

29:30 but there were tracers coming up and tracers going down and rockets going off and all that sort of… yeah. We got in the helicopter and not a scratch on anyone, they flew the helicopter away probably about four or five ks, put it down and then inspected it and said it couldn't fly any more cause there was too many bullet holes in it. The tail rotor is still down at SAS. We rescued that tail rotor off that particular aircraft.

As a souvenir?

Yeah.

30:00 So we – yeah, we had that, but it's got dents and bullet holes in it and that was what their aim was, to shoot at the tail rotor because they knew that if they got that, or at least got some of the wiring connected to it, that would knock the chopper out, it'd fall down. So that was good. So that's probably what saved us, they were probably instructed to shoot at the tail rotor. "Don't worry about the blokes, we'll get them if it falls out of the sky." Anyway, so that was alright, they condemned the chopper, we transferred to another one, the slick, the back-up, and

30:30 they then brought other people out and put a guard around the helicopter and left it there, and collected it the next day. But that was after probably a couple of day patrol. That was the second instance. The third instance was in the dry season, very late on, and we had had a full five-day patrol.

Is that one of the longest ones that you'd do, five-day patrol?

Oh no, five or seven, something like that. The first – as I said before, the first fifteen was interspersed with eleven

31:00 contacts and we only did the insert, come out, sort of thing. The next instance where we had a helicopter crash was where we had finished a five day patrol, and right on the last minute, and it was dry season, we'd been resupplied with water 'cause there were none around, no ground water, streams or anything like that. And that was mid-point of the patrol.

Do they resupply you with helicopter drop?

Yeah, they'd fly over the,

31:30 what they used to do is they'd tie all the plastic water bottles together, tape them all up. Fill them all up except for the ones on the outside, two on the outside, they'd fill them enough in the middle of the square for us to get us through the next couple of, three days. And they'd hoick it out of the helicopter. And it'd hit the ground, of course, and all the ones that were empty on the outside would act as buffers for the ones that – it still didn't matter, half of the bottles bloody broke or their tops came off or whatever it was, but anyway, that was alright.

32:00 This instance was, as I said, was right at the end, we'd completed the task and we were being exfiltrated, we got on the choppers, and I went, big drink. The last two inches of my water bottle. And I'll never do it again. We went probably a k and a half, two ks along, and this "Bang!" behind our heads. We sat in the helicopter with our backs to the engine area, and the pilot and co-pilot

32:30 were in front of us. We could see through to – I always got in the middle 'cause I wanted to see where I was going. Then the two gunnies were on either side, the RAAF gun, they had an M60 machine gun each and they were like load master, did all that, so they counted heads on, heads off, all that sort of thing, got all your gear. So they'd be prepared to fire if someone was taking – or shooting at them. So that was good. So we got our backs to the wall, which is the engine compartment. Engine sits above you.

33:00 "Bang!" Looking up, what was that? Then all of pilot's dashboard is flashing, orange lights, flashing orange lights. Flashing orange lights. The – we didn't know what it was, we just went into an auto gyro and just landed. We must have fallen probably a hundred metres, we might have been at 300 feet. And bang and landed in the bush, crashed

33:30 through the canopy onto the ground. I've got a wee scar here on the bottom of my chin, which is from the foreside of my rifle, because I had it between my knees like that and I thought, "Oh bugger, I'm going to – I'm not going to go falling around over here, and I'll leave something outside this thing just in case it turns over". Bang, we hit the ground. We got out of it. This was, midday. Late – mid to late morning. Yeah, morning, ten o'clock, something like that.

34:00 And bloody thing crashed. So that was – there we were in the middle of nowhere, no – 'cause we'd all been dry, we'd had a drink and – so the immediate reaction was to get the pilots out with their maps, because they were worth a hell of a lot of money. At least they can fly another helicopter, and they had all their maps and their radio equipment that they could pick up, so they got them out, brought the choppers in and winched them out. The two gun – the two gunnies stayed with us,

34:30 yeah, dismounted their weapons, and stayed with us, then they were winched out as well and they said, "You blokes alright?" And they took off. And, you know, "We'll come back and get you". So that's alright. So we're sitting on our bums in the middle of nowhere, all this kafuffle, and crash, there's a bloody aircraft sitting beside us. Didn't catch fire, thank God – we're just sitting there. I didn't have a drink of water. I was a bit grumpy about that. Anyway, they brought in what they call

35:00 airport defence. A ready defence group, they were a patrol, a team of, say, 30 which they brought in a Chinook and they let them off a way away, and they walked into us, if my recollection is right. And they then formed a perimeter round us, which gave us a bit of a break because we were right in this noisy part. They then brought in – I thought, "Oh well, that's alright, we'll get on the helicopter with the gunnies". Nup, they took them away. So we're still there with all these young blokes and they

35:30 were all wide eyed and, you know, probably as bad as I was the first time as well.

Are they SAS?

No. No, they're just infantry blokes. Airfield defence, which is made up from battalions and so forth. So we were still there, they then brought in a Chinook and hooked up this helicopter with the big straps underneath and winched it and flew away. And then they came and got us. And we moved off and we were extracted from there.

36:00 But the helicopter had the underneath struts above – with a ski-like tubular structure, they were actually flat. The thing had pushed itself out, so three helicopter crashes or instances where we pranged helicopters and not a scratch, except for a little scratch there and John's broken leg.

Well, that must be terrifying, actually falling out of the air.

You're auto-gyrating. The craft's – because there's no power,

36:30 it's – everything's stopped and the rotors are still going, and with the impetus that you had already the flight – the flight speed that you had already, you continued to go in that way and the tail was sort of kept in that place. But when you started to get, slow down, it started to rotate. So my recollection is that it went virtually straight down, and I can't recall whether it rotated, auto-rotated or not.

37:00 **Did you find out why it did that?**

Metal fatigue on one of the fan blades in the engine, one of the blades had come off and went through the side of it. We thought we'd been shot down. We thought we'd been shot down, copped a rocket or something like that. Yeah. That was – one of the blades came off the fan in the engine. Made a big noise.

How long in total did it take you from the point of when you

37:30 **crash landed to when you were actually out of there?**

Probably four hours. More, probably five hours. I was hanging out for a drink then.

It's amazing the organisation is such that it just happens.

Oh yeah, it's on that emergency – and we were, if you like, highly protected. Or, sorry, one needed to be highly protected, so those things

38:00 were already ready. Those people were ready, and they'd go onto the chopper and just go, bang, like that. I mean, it probably could have been half an hour before they – half an hour to an hour before they got there. But it didn't seem that long. Yeah, so that was – they must have been put down away from us because they came up through us. And we had radio contact with them. So we knew that they were coming. Yeah, so…

The thing that strikes me is that

38:30 **incredible immediate response from 30 other soldiers coming along to protect you guys.**

Well, that was really what it was all about.

I mean it just goes to show how highly valued you were, with the skills that you have.

I presume because it was a helicopter that went down too that they would want to get certain parts of it, and not have that helicopter set on fire. There was still ammunition on board. All of those sorts of things. There were still probably sensitive pieces of equipment that could have been used by the VC against us, they could take the,

39:00 use the rockets if you like, take them apart, get the propellant and get the explosive and create a bomb out of it, so that was part and parcel, 'cause I don't believe that it was just us that they were actually looking for, but they needed us to stay there and to protect it until they could get someone else in and they could get it away.

Were they always on the lookout for that sort of salvaging of various pieces of equipment that were left behind?

Oh yeah. One patrol that I went on was a big one, it was only just a day job, a helicopter had crashed

39:30 and they couldn't recover it, they considered it not recoverable, we went out and set fire to it and burned it so that it wouldn't be – couldn't be – nothing could be used.

Why was it non-recoverable?

It was in a position that was – nothing on the chopper was straight. Everything was wrinkled, yeah.

That's a bad crash. How do you set fire to a helicopter?

From a long way away with a big match. No. Fire

40:00 an incendiary into a fuel tank.

And it just goes up? Did want to ask you, when your mate who was sitting on the skids with

your first helicopter crash, you said that you went to go and visit him in hospital, if he was in hospital, do you have to bring in another bloke to be in your patrol?

Yeah, yeah. And that could be a variety of – say, for instance we went

40:30 on our R and R, recreation [Rest and Recreation] – only one of us would go, we wouldn't go all as a group. So there would be, someone would come in from one of the signallers or something like that, because we had an attachment of corps of signals people from – what we had was 152 Signal Squadron and they were attached to us. Detached from the squadron headquarters here, 152 here, to us as 1 Squadron, and they were our signals and I think there was six – there was a sergeant and

41:00 five others, so that would be what they were. So those blokes were combat trained troops as well. So they would go out and do the work, replace the signalman, and the forward scout or someone, they'd just change the positions within the thing We used to change positions within the patrol itself just for a bit of variety. And make sure that everyone was cross trained and that was part of what we were cross trained to, I mean, I was the medic, so someone else, all the other four, were

41:30 interested mainly in what they would do, whether it be demolitions or forward scout or whatever it was, or – but they were cross trained, so they were patrol medics as well, but I'd gone that little bit higher, if you like, and more specialised in the area, so, but if I got knocked over they could come and treat me using the pack or whatever, and if the radio operator got knocked over we could all send Morse code to save our lives if that was the best we could do, but, or we had the emergency equipment.

Tape 7

00:31 **Was there much segregation between the SAS and the regular army?**

Yes, in Vietnam, yeah. We were on the hill, as we'll call it, people called it SAS Hill. The hill, and we were separated by, probably a good kilometre all the way around. From the other areas, they were restricted in, they weren't allowed, it was a restricted area, they weren't allowed entry.

01:00 So much so that if I'm not wrong Harold Holt came up for a visit and wasn't allowed on the base. Our people had to go out and see him.

Did you mingle at all with the regular army if you left the hill?

Yes, say, for instance, if you had a mate up and he was in 3 RAR, and this happened to me, I got an overnight leave to go from my base to his, he couldn't come to me.

01:30 So I went down and got on – had dinner and got on the turps with him and had drinks and slept there, and then got on the vehicles and then came back the next morning. And that was not a rarity, and it was accepted.

Were you at liberty to disclose the kind of operations that you were doing to those blokes?

No. No, we never talked about that sort of stuff. We never took anything with us, it was – other than the – no. They would get

02:00 probably some bland information about a patrol or a contact in this area, whether or not they got as detailed as us, I don't know, I doubt it. They might have come down at platoon level as the platoon sergeants if they were going into that area, they'd say, "Oh, there's an SAS patrol here and an SAS patrol here, you're to stick into this area and not go into that area". So that was that.

Did your mate ask you what you'd been doing?

Oh yeah, he was

02:30 quite keen to know what was going on, so you just blandly sort of talked over a couple of different things that you'd done. That was it, wasn't, there was no hyper secret about the – some of the operations that we did, no.

What about some of the incidents that you shared with us today, were you at liberty to disclose those?

Yes, we would not discuss the patrol insertion techniques or our escape and evasion techniques at all.

What about some of those hot situations?

They were

03:00 bit of a brag, yeah, bit of a warrie [war story] to tell, you'd have to tell a warrie. Yeah. He had his too, I mean, he was in a couple of fire fights. Peter Hedrick, and he was a mate of mine from the surf club, remember I said before about belonging to the Apollo Bay Surf Club, he was a guy that was in the surf club and he was a national serviceman, called up. And yeah, fortunately he was there at the same time. I only met him that once

03:30 in the whole time that I was there. I think, I can't remember, might have been twice. Might have been twice.

Were the SAS blokes revered by the regular army blokes?

Revered? Oh yeah, crazy, yeah, "You're mad". Yeah we had our aura, if that's the right word to use, our persona that – I wasn't aware of anyone that sort of overplayed it or whatever,

04:00 we always went on leave in uniform so everyone knew that we were there. If we left the area we had to have either our beret on or our bush hat. So you didn't overtly – I didn't wear my beret, you wore your beret if you were going somewhere into the headquarters. I never did that, I did that on a couple of occasions for just different, variety of things. But generally it was just a bush hat, green cotton bush

04:30 hat.

So was there any shyaking going on when you mingled with the regular blokes?

You mean ragging of us and ragging of them? Yeah, that would happen. There was sort of a – yeah, there was a – maybe I was just thick, I didn't notice anyone particularly having a go at me because of my unit, no.

So they didn't really have any idea of what your purpose was

05:00 **as opposed to their role in the war?**

They knew that we were there to do a specific purpose and to a) either find the intelligence to protect them when they went in and did their operation or to be out whilst they were doing an operation to protect them of any insertions coming through, say, suddenly they started to do an operation in an area, we'd be out in various places to forewarn, we'd hear a group of 50 or 100 or something like that moving through. We ring

05:30 up and say, "Hey, there's 200 and they're going that way", which is straight towards where the headquarters of the battalion is or whatever. So that would then be taken back to intelligence and they'd wind up their security and stand to and look forward, yeah.

So they could respect you for providing that?

Oh yeah, well, they knew those sorts of things that went on. But as to the detail that they got, I wasn't sure. Not sure.

How good was the intelligence? Was it always accurate?

No, not always, but there again, you

06:00 were relying on humans and that was very subjective, or not really, objective in some cases, and we had a classification that was A1 or F6. A on a grid, one across and A to F. One to six. F6 information was the worst, unreliable source that you could probably get. It couldn't be confirmed, so then it came as C3 or a C2 or B1

06:30 or an A1, sort of thing. So that was the level at which you gauged, or they put that interpretation on that information to us, to tell us that yes, it's good information or it's pretty good, or it's totally unreliable, don't rely on it. But take aware of – be aware of it, because it's been said.

Was there a special nature to some of the operations that you did?

Special nature? There were odd things, I remember one patrol we were

07:00 tasked to snatch a prisoner because they wanted to get intelligence, they couldn't find this particular group called D445, which was a North Vietnamese regiment, and they were the bane of our lives, we chased them uphill, down – round corners, they were anywhere we could find. If there was a report of them, we'd be "zoom." On the helicopters out looking for them, patrols, you know, slotted next to them and try and pin them down. North Vietnamese regular army unit.

07:30 Stop, why did we get onto that?

Just the special nature of your patrols?

Oh right, yeah, so we wanted to capture one of these blokes, so the patrol was set up to snatch it was called a snatch patrol. And they were attempting different methods, how would we grab a person? Would set off a bang and knock them over or run out and hit them with a baseball bat, or would we shoot everyone else and keep one bloke alive? Would we

08:00 gas them all? Oh, that's a good idea. So it was set up, CS gas. You know CS gas is a tear gas. So they had to do a practice with that. So they set up, and at the bottom of where we were there was some bush area on the hill, there was some bush area before it came up to where the artillery base was down below us. So these fellas set up their patrol and a bit of a track there and

08:30 set up all the CS gas and everything like that, and unfortunately the wind changed and blew all of the CS gas over the rest of the taskforce, so we had a bit of trouble with that one. Specific tasks like that.

Yeah.

What was the fallout in that incident?

Oh, there was a bit of grumpy and groaning about everyone getting gassed and carrying on about it, but that was alright, they did it the next day and it came up through us. So didn't matter much, we got our own back. With our own back on that. But it was those sorts of things, there would be

09:00 someone heard a tractor moving through the bush at such and such a point. Go and sit on the track and wait for that tractor to come back again, see if you can find the frequency with which it's going. If you do find it, what's on it? What's in it? How many people are with it? Are they moving heavy equipment, are they moving artillery, are they moving mortars or those sort of things. Rather than carrying it themselves. So those, they were individual tasks. And you

09:30 had to go and just do those.

Did you have to assess bomb targets or…?

Yeah, bomb damage assessment was one of the things that occurred, which we had an instance of doing. It was a dry season again, probably late in August or September of '67, and we'd been put into two head – to do a bomb damage assessment on this particular camp that they'd bombed last week or a couple of days before. And we were in this area and

10:00 it was intended to be a full five day patrol, which was okay, and we were just sort of probing around, and then we go out and then come back and probe in again and just see if there was any movement or bodies or whatever it was around the place, and then you just make an assessment of what had happened, you know – if the place was destroyed or you missed a bunker or something like that. And Vietnam jungle has got a lot of different vegetation in it, and one of the nastiest pieces of vegetation is bamboo. And

10:30 bamboo grows in thickets and it's usually individual pieces about that round, about five centimetres – was round as your hand. They used to make beer mugs and coffee mugs out of the pieces, the segments like that. And of course, that then grew in there, but it also had a nasty habit of putting a big spine out which would be like a spear, probably about that long. Very pointed, sharp,

11:00 thorn would be the right word to describe it, but it was very long and thin, like about as thick as the core of a biro, it could be, start out as thick as that and then taper down, yeah, so that was that. In a bomb damage assessment, everything is gone up in the air and come down, it's either laying on its side or upside down and this bloody bamboo, in this particular case, was lying horizontal, and we couldn't see through it or over, enough to – up to see over it, to see

11:30 what was on the other side. So I was given the task of sneaking through and seeing if I could get through far enough to see what was on the other side and report, and I still had my pack on and my rifle with me and I was moving in the bush. No, sorry, I've left my rifle at the back of, my patrol commander and the 2IC were holding it and they were behind me by about a couple of metres, not far so they could protect me if I got into strife.

12:00 And I just went in and crouched down then pushed up, and went in and crouched down and pushed up, and went in and crouched down and pushed up, and I looked down and in between my hands there was a device, a round device about the size of a saucer, or maybe a bread and butter plate-sized circular metal thing with wires going off it, one went, above, in front of me

12:30 one went between my knees and the other one went across horizontal and they were trip wires, and I think it was a 250-pound bomb, as a booby trap if you like. So I backed out of there fairly quickly, and we went back and my eyes were all like, I talked about saucers, mine were dinner plates, they were that big. And then we were sort of really aware of everything that was going on. But that's one instance which I have a vivid memory of on regular occasions.

What was that target

13:00 **area that you were in?**

That was a bomb damage assessment of a bunker system, which would probably mean that they were decamped there, and they had used this 250-pound bomb or whatever it was as an explosive booby trap, clip the wires out and she goes "Bang!"

So the area was no longer occupied?

No. Not as far as we were aware, no.

What was your assessment of the damage?

Oh, was pretty good. Except for that bit.

13:30 So yeah, we – I can't remember whether we came out directly after that or not, whether we spent another day there, but I came out and had a big pull on my water bottle I can tell you that right now. Yeah, it was – my mouth went dry and yeah, I backed out of there fairly quick, but very gingerly. So that was one instance that I can recall of that.

How did the seasons affect your operations on patrol?

Dry seasons made it very, very difficult, because you just didn't have enough water.

14:00 As it was, we – and still do run on very little water. I – my wife says, "You've got to drink more water". And I don't, because it's not used to it. And that was part of our training as well at that time. You just had to ration yourself out if you knew that you were going to be out four days. What we used to do – oh, that's right, we used to do that too. A wine cask, the bladder inside it, if you've ever taken one apart

14:30 it's about that square with a little screw thing in the end of it. We'd fill that up as a supplement and we'd put it down our shirts, and in some of the photos you see, we look like we've got big fat guts. It's not, that's our water bladder, spare water bladder. So you take that – in the dry season, you'd take that and you'd scoot off the chopper with that. And you drank that first. And then you went to your water bottles, you'd fold that up and put it in your pack. You

15:00 sucked the last little drop out of it and then put that into your pack. And then you went on to your water bottles that you carried on the side, so that would give you about four to five days' water that we would use, so we would use about one water bottle, which is a litre and a bit a day.

Could you collect water out there?

If you could, yeah, if you could. I remember once we were sitting there, we used to go to sleep at night on a sheet of black plastic because it was always warm.

15:30 If it got a bit wet, you turned the black plastic over and – not over, but you took the other part and pulled it over yourself so that you got – kept you dry. Didn't use any mattresses or anything like that, just slept on the ground. And this particular night we were really dry, and it came down, the rain. So we put up a shelter, and we had to be so careful because it's night time, the noise that the rain makes falling on the plastic sheeting is different from the noise falling on leaves and

16:00 so forth, so we had to be extra careful about that in particular and we had the four of us, one was standing on that corner, one was standing on that corner, one was standing on that corner and the fourth and the fifth people were holding the thing down and filling water bottles as the rain ran off this sheet. And we supplemented our water by that. That was difficult. Other times – and that was more dangerous in the dry, was when you found a watercourse, everybody else didn't have any water either,

16:30 and if there was water down and particularly if it was a loch, like a billabong or something like that, or just a puddle in the creek, you had to be extra careful too, because the VC would need their water too and they'd come to that place. And, or animals and the animals, if you stirred the animals up and they started howling and carrying on, whatever, that would draw attention to you. And therefore you could be compromised as well.

What kind of animals did you come across?

Oh, there were monkeys and a variety of different things, people said

17:00 they saw tigers and all that sort of stuff. There were elephants there as well. And we know that for sure. I don't – I never, ever saw a tiger. Spiders and creepy crawlies, yeah, all sorts. Millipedes, centipedes that were about that long and as thick as your thumb and crawling along, they were nasty. They would, one bloke came out – one of the blokes went on leave and we took one of the cooks out with us, and he was sort of amateur entomologist, picked this thing up and

17:30 it went "shhhht!" and sprayed into his face. Oh, I think it was, they told me afterwards, like hydrochloric acid that was a spray, defensive of this particular beast and it sprayed all over his face, so he was burning, his face was virtually blistering and we had to keep him quiet because he wanted to have a yell out so we're stuffing his bloody sweat rag down his mouth so he couldn't make too much noise, and I'm trying to treat it

18:00 by pouring water all over it, which was nasty because it was dry season and we needed the water, and yeah, so, but we got out of it, but that was okay.

How did the weather or season affect the terrain?

Noise. In the dry season was more noisy. The leaves, and particularly bamboo fall off and they curl up into sort of a semi-circular shape, or even a C shape. And if you stand on them they make a racket, and if there's more than – say, there's a good ground cover, that'll

18:30 make even more racket. So you've got to be very careful about how you move. In the wet season was the reverse, it was not as noisy but you couldn't hear what was going on around you, you had to be extra vigilant to be aware of what was going on. Also in the wet season it's darker, so the brightness and colour variation in the bush isn't all that much and it's dark, particularly if it's an overcast day, there's no sun.

19:00 So you have dark green, light green, dark green, light green, and it's difficult to pick up black shadows and so forth. So that's another problem that you face in wet season, the noise of the rain falling, and so on. Those sorts of things. Yeah, so there was – it was – your level of stealth was, or level of patrolling was affected by the weather.

How would you spend a night when you decide to bed down?

Okay, you'd have a,

19:30 the day was spent, in effect, we would have a Lying Up Position, we called it an LUP. Where we would sleep, that was it. And that was all that was for. Was just sleep. Get up, wake up in the morning, put your gear together and you move off. You move off, say, 50 metres, stop, have your breakfast, brew up if there's nothing around you, no noise, no follow up, had your breakfast, then you went on and you went, say, through to,

20:00 that was, say, at first light, so you'd have your breakfast at seven, seven thirty, something like that. Then you move on for another hour or so, and then you'd have a stop for a cup of coffee and then you'd go on a bit further and you stopped around about lunchtime because it was like one till – was from about eleven till one was when the Vietnamese stopped as well. They stopped for their lunch, siesta type thing. So if we're stumbling around we could step on them, if we were sitting down we could hear them moving, and when they started up again, if they were close to us, so we

20:30 worked our timings around that day and we'd go on in the afternoon, we'd have our lunch in that siesta time, we'd go in the afternoon until about four o'clock, then we'd settle there, we'd pick where we were going to lie up for the night and move back away from that about 25 metres, 30 metres, something like that. Have our meal, and then move into that position just before dusk. At dusk, we then

21:00 put out our groundsheets and whatever we were going to sleep on and get in our position, because we always laid in the diamond position protected, so we've got, you know, three people on each side to fire over, as I was talking about before. And then mount picket, one would stay awake for an hour, and the other four would go to sleep for four hours or three hours or whatever it was and rotate through that and we'd do that through the night. Then up in the morning and go. Preparation was

21:30 that we were never wanted to move into area where we didn't know there was nothing there, 'cause there's nothing worse than stumbling over something right on the last light, because you don't know where they are, how many there are or whatever it is. So with caution, you moved in and checked the area where you're going to lay up and move back. Then you could say, "Right-o", if someone came along and said, "I saw them in there", then they'd – you disappear and they think, "Oh, they're gone". So go and have a look and see what they left, so you go and they could be following us

22:00 up – so yeah, to be in hearing and sometimes sight range of where you were going to lie up, so you know that – knew that no one had compromised that area for you.

How would you choose a good lying up position?

Generally with some trees, some cover from undergrowth cover which would protect us from someone coming in. Not in an open space, never

22:30 in an open space. Just looked good. That was really what it was and it's hard for me to describe, but that would be basically what it would – a couple of good solid trees that you can hide behind if someone has a go at you in the night. Also somewhere where you could leave your gear that you could find it again, and if you got separated and everyone bolted off with your rifle and just your webbing you could leave your gear like your pack and go back

23:00 and get it to get your food the next day if someone disturbed you. So those sorts of things, it was just, it was hard to say what it was, but that was basically what it was, it was fairly, relatively safe position.

You mentioned that you'd brew up coffee, coffee's pretty aromatic, I wouldn't have thought you'd drink that in the jungle.

Yeah, well, or tea. Same thing. Any smell would, within a jungle type situation, you have the undergrowth and then

23:30 the canopy of the jungle. And the air circulates around in that area. So yes, you had to be very careful about your smells that you left, smoke if you smoked, etcetera. And, or coffee as you said. But we were fairly secure of where we were and we would know if someone else was around us, because we'd sat quietly, we never sort of sat down and set fire and starting going, we always sat for at

24:00 least a half an hour and then we'd get the mark from the patrol commander or whatever and he'd say, "Yeah, right-o, brew up now". And then you could do it, because we were satisfied that we had secured our area by listening and, or moving into it. We knew that we were fairly clear.

Did many of the SAS blokes smoke on patrol?

Couple or three, not all, not all. No.

Did you have an issue with them smoking at all?

No, didn't

24:30 matter, didn't matter. It wasn't a problem really. No. Oh well, yes, it was a problem, if you like, if

someone left something behind on the ground like a cigarette butt or those sorts of things, but that wouldn't have happened because you were disciplined to, and particularly because you did smoke, put it in your pocket or you made sure you buried it well and truly. And disguise the place where you were. Same as if you sat down for your mid coffee,

25:00 you always got up and you looked around at the place where you'd sat and you just strewed the leaves back as natural looking as you could to disguise where you had been. And things like, you never leant your rifle up against a tree because where the foresight was, or the barrel could make a gouge mark or a mark in the tree and a tracker could – if a person was a good enough a tracker, could find you looking at that and say, "Oh, there's one here, where's the other one?"

25:30 And you see something on the ground over there that's not quite the same or natural.

I've lost my train of thought.

You were talking about smoking and trails of smell in the jungle, making coffee.

Did you have some kind of waste disposal technique or procedure?

No, we carried everything, we were

26:00 using rations that were being developed or had been developed by Cadbury's in Tasmania and they were a dehydrated ration, the Americans had dehydrated rations as well, to which you just added a half a cup of water or whatever it was, it was in a foil pack, you ripped the corner of the pack off and poured the hot water in, folded the corner down and waited for a couple of minutes, and there – sorry, that was right. Half of your one litre or pint can went into the pack, the

26:30 remainder you made your coffee with. The dehydrated rations were then in a foil, so you picked your foil up and the coffee was in a little brown paper bag, a little brown silver lined sachet, so you put that inside there all in the one, folded it all up and put it in your pack. So you left nothing behind that would be indicative of you being there.

What goes in has to come out.

Oh yeah, well, we were on rations, and dehydrated at that. Highly unlikely, very dangerous

27:00 situation to be in to go and have a bog in the bush.

Did it ever happen?

Not to me. And I can only remember one instance of where one of our blokes had to do that. But that was high alert time, because you were depleted by one, he was in a situation where – what the idea was that you would form up in your lying up position with your diamond shape, you'd indicate that you were going out.

27:30 If you were facing that way, you went out that way. And you came back in that way. If you went out that way and came around and came back in there, that's not where he went out, bang! And that happened. I think it happened twice.

What happened?

Blokes were killed.

What happened, please?

They were shot coming back through in the wrong direction.

So you'd call that friendly fire, I guess?

Yep.

28:00 **Did it happen on one of your patrols?**

No. Not in our squadron either. Happened in other squadrons.

But it was an SAS? That demonstrates the importance of sticking to a routine and following instruction.

Well, yeah, it's – again, it's what we call an IA, an instant action. Is what you do, you know,

28:30 those are the rules. And, you know, the rules are there to keep you safe, and that's really what it comes back down to. And the rules we learned and the practices we implemented were to keep us preserved as a fighting unit so that we could run away and fight again another day. If we had to stop and defecate we were able to do that to a point, I mean, but it was so dangerous to do that sort of thing. I mean, you have a piddle, you get up and go round the other side of the tree, or as long as

29:00 you're not going to sit down on the spot again, quite close by. Some blokes probably were – didn't care, or the other blokes thought, "Oh pooh, that stinks, I'm having my lunch". Whatever. But we didn't have that problem, we didn't have that problem really at all. I never had to leave the patrol as a group to go

defecate at all and I can only remember one or two instances where that had happened, where the patrol commander,

29:30 sorry, another instance, say, like where we didn't quite know where we were. So the patrol commander would take the forward scout and leave the remaining three of us to guard the position where we were and they would go out and do a circuit and we would know that they will be coming back through there. They'd go out this way and they'd come back through that way. What they were trying to do was cast to find a track or find some sort of a feature to position ourselves where we were,

30:00 where we thought we were to prove where we were. And that would be all. Those are the only instances that I'm aware of.

But I guess those instances where those men were shot for not following a procedure demonstrates how important procedure was to your survival.

Absolutely. Before we went on patrol, and I omitted to say this before, in those two days leading up to the patrol after we got our warning for the patrol, we would rehearse. We would go down to the range and fire our weapons to make sure that they were firing correctly, unload all of your

30:30 magazines and reload them again to make sure. Fire the weapons if there was something wrong, if your siding or your weapon was damaged and you need a new one you needed that siding, so you physically went and did that. Then you went and did your rehearsal. You went through the escape and evasion procedures, you went through the helicopter off, helicopter on, all those sorts of things. And then you'd go through the map again and you'd get it in your head where you were going and where the insertion point was. One of us would then

31:00 go on a fixed-wing aircraft and go around, fly out over the area. We were given our grid squares, we'd fly out over the area and select the insertion and extraction sites and so forth and/or water courses or places like that, so we had a visual of the area and we picked the best one, I mean, something like a clearing that looks like on an air photo map may not necessarily be a good one because it's got kunai grass, which is eight feet tall, on it. And its

31:30 sharp edges, it cuts you when you brush it aside, it's like paper cuts. And you get all those sort of scratches and stuff, and that's not good in the bush because you get an infection in it from the dirt. So that was an inappropriate place to put an LZ. So you then had to select another one. If that was sort of, we thought, oh, that would be good, have a look at that one. But that could be the, this'll be the back up over here, then the back up may turn out to be the main insertion point with that as the back up extraction point.

32:00 So that was, yeah.

How good was health in the jungle?

Health? Oh, I don't – I never got the flu. None of us got a cold while we were there. I don't recall ever having a cold in the bush, because the germs aren't there, there are other germs there. From animal faeces or just dirt, 'cause you can pick up things out of the dirt, there's strongyloidiasis, which is a – the Strongyloides is

32:30 bacteria which is a little beastie that can get in your lungs and reside there and then flare up later. Five years, ten years later and so forth. Yeah. All those little weird diseases, tropical diseases then.

Did you know anybody who came down with any of those weird diseases?

Me, I had strongyloidiasis. Yeah.

What did you suffer as a consequence?

It was a silly cough. 'Cause what happens with the Strongyloidiasis

33:00 is that it sits in your lungs and then comes to life. Breeds, if you like, or hibernates or whatever, comes to life and you start coughing. And these little beasts come out of your throat, yeah, sometimes. Hookworm, all those sorts of stuff. Because you're lying on the ground all night the hookworm can sneak up and grab you as well. And what they do is they bury themselves into a cut and eat their way into your body.

33:30 **What happened when you went on leave?**

There were two types of leave, you had R and C [Rest in Country], which was to go down to Vung Tau, which was the main provincial town of the Phuoc Tuy province, it was actually a seaside area which was used by the French in their time in the Second World War and prior to that, and it was sort of like the French Riviera

34:00 style. There was all those Riviera style buildings and beaches and that sort of thing. There was never anything like the surf or anything like that, oh, I suppose there might have been, but I never ever saw it, every time I went there it was flat like a millpond, so, but it was nice to go and have a swim and so forth. So you'd go down there and you might get a haircut and a couple of beers and go and talk, have a meal or something like that, and we usually stayed with the 9 Squadron fellas, they were the – 9 Squadron was the helicopter pilots and gunship runners,

34:30 the bushrangers that used to come and get us out of strife. So we had a very close bond with them, so we would, in fact, on some occasions take the last white helicopter down with them and have an overnight or weekend or whatever it was and come back with them on the Monday morning or the Sunday night or whatever it was. So we'd go and have a couple of beers and there were clubs there, like Badcoe Club which was – had a big swimming pool and you could get a hamburger and coke and milk and all that sort of thing,

35:00 those sorts of milkshake type things, which were not common up at the – well, you could – Coca Cola and beer and all that sort of thing, but like a hamburger cooked with onions and all that sort of gear, never really happened, it was sort of, and that was not sort of the food you had. Go to the theatre if you wanted to, like movies would be on at night, open air theatre. They had a canteen there, like a – not a canteen, but a what the Americans call a PX [Post Exchange Store] where you could go in and buy a tape recorder or a something

35:30 for your wife or if it was your missus' birthday, blokes would go down and buy them a present and pack it all up and send it home. That sort of stuff. Stuff for your kids if you were going home on your R and R, leave, going back to Australia, they'd go and buy dolls and, you know, those sort of toy-type things, to take home to their kids, something from Vietnam. The second type was out of country leave, which was called R and R. And some blokes, if they were married they'd go back home to Australia and visit with their

36:00 family for the five, six days or whatever it was. And there were other places, Taipei, Hong Kong, Manila, and Bangkok. But I went to Bangkok and I enjoyed it, it was nice, different. Different country, not far away, really was only about an hour and a bit on the plane, but yeah.

Did you run amok?

I had a few beers and a few chasing around, yeah, yeah, we had – I went on leave with a fella named Darryl Cochrane, and

36:30 this bloke's name was the Adonis, 'cause he had the – you know, the big muscular body and the bloody blond hair and all the girls were running to him and so I got the crumbs, and so that was alright, I did okay. I did okay. There was the nightclubs and the bar girls and all that sort of stuff. But, you know, that was that. Food was nice 'cause it was something different. Still Asian food and different, but yeah. And was interesting for shopping. There I was, 20 years old, for Christ's sake, I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what I was buying. So,

37:00 yeah, so I bought some jewellery and things like that that I thought was okay, and yeah, in fact we made my wife's engagement ring out of a piece, the star sapphire that I bought over there so yeah. Didn't know her then, I didn't – she wasn't even in the back of my mind.

What about prostitution, was it popular amongst the fellas?

Oh yeah, of course it was, yeah. Well, yeah, well, it was part of the parcel, I mean, you're a healthy 21-year old that barred up every breakfast time, so what's

37:30 the point, you know, you just did it, that was the go. And of course there was no females within the – well, there were but there weren't – there was nurses, but we never ever got to see them. They were sort of down in the hospitals and so forth. And in Vung Tau, and to be honest with you, no, nuh. They're Americans as well. No. Not my style.

The nurses or the…?

Yeah, it was too close to home. Too close to home, and that can complicate the issue.

38:00 As well, other issues as well, by having a relationship in that area, and that could cause problems in the patrol or in the squadron or whatever. And there was also the fact that I was a trooper and they were officers, so you weren't allowed to fraternise with officers as male and female and that sort of, that was very frowned upon, yeah.

What about recreational drugs as opposed to alcohol?

I never saw it. I am unaware

38:30 of anyone having drugs, recreational drugs like marijuana or heroin, I'm totally unaware of that at all. I do not recall anyone even talking about it. We were in the Bacardi, Bundy, vodka, scotch, Foster's Lager, Victoria Bitter, Swan Lager and that was it, in as much quantity as we could possibly stuff in our faces.

Well, that's a fair variety you've got going there.

39:00 Yeah, well, see a lot of that came in from the Americans, they had all of those sorts of things. And so you had that. I mean it was – think ten – we were paid in Australian dollars, but we were paid in what was called MPC. Military Payment Certificates, which was American money,and it was in dollars and cents. But it was all paper money. There were no coins. So they could just pick up and go and start paying people, which

39:30 stopped people transferring greenbacks and selling a greenback – US Dollar note, or ten or fifteen to

the local villagers. The villagers would the, bring that back and they'd get that changed into Vietnamese money. And the banks would take that back and then sell it back to the army again. So that was the way that – the American Army, an MPC was the manner in which we got paid.

40:00 We had, a can of beer was ten cents. A bottle of Bacardi, 750 mil I think it was at that time, $1.50, and a can of coke was five cents, or something of that, you know, something ridiculously low like that. We had our hundred people up there who were very enthusiastic and it was very hot. We came home with, everyone had a pewter mug engraved with their name and squadron on it.

40:30 A Zippo lighter. A war plaque and that was it, and then we had at the North Cottesloe surf club a party at the end to spend the remainder of the money, I think there was about fourteen dollars left over at the time. So that was for all of the squadron and their wives or girlfriends or whatever, and they all went there and so there was 200 people were fed and watered and yeah looked after for that – that was the profits that came from that, the purchases of

41:00 just sweets, I mean, I'm trying to think, there's a chocolate bar of some sort, a bar of chocolate or something like that was ridiculous, was 25 cents. We'd pay for it and paid for the same thing, I think a can of beer in Australia at that time was about 60 cents and we're getting it for ten, so we were Christmas. And reality was that it was costing less than that, it was costing about eight cents, but we were getting two cents to three cents per can was

41:30 going into the profits, so that's why we could pay for all of those things. Then at the end we said, "Well, we're going to party, let's put the cans up to fifteen cents", and everyone said, "Okay." That was it, so it went to fifteen cents from ten at 50% increments, which was unheard of but that's what happened, and we ended up having a party at the North Cott Surf Club, and yeah, good.

Tape 8

00:31 **With all your movements around the area, did you ever get some sort of a bounty on your head?**

Yes, there was, the Vietnamese had a bounty on the heads of SAS people. It was, I forget the number now, but I think it was a substantial amount like 5000 dollars US or something like that, yeah.

Was it ever collected, do you think?

No.

'Cause $5000 dollars for…

01:00 No, there was never anyone left, everyone was brought back complete.

How did you find out about the fact that there was the bounty?

Oh, it was just intelligence would tell us, they'd pick up a leaflet or we'd get – if you had an ambush you would get a short period of time to get any papers or packs or whatever, to go through what was in there and grab what looked like intelligence, and one

01:30 bloke – one bunch of the blokes got the paymaster and they got a whole pack full of Vietnamese money, paper money, which they brought back and handed in and they counted it and all that, and when they went on leave they got some money back out of it, 'cause it was illegal money, if you like, but it was money. But you could pick intelligence up, sometimes you could get, another bloke got the intelligence officer, he had a briefcase,

02:00 and carrying a briefcase locked to his arm, so they cut the chain off the briefcase and brought it back and it had all maps and things like that ready for an offensive. So we were able to then use that as intelligence as well. So you had, after you'd sprung an ambush you'd go, bang, two people would move out onto the track, two people would go guard on either end to stop anyone coming down the tracks either way, attracting

02:30 the flies if you like. And the last person would be putting his back to that – to the group and facing out. Looking out to see if there was anyone coming in that way. Those two that were on the track then were sort of looking across the track to make sure no one was coming into them, and the same was happening, you know, you're just looking, looking, like this. Up and down the track and side to side to see if there was any movement. So that gave you a minute or two minutes or something like that. It was, shoot and scoot was the rule

03:00 that we ran on, worked on, and if there was something of intelligence, a map or something like that, not necessarily ID, we didn't particularly worry about the ideas as far as I'm aware, but it could be photos or film or a camera, you take those sorts of things and then get the films developed back and so forth, and we have got some photos of that sort of thing, people in their, they could be political officers, communists from the north, they'd come down and then indoctrinate the people,

03:30 the new recruits or whatever it was. So they would have books or diaries or those sorts of things, so you

grabbed those, then the interpreters would interpret that and the intelligence interpreters would then interpret that information and give it back to us.

What was more dangerous, a reconnaissance or an ambush?

The ambush was, because you were exposed, you'd created a noise, and that just attracted them. If they were in the area they

04:00 would generally come scooting down and try to find out what was going on. And that was why you had to be careful where you placed your ambush, you wouldn't want to place it in a curve, say, away from you, you wouldn't go at the apex of a curve, you'd go on the straight so that you could – you didn't want to sort of a corner within eyesight, you wanted fairly straight area so that you could give yourself, say, 50 to 75 metres if you were lucky, distant, they travelled in straight lines.

04:30 Simple. Shortest possible route. So, unless there was a feature like a tree or a rock or something like that would make them go round. So you selected your ambush site so you had the best advantage for you to see up the track to see them coming. And the other way, and also to see if they were coming after you after you'd set the ambush off. So that was, yes, ambushes were particularly dangerous, but the same applied if you walked into a group of people as

05:00 we did on one occasion, was just as equally as damaging as – dangerous as being in a, on a reconnaissance patrol.

The longer that your tour took, would you get more confident about going out there?

Oh yes, yeah. Things settled down towards the end of it too. There was – as I said, we had fifteen patrols that were, of eleven of those we were disturbed on or compromised on and had to be withdrawn.

05:30 **That's a lot.**

It was, it was a lot, and very disconcerting for – people were laughing at us and calling us the movie mob, because we'd be coming back to see the movie that night. That was, they always said, "Ah, you'll be back, you'll be back". And you knew in your mind that there was always a possibility. Every patrol had that possibility of being back, because that was the most vulnerable time when you were moving into their area, you created a lot of noise, and

06:00 helicopters, they got to twig then, they started to learn, in fact, on 2 Squadron's tour they were finding people were coming in towards where helicopters were. And if a helicopter landed they were being brassed up [?], that's right, because they learned from experience that the helicopter went that way but one of them always stopped to let someone off. So they'd go into the flight path and then they'd say, "Right, there's a clearing there, so head for that". So that could be a

06:30 a dangerous part of it. And that's one of the reasons why, they learned in the second, when 2 Squadron were up there, that was what they faced as well.

How well trained do you think the VC were as an enemy?

They were mercenary. They were just mercenaries, they were just local forces, fortunately or unfortunately, unfortunately for them they were very poorly armed. They had

07:00 Chinese communist weapons that were manufactured in bulk, and their accuracy was somewhat less than what was, ours was, of course. Still, it didn't matter, the biggest mug in the bush could put a bullet through your head and he had to be the muggest shot in the world, I mean, he missed everything else, like the Eagles when they hit the post, in a football match you're aiming to get through the middle of the pole but they hit the post, so any mug can do that and knock you over, so the weapons

07:30 were not as good as ours, however, luck had it, on certain occasions things didn't go off or misfired or whatever it was, and yeah.

Did you ever have to use your medical knowledge when you were out on patrol?

Only the instance where John was hurt on the – that helicopter, the other fella, where he was hurt with the millipede, centipede. No there wasn't, fortunately I never had to use it. It was

08:00 mainly to do with insects and scratches and that sort of thing, so it was just minor stuff, but a little bit of Savlon, some purcin powder and a bandaid or bandage over the top of it. Did most things, purcin powder was an antibiotic powder which we used.

So how did you celebrate your 21st birthday?

The mail came in at about four o'clock and I opened my mail and found it was my birthday. I had a card from my mother.

08:30 **You didn't know it was your birthday?**

No, I'd forgotten about it. It was just, you know, a busy time and that was it. Yeah, it was just a busy time. And just gets away from you, you get involved in things that you're doing and so forth. So that was it, the birthday came and there was a cake sewn up in calico, about four or five layers, and there was a

bottle of scotch in the middle

09:00 of the cake. She'd cooked the cake, fruitcake, she'd cut it in half and hollowed it out and put a bottle of scotch in the middle of it, little flask about that big, and then put it all back together again and then sewed it into a calico case, very closely so it fitted, and then did it again and did it again and then posted it in a box. I got a whisky fruitcake if you like,

09:30 yeah.

Why did she have to go to such trouble to send alcohol?

Wasn't the done thing.

So it was actually illegal to receive alcohol?

Yeah, wasn't – you shouldn't do that no. But she'd come through the Second World War where those sort of things were done.

Did it give you a bit of a surprise?

Oh yes, it did. I mean it's quite a bit of a thrill, you know, suddenly, "Hey, I'm 21 today". And everyone's going, "Hooray, hooray, it's your bloody shout". So, up to the top of the town club we'd then built at that stage, when we first got up onto the

10:00 hill we didn't have a mess, if you like, we had a couple of tent things, and then a couple of the builders, one fella called Bobby Mutch and Ocker Stevenson were builders by trade, or apprentice builders, or they had had enough good hands to – with everyone else chipping in we'd bring some corrugated iron from, or swap it for something or whatever, and we'd get corrugated iron to put the roof on and then we'd get the packing cases and pull all the packing cases apart and that made the frames and the

10:30 walls and benches and so forth, and we then got military army chairs and little tables, things like that, yeah. A fridge, but the most popular man in the whole of the task force was the ice man. And he – if we were having a barbecue, was always the first person we invited, so he could bring the ice up and he'd stay and have a – I think one story goes that he was charged when he went back down the hill cause he was driving under the influence.

11:00 He was full and he drove his truck back and forgot to deliver the rest of the ice to the rest of the task force. That's the story, I don't know how veracious that is, but there you go. That's the story.

So the problem is, it's not the fact that he was drunk at the time but the fact that he forgot to deliver the ice.

That was more important, yeah, so that's it. And at those times we would get fresh meat, which was again an important part. We would have say, like the unit birthday's on the 4th of September, that was a day off. And the RAAFies the 9 Squadron boys, had

11:30 organised to get steaks and sausages from Perth and had them flown up, and we had those for that barbecue. And we were Christmas. Just so, ah, you know, good to have. As apart from the pre-chewed steak and the 45-year-old eggs and that sort of thing, yeah, no it was good fun.

Would the barbecues and social functions be things that you could look forward to, to get over the hard stuff?

They

12:00 were things to look forward to, yeah, yeah. Christmas was good too, you know, Christmas was an army tradition, the officers would get up and make you the, they'd serve you in the mess and then you'd go and serve them in the mess, all that sort of stuff. Unit birthday was very significant for us because that was a similar thing, that was the anniversary of the formation of the SAS regiment, 4th of September. Anzac Day.

What did you do for Anzac Day?

Same thing, dawn service, few

12:30 drinks and no patrols on that day, day after or the day before. Yeah. Usual, just gunfire breakfast, dawn service. And have a few beers for the rest of the day and barbecue lunch or something like that, yeah.

How would you keep your morale up?

I think we were pretty well up anyway, we were – you know, we were hightailing it, we were doing real good. We hadn't lost anybody to enemy fire, we'd had one fellow

13:00 die named Rick O'Shea, he died of encephalitis. And died not with us, but died in the hospital in Vung Tau. And the other fella was Chicka Baines, and it was right at the end of our tour, 13th of February, something like that, '68 we had hand grenades that were US patent, US made, and instead of a percussion trigger mechanism, firing mechanism, it was a chemical.

13:30 If those hand grenades had been stored upside down, some of them could become fused instantaneous,

in other words, when you pulled the pin and let the handle off, they'd go, "Bang!" We had to get rid of a bundle of these because they were close to their use by date and there was, pull a figure out of your head, 80 on the 75th [?], one was fired, FI [?] and blew up and killed him, cut him in half. So that was a bit sad. George Baines, yeah. But it was very late, very late, almost a month before we – not even

14:00 that, two or three weeks before we went home.

How long were you expecting to stay there when you first went over?

We – 3 Squadron had been put in in June of '66 and we relieved them in the February, March of '66 – '67, rather. We expected six to seven months. In Borneo it was a six-month tour for both 1 and 2 Squadron. They then said, "Well, that's about as long as it really could be". So they said, "Oh well,

14:30 you'll – you're.." We came to the June and we thought, "Oh well, not got to be too far away now". August to September and there wasn't any talk of it, so, oh yeah, we'll be home for unit birthday and yeah, okay. Didn't happen. Then they said, "Well, look, we've extended your tour because we, your replacement squadron isn't ready yet, so you'll be here for Christmas." And then it ended up being almost February

15:00 by the time we got home, by the time all of the changeovers started to happen.

How did that news go down?

Wasn't very good, it was, married guys had been away from – separated from their wives and so forth. Singlies, well, that really wasn't as much, but it was still an all, you know, you sort of mentally prepare yourself for those things. People became fractious after that. And little things would set some people off, and there'd be an argument and, you know, "You're a bloody idiot!" And maybe a punch thrown or something like

15:30 that. It wasn't like everyone was walking around tearing their hair out and belting the daylights out of everyone, it was just a matter of acceptance of the fact that we were disappointed and sometimes very, very bitterly disappointed, but that wasn't, 'cause it could be the kid's birthday or wedding anniversary or whatever. Yeah, so that could be the –

Did you feel your stress levels go up after you heard the news that you wouldn't get out?

Stress levels were pretty high most of the time. It didn't make it

16:00 any easier, put it that way. Didn't make it any easier.

How do you cope with your stress levels being that high all the time?

VB [Victoria Bitter]. Beers, we would have – at the end of our normal day in camp you would put on your long flying suit, we all had flying suits which we pinched from the RAAF or borrowed or stole or whatever it was.

Liberated.

Liberated, yeah. And they were good because they were poplin and they were lightweight, was still warm at night, but they were down to your wrists 'cause

16:30 you had to be wrists to ankles covered and put repellent on. On your hands and so forth, to stop the mosquitos getting at you. But you had to wear the long clothes to protect you from them biting through. So you had your dinner, had your shower after your dinner, got into your flying suit, went up to the canteen, the Top of the Town it was called, you'd buy your half dozen cans or four cans and you'd put that into an ammo box. An ammunition tin would fit four cans in a row. And

17:00 you could put some ice on top of that and you'd go to the movies. You'd get your folding chair and your cans and you'd go to the movies. And we had built – Ocker Stevenson, one of the blokes had built a picture theatre which was covered and they had a projection box at the back, and over the road they had the screen and built the screen up and posts and everything like that, so that was lovely. And we'd go and sit up in there and watch the movie. You'd take half a dozen cans and sit on your folding chair, you know, those plastic, not plastic but the nylon strap things, fold

17:30 that out, sit down. Get your – pop your can and away you went. And that's then that'd be finished, say, nine. You might go back, and if you hadn't had enough dinner you might get one of your spare ration packs out and fire that up and have that before you went to bed, read a book, listen to your Akai reel to reel tape, seven inch, that you'd just brought back from Bangkok or someone had brought back from Hong Kong or whatever.

Was music a big part of the relaxation?

Yeah, well,

18:00 yes it was, in a variety of music, we had a juke box for a while, but they found that the guy that was supplying into the taskforce, this was probably a rumour too, but he was a member of the Viet Cong and he was doing intelligence by when he came in, to the taskforce he'd change all the records inside the machine but he wouldn't be allowed to do ours, so they'd get the records out of the machine and take

them down and bring them back and put them back in again. And, or the machine would

18:30 go down to be repaired 'cause it wasn't working or whatever. Could be a rumour, I don't know, but he was supposedly VC. Telling everyone what was going on inside, what he saw and what he'd seen.

Did you have any Vietnamese working inside the compound?

No, not in our place. No. No, the only outsiders that came in were guests of the squadron at the time, and they would be Americans or so forth, so like, we might have people from

19:00 Brit SAS come in on a visit. They'd come in and look at what we were doing to see, because they weren't in – at that time they weren't in a conflict situation, they were still in Malaya, but not in a – what we were doing, and they were interested to find out the way in which we were operating so they could, say, pick the eyes out of it or copy it or do whatever or say, "Oh well, you could do it better by doing this". So it was a learning thing. And the Americans would come down – they would be just – the Brits would be just a visit.

19:30 Well probably all diplomatically done and everything like that. Then we had our own people that were away with the training team, local people that we – our old sergeants and so forth, who'd gone with a training team, they'd come down for the weekend at birthday or Anzac Day or whatever. And Americans from the SEAL teams and special forces and so forth. And they had a long-range reconnaissance group as well, those blokes came down and we did exchanges with them. But other than

20:00 that, no, there were no other people inside the – inside our, on the hill.

How often would you actually get leave?

I think it was about every month. You'd get a couple of days. Then you had six days', seven days' R and R mid-term, you selected when you wanted it and

20:30 you usually said, "Right, what's going on here? Who's going on R and R?" so you could tee it up together. But you didn't go on R and R with someone from your own patrol, because that would mean that patrol was compromised by having two of its members away at the one time, which left them short, they couldn't make – if something happened they couldn't get two replacements of your signal and your medical whatever it was, so they used to take one person from a separate patrol and they'd go out, then the others could slot in and take their place

21:00 **Did you ever slot into another…?**

No, no, I only ever worked with my people, except for that one where I went on the ten-man patrol where we got the – had to go and burn that helicopter. That's the only time I worked in another patrol.

How tired were you by the time your twelve months was coming up?

I was well and truly ready to come home. As was everyone else.

So everybody else was feeling…

Yeah, we were ready, we were all ready,

21:30 it's very draining. You're in a tropical environment, it's tedious, it's hot and it's humid, the living conditions, you're living in tents, little luxuries like having a level floor in your tent, that made a bit of a difference, that boosted your morale a bit, you physically went out and got the pallets from the engineers where they'd brought stuff

22:00 up. And we'd go in a truck or something like that and we'd get a whole load of pallets and bring all the timber back and break them all up and make a level floor in your tent. So you had – you didn't sort of get out of bed and have to roll downhill or whatever, you just had a level floor. In fact, John Delgado, the patrol forward scout, and I, we had a boxing championships, mid-year. Some – for some reason it was some silly occasion, whatever, they decided they'd

22:30 have a boxing competition to improve morale or whatever it was, so they built a boxing ring. And that had to have a level floor and it had to have canvas on it and everything like that, so that was good, so Johnny and I decided that after the boxing was over that was going to be our tent. So we moved up there, just the two men, we had the two man, we had the big floor and we had the tent over the top, it was all a bit exposed and we had a couple of pythons underneath that rattled around and ate rats and whatever else that were, or whatever the local possums were or little creepy crawly mouse type things.

23:00 Yeah, we had to increase the level of – had to sandbag the whole lot, 'cause it wasn't there, so that was a task, we really earned the fact that, we really earned the privilege of having a flat floor, I can tell you that right now.

You really wanted a flat floor big time?

Oh yeah. What was the big deal? I mean, it was off the ground as well so you were – you know, it was just a bit cooler, it was a little bit better, just better, nicer.

So actually you didn't move it to you, you moved your tent to it?

23:30 No, we moved us, our gear, like your bed and all that sort of stuff and built a fly over the top of it and the tent over the top of that. Strung the tent up.

Did you get a bit of ribbing about that?

Oh yeah. Yeah. Privilege, silvertails.

Was all in fun, though?

Oh yeah.

Was probably…

There were plenty of jealous people, I can tell you that. The OC of the squadron, he had a leaning floor and he wanted a level floor after that, so yeah.

You didn't lose your construction to…?

24:00 No, we didn't, no.

So towards the end of your tour, when you're starting to feel a bit tired, do you start to get a bit more nervous that something's going to happen to you?

Well, the days were counted. They had a picture of a naked lady and she was broken up into little squares with numbers on them, and number one was the obvious place. And number 60, 90 days, all little squares,

24:30 and you had to colour them in. It was something (UNCLEAR) hadn't passed around yet, colour them in, so it was, you know, that in the end became a morale booster, because you were getting closer to going home. And it was "ten and a wakey" and all this sort of thing, ten and a wakeup, "two and a wakey," and then you knew you were definitely going home on that day so it was then "one and a wakey," and then "today's the day," sort of thing. And you coloured your little lady in, naked lady in, and it was good.

25:00 So that was morale boosting, that respect.

It's also got quite a bit of humour in there.

Oh yeah, it was fun.

Do you think as Australians you had a better sense of humour than the Brits or the Americans?

No, I don't, I think that they had their own sense of humour, but an Australian sense of humour makes light of a situation that's quite serious. And you can turn a very tight situation into a lighter situation by doing the things that they do, the stupid comment or the wry remark or the observation that

25:30 probably puts someone down slightly but doesn't really. "You bloody idiot." Or, "You mug". Or whatever, and yeah.

Do you remember what the last patrol was that you did before you got sent home?

No, I don't. I don't recall that one at all. I have no, it must have been a very bland one, because there was nothing happened and it was dry season. No, I don't recall.

So how did you celebrate the fact that you'd managed to colour in all the coloured squares on the

26:00 **lady?**

It didn't matter, that was the last day. And everything was packed and – our bags and so forth and onto the trucks, the blokes that were coming to take over the tent had been there, like, a week or so, and we were talking in between, they were in the tent with us, so we had four instead of the two. And we were passing information, "This is a good bit of kit". Or, you know, whatever you wanted, or yeah.

Would you give away some of your stuff?

Yeah, yeah, swap it out.

26:30 And if – we had a pretty good Q [Quartermaster's] store guy that ran the supply store. Taffy Davis, and he went away early in the piece, third month, fourth month and came back with American survival knives and Cam [camouflage] suits were – Australians didn't have, they just had the green cotton uniform. The Americans had leaf suits, and the marines in particular had

27:00 green, brown and light beigey coloured suits, all disruptive pattern. And that was good, we needed those, because we felt that we were more obvious in the, although you sweated and you got a dark green stripe, or a green sleeve or you got wet, but everything was the same, but with these leaf suits you looked a bit better, there was also tiger suits. So that sort of thing was traded around. Yeah. Or if something that, you'd have no more use for.

27:30 Or it was a good mate, "You take this, look after that for me".

Were you engaged by this point?

No.

So you hadn't met your future wife?

No.

So can you step me through what you did in order to get home, what happened?

We – the morning came, we had breakfast and everything was packed the night before, we had our uniforms all pressed and ready to go. So we just stepped out of the shower and into our clean

28:00 gear and all our medals and bits were on. We were then transported down to the – to an aircraft, a Caribou down at Luscombe Field and we were flown to Saigon. We landed at Tan Son Nhut airport. I think we had an hour or two for the Qantas plane to bring in the other people, refuel, and we got on that and came back. Came home.

Is it all five of you that are going home together?

Yes. Yes, we all came home together.

28:30 **What were you talking about on the way home?**

We were tired, a lot of blokes went to sleep because it was night time that we came in, we didn't come in till midnight, so forth, yeah. So if I remember rightly, would have been one or midday or two o'clock in the afternoon, or something the order of ten or eleven o'clock at night when we came in. And that would be about right, it

29:00 was a direct flight so there's six hours, seven hours, something like that in an aircraft.

Was there any talk of the Tet Offensive at that point?

The Tet Offensive was on as we were leaving, there was a kafuffle going on then, yeah. And that was quite a bit of time, street fighting, etcetera, yeah, that was a pretty heavy time. So we're – we were given a send off, if you like.

A send off by the..?

Yeah.

29:30 **You were just glad that you weren't there?**

Oh no, we were still there for that particular time and everyone was high alert, but it wasn't – we all survived, there was – no one ever, no one hurt at all.

Were you actually a part of it?

Yes, we did co-ordinance searches and we did – I wasn't involved, there was a battle at Baria and I wasn't involved in that, no, not that particular part. But yeah, we were used as – you know, just inserted to stand for

30:00 the day or the night or whatever it was.

How populated was the area that you were there?

Baria was the provincial capital and there would have been probably 10,000, 15,000 people living there, and the VC came in and tried to take over that town to say that they owned the province, if you like, or they owned the capital of the province. But they did other attacks on other areas, on outlying villages and so forth,

30:30 some of which were successful and some weren't. But yeah, so…

Did you actually get out round about the middle of it?

No, it was all over by the time we had left. No, it was sort of a – it was only about a four-day – four or five days that I recall. But that was a concerted effort by the North Vietnamese to do – take over the country. They attempted to get into Saigon as well and were repulsed there,

31:00 they attempted to get into Baria and Vung Tau and they were repulsed there as well. Mortar attacks and so forth occurred. But it was a general push for them to take over to get rid of the taskforce and the Americans.

What would you be seeing from your position during that time?

Would I be seeing? In which way?

In front of you, what was going on in front of you?

Oh well, we were just generally in holding

31:30 positions, we were just there to be protection, if you like, and stop anyone running in or running out or whatever it was and no, I didn't have anything – I wasn't in any street fighting or anything like that, no.

So you're actually in quite a safe position throughout the..?

Oh yeah, yeah. It was mainly, if I'm not wrong, it was mainly cavalry, the APCs and places like that – there was infantry involved in it, so

32:00 I don't recall, there probably was some of our people involved in it too, but I don't recall – I wasn't specifically in that street fighting environment, but I was very pleased about that too.

'Cause that was quite towards the end of your tour?

Yes.

When you got home, what was the first thing that you wanted to do?

We went

32:30 on leave. We went on leave, and it was rather strange because we were in, say, like it was Monday, we arrived at midnight, we went to the barracks and slept. The married guys went to their wives and home. We were tired and we just got up the next day and had the shower and went and had some breakfast and whatever it was, and we're going to meet for lunch today or meet for

33:00 dinner tonight or whatever it was. And yeah, that was that, and I think within about two or three days of that I was on a train going over east to go and see Mum and my brother. And then that was, God, six weeks, something like that, four weeks' leave. And so we had four or six weeks' leave at home, no, it wasn't six weeks, it must be four weeks or

33:30 something like that because you didn't get six weeks' leave.

Was it difficult being separated from these four other blokes?

On leave –the patrol sergeant, Frank Sikes, lived at Frankston which was about ten, fifteen miles away from where I lived. We were sort of catching up with each other on – every couple or three days, I'd ring him up and say, "What're you doing?" We'd go and have a meal or a beer or whatever it was. Yeah, that was strange. 'Cause I took

34:00 Mum away with us. We went down to Apollo Bay to the surf club and had a bit of fun down there and came back again, and yeah.

You keep going back to that Apollo Bay.

Yeah, well, we liked it, it was good fun, my mate Glen Taylor was still there at that stage, he was the guy that, his mother was matron of the hospital and so she'd been sort of a pseudo-mum too, if you like, she was the other mum. And as my Mum was to Glen. And so it was nice to catch up with him again, he hadn't done his tour at that time and

34:30 he was about to. Yes so that was a bit of a blur. I mean, I tried to catch up with some schoolmates of mine, and even though we were 21, they were different people. Just wasn't there. Blokes that we were virtually joined at the hip on before I went away were just not the same people any more, I'd grown away from them and my experiences had gone

35:00 further away from them, if you like. They were still in that little niche of, what was it – they wanted to go to the drive-in and they bought six bottles, four bottles of, King Brown bottles of beer and wanted to go to the drive-in in a car and they thought that was pretty tops and yeah, well, I went and didn't ever bother ringing any more. They were just too different. Most – three of them were still at university, no, two of them were at university and one guy was in a job, had an apprenticeship or something like that.

35:30 Yeah, just – we'd just grown apart. Was not the same. We didn't speak the same languages, things just were not the same. And of course you had to be careful you didn't swear and oh, it was the worst, that was the hardest part. Sitting down and your brother and your mother's picked you up at the station and I sat – we drove 35 kilometres from the station, Spencer Street to our house in Mordialloc, and I don't think

36:00 I said a word. I might have said, "Hi Mum, how are you going?", 'cause I was so afraid of saying, "Fuck!" in front of her or something, some other bad language, and it was just, I had to be awake the whole time, I was tired and I was sick of travelling and – so that was hard. Then I got relaxed a bit over the last couple of days and all the next couple of days, so it didn't matter all that much.

What was the media saying when you arrived back home about the Vietnam War?

36:30 Things were still positive then. In '67, '68 things were still very positive, there was an anti-war movement but it was in its infancy. And I don't really think that that got itself up in my recollection probably until '69 or '70 that that was getting up, so that was two years down the track from when I was there. There were anti-war people and that's okay, your opinion, that's your opinion and leave me alone, I don't – I wasn't overtly

37:00 pronouncing that I'd been in Vietnam either. Wasn't doing that – that was the nature of the beast, you didn't brag about that, or didn't brag off to people that you didn't know, 'cause one, you didn't know who you were talking to or who was listening at the table over the back anyway, and the blokes that were there weren't interested in war stories at all.

How different did you feel from the rest of the population, considering…?

Quite, quite different. Yeah. What was it, there was something said the other day, which

37:30 is – you've never tasted till you supped from a cup, which was something was quoted on Denton the other night on television, and I think that was quite true, you don't understand until you've experienced it and no one else can live it. That's why the blokes that we were all with now were all the same, because we feel relaxed with each other, because we know that's the,

38:00 we were the blokes that we were serving with, we're relaxed with, and that's why now we still have the association, we've got 800 members here in WA, that's not enough, there are 800 paid up members, there should be another probably 2000 or 1500 people in that group. But we feel safe with each other, we go

38:30 inside the barracks there and we're lucky we've got our own headquarters with inside the barracks so we're safe, we can park our cars, we know that they're not going to get broken into, you know that you can leave it open or the keys in it or whatever. But you feel safe with the people there too. You know that they've experienced what you've experienced, even the younger blokes, the newer blokes now, that are coming through the Iraqs and the Afghanis and the East Timor blokes, they've got the same sort of feeling as, well, they've got the sort of the

39:00 brotherhood of arms if you like, to use a hackneyed phrase, I suppose. But that's the brotherhood, and it's really very close. Trust, trust is what it is, too.

Are they, the ones who are coming back from Afghanistan and Gulf War, were they the same age as you when you went to Vietnam?

Funnily enough, they're much older. Much older, as I said to you, the Oaksbridge before, and if I remember it, like our average age in our patrol

39:30 would have been 22 and a half, 23. The average age of a patrol in East Timor was 29. The average, the oldest patrol ever mounted, the average age was 42. In Afghanistan.

Why were they using blokes that were that age?

Experience. Particular task.

So experience actually counts for something rather than just brute strength?

Yeah, oh no, brute strength played a part

40:00 in it, because that proved your endurance. Brute strength was never – I mean, you look at some of the photos in that album, there there's no real hugely built, overly muscled blokes in it. They're average fellas, average height, you couldn't be too tall because you couldn't get out of an aircraft for a starter with your boots and your helmet on to parachute. You couldn't be too short either, because if you were too light the parachute – you'd fly away. We had one bloke who was very light and we

40:30 had to put bricks in his pack so that he could come down. So he would waft away and the vehicles are all driving around the countryside of New South Wales looking for this little wee bloke in his parachute, floating away, wafting away. I never had any problem, I was just straight down. I didn't have to put bricks in my pack.

Because you were in Vietnam, and it's such an extraordinary thing that you actually achieved when you were there, do they really look up to you, the younger blokes?

It's interesting in that – there are two groups now, there is the middle group which were the unfortunate ones if you like. Although they were fortunate in a different way. They didn't have the battle experience, if you like, but they had – the middle group, and I'll refer to them as that, in the '80s in the regiment where there was no wars to go to that we were involved in. They were building up the counter terrorism after the Hilton bombing in Sydney and so forth, Malcolm Fraser said, "We need to be protected against terrorists". So they built that up, and this was a task that was given to them. Between the Hilton bombing and the CHOGM [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting] conference, they had to get a counter-terrorism group up and running. So people were going all over the world and coming back again with all this information that they'd glean and then they'd amalgamated together and made that group. Now that group, I called them unfortunate, however, they were lucky in a way. So there's been a space between…

Tape 9

00:34 **How has the role of the SAS changed, do you think?**

It is still basically the same thing. Reconnaissance, ambush, those sorts of, types of operations, although it's more intelligence gathering now. I know enough, but I don't know a lot of what goes on now, I know that the equipment stuff that

01:00 we used to dream about or go to see Star Wars and think, oh, that's fantastic, is available to them. We don't see that at all because that's restricted information and we don't see that. We are privy to some information because of a dinner party story or something like that, yeah, but that's kept well and truly within the group, if you like, and you don't pass that information on to other people. So I don't think that the roles in effect have changed markedly since Vietnam, but

01:30 they are still basically the same thing, a five-man patrol on a reconnaissance mission is a standard thing to have.

What do you think the future role of the SAS is?

Again, you look at the incidents of Victoria where they were border protecting, if you like, or the Tampa incident, those sorts of things, where – the one I referred to in Victoria was where the North Korean ship dumped

02:00 heroin overboard, drugs overboard off Lorne and our fellas were sent in to take over that ship and bring it into Sydney. Those – they were part of the group that did that. So those sorts of things, yeah. The roles are many and varied. There's peacekeeping roles, there's advisory roles, there's Pacific area – recently our government has decided that they want to be a good neighbour in the Pacific and

02:30 help out those smaller nations, if you like. Yeah, who knows, the role could be that there'll be, such as Iraq, come up within 30 days, 60 days, where the intent is there and the request is made and the agreement's made.

You mentioned earlier that you spoke, in your last interview you spoke about the role of the SAS when the SAS was going to Iraq

03:00 **what capacity did you speak in?**

To them.

Earlier on today, you mentioned that in your last interview you were speaking about the role of the SAS when they were going over to Iraq.

Oh yes, that was a television interview which was done for Channel 7 here in Perth. And that was for the Gulf War 1, first Gulf War, and that was mainly a – how do you say it, a news filler, news item typical of the time.

03:30 And I was asked my opinion on what would be happening.

In what capacity were you speaking, on behalf of the SAS?

I'm the national secretary of the SAS Association, yeah. Which is a role, if you like, which is second in command if you like of the association, but a secretarial role. And yeah.

What is the function of the SAS Association?

We've got three main objectives, and that

04:00 is to support our mates and their wives and families. The second is to ensure that they are well and looked after, and particularly if anyone has been killed or maimed or so forth. And the third is to maintain the esprit de corps of the regiment, so in other words, keep up – uphold the traditions.

What are you seeing – what do you see as being the foremost traditions of the SAS?

Looking after your mates. Really

04:30 looking after your mates. We have had a period of difficulty where some of the information or patrols and injuries that have occurred have been done in a certain manner or an incident that cannot be talked about, so you've got to rely on other people that were in the group with them to provide them with the verbal support or the verification support where the reason why the injury occurred can't be told or the reason injury

05:00 can be told, "He fell off a ladder", But where it happened and why it happened and how it happened is a different thing.

I hear reports in the media recently about SAS soldiers being scalped or head-hunted for private purposes?

That's an understanding position. There are fellows that have been there for a long time who have had an exciting last five years, six years or so. There are those that are,

05:30 they get paid very well, put it this way, they get paid very well, but there is big money to be made in certain aspects of their experiences, with certain aspects of their experiences, so they can be used, for

instance, as training other armies in techniques, plus there's also the fact that those blokes there have been on an operational footing

06:00 for probably five to six years and their families are saying, "Hey, it's my turn now". Some of them are getting towards the end of their careers and want to get out or they will get out of the army because they've got the benefits of what they, experiences, area, and also the monetary benefits of what they've done sets them up for a business or a career in another area. And so many of them are taking the family

06:30 option, if you like and, or age could be a part of it. I said before that there are people in their 40s that are still serving and in their 50s that are still serving. And there is one bloke that served in Vietnam who's still serving there, although in a different role than what he had at that time. But there are those people that are tired and they want a change. That's really what it goes. And once you've been in SAS it is very difficult to go to

07:00 another part of the army or the army, if you like, because we – it's an isolated area where it's highly expertise, there's high levels of expertise in the jobs that they do and to go back to another unit would be mundane. And so therefore they would miss the rush or the ability or the tempo, and one person might do it because they're going to get out of the army and they're going to move

07:30 back to New South Wales where they were born and their wife is or their family is or whatever. So they might take a six-month posting or a twelve-month posting or something like that, just to finish off the career and get themselves set up in another state.

Is there a threat to the future of the SAS men leaving for various reasons?

No, no. They still recruit, they still have their selection courses and the same level of

08:00 expertise is required, the same levels that I spoke about before are still there. The determination, the integrity, the independence and the strength of character and the sense of humour is still a necessary part of the job, you've got to be able to do the job and finish the job.

Is income an issue?

Not really, no. Not now. There was,

08:30 until people started getting their special action forces allowance which allowed them to come up to a certain – up to a good income level. Like, my time it was just basic pay, and because I was a specialist in certain areas I got a higher rate of pay than other people. And I got parachute allowance, which was 68 cents a day, I think it would have been up to 75 cents a day or something like that. Which was an extra allowance. That was meagre to say the least.

09:00 But we were well paid for the time. We were paid more than the average soldier was in the army because of our expertise and so forth. Yeah.

Would you say that the SAS is being properly or well maintained?

Oh yeah, there's no question about that. Roles and tasks may vary, but the management that comes through there, people that are in there are, as I said, there's blokes that have served in SAS virtually from the '70s on and they're 30-year men now, they're coming up for 30

09:30 and 35 years in the army and even more than that. That expertise is still there. Also there's the younger blokes – the 30s and the 40 year olds that have had all of this experience, they will stay there. And that will be imparted on the role might change, it might change from a desert to a tropical to a jungle to whatever, I don't know. Or ice or snow. But those same basic principles still apply.

10:00 **What about the reputation of the SAS overseas, they played an instrumental role in the recent invasion of Iraq, how do you see the reputation growing?**

That would be predicated by conflicts that are to come and tasks and roles that they perform. You can say that they've covered themselves in glory, certainly there is no question about that. With the handling of situations and the

10:30 situations that they were put in, and got out of, the professional expertise is there, the counter terrorism level of training is bar none. World class. The equipment that they have is world class. So I can't see any diminishing of the expertise and the professionalism of the regiment changing at all. No.

How would you rate or compare them to other forces?

That's a hard thing to say, because everyone's

11:00 got their professional jealousy, and of course there's nothing better than the Australian SAS as far as I'm concerned, but there are other groups that are equally as good or come up to the standards that we have in the world. We are well respected, or our people are well and truly respected throughout the world.

What groups would you highly rate?

The British SAS, 22 SAS. There is various American

11:30 army and navy people like the SEAL teams, they are very good. And there's Germans and French and the Spanish and New Zealanders as well, New Zealand SAS is exactly the same, virtually the same as us, they run on the same roles, British, New Zealand and Australian SAS are virtually tarred with the one brush. We were, the original thought came from a British officer in the Second World War,

12:00 1941, '40, '41 and that role was a harassment desert type thing. So that thought processes and genre, if that's the right word or ethos, is still maintained through now. But as I said, the tasks are bigger, the helicopters go faster, the – didn't have a helicopter in the Second World War. Those sorts of things. Just make them and others, because of the

12:30 cross-pollination of ideas, in particularly in those communities, they're pretty well up with everything else, yeah.

Just coming back to your service, did you consider returning to Vietnam with the SAS?

I was in – set to go back in 1970, I had second thoughts. Mainly because I had had the experiences that I've talked about before, and the way range and the helicopter crashes.

13:00 And I didn't feel that I was going to – my luck would stay. Really, that was that. One, only one of my patrol went back in the same role as what he'd done the first tour, which is indicative to me that they were affected in the same manner as I was. Maybe because I was younger and greener, that's probably a reason too. The other guys had been in the army longer than that, but that experience was quite a

13:30 good one for them.

Was your squadron dispersing?

Dispersed? No, no, the squadron changed the commanding officer, the officer commanding of it, but basically the same people stayed in that and so the corporals became sergeants and the warrant officers – sergeants became warrant officers and so on and so forth. But basically the same people went again, yeah.

14:00 **Did you remain in the SAS or did you move to the regular army?**

No, I got out of the army in 1970.

So that was how many years after you returned?

Six years. Sorry, six years, I joined in '64. Yeah.

How did you spend those six years?

How did I spend…?

Those six years in the army when you returned to Australia?

No, I got out. I was still here in SAS here. I returned from Vietnam and I was still here and served here until my discharge.

That was how many years later?

'66 to '70, four years.

How did you spend those four years?

Again,

14:30 I was in the relief phase, which was getting courses and training again, other expertise, we went and worked at the hospitals 'cause of the medical background. We went and worked in the accident and emergencies in Royal Perth and Fremantle Hospitals, and that was a sort of a training build-up for the next phase, then we went into the build-up for the next tour. And I made the decision towards the end of 1969 that I wasn't going to go on

15:00 with it. And that was when, no, early, mid-'69, I made – because there was a crunch time. When you were going to, you know, I couldn't jeopardise the guys in the patrol that I was in by pulling out too late before – if I pulled out I had to pull out early enough for them to get someone in to fill the position that I had and get to work as I was talking to you earlier about.

How had the perception of the war changed in that time?

15:30 Again, it was anti-war, that didn't really affect me because it's – Perth had their anti-war people as well, but I think that SAS had been very well respected by the community in Western Australia and that really wasn't a problem, although the protesters were there and those sorts of things, yeah.

Did you bear the brunt of any protest?

Only till I went back into Victoria and was a civilian, yeah.

Only until, or when?

Wasn't

16:00 after I got out of the army that I was actually, 'cause I was making applications for jobs, and of course, "What have you been doing for the past, who was your last employer?" Yeah, and I was, little secretary called me a baby killer, whatever.

That's a bit rough on your job interview.

Yeah, well, it was the secretary to the job interview, but she must have had influence because I didn't get the job anyway, but that was – or the interviewer for the

16:30 position may have had a prejudice, you don't know.

That's a fairly hostile reaction to get from someone.

At the time it was very hostile. You had a significant amount of the population, particularly young people who were in our age group, who were anti-Vietnam and that was that.

Especially in the environment of a job interview or an office, a secretary to launch into an attack like that.

That was prior to the interview. But she, when I gave her my CV she said, "Oh, a baby killer". And

17:00 that set the tone, if you like, I was probably not in a very receptive or friendly sort of a mindset at that time when I went in for that interview anyway.

Did you have much difficulty returning to civvy street [civilian life]?

Yes, I felt, how can I say? Different. I still feel different, I know I'm different from other people for the experience.

17:30 Or from the experience as a result of the experience. But I'm not different from the other blokes that have served with me, so – or our Vietnam veteran community, and particularly SAS community because we, as I said before, we stick together and we formed our association to look after each other. And we help each other out with a variety of different methods and means, and so yes, I've always felt different from other people after that experience, and I was a little bit before too, because I felt

18:00 I was different before, so if you asked my wife, she'd probably say that I'm a loner, I get on very well by myself, I don't have a problem with that. She does say I'm a cold-hearted bastard at times, and I know I can be that. Yet stupid things can bring me to tears. You know, stupid things can – I think I can't, if I see Second World War films where people are being murdered and shot and put into trenches, shot in

18:30 pits and things like that, that brings me to the point where I'm frustrated and that's anger and at how people can be so cruel and I don't understand that cruelty.

What about post-traumatic stress?

Oh yes, I suffered that. Yeah, I've had that, well, diagnosed for about three years, and that becomes self evident if I'm put into a situation where I'm unsure of myself. And I'll sweat through a shirt or two

19:00 if I'm going to an appointment where I'm not positive of what's going to be the outcome of it, yes, I will have a – I got to a stage there where I was taking a second shirt, I'd put one on and then just whip this one off and put the fresh one on before I went into the interview.

You were only diagnosed three years ago?

Yes. Probably when I allowed it to be diagnosed, I would say

19:30 that I hung out as long as I could.

Three years ago is 2001.

2000, probably be four years ago, probably, yeah.

About 25 years after the end of the war?

Yeah. But it was there all the time, it was there in a lesser light. Lesser – it was not as overt.

Was there an incident that brought it to your attention?

No, it was just a general sort of easing

20:00 into it. It was coming a little bit, "Oh, that felt strange, I don't know why I'm feeling like that". Or my wife would say, "What's wrong with you?" And I'd say, "Oh, nothing". And then it became more frequent and then it became almost a daily basis, and that was when it sort of became too hard. And, of course, I suppose too there's the fact that I'm 57 years of age, and you become a grumpy old fart anyway, and intolerant of other people who are mugs. So

20:30 that doesn't help. And you think, "Oh God, I've got to go and deal with a mug", or whatever it is. "Am I

going to be able to control myself in front of them?" Yeah.

What other kinds of experiences have you had as a part of your post-traumatic stress?

Mainly manifests in that way. As an anxiety state. So much so that I would be probably sleep – I'll go to sleep and I'll wake up at two or three

21:00 spend an hour, read a book, go back to sleep again. Something will have woken me up. A dream or something of that nature, some incident during the day or sort of, what was it? The Mel Gibson film, Once We Were Soldiers [We Were Soldiers]. Something of that kind, very recent Mel Gibson film. My son and I watched it, on our television, it was on Foxtel I think it was, a and I had to get up, walk away from it

21:30 three quarters of the way through, I got the dry horrors, I was – had to leave. He said, "You alright?" And I said, "Nuh, I'm not". Had to go out, so he understands it too, I mean, he's 32 years of age so he's lived with it for the past four or five years as well. As my wife does. She's more overt, she'll say, "You having a sweat?" And it's – I've got a wrung out shirt on and it's bloody pouring off my face and the handkerchief's out rubbing the back of my hair.

22:00 Yeah.

Have you developed any other sorts of unnatural behaviour or habits?

No, not that I'm aware of. Apart from belligerence.

What about the turning point in the Vietnam War, the way the Vietnam War ended up, what transpired, how did that affect you?

Oh, you mean as far as everyone saying that the war was lost?

22:30 Yeah, well, it wasn't. It isn't – it wasn't lost at all, we were politically hamstrung and withdrawn by the politicians. Phuoc Tuy province was the most well-policed province in Vietnam at the time, and I say that purely as my knowledge of Vietnam time, the Tet Offensive was almost the end of the North Vietnamese Army as it stood. Because they went to the negotiation table in 1968 in

23:00 France and started that backing off the bombing and all that sort of thing and then it started up again. They were on their knees. There's a book called Unheralded Victory. And this fella goes through the battles and the times and the years and so forth and different things that happened and explains why and the numbers on this side and the numbers on that side and the numbers add up to

23:30 the army – the US and the Australians were in, well, the Allies were well and truly in control and the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese in particular and VC in general were a defeated force. And they won the battle by turning political opinion against the war.

What about the fall of Saigon?

Again, I mean, that, in point, would be a victory and be

24:00 shown as a victory and so it is, because there was no one there to defend and the will had gone, the political will had gone well and truly before that, so it was remnants of the South Vietnamese Army that were defending and they were virtually left high and dry. I mean, whether or not that's the right words to use, I don't know, but the American Army was withdrawing, their support was withdrawing, their intelligence was withdrawing,

24:30 their money was withdrawing as well. Because of the political influence. Such as the Labor Party here in Australia and so forth. And the moratorium movement, those sorts of things, they were bringing us home well and truly in the – '69. You know, those sorts of, '69, '70 was really the time when that was starting to gain a real impetus. And yeah.

What was the significance of Australia's role

25:00 **in the Vietnam War?**

We kept that province clear where people could go about their daily business without worrying about being bombed – well, it wasn't a significant part of their lives. Australia's role in Vietnam was a good neighbour. An ally of the United States, there were other people in the world who were jealous of us that we had a role in there. I can tell you that there were a number of other countries that wanted to be involved

25:30 in it. But it was a safe place whilst we were there. Safe place.

What about the province itself, what was its significance in the conflict?

It was a recreation centre for the North Vietnamese and the VC, they'd come out and go down to have a beer, I mean, I could be sitting at a bar somewhere in Vung Tau and there'd be a little Vietnamese bloke beside me and he could have been the bloke that I was

26:00 shooting at or shooting at me the week before, 'cause he'd had his, been in his fire fight, he'd been

given his leave and he was going down to Vung Tau for his R and R and that's a – that's what happened, that was a recreation centre for them as well.

Just coming back to the climate in Australia when you came home from the war, where did you find acceptance when there was a lot of – or lack of acceptance for returned

26:30 **Vietnam vets?**

I didn't return to Victoria until 1972, I was in the army for two years so I was still weaning myself off the army if you like, but I still had my friends who were still in the army and/or getting out of the army here. Through a set of circumstances, my mother had cancer and we went back, I was – we were living together at this stage and we went back to Victoria and we got married and

27:00 my mother died in the April so I was left – I left Western Australia, so virtually my military ties had been severed by that move. Although writing letters and maybe a phone call every now and then, or someone coming through or me seeing someone on the street or something like that. And I never, ever went to the RSL [Returned Services League], 'cause I didn't feel that was right, and the only reason I went to the RSL really in the end was because they brought in drink driving

27:30 laws in Victoria. We used to finish work on a Friday night and go to the hotel in Prahran and have a couple or three beers and then head off home. And then they started to bring in drink driving laws, so I thought, "Well, that's done. I'll drive home to the RSL", which was about four ks from where I lived, "and risk the difference". So yeah. And that was when I joined the RSL in Victoria.

What about the World War II vets, how did they greet you?

World War II vets have got a different

28:00 attitude to Vietnam veterans. Mainly because they say our war was five years long and my war – sorry, they say that their war was five years long, 1939, '45, whereas ours was only twelve months. But statistically it's shown that a Vietnam veteran would have had more bush time and actual time under fire than a Second World War veteran. On average, the averages show. There were blokes, obviously, that were

28:30 in places where it was a shit fight every day. But the time, amount of bush time that we spent on the ground, in a combat zone, not in Nui Dat, I mean out in the bush, was significantly more than what the Second World War veteran would have been expected to do in those situations.

There seems to have been a lot more attention paid to the post-traumatic stress of Vietnam vets than perhaps the veterans of earlier wars?

29:00 Different names. That's all it was. "Battle fatigue" was the Second World War, "shell-shock" was the First World War, it manifests itself in every – from every war. There will be people that come out of Timor with – out of Afghanistan and Iraq, probably, every conflict has its psychological post-traumatic stress disorder. And sometimes those names, if you

29:30 like, are hung on and they're overused, and so you might find another terminology will come out as battle fatigue or shell-shock in the First and Second World Wars, has gone by the wayside. So this will go by the wayside as well, but the syndrome will still be there. The underlying syndrome will still be there. Some people suffer it, some people don't.

Do you think that the instances of those

30:00 **of that syndrome are greater amongst Vietnam vets than earlier vets?**

The Vietnam veterans were more educated, better educated than their fathers in the Second World War. Probably better educated than their grandfathers in the First World War, and the facilities are there now for the treatment of those things. Whereas before the fella would go, from the First World War go back to his farm. And he'd be fine,

30:30 he'd be round there four or five years and he'd have a few memory relapses and so forth. The horse blowing off will remind him of the Fifth Hussars charging over the hill or whatever. Those sorts of things. A Second World War bloke would probably go silly with malaria because he'd be shaking in the corner. But I just, sorry, I've lost the train of the thought now.

Are the instances greater amongst Vietnam vets than those earlier vets or are they just…?

That's right, and I was talking about their

31:00 education being higher. Their awareness of their condition and/or their family, and I mean, families in my time, like my Mum and Dad would say, "Are you alright?" And you'd say, "Yes". And that would be it, whereas now people are more open to discuss their sexual dysfunction or their marital dysfunction or whatever and they'll do it with their family rather than going down the pub and coming home and kicking the cat or locking yourself in the TV room or something like that, you know,

31:30 but because we're more educated, we know more about what our condition is, and if you were stopped from working, you can't go to work and stand in front of the managing director that's flown in from New

York because your shirt's sopping wet, or you're a gibbering wreck in the corner, having to have four cigarettes and fourteen cups of coffee to get yourself through the first hour of the meeting. And I think because of that education – there's also the facility, the veterans,

32:00 Department of Veterans' Affairs has recognised these conditions, and so therefore there is compensation for it, there is treatment available for it, there is understanding of it, not before, where, "Oh, you're a coward". Because you cowered in the corner in the First World War when the artillery shells were coming in at 90 to the dozen, or you were faced with sitting on Shaggy Ridge with a battalion of Japanese throwing everything that they had bar their kitchen sink at you.

32:30 So that's been, yeah, we've got the – they've now got the understanding that these things can come into and individual, via an incident or a series of incidents, and they are prepared to compensate people for it. That's why the Department of Veterans' Affairs, exists, if you like.

Kinda makes you laugh, that it's taken us till this era for us to accept that

33:00 **war would have that kind of affect on a person, really.**

Yeah, it is, but I think it comes back to education and understanding and getting rid of that British stiff upper lip sort of thing. Bear it, grin and bear it, you know, that sort of thing. Where people are more vocal now, and they'll say, like, "Jeez, I can't do that any more". Whereas before you said, "Oh, you bloody weak bastard. You can do it." Some people can't. Some people labour on under the misconception that they're doing

33:30 okay, but they're not, and it's their family around them that sees the slowly deleterious effect of that service, if you like, on their lives and the individual's lives.

And if you can't, it's okay.

Yeah, but your mates know it's okay. Other people, civilians, people that have never been exposed to the military may not understand that. But who cares?

34:00 **It was a long time before Vietnam vets marched. I think there was a march in the '80s.**

Yes, '86. '86, yeah, it was June '86, I think it was. Sydney. And they organised their own welcome home parade. It was difficult for the government to do it because, I mean, I came home at midnight or eleven o'clock at night into a darkened Perth airport, they did that for the simple reason that there could have been protesters there and

34:30 they didn't want families and children, if that was the case, that were there to meet us, to be exposed to those sorts of dangers. So they were there, sometimes they were taking, we were just whisked into the back of trucks, taken back to Swanbourne and, happy days, here's a cup of coffee, go to bed sort of thing, that was it. So, and I didn't have any family here so I didn't have anyone to meet me, specifically. Yeah, so…

Did you march in Sydney?

Did I march?

In Sydney?

35:00 Yes. Yeah. We were living in Sydney at the time and we had a group of people come up, blokes come up from Victoria and they stayed with us, there were about ten of us all stayed in the house and we all bolted off that day and had a great laugh it was, yeah. It was a good time.

What did that day mean to you?

It was sort of like a bit of a red line under or a ruling off of a situation that was untidy. But as I said before, their government didn't have an opportunity because there was 1 RAR came that day and then

35:30 3 RAR came that day. So you'd be having welcome home parades forever. And the poor old coppers and horses in Sydney and the governor general would be up there standing with his arm permanently stuck in a position saluting. So that's, it's a hard thing. Yeah, alright, now we've had the Afghani war finished, so you could have a welcome home parade for there. The Iraq war went for three, four months, you could have a welcome home parade for that. But

36:00 not in the situation like we had. Nor was it Second World War. Peace was signed, VE [Victory in Europe] Day, VJ [Victory over Japan] Day or whatever it was, then you could have a march through the streets for the people that were coming back, but there were people who missed out on that because they were still prisoners of war or they were stuck somewhere or they were in Japan, looking after the people in Japan, providing a police and an administration for the Japanese.

What does Anzac Day mean to you, Charlie?

It's significant, very significant,

36:30 and particularly here in Perth with our association, we get probably 200, 250 marching with us, we have an interspersion now of the younger blokes who are veterans of Afghanistan, Iraq, Timor and so forth and march with us as well. And that's heartening, because we see our numbers rising, there are those

that wouldn't march at all. And don't want to be involved with it. And I understand that, I mean, not everybody does those things, but I'm curious

37:00 and I like to see and be with my mates and I like to – someone will turn up out of the blue who we haven't seen for X years, how nice to see him and catch up with what he's doing. You know. It's a significant day, and for us it's a significant day too.

What do you think of the growing popularity of Anzac Day?

Well, I think that that's right. It is right. Because for a period of years there was an actually waning of interest in Anzac

37:30 Day. And I think that's dreadful, my – as I told you earlier in the day, two uncles who served in the First World War, one was killed in action and the other one came home with a Military Medal because he captured seventeen Germans with one rifle. And five rounds in that rifle, he captured those after brassing them up and catching them, so he was quite an heroic action and I think that it's a shame that people – actions like that, could be just sort of ruled off and said, "No, that's finished, we

38:00 don't want to celebrate that anymore". And I really think that the impetus is coming on now, because we're coming up for the 100th anniversary, 1914, 1915, it's not that far away, we're ten years away if you like. And that's going to be a significant year, the 100th anniversary of the Anzac landing in 1915.

Do you think that people might be starting to identify more with the role of servicemen, in the fact – how they've served their country and they've fought

38:30 **for their country's freedom?**

Servicemen in the – being in the services is a real job, now. It's a real job, alright, our blokes are on the pointy end of that job, they're specialised in that area, but engineers and arts degrees and geologists and surveyors and all those sorts of people still get jobs in the army and can do good jobs, good work in the army, and fortunately now they're starting to get paid, the recognition for that as well. And I think that the army is

39:00 becoming an accepted part of – it used to be, "Oh, you're in the army", sort of thing, "'cause you couldn't get a real job." Or whatever it was. Didn't matter whether you'd wanted the adventure or the mateship or whatever, I think it's an accepted part of Australia's society now.

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

A couple of blokes – mainly to remember the names of the blokes that I'm talking to. Because the face is familiar, but what's your bloody name. And I think, oh Christ, I know him, like,

39:30 you know, my own brother and I think, oh, what's his name. Then yeah, then it all comes.

Do you reflect upon any more deeper feelings than that?

Yeah but that's just goes, you think about the blokes that – the two blokes that I mentioned before that have died, that died over there. And then others that have died since, when we – the majority, sorry, if a fellow's going to die, ex-SAS he would die between

40:00 49 and 55. Be that by suicide, heart attack, cancer or whatever. And we're getting cancers in a variety of different forms occurring in blokes, so it may be an indicator of their armed service, or it may be just that segment of the population, there's that problem.

Well, you've only lightly touched on quite a few issues there, Charlie, but I think we might be out of time to explore those tonight. Thanks for spending the day with us and sharing your experiences with us.

40:30 **INTERVIEW ENDS**