

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Martin Hamilton-Smith - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

- 00:43 I grew up in the 1950's and '60s, at a time when World War II was still a living memory. And my grandfather had been a Rat of Tobruk. I had other family members who'd both served in World War II and World War I. And there were people well known to our family
- 01:00 who were serving in Vietnam. So I grew up in what I would say is a community that was fairly conscious of the conflicts in which Australia had been involved. I became involved in the army cadets through the school system. I then developed from that into the army reserve, as a seventeen-year-old, and spent nearly two years in the army reserve, before going to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, through a scholarship, which I was awarded. Commencing four years at the Royal Military
- 01:30 College, Duntroon, I graduated in 1975 into the infantry. I spent two years in an infantry battalion as a platoon commander. And then into Headquarters 3 Brigade as the headquarters' defence platoon commander, and later the LO [Liaison Officer] or staff officer to the brigade commander. Then I went over there the SAS [Special Air Service] regiment for nearly four years, as a troop commander and operations officer, including service overseas with
- 02:00 the British SAS and other units. And from there to a staff position at headquarters field command as a captain. During which time I completed my master of arts in history, focusing on guerrilla warfare. Following that, my first sub-unit command was in the commando regiment, 1st Commando Company. Then following that training command to a staff position in operations and training management for two
- 02:30 years. Staff college, commanding staff college for a year in 1988. Following that I went to Canberra to Headquarters Special Forces. Although at that time it was called the Directorate of Special Action Forces in headquarters army. While I was there I was involved in raising Headquarters Special Forces as firstly a major and then a lieutenant colonel. And we raised that first Headquarters Special Forces, which is now grown
- 03:00 into a very large organisation following Iraq and Afghanistan. My first command was as regimental commander at the 1st Commando Regiment in 1991 and '92. And following that, my second command was as CO [Commanding Officer] of our peacekeepers in Egypt, serving as the Australian contingent of the multinational force and observers in Sinai in 1993. I was involved, as CO, in raising and training and equipping
- 03:30 that group, deploying them overseas and then redeploying to Australia. In 1994, on return from Sinai, I took a year's leave, long service leave. And I left the army in 1995 and pursued a career in business. That career in business actually was involved, interestingly enough, in building and operating private childcare centres and kindergartens, which is probably an odd business career after a long period of service in the
- 04:00 Army Special Forces. But I did that for nearly ten years. In fact, I started that business while I was still in the army. And in 1997 I was elected to the South Australian parliament, where I still serve as the member for Waite. I became a minister in our government in 2001. And since 2002 I've been an opposition front bencher for economic development, small business,
- 04:30 science, and innovation information, economy and the arts -quite a large basket of portfolios - to the present time, 2004.
- Just asking a few questions on your post service years. Where did the desire for the childcare centres come from?**
- Well, interestingly enough I made a decision, I think while I was in Egypt. And it had been probably brewing
- 05:00 for a few years too, to move on from the military. I felt that commanding a regiment and unit was probably my last opportunity to command with soldiers directly. At that time, in the early 1990s, it looked as though we were in for a period of prolonged peace. It looked as though the future as a senior

officer in the army probably involved long periods in Canberra as a senior officer, with not much operational activity. Had

05:30 one been able to look into a crystal ball and see what would happen in the world during the 1990s, with Timor and Afghanistan and Iraq, I might have made a different decision. I might have felt that my calling was to remain. But I felt that it was time to move aside, and to let others step into my shoes and go forward. I wanted to start a business. It didn't worry me what business as long as it was a good, profitable, sound business. I had an opportunity to get

06:00 involved in the childcare industry because members of my family had an involvement in it. My mother and my sister actually owned a business and understood the business. And I had partly grown up in a childcare centre, in that my mother ran one when I was a child. She was a pioneer of that industry in the nation. She started the first private childcare centre in the country I think, here in Adelaide. And I'd grown up in that environment, so it was an environment that I understood. The industry was going through

06:30 a boom at that time. There was good money to be made. It was a good, profitable business. It was a private business and it was an opportunity to be an employer and see if I could transfer the skills that I had learnt in the military into the private sector, and if I could make a success of the private sector. So I decided that childcare would be the industry for me. I also have a property business, investment and development business, which was going concurrently. So I was interested in acquiring land,

07:00 building childcare centres. I had an architect, a team of builders. And building the development side of the business, as well as hiring staff and putting good managers in place and running good quality service. For all of those reasons I just thought it was time to get out and try to cut it in business.

**And how did you move from the private sector into a political career?**

Well, I found in business that it was very personally rewarding in financial terms, and it was a challenge to

07:30 transfer all those leadership and man-management skills you'd learned and practised in the army, to the civilian sphere. Which I could say was quite remarkable. I went for example, from commanding a regiment of five hundred and forty men, with only two or three women, to having a workforce at one stage, of a hundred and twenty-three people, of whom, apart from me and the handyman, everyone of them was a woman. And everyone of them was a civilian, and a non uniformed civilian. So I had to make that leap in terms of leadership and management to

08:00 handling a non uniformed, non military workforce that was predominantly female rather than predominantly male. All those challenges were quite amusing and quite challenging and interesting. And in some ways demanding for me. But something was missing in that business life for me. There was no sense of service to nation. And there was no sense of duty. It was almost, in a sense, a self-serving

08:30 way to spend your life. Not to diminish that, because millions of Australians are out there involved in business every day and that's what makes the Australian economy and culture tick. These are worthwhile endeavours. But for me I felt a calling to go back into public service. And it was inappropriate, once Timor and Iraq and Afghanistan started to unfold

09:00 to go back into the military. I'd moved on from that. But it seemed to me that I could make a contribution to our democracy, through being a member of parliament. I actually entertained the idea of becoming a media commentator on defence issues. And I actually began that. I did some work with Channel Nine, Channel Two and Channel Seven. I reported on, and was involved as a commentator during the Blackhawk crash involving the SAS regiment,

09:30 on matters involving the submarine project, on other matters regarding defence efficiency review, in the mid to late 1990s, and other matters. I wrote columns for The Australian. While I was still working in my private business I started to develop an interest and a career in becoming a foreign affairs commentator. But when I was offered an opportunity to run for pre-selection for the Liberal Party in the seat of Waite, in 1997, I decided to take that opportunity.

10:00 And it was apparent that I should, given that we had a Liberal Federal and State government, that I should probably stand back from that defence and foreign affairs commentary role that I'd developed, and let others who were more qualified and more in the positions to manage those affairs. So I stood back from that. It was really a calling to, again have an opportunity to serve your nation, and to be intellectually challenged. I found being in business

10:30 a lonely boat to row, in some respects. You would come up against people who were in your business, but it was quite narrow and focused on that particular business. Which for me was property development and childcare and the childcare business, which at the time was booming. It was a multi billion dollar industry. It was involving thousands of small business people. I got involved in the structural

11:00 business of childcare. I became president of one of the local business industry associations here in South Australia. I then became national secretary of the national industry body, the Australian Confederation of Childcare. I got involved in lobbying federal and state ministers on behalf of the childcare industry. I got involved in the legislative and financial management issues that affected the

national industry, as you would with any industry as a national leader in it. As secretary of the national body,

11:30 I produced a national industry magazine, etcetera. And that brought me back into contact with Federal and State governments, and with higher strategic issues in that case, to do with the economy and that particular business, and its place in the broader economy. But that all formed part of re-stimulating my interest in service. And I found it more intellectually challenging being involved in matters to do with governance and the future of the nation - where we were headed and

12:00 where we needed to be heading. I always had a view when I was in the army, that put up or shut up. If you had an idea on how the job should be done and you thought you could do it better, rather than knock the bloke who was doing it, be prepared to contribute your idea, and roll your sleeves up and make the change happen. If you thought you could do it better than somebody else then you had a responsibility to stand up to the plate and have

12:30 a go. And rather than sit home and watch TV and critique what was going on in the world, I wanted to become involved. The opportunity for me that presented in Adelaide, South Australia was to take up a State seat in the State parliament. There were only a few Federal seats. They were filled by young men and women who were probably

13:00 going to be there for a period. An opportunity to enter the Federal parliament didn't present itself for me at the time that I was ready. So I took the opportunity that did present, and that was to become the member for the Mitcham area, which is the area after all, that I grew up in, went to school in and was my heart. So I'm one of these odd creatures called a member of parliament, actually in the city anyway, where I grew up in, worked in and my businesses were in, the electorate

13:30 which I now represent. So I'm pretty well home-grown in that respect. I came home, if you like, after all those years in the army and now represent the area in which I was born.

**That's great. Let's go back to the area that you were born. Whereabouts was it, the family home?**

Well, my earliest memory of home was as a resident in, what could only be described as a camp.

14:00 It was an old air force base right here in Mitcham, down near Daws Road. It had been used as an air force base during the war. And it comprised of asbestos, prefabricated homes on stilts. It was a very low socio-economic area. And my parents married very, very young, shortly after the war. In fact, they were both teenagers when they married, which was not uncommon. They were struggling to survive.

14:30 Dad was a policeman. Mum was a housewife and mother, doing part-time work. I think she had a dry-cleaning round. She used to do odd jobs cleaning and so on. And eventually some childcare work that ultimately grew into this business. So we were, by the standards of the day, poor. Certainly low socio-economic category. We lived in this camp, was essentially what it was.

15:00 It's all been bulldozed. It's quite a nice suburb in the electorate now, or on the boundary of the electorate. So we grew up in that environment until I was about four. I have pleasant memories of going to kindergarten in that area. It was a nice place to grow up. Adelaide was a little rough and tumble in those days. This is mid '50s. We'd started that long economic boom. Things were starting to improve right around the city.

15:30 It was the Playford period in South Australia. And eventually the family managed to raise enough for a deposit on a block of land, which was at the back of my grandparents' home, just around the corner in Boothby Street, in Panorama. And Mum and Dad built their own house on the cement foundations that they laid themselves. I've got quite vivid memories of it as a five or six year old, seeing the foundations laid and the uncles and aunts came over. And everyone chipped in

16:00 and built a house on the spare block, out the back of my grandparents' home. And we moved into that when I was about six or seven, and that became our home. Interestingly it was my home right up until the time that I was seventeen, and joined the army and left South Australia. And it was in that home that we all grew up. There were six children. Three boys,

16:30 three girls, Mum and Dad. Dad left the police force eventually and started his own business. He bought a large prime mover and became a long-haul interstate truck driver. Effectively he was a truckie. And his job was to drive goods and products all around the country. And I went on trips with him as a youngster; nine, ten, eleven, to Melbourne

17:00 and Sydney. It was my first trip to Sydney, and started to see a bit of the country with him during school holidays. Trucking, essentially. You got the sense of this big nation, this big country. It took me out of South Australia and I got interested in the idea of seeing that country, and seeing the world, and getting out of Adelaide. I realised that there was a world beyond. It partly stimulated my interest in the military. When I was about eleven

17:30 my mother and father parted. And Dad headed down to Mount Gambia and he raised a second family down there, and Mum stayed in Adelaide in the family home in Boothby Street. She realised that she had six children to support. This was the early '60s. It was a tough time. There was no dole, no supporting mothers' pension. Very few benefits of any kind available for a mother

18:00 with six children, in those times, other than to throw yourself at the mercy of the welfare system and turn up at the soup kitchen. My mother was made of much tougher stuff than that. And she said, "Right, it's sink or swim. What can I do?" So she started child minding for others. And at this time, women were increasingly entering the workforce. Pretty soon child minding for others meant that she had two or three times as many kids

18:30 as she had herself, in her own home during the day. And that developed into a business. The first private childcare centre in the nation really, I think it was, in the late '50s, very early '60s. And she was able to support our family throughout our teen years, running that business and building that business up.

**You said it was developed into a private business. Did it run**

19:00 **out of the family home?**

Out of the family home, yes. We lived there, and eventually a large room was built on the back. And then, it was quite a large property, new buildings were built down at the rear of the property to accommodate a kindy room. And then, eventually we bought the house next door and the two properties were adjoined and further buildings were constructed. And eventually there was a complex of two homes with buildings at the rear. Quite

19:30 comfortable lodgings. Big enough for fifty or sixty children to be cared for on those two adjoining properties, with trained staff and so on. So it grew into quite a big business. But it also was our home. So in effect, I grew up in a childcare centre.

**So you were never short of playmates?**

Well, I suppose not. But of course, by the time I was growing up most of the kids in the centre were much younger than me, because I moved into this home when I was about six or seven.

20:00 I was already at school. And most of my formative years, early teens, most of the kids in the childcare centre were obviously under five or six. And staff looked after those kids. And really, the way it worked out was, there was a part of the home that was really for the family. And there were the properties that had been built down the back and the buildings that had been built on the adjacent home, which were the sites of the business. So although everyone was intermingled,

20:30 it was as if the childcare centre business operated concurrently with us living in the home. Our part of the home was preserved for family. And there was overlap, but it was certainly interesting to grow up in a business, with a small business basically all around you. Interesting.

**And where did you go to school?**

I started school at Colonel Light Gardens Primary School, which is again, in my electorate, and close to home.

21:00 I did two years there and then they built a new school, closer to my home called Clapham Primary School. And those of us that lived closer to Clapham than we did to Colonel Light Gardens were asked if we'd like to move. And the family made a decision that we would, so my brothers and sisters and I all moved to Clapham. So I finished my primary school years at Clapham. And that was great. Played footy, we were in the Sturt and South Adelaide football club districts, it flip-flopped.

21:30 And I became a pretty keen footy player and did all the things that boys do. You know, had mates, wandered around the foothills of Adelaide, got involved a lot in sport, had a pretty good life actually. It was a good place to grow up, in the foothills of Adelaide at that time. I left Clapham Primary School after Grade 7. And went off to Daws Road High School, as it was then, which again, wasn't far from home. In fact, it was on the site

22:00 that we'd once lived in the camp. In fact, that camp had been bulldozed and one of the things that they built was a school. And I went over there, that school. So interestingly, I wasn't far from where I'd once lived as a child. I did two years there at Daws Road High School. And this was the time when my parents split, and I was probably not the best behaved kid in the class, I think it would be fair to say.

22:30 In those days, it was all right for the principal to cane students. And I seem to recall regular attendance in the principal's office, not without good reason. I probably deserved every whack I got. It must have been quite tough for those teachers actually. Because these were interesting, and tough times in Australia, in the early '60s, mid '60s. And Australia itself, and South Australia, was going through an interesting time.

23:00 By this time I had developed this passion for things military for some reason. I think about the age of twelve I decided really that I wanted to be a soldier. And in particular, that I wanted to be an officer. And I credit that to the influence partly, of my grandfather. Being a Rat of Tobruk, and he'd served in the battalion, 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force], and later in New Guinea, and was a very commanding figure and a very dominant figure in my early life.

23:30 But also, with the fact that the family came into contact with a lot of Vietnam veterans, with a lot of servicemen, in fact, my mother's second marriage was finally to a serviceman, a Vietnam veteran and Korea veteran. So her second marriage was to a man with whom I came into contact obviously, in my

last two or three years at home. And through him and his mates, I came

24:00 to be discussing military matters. Got a bit of feel to what service in the army and the defence force was like. So I had these combining influences of my grandfather with my mother's second husband, and his friends. And it's just something that I came to become familiar with. Combined with, I suppose, a biological tendency to have an interest in history.

24:30 I just found that I was good at history. I liked history. History interested me. Anything to do with history fascinated me. So, I found that I had a passionate interest in, for example, the history of World War I and World War II, and going right back to the Romans, to be frank. It's a passion that's been with me all my life. I went on to university and studied military history. I went on to

25:00 university again, later in Sydney, the University of New South Wales, and did a masters degree in history, focusing on aspects of military history. And it's just been a passion that's always been with me. So all these influences coalesced to convince me, at the early age of twelve or thirteen. After going through the initial process of deciding I wanted to be a policeman and a fireman and so on, I arrived at the conclusion that really, being in the army was probably what I wanted to be. So I found

25:30 then that I was at a school, Pasadena, that didn't have army cadets. And this gets me back to the question you asked, I wanted to change schools after two years of high school, to a school that had army cadets. And I had two choices. Unley High School or Marion High School. Marion High School was just a slightly closer school. So, in my third year at high school I switched to Marion High School and I joined the army cadets.

26:00 And I then did three years in the army cadets. And that really cemented my interest in a career in the military. So those five years at high school were completed at Daws Road for the first two, and then Marion for the following three years.

**Can I just touch on your grandfather being a Rat of Tobruk, and your mother's second husband being a veteran of Korea and Vietnam. What were they telling you about two aspects - firstly**

26:30 **military life, and war?**

Well, through the eyes of a ten, eleven or twelve year old, what I saw was the mateship. What I saw were the veterans, my grandfather's mates from Tobruk and New Guinea, gathering at his place several times a year for a barbecue

27:00 and a couple of beers, with their families. There was this incredible camaraderie. This incredible mateship. And I remember, as a very early teenager, wondering what it was that had happened to these people. What had made them develop this amazing bond together that they'd become such amazingly good mates. Of course, at the time, these men would have only been, this was the early '60s, some of them would have only been in their forties. They

27:30 were younger than I am today. They weren't old men. Of course, they looked old to me, but they weren't. But they had this incredible mateship and I thought, look, that captured me a little bit, there's something special about this career, this vocation. I didn't really talk much to my grandfather about the horrors of war, if you like, or the details of war. He didn't really talk about that a great deal, and I never asked him until much later, when I was serving myself, we

28:00 talked about a few things. I can come back to that later. And he talked to me about some of his experiences in Tobruk, and he talked to me about some of his experiences in New Guinea, how different they were. By then I understood the issues a bit better. But I remember at his funeral, which I think was around 1986...

28:30 He was a larger than life figure, my grandfather. When he joined the army he was thirty-two. He was older than most of the other young men that joined. And I think they looked up to him a bit. He was a trumpet player in the band, as well as a signalman. His job was to go out at Tobruk and lay the phone lines between positions, often out in no-man's land, and link them up, often under fire. And being a

29:00 trumpeter in the band, he'd been at Tobruk during each of the sieges. And I remember his funeral, he died well into his eighties, people turned up from all over the country still to see him off. I counted about a hundred and five I think it was, at the funeral. Which, for people that have been in the military would understand that's almost a company. And a company from a battalion that had fought so long before.

29:30 And they'd come from all over the country. And they all threw a poppy into his grave. And this was at Stansbury, a seaside country town on York Peninsula, about a three or four hours drive from Adelaide. But one of the things I remember most was, as we were laying the casket into the car, this crumpled old bloke in a sort of ramshackle jacket staggered to the front. I think

30:00 he might have looked like he'd had a couple of drinks the night before, and he had a bugle under his coat. I said to a couple of the RSL [Returned and Services League] guys, "Who's that guy?" And they said, "Well..." To cut a long story short, at the second battle of Tobruk, this fellow and my grandfather had both been buglers together in the battalion, and being quite convinced that they were both going to die that night, they made a promise to each other that

- 30:30 if one of them got killed the other one would play the 'Last Post' at their funeral. It was very touching. And off they went. And that night they survived. A number of their mates were killed. And this fellow was living up in North Queensland somewhere and no one had heard from him for years. And they put the notice in the papers as they do, Jim McIntyre had died.
- 31:00 This bloke turned up unannounced in Stansbury the day before. Got off the bus with his bugle, played the 'Last Post'. So that was very touching. And of course, as a young teenager I didn't understand that at the time. But later on when you see those things happen you think, gee, isn't that amazing that he would turn up
- 31:30 unannounced like that, straight out of the blue. But they sort of catch up with each other at the funerals these guys. And in a way, I could sort of feel that when I was a twelve or thirteen years old, that mateship. And I think that was enormously appealing to me as a young man. To think, that's probably not a bad career to go into. There's something about that, I'd like to be
- 32:00 part of that experience. And then of course, complementing that was the influences of these other people that I came into contact with, the Vietnam and Korea veterans. And remember that the Vietnam War was raging during this period. I went to high school at a time when you would pick up the paper and Vietnam was on the front page every day. The school that I went to, Pasadena,
- 32:30 on the corner of Daws Road and Goodwood Road, is right beside the Centennial Park Cemetery, which is the major war grave in this state. And regularly, as we were in our classrooms, there'd be a military funeral. And most of our dead in South Australia, in fact the first national serviceman killed in Vietnam was
- 33:00 a South Australian from Adelaide, buried at Centennial Park. I remember the funeral, and it was conducted with great fanfare. And the funeral cortege moved down Daws Road from the church, past my school as we sat in the classroom looking out the window, watching it proceed, with the coffin on a gun carriage, from memory.
- 33:30 And that was not an uncommon occurrence during those, I think it was '67, '68, around there. So there were a number of dead servicemen buried here, right beside my school. And it was probably the major veterans' cemetery in the state.
- 34:00 So for all those reasons, it was very much in my mind. And I thought, that's really something. It was almost calling me to go and to serve and to be part of this. And so, I think it was partly personal, it was partly this family involvement and this feeling of wanting
- 34:30 to be in this sort of mateship thing. It was also partly the feeling that, the perception that I had as a young teenager was that these young men were defending the country. I didn't understand the politics of what was going on. In fact, what I know about Vietnam now, having studied it at university level, and having met so many veterans, and having a much more knowledgeable base, was it was probably a conflict that we should never have been involved in, for a whole range of reasons. But the quality
- 35:00 of the sacrifice is really something that all Australians should be proud of. Years later I visited the (UNCLEAR) in Normandy. It's interesting. We just celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, and I was there with a German friend,
- 35:30 and we visited the landing ground of Normandy where so many of our servicemen, our airmen had been. And I was reminded, as I visited the cemeteries, of the experience of watching the Vietnam veterans being buried at Centennial Park. And I went to the cemetery at Omaha Beach, and this was the cemetery we saw in 'Saving Private Ryan'. It's quite a glorious cemetery.
- 36:00 It's full of beautiful marble tombstones, and there's little places to worship. It's beautifully maintained, there's plenty of parking. American tourists visit their relatives. Where the tombstone is, of a Jewish American soldier, it had the Star of David. It's appropriately marked. The sense of glory, you know, there's a sense of purpose as if these men died an honourable and brave death.
- 36:30 I went down to the beaches and looked at the landing site at Omaha Beach, and I was a serving soldier at that time. A passion of mine has always the siting of machine guns. And you could see that the tactical commanders at that particular beach... I would say that the reason why the casualties were so high at Omaha was because they came up against a group of German tactical commanders who really knew how to site their machine guns well, and who really knew what they were doing. And they really
- 37:00 made good use of enfilade fire. They'd sighted their positions brilliantly. And the result of that tactical achievement filled the graves and cemetery at Omaha Beach. But before leaving I said to the girl I was travelling with, "I want to go and find a German grave. Because I don't think I should leave this area without seeing the other side. Because there were no Germans buried here."
- 37:30 I think there were about six thousand Americans buried at Omaha Beach. Well, we looked at the maps and eventually found one of the two or three German grave sites. I think it was near Bayeux, hidden behind hedgerows. We missed it the first time and had to turn around and come back. You walked into the German grave sites, and I think from memory, there were about thirty thousand Germans buried in this

- 38:00 grave site compared to six thousand at Omaha. I stood to be corrected on that, I'm not sure. It was a massively larger number. And instead of a glorious tombstone there was nothing but a tablet on the ground. And in each hole there were at least four or five, sometimes six Germans buried one on top of the other. They'd obviously been buried there at great haste. Sometimes
- 38:30 each of the six names would be given on the tombstone or on the tablet on the ground, flat on top of the grave site. But most often there'd be one or two names, and the other three or four would say, "An unknown soldier of Germany." And in the middle of the grave yard is a fallen angel looking down woefully over this barren and grey, undramatic, unvictorious
- 39:00 desolation. And I was quite moved. And I was as moved as I had been watching the Vietnam vets be buried. And the thing that moved me about it was, as a soldier, soldiers from both sides had fought bravely and died bravely for their country, for their families and for what they believed in.
- 39:30 And in a way the quality of their sacrifice was equal. And yet, to the victor goes the glory. I was very troubled by the fact. And I said to my friend, "Why haven't the Germans come back here and fixed these graves up? Why haven't they made them glorious like the grave site at Omaha Beach?" And she said, "Well the Germans have a different attitude to these things. They believe it was a bleak patch in their
- 40:00 lives. They just want to be done with it." And I thought, well why haven't the families come back, and I still wrestle with that. And the other thing that I wrestle with, as a Christian, was in a way we always recognise in our culture, the individual sacrifice of a soldier's death for his country. And it's a point in all of the Commonwealth graves that
- 40:30 each soldier is buried in his own grave. And I had difficulty with the fact that the German soldiers were buried in what amounted to mass graves. And their sacrifice wasn't individually remembered. And I guess it counts to the way in which different nations see their involvement in war, depending on whether they won or lost, and depending on the cause. And I saw this again later when I was in Egypt and I went to El Alamein
- 41:00 to visit the graves there for the anniversary, and I noticed the same thing. The Commonwealth war graves and the German war graves were quite markedly different.

## Tape 2

- 00:32 **I'm going to pick up from Duntroon. How did you find out about Duntroon or the scholarships that were available?**
- I was in the army reserve at this stage. I joined the Adelaide University Regiment about eighteen months before I went to Duntroon, so I was given information there. So from family contacts and friends, I knew that this Duntroon opportunity was available. There are advertisements. Overseas it was put out
- 01:00 there. The country, at war in Vietnam, was actively promoting and looking for recruits. So there was plenty of exposure to the fact that there was an opportunity. I applied for a scholarship in my Year 11 year, to attend Duntroon. You go through all the selection processes, etcetera. And it's, in effect, a scholarship for Year 12, for your matriculation year. And I was
- 01:30 lucky to be successful in that selection process for Duntroon in Year 11, or leaving I think it was called then. So I was given a scholarship. I think it was the princely sum of four hundred dollars, which back in 1971, was a lot of money. And that helped me through Year 12. And it meant that if I successfully completed Year 12 that I would automatically
- 02:00 have a place available in Duntroon. And I successfully completed Year 12 and went off to Duntroon in January 1972, and started there with what we call the Class of '75, because that's when we graduated.
- What were your first impressions of Duntroon when you got there?**
- I'd been there briefly on a school visit, which was this opportunity to send a group of schoolboys over there to have a look, spend a week
- 02:30 there and see what it's like. So I had a look. But I really had no experience with it. It was pretty interesting. We arrived from all over the country. There were about a hundred and forty-nine I think, a hundred and fifty young men, no women at that stage, all selected from around the nation to attend. Now, of that hundred and forty-nine, or fifty, that started, sixty-three ultimately graduated three years later. So it
- 03:00 was quite a large drop out along the way. Some decided that it wasn't for them. Some struggled with the academic side of it. Some struggled with the military side of it. There were a range of reasons, but that group dropped off. I think that we were an interesting group of young blokes. We were pretty fired up, pretty keen. Remember the Vietnam War was raging, that was the army we were entering, and

- everyone expected to go. There were a variety of backgrounds. Some had come from private schools,
- 03:30 some had come, like me, from the public schooling system. Some, I'd say, were pretty well heeled. Some, like me, weren't. Some were very focussed on sport, some perhaps weren't. Although everybody had been pretty focused on sport, but some, I'd say, were nationally competitive athletes and others were just solid footy players, if you like. Some were very focused
- 04:00 on academics, some weren't. You know, it was a mixed bag of people. Some were farmers, some were city boys. From all around the country. It was a pretty amazing group of young blokes. And of course, these people ultimately turned out to be your best mates in life. And I'm getting married next week and quite a number of these guys are coming. A couple of them are generals, a couple of them are out now, they're in business, whatever, and they're
- 04:30 the greatest mates you'd ever have in your life. And you started a bonding there and a mateship that has lasted a lifetime, and will no doubt, when the time comes, we'll all be turning up to each other's funerals, just like they did for my grandfather. That's the nature of military service, isn't it? You go through things together. But Duntroon at that time was very collegiate.
- 05:00 This is the old Duntroon. The four-year course, as it had been since 1911. Except for the war years, World War I and II, when the course was abbreviated down. It had become a fully degree granting institution, I think in about 1968, through it's partnership with the University of New South Wales. So we were going to university as well as going to a military college, or a military academy. It was a little bit old school tie. You had the
- 05:30 blazer and the tie and off you'd go. As I said, quite collegiate. And everyone would go off to the rugby on weekends or the Aussie rules football or to the cricket, or whatever it was you did. And you were very much having this sense of being a group of handpicked young men who'd been put together in this very old institution. It was probably as close as you come in Australia, to English private school,
- 06:00 military school institution that you have in the UK. That was probably as close as Australia came to that environment. And it was pretty uplifting. You got to know people. You went through a lot of hard times together. And you were training for war, so you got to know each other pretty well. It was a pretty amazing place to be. A bit cold, a bit of a shock. Some of us were seventeen, I think I'd just turned eighteen. I had my eighteenth birthday just before I got on the plane.
- 06:30 And you were away from home. I look at some families today and the kids are still at home, living with Mum and they're thirty. You think back, there was very little time to reminisce about what it was like being at home. You were just into this new life and you left home, you were in another state, you were in the army. You'd grown up all of a sudden. You'd gone from being a boy to a man, and that was it. There was no going back.
- 07:00 A pretty interesting time.

**When you got to Duntroon what struck you the most about it?**

- I think the thing that struck me the most were the mateships that I was starting to form, the people that I'd met. And the next thing that struck me was the high calibre and quality of the staff that ran the place, of the military staff and the academic staff. This was a very professionally run show.
- 07:30 It really quite struck me. It was a very old, well-established institution. It was tough discipline. They had the job of knocking us into shape. And we were pretty disorganised. Remember, these were boys that could easily take an hour to get ready to go to school in the morning, for whom, in many cases, Mum would have cooked all the meals and washed all the clothes and ironed
- 08:00 everything. There were a few in our group that were, it would be fair to say, in shock for the first few weeks. You would be shown how to wear your uniform, and get yourself personally organised. Personal organisation was a big issue. A lot of us weren't personally organised. I remember things called leaps, where you would be lined up out the front of the barracks and you were in your combat uniform. And you would be told, "Right. Go away and come back in your parade ground dress uniform. And you'll be back here
- 08:30 in exactly ten minutes." And by the time you scampered off to your room, that's two minutes. And allow two minutes to scamper back down. That's four minutes. You had about six minutes to get your combat equipment off, all stacked away beautifully. Get your new equipment out. Put your new uniform on, get down stairs. Of course, the first time you did this, there'd still be people struggling out the door, half dressed twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes after you'd left. So off you'd go again.
- 09:00 And you'd have to do the same exercise again and again and again. And this would go on for hours. Until eventually, after a week or two, when somebody said, "Disappear and come back dressed in this clobber within ten minutes." Everyone would be out the door and lined up in ten minutes in the right clobber. And what that forced people to do, was to get organised. And it was interesting, peer group pressure would do the job. It would
- 09:30 usually be the same one or two culprits, I was probably one of them at some stage, who'd be the last out the door. And pretty soon they'd get the message from everybody else that, hey, the group was going to

cop it if we all didn't pull together. So you'd get people helping one or two slow ones out. They'd come in and say, "Right, now Fred how can everyone help you get organised so that tomorrow when this happens you're not the last one out the door?" And you would get people bonding together and helping each other through it.

10:00 That is the way the military system works. It's often mis-portrayed on television. Hollywood loves to get carried away with images of bastardisation, and excessive and senseless discipline. And it tends to create this image of mindless stupidity and marching around following orders, no self-initiative. Nothing could be further from the truth. The army of the early 1970's, that I joined, was

10:30 a disciplined army. It was an army where you were expected to think for yourself. Where you were expected to portray self discipline, not mindless group discipline. Where you were expected to be responsible for your own actions. Where the group was meant to pull you through, and you were meant, over there, to be part of the group and help pull others in the group through. It was far and away from this mindless, brainless sort of discipline that you often see portrayed in Hollywood versions of what the military was like. And it was these

11:00 systems and devices that we used in these early years, in your formative years, in your first six months, in the field and on the parade ground, and about the barracks, that really created this culture. Some people thought, as they always do, that they were a bit better than that and didn't need all that. Well, they soon had the chip knocked off their shoulder. And there were others that needed a bit of a helping hand. But

11:30 you all finished up at the same level. You all finished up realising that you were a team, you needed to stick together and pull together and work as a team. You all recognised your strengths and weaknesses. Everybody realised they weren't good at everything. Everybody realised they could be really good at something. And everybody understood that they could be satisfactorily good at everything if they worked hard enough at it.

12:00 That was all part of that initial period at Duntroon. A lot of people were homesick. But you didn't have time to be too homesick because you were running, jumping, dodging and weaving, firing, in the bush working, lifting. You know, doing all these physical things. And our bodies too, were turning into the bodies of men. And you ached and groaned. And people had no trouble sleeping. Most of us, I recall, in those early weeks, you couldn't straighten your arms, they were just

12:30 aching so much from growth, muscle growth. Two to three good solid forty minute work-outs a day, in the gym. It was pretty physically demanding.

**Aside from the physical training that you went through in Duntroon, what was the academic?**

Duntroon was designed

13:00 as a faculty of the University of New South Wales. So the University of New South Wales was the degree granting body. But the university training that was designed there was designed as degree granting in military studies. So for example, you'd study history but the focus of your history would be on military history rather than perhaps on more esoteric aspects of history that might have been taught at Kensington in Sydney, in other branches of history. So instead of having three years,

13:30 of perhaps studying ancient history we studied history at large, but we tended to focus on the Napoleonic Wars, the history of World War I and II. Aspects of military history were given some impetus and some emphasis, instead of going off on tangents that were less relevant to military. And I understand, in the science faculties and other faculties,

14:00 that was similarly the case. So it was a full degree run by the University of New South Wales. Arts, science or engineering were offered. The first three years you were at Duntroon were predominantly academic. You did about six weeks of military training at the beginning of the year. And then several times during the year you'd do a couple of weeks solid military training. And then at the end of the year you would do a camp training period of three or four weeks, where you went bush on a major exercise. And

14:30 each week you'd do, I think Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings, you'd do military training. And every day you'd be in uniform. You'd have a parade every morning. So you were getting this constant military training in terms of your daily routines. And every week you were getting two half days of military training. But the rest of the time you were a uni student, and Duntroon ran as a campus. You were free to study, you'd prepare your assignments, you'd do all the normal things university students did at the time. Except

15:00 have long hair and sit around smoking dope and listening to Bob Dylan. Although we did a fair bit of listening to Bob Dylan, I must say. Remember at this time, the anti war movement was under way. Universities were fairly out there in protest, and places of rebellion. And there was a little bit of that at Duntroon but not anything to the scale we saw at other universities.

15:30 And in a sense that put you apart. I remember in early '72 we were told, "Don't go on leave in your uniform." This was a time that you could be spat at in the street by protestors. When I was at high school I remember having been stood up in my school cadet uniform by a student teacher and admonished in front of the class for doing something wrong. I can't remember what it was.

- 16:00 But the thrust of this particular teacher's protest was how could I be in a military uniform and misbehave in the class. And I was a disgrace to the uniform. And it was basically ostracising me because I was in a military uniform. And I think the teacher subsequently got into trouble with the school over that incident. But the protests were quite open. We had short hair in 1972. There wouldn't have been another young bloke in the country that had short hair. In fact, I remember one
- 16:30 of my mates would actually wear a wig when he went out to the pub. He was so embarrassed at being singled out for abuse, if you like. Because the minute the cadets came in, the cordies came in, the cadets from Duntroon came into the pub, everyone knew who they were, a fight was likely to break out in some cases. Or at the very least people would
- 17:00 single you out for whatever. And even girls, you know, you would be stereotyped as being one of those military cadets from Duntroon, at a time when everyone else was having long hair and being sort of a laidback uni student or whatever. So that was an issue as well. It was all those social issues that we were dealing with as young cadets.

**I was just going to ask how you personally dealt with the**

- 17:30 **fact that you took great pride in being a part of the military and yet outside of Duntroon it was a disgrace to the public?**

Well, this wasn't universally so. The vast majority of sensible, proud Australians didn't see it that way. Particularly older and more mature Australians, and most families.

- 18:00 I think you could still be proud and very, very proud. But there was a group, a loud, vocal anti war movement. There was a lot of hostility. Remember this was a time that, here in Adelaide, people ran out when one of our battalions came home, with buckets of blood and threw it on the troops, when Vietnam veterans or others in uniform, were exposed to all sorts of horrible abuses because
- 18:30 they were in uniform. And this contributed I think, largely to the feeling of rejection that a lot of Vietnam vets felt from some sectors of the community when they came home. And that was transferred to us as well, even though we weren't Vietnam veterans, we were young men in uniform. And to these protestors, this active, vocal group we were the problem. They took it out on the soldiers. I think it was a great mistake this nation made, to blame the soldiers for the decisions
- 19:00 of their governments. Decisions made in the best interests of this nation at the time, given the information available. Hindsight's a wonderful thing. Maybe they were wrong decisions but don't ever take it out on the soldiers. The soldiers are trying to do the right thing for their nation and for their families. We copped a lot of that flak but it was nothing compared to the Vietnam veterans. We hadn't been through anything on the par that they'd been through,
- 19:30 at that point. And I felt for them. And most of them, as they do, took it quietly, said nothing. But the people that were training us, the people we were working with at Duntroon, were largely Vietnam veterans. We had Keith Payne VC [Victoria Cross] as one of our staff. Nearly all of our instructors in military training wing were Vietnam vets. And the standard of training we were getting was second to none. And a lot of the people working at Duntroon at
- 20:00 this time, '72 to '75, were all Vietnam vets, and they were putting up with us, putting up with mistreatment from a small but vocal group in the community. It was pretty tough for them, and we felt some of that, because we were in uniform we copped it as well. So there was a bit of angst about that. But you took it on the chin. You realised it was a vocal minority. You just played the game. You didn't go on leave in uniform.
- 20:30 Things improved by 1973. But there was still a bit of friendly animosity between say Duntroon and ANU [Australian National University]. I'm sure they regarded us as military morons and we regarded them as sort of feral left-wing revolutionaries, and Che Guevara. But these were the times, and this was the debate that was going on in our community more broadly, between those who perceived
- 21:00 themselves as being the forces of light and then those who had more traditional views, and felt that the country faced great challenges that needed to be overcome. Remember too, the context of all this. The context of all this was the Cold War. We'd had the Cuban missile crisis. The world had been on the verge of a nuclear holocaust.
- 21:30 At any time there was this struggle going on between communism and capitalism. A massive army was facing each other in Europe. This domino theory, communism had swept through China, was sweeping down through Vietnam. There was this concern, this feeling that there was this explosive expansion of communism and it threatened the very system, the very lives we lead. And that was the context in which I joined the army.
- 22:00 And people ought not forget that that was a pretty serious. It may seem like history now but at the time it was a matter of life or death. As recently as this week, we're hearing that a Russian senior officer had almost pressed the button some time in the mid 1970's and caused a nuclear holocaust, because of a false alarm. The world was living on the edge of its seat. So this was the context of the Vietnam conflict. We look back now and breathe a sigh of relief and know that we've moved on.

22:30 But these were dangerous times.

**When you graduated in '75 things were winding down in Vietnam?**

Well, that's right. And this was a great challenge for my generation of soldiers. We entered the army at a time when, I think it was around forty-four thousand strong. When I left the army it was under twenty-five thousand. It had been a period, in some respects, certainly in terms of numbers, of decline.

23:00 As a sharer for the defence budget it had declined substantially and markedly. I think we had nine battalions in the army infantry when I joined. When I left I think we struggled to have four full-strength regular battalions, and two so-called, ready reserve battalions. It was an army in decline in many ways by the time I left

23:30 in 1995. And over this period, this tremendous change had occurred. If you like, peace was breaking out every where. The Vietnam War ended effectively in 1975, for us in 1972. And by the time we graduated in 1975 the thinking was towards a defence of continental Australia. The idea was that we'll never again get involved in any conflict off our shores.

24:00 Interesting, in light of recent events. Here we are fighting a conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq and Timor. But the feeling then was let's just put up a brick wall around Australia and we'll defend Australia. So the army we graduated into in 1975 was a very different army. So a lot of that change occurred while we were there, and our training was reoriented accordingly. We had to develop a new enemy for example. The Missourians were invented.

24:30 A mythical enemy that was a combination of the Warsaw Pact and a range of other East-Asian nations. And it was this mystical enemy. You could no longer talk about the North Vietnamese Army as being the enemy. They were the enemy in 1972. We would fire at figure targets on the rifle range and those figure targets looked like North Vietnamese Army regulars. They had pictures of them, in effect. That's what

25:00 we fired at on the range. By the time we left in 1975 we were firing at classification targets. And these targets weren't made to look like Vietnamese any more. They were made to look like so-called Missourians. So times had changed, and in some respects the defence force and the army was probably looking for a role. And subsequently budgets were cut, numbers were reduced, battalions were closed down, colours were laid up.

25:30 And that all happened during the 1970's. There were still operational missions going on, but nothing of the scale of Vietnam. So it was an interesting period, particularly considering that the generation of senior officers and senior soldiers had lived through, not only Vietnam, but they'd been through the Malaysian Emergency, the conflict with Indonesia and Borneo. They'd been through Korea, and in some cases they'd been through World War II. There were senior soldiers and officers in the army

26:00 that had World War II service. So this period of the mid '70s onwards was a real change of the guard. And I think it was a period when a lot of people retired from the service, who'd lived through this period of conflict. We'd been almost continuously at war, arguably, since World War II, certainly since Korea, in one way or another, to a period of almost sustained peace and the onset of new challenges,

26:30 like terrorism and peacekeeping, and these other missions.

**So after Duntroon you went to 6RAR [6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment].**

That's right. I elected to go to the infantry. I looked at the armoured corps. I looked at army aviation, but I think the infantry was for me. And I was fortunate to be selected to go to 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, a fine battalion, based in Brisbane. And that was a bit of an adventure, I'd never lived in Queensland before. So there I was.

27:00 I think I'd just turned twenty-two. The Whitlam Government had just been sacked in November 1975. So that was the context of the times. They were interesting times. Now, as a twenty-two year old arriving in your first battalion it's a bit sobering. You've had all the training, you know all the theory, you're fit, you're strong, you're really

27:30 ready to go, and suddenly you turn up and you have to adjust to this new pace of life. And, if anything, I would say that, first of all, I had a battalion that had recently come back from Singapore. It had served several tours in Vietnam. My first platoon, of around thirty men, about a third of them were Vietnam veterans. I had two Aborigines and a Pacific Islander. I had

28:00 people as young as seventeen, and I think the oldest would have been in his early forties, an ex-British Army corporal. So a real mixed bag in age, in ethnicity, in experience and skill. Some of them were really well organised and personally self-disciplined. Some of them were young men in a hurry.

28:30 I spent some of my time administering these guys, and keeping some of them out of trouble, particularly the very young ones. They got their first big pay cheque and they wanted to go out and by big, powerful motorbikes and cars, which they then promptly smashed into telegraph poles. They were exposed to alcohol. At this time, on Commonwealth bases, like military bases, those states that had licensing laws that required

29:00 that you not be able to drink until you were twenty-one, which was many of the states at that stage,

found those laws not applying on Commonwealth bases. So soldiers at eighteen could have access to a bar, which for some of them was a bit of a shock. This was a time when the country was going towards eighteen as an age for franchise and for access to alcohol. So there were some issues there. Then there were a lot of issues with training

- 29:30 and preparing for war, without necessarily knowing, because of the times we were in, what that conflict might be. So we were having to tell people to rearrange their thinking away from the Vietnam style of thinking, to perhaps, which was a war fighting an evasive, elusive guerrilla enemy, to perhaps getting their mind around fighting a war that might involve an enemy that was organised in brigades and divisions, and
- 30:00 might have tanks, and be a more conventional force in a more limited war, or a very substantial, traditional if you like, war. And for some people that was a bit of a challenge. It involved new skills. So as a twenty-two year old, one of the youngest in the group, finding yourself with this young and older group of guys, it was quite a challenge. You didn't know everything. A lot of them had a lot more experience than I did. You relied a lot on your platoon
- 30:30 sergeant and your corporals and your senior people for their advice. If anything, I would say I think I made quite a few mistakes in that first six months. I was probably a bit overly enthusiastic. I was very fit and strong and I probably drove the platoon a bit hard in that respect. I think you make the sort of mistakes that a youth makes. You've been trained to a certain level
- 31:00 but when you go out to the battalion you find out that things are a little bit more casual than you expected. You couldn't maintain the sort of tempo that you'd maintained at Duntroon. A different tempo was required because this was going to be long-term, and perhaps you were a little bit over-enthusiastic. So you needed to temper that a little bit. I think in retrospect
- 31:30 there were some issues with leadership in my battalion at that time, that I would partly attribute to Vietnam. When I think back, my company commander was a Vietnam veteran. My company 2IC [2nd In Command], second in command, was a Vietnam veteran. And looking back, both of them were, I think, having issues that they were dealing with. My company commander was
- 32:00 a terrific bloke but he was having some issues with alcohol. My platoon sergeant even, who was a Vietnam vet, was having some issues. And I may not have understood their issues perhaps, as well as I might have at that time, being only twenty-two myself.
- 32:30 Even for your own soldiers, when a third of them are Vietnam vets and have been to war and back, how do you motivate a group of blokes, who've already been to war, to prepare for the next one, without even being able to explain to them what that might be, who the enemy is and what shape or form that war might take. And also they've had platoon commanders before and you're another one. And every one of them seems keener than the last one, and wants to reinvent the wheel a little bit.
- 33:00 They've seen it all before.

**How did they respond to you having not even gone to war and just straight out of university so to speak?**

They probably regarded me, and the whole generation of young officers that came through with me, as being a little raw and a little new, fresh, inexperienced. And they would have been right in that assessment. We were. But on the other hand they were used to the fact that they'd

- 33:30 get new platoon commanders. And even for the ones that were Vietnam veterans, they had new platoon commanders turn up. And they had to learn, everyone had to learn. And so they understood, this is the way the army worked. Every couple of years you'd get a new platoon commander, and you had to, so-called, break the new platoon commander in. And they boys would laugh about it. And if you were smart you'd quickly
- 34:00 get on to this fact and this attitude and you wouldn't fight the problem. And that's what I did and what most of us did. You'd realise that these were the people that you had to lead. These were the people that you needed to work with in the bush. These are the people you might go to war with, and you had to get along. And not everything would go the way you perhaps thought it might. There had to be a bit of give and take. You had to know when to push people to the limit
- 34:30 and when not to push people to the limit. And you had to know where everybody's limit was, including your own. And you needed to listen to people. You needed to not be too stupid and get carried away with things that don't really matter. You needed to understand that all these soldiers really wanted to do a good job. Your expectations had to be realistic.
- 35:00 All the same challenges that not only an officer commanding a group of soldiers experiences, but a coach for a football team goes through this. A corporate CEO [Chief Executive Officer] goes through this with his group. Any leader goes through this with their group. You have to work out how to build a culture within that group. How to build a team, how to get people working together. You have to accommodate the individual differences
- 35:30 of the people. You'll always get people in the group who may not be liked by all, but they're still one of your platoon. You have to look after them too. There'll be people you've got who you might not like

particularly well, and others you might naturally favour, like more, but you've got to be fair to everyone. You can't play favourites. You really have to give everyone a fair go, and listen to people and just not get too

- 36:00 carried away with your own sense of being, and what must be. And realise that you've got to bring everybody else with you. You all have to get across the line together. And it's actually that mateship and that sense of all working together that is going to enable you to get there. There's no point in you being there on your own with two or three of your favourites, with the rest of the platoon still back there trying to catch up. It doesn't work that way. So
- 36:30 you grow up quickly as a young twenty-one, twenty-two year old as a platoon commander. There aren't many jobs in the world where you find yourself in these sorts of circumstances. Particularly knowing that within a few months of arrival we were off to Malaysia. Our company was nominated to defend our airbase in Butterworth and our aeroplanes up there, from insurgents.
- 37:00 And we've been doing that for a long time and did it right through until about 1985, I think it was. And then it was deemed to be a training post. As you know, there'd been a war in Malaysia, a shooting war that had been quite heated. As a result we left two Mirage squadrons based up there at Butterworth, in north-western Malaysia, and a company there to defend them. And at the time I was there, the threat was very low but we carried light ammunition.
- 37:30 We deployed and conducted ourselves in 1976, in a way as if we expected to fight with force, anyone who tried to enter the base and destroy the aircraft or kill and injure people. So although it's now been deemed to be overseas service, at the time I think we just took it in our stride and said, "Look, this is our job. We'll defend the airbase for three months."
- 38:00 But as I said, the risk was quite low but it was there. We were working with live ammunition. We were firing live ammunition on the ranges. We spent quite a bit of time in the jungle, and I actually think that was an important experience for me, to spend that three or four months over there, particularly the jungle time with my platoon in the south of Malaysia. When you go out into the bush with your men you really do get to know each other. That's when you get to understand
- 38:30 how things are. We carried live ammunition. We didn't for a moment expect to be in a contact. It was really a training event. You're working through your daily routine, you're moving through the jungle. Beautiful jungle, monkey, birds, all the things you imagine. It's actually quite amazing. Beautiful and mysterious.
- 39:00 You really do get to know each other and you get to work as a team. You've got certain missions and patrolling objectives that you have to get through. And I think, after we came back from those weeks in the jungle it was actually quite an important step for us as a group. I think after that I found things a bit easier, and so did the troops. It was about three months since I'd arrived in the battalion, three or four months,
- 39:30 and I felt that we'd actually got to the point where we were starting to click. Because you know, it takes time. So there's a lot of leadership challenges for you as a young man commanding a group of soldiers in these circumstances. And I had some tragedies along the way. Months later, after returning from Malaysia, and this is barrack life, and barrack life presents its challenges,
- 40:00 I had one of my soldiers arrested by the police for driving his car without a licence. Now the story behind this young soldier...

## Tape 3

- 00:36 **You were just about to tell a story.**
- It's about barrack life when we came back from Malaysia, and some of the challenges that you have with young soldiers. I had one who was arrested by the police for driving his car without a licence. And what had happened to him was, he'd had a series of speeding offences and he'd lost points on
- 01:00 each occasion that he was speeding, whatever, and eventually he lost his licence. He was sitting at home with his girlfriend and said, "Look, let's go down to the shop and get some cigarettes." They jumped in the car and off they went. He didn't have a licence. When he came back his neighbour, who was a policeman, who'd been mowing the lawn and who knew that he was on a suspended licence, saw him and pulled out his book and booked him. The charge was driving on a suspended licence. This was in Queensland.
- 01:30 As his platoon commander it was my job to act as a character reference for him and to attend in court. I went and sought advice - do I get this soldier a lawyer? And I was counselled, no, just get there and if there's legal advice available at the court in the way of legal aid use that. This is in
- 02:00 Queensland, under Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Queensland was a fairly definite place to be. If you were a

young man who'd misbehaved you didn't want to be there. And we turned up at court and the charge was driving without a licence. I sought legal advice from the legal aid but none was available. In the end we went into the courtroom. I expected him to be heavily fined and receive a suspension.

- 02:30 I had no idea of what was to unfold. But what did unfold was that someone got up, and it was a truck driver, this is the case before my soldier's case, and he'd been driving his truck in Queensland, without a licence, from New South Wales. He'd left his licence at home in the glove box of his car back in Sydney. Was pulled up, the police stopped him, he didn't have his licence on him, they said, "Right, you're driving without a licence." He
- 03:00 went before the court and the judge on the day gave him a twelve month suspension of his licence. Not only in Queensland but in New South Wales. Basically he'd have to sell his truck, give up his job, which is his livelihood. And after I heard that I thought, my guy's in trouble. Then a young girl got up, very well-dressed young girl, represented by a QC [Queen's Counsel], obviously from a well-to-do family. She'd been driving
- 03:30 on a learner's permit, she'd careered around the block, she'd hit a car, she'd been driving alone without a licensed driver. She'd been quite naughty. She got off with a very small fine, and I think a small suspension. By now I was confused. The semi-trailer driver hadn't had legal representation, she had. Then my fellow
- 04:00 came forward. It was very brief, it was very quick. The judge simply took the view that he was driving without a licence. He gave him an absolute serve over being a young larrikin who didn't have a clue what he was doing, dangerous and people like him shouldn't be on the streets. Gave him an absolute going over. I was asked to give a character reference. I briefly said what a good young man this guy was. He was just a young bloke who had done something very, very
- 04:30 foolish but basically he was a good young fellow, a good young soldier. I'd had this young bloke in Malaysia with me. He was a good young man. The judge locked him up in Boggo Road [gaol] for three months. This was December 1976. And this kid was eighteen. He was a good-looking boy, fit, strong, good young man but he was just a bit of a larrikin. And he'd been foolish, there's no question. Well,
- 05:00 the next day I was at Boggo Road counselling him over there, keep his back to the wall, it was just before Christmas, and to look after himself while he was in jail. There was no way I could get him out. He was in there for three months. Boggo Road is high security. He was in with some of the most hardened criminals in Queensland in 1976. Now I don't know what happened to him in there. I don't know what experiences he endured.
- 05:30 A young eighteen, nineteen year old kid, good looking, who was basically a good kid but had run foul of the law. But he was never the same when he came out. And a few months later he drove his bike under a truck and was killed, and his mate who was with him felt he'd done it on purpose. And writing to his mother and trying to explain what had happened was very
- 06:00 upsetting. And these are the mistakes you make too, as a platoon commander. Because I still ask myself, and I wrestle with this a bit, should I have insisted on legal representation? Seeing this young girl get off; she had the silk there. Did I do the right thing? Did I get the right advice? He should not have gone to jail in my view, for the offence. Particularly to a jail
- 06:30 like Boggo Road. But I just give that as an example of the sort of issues that came up for a platoon commander in the mid 1970s, on the barracks, you know, after you'd come back from Malaysia. I can tell you others but that's just one. And even in barracks these issues can be issues of life and death, and you wrestle with these. But in a sense,
- 07:00 as the platoon commander, you are the platoon commander but you're also the big brother, even though you're younger than half the people, you almost have to be like their father sometimes, keeping them out of trouble. At other times they're helping you and keeping you out of trouble. You're in it together, all of you. And you've got a responsibility to look after these people and know what their issues are, know what problems they've got. Know what personal
- 07:30 problems they've got, what issues they're dealing with, what demons they're wrestling with. Because you can't possibly go off to war with these people unless you're on top of these things. That's one little failure that I carry with me, about that soldier. And you will never know what might have been. But these are sort of the same challenges that every platoon commander and every company commander have
- 08:00 handled.

**Just touching briefly again on Malaysia, that was your first time out in the field. What were the lessons for you from Malaysia?**

I think the main lesson is about teamwork. As I said, it was a pretty non-threatening environment at Butterworth, although there was a little bit of risk at that time. I think a few years later it was determined that the risk

- 08:30 was so minimal now that it's virtually regarded as a training post. But it was interesting to be in a

situation with soldiers with live ammunition, where you could find yourself in a shooting situation.

### **Did you experience any accidents or any mishaps?**

No. There were a few injuries, you know, traffic accidents, issues like that. We had two soldiers repatriated. One in very serious condition, a

- 09:00 traffic accident. There are all those sorts of issues that you've always got in a foreign country, but you've got them back here as well. We had a few training accidents, nothing of a life threatening nature. So there were no contacts at the time. As I said, by that time the fighting was almost over, although, interestingly the Malaysians were still fighting up on that northern borders, separatists, at that time. The Malaysians had helicopters coming back at that time, with holes in them,
- 09:30 and they were in a shooting war, this is in the mid '70s up on the border. Interestingly, years later I went back to that border on the northern side, on the Thai side, and the Thais were fighting a war still, and that was in 1992. So I got to see that border conflict in Malaysia on both sides of the border. So the Malays were in a shooting war but we were out of it. But I think the teamwork is the key. I think you, as a group of soldiers, don't really
- 10:00 gel together until you're in the field. Being in the field, whether it's in the jungle or the desert, or wherever the field may happen to be, you don't really get to apply your trade. This is a profession, and until you are all out there and you're in the bush and you're doing your job, now whether it's in an exercise environment during training or whether it's deploying on operations, you've got to get out in the field.
- 10:30 It doesn't gel in the barracks. And this is a profession that needs to get out on the ground and do what it does. Now when you get out there you measure the results and your effectiveness, not in dollars or in the bottom line, you measure it in lives and whether or not you achieve your mission. And if you muck it up, then people get hurt or you fail. So in that respect
- 11:00 being in Malaysia was very important, because we were in another country, we had a mission, it wasn't a high-risk mission but there was an element of risk. We were in the jungle or we were on the base, defending the base. We were doing our thing on the range, we were out there. It gave us a sense of purpose. And I think in that sense it was quite important for me, as a platoon commander, to have that experience. And when we came back I think we'd sort of made it.
- 11:30 We'd pushed through the s-bend so to speak, and we were I think, starting to work together. Later on in 6RAR I eventually left my platoon, command of the rifle platoon, and became the reconnaissance and surveillance platoon commander. Which was really quite a challenge because the battalion commander decided to raise this sort of like an elite group, in a sense, within the battalion. And we ran a little selection course within the battalion to get the very best soldiers. We asked for volunteers.
- 12:00 And I got to run the initial training course for, and to command this reconnaissance, surveillance platoon in my second year. And it was one of the first reconnaissance and surveillance platoons that the army had raised in an infantry battalion at that time. We sent people off for sniper training. We had people specially trained for close reconnaissance and surveillance. And a lot of it was touching on special forces skills and training. And I think it was a great opportunity to get the very
- 12:30 best soldiers in the unit together. Get a really good group happening, and actually go beyond what you could normally achieve in a rifle platoon, with the special people that you had, and the training you'd been able to give them. By the time I left the battalion, at the end of 1997, soldiers were lining up to be in this platoon. It was the most sought after job in the battalion. Because we'd actually created a bit of teamwork here and a bit of there, where every soldiers thought, boom, if I'm in this battalion
- 13:00 that is the platoon I want to be in, because that's the one that's going out there to the edge, doing sniper training, training to a high standard where we would often be the enemy for the rest of the battalion on exercises. Other soldiers could see that this was a highly trained and highly motivated group. So in a sense, in that two years I was in 6RAR I felt there was a progression from my rifle platoon to this recon surveillance platoon. Raising, training and equipping, that was interesting and a challenge.
- 13:30 And I left the battalion feeling as though I'd really learnt something. Not only about being a soldier and a young officer but I'd learnt about myself. I'd made a lot of good friends. But I'd also learned a lot about my soldiers and I'd actually developed, I would say it is a love for your soldiers. It's almost like a brotherly love that you develop for them. Even the ones
- 14:00 that drag the chain a bit and are always the last to come over the line, are always your problem children. Just as a father would, or an older brother would love his brothers and sisters, even the ones who were a little bit of an embarrassment sometimes. You develop this compassion for one another. And it's actually reflected backwards too. The men will actually look after you too.
- 14:30 And keep you out of trouble if things don't go too well from time to time. Doesn't mean you don't have your moments.

### **How would they look after your back?**

If they sensed something was about to go wrong they might give you a heads up, you know, that something's about to go wrong. Or if you were making a decision that, with their experience they could see might not be the best decision

- 15:00 to make they might say, "Sir, that might not be a very good idea. You might want to think about that one again. Perhaps we should go the other way?" And just call to your attention that you might not have made the soundest decision on that particular occasion. I do remember one occasion, our job was to reconnoitre an enemy night position on the top of a very rocky and jagged hill.
- 15:30 And I had the platoon lined up behind me, and the going was so difficult. This was a major exercise and it was our job to get to the top of this hill, reconnoitre this position and then, if it was within our ability, to mount a small attack and push the enemy off the top of this jagged and rugged mountain range. As it turned out, when we got to the top of the hill we found out that there was a much larger force than we were able to cater with, on the top of the hill. So that wasn't an option.
- 16:00 We climbed over rocks and rugged terrain. In the end the going got so difficult, I was responsible for navigation, I kept getting further and further to the front of the group because it was the only way that we could remain on course. Eventually I said to the scout, "Look, you fall back. I'll lead because otherwise we're going to go astray. I've got the compass and I've got the map." So I had the whole platoon, about thirty people behind me.
- 16:30 And we were very bunched up, climbing over extremely rugged and steep terrain upwards. It was a bit like Shaggy Ridge I'm sure, in New Guinea. And we get to what we thought was the top of this cliff and the word came from behind, "How's it going boss?" And I said, "It looks all clear I think. We're at the top. Follow me." And I took one step and I went straight off a cliff. And I slid down these
- 17:00 cliffs bare knuckled and bare kneed for about twenty or thirty metres. I was sliding down this rock face and I'd come to a little ravine. And I went 'splat' at the bottom of this cliff. Of course, we'd gone to great lengths over there to be very, very quiet. There was no way I was going to be quiet as I'm going down this thing. My rifle's rattling against the cliff, and I'm rolling and tumbling and the skins peeling off me. And as soon as I hit the bottom all
- 17:30 I could do was laugh. The stupidity of the situation. Because there's me turning around and saying. "Everything's under control men. I'm at the front. Follow me." Took one step, went straight off a cliff and 'splat' at the bottom. Lo and behold, unbeknownst to me, I find out that the whole situation was so Keystone Cops, that the whole platoon who'd heard me say, "Everything's under control men. Follow me." were also lying on their backs laughing. So we've got this situation where I've disappeared over the
- 18:00 cliff. No one knows if I'm alive or dead except the bloke at the front can hear me laughing at the bottom, so he knows I'm still alive. Whereupon, thirty people are lying on their backs like dead ants, cracking themselves laughing at the stupidity of the whole situation. And in the end, I crawled back up the cliff. I said, "I think we'll go around this. I think we'll go the other way." And after that for about six months, every time I said, "Look, I think what we'll do is this." One of
- 18:30 the diggers would say, "Follow you sir?" So it's one of those funny things that happens. But you look back on that, we all just cacked ourselves laughing. That was the subject of many drinks in the bar. But you sort of take those things in your stride and you realise that all you can do is laugh about it. There was no pretence in trying to take the situation seriously.
- 19:00 These are the experiences you have, and the good and the bad. You have the bad times, you have the good times. But the net result of it all is that, at the end of the day, you can slap each other on the back and you're starting to work as a bit of a team. And a little thing like that, the soldiers can see the humour of it. Never ever underestimate the sense of humour of the average Aussie soldier. They've got a very, very good sense of humour.
- 19:30 If an officer or anyone takes themselves too seriously the Aussie soldier will soon let them know. And I think that's probably been so since the Boer War. And it's probably still very much the case today.

**That's a very fine example of the leader being just as**

20:00 **human.**

Yeah, it does.

**So the recon [reconnaissance] and surveillance platoon, how long were you with them?**

We raised the platoon, I think around about March 1977. And I was

20:30 the platoon commander until the end of that year, when I left the battalion and went off to Townsville. So that was pretty interesting. I got very interested in sniping. I was always a very keen shooter. And it was interesting looking at the history of sniping. We'd talk to the troops about the sniper battles of World War II. I always had a great comfort in the bush. I always loved the bush. And sniping and

21:00 being in the field is largely about observation, detection or movement. It's about very slowly and carefully moving from point A to point B, all in concealed positions. It's also about shooting. But

interestingly, when you run a sniper course it's about ten percent shooting and ninety percent bush craft and observation. They're the real skills. And I always had a keen interest in that. And it was really partly that experience that put

21:30 me in contact with a couple of ex-SAS soldiers who were now in the battalion, for whom this was their bread and butter. And that really helped get me interested in SAS. So it was around this time I said, "Look, if I'm going to be in the army, if I'm going to do this I want, over there, to be all I can be. So I'm going to apply for the SAS." So I did. I was posted at the end of that year to 3-Brigade in Townsville,

22:00 as the defence platoon commander. And then later as LO to the commander, or liaison officer to the commander, like his staff office assistant. But during that early 1978 period I did the SAS selection course from Townsville, and started my training and build up for that. And my career moved to a new phase.

#### **How rigorous was that selection course?**

Well, I was in Townsville for those six months in early 1978. I probably expected to be there for two years. But I did apply

22:30 for SAS, as I said. I think my selection course was around about March, April in 1978. I started training in December. And I knew that this was going to be tough. I went hard. I was very fit at the time. You would run literally miles, nine to twenty miles at a time, with your combat equipment, with your rifle.

23:00 You'd be stomping up and down hills all day. You knew that if you didn't prepare yourself, toughen your feet up, toughen your body up, toughen your mind up then you would run the risk of injuring yourself and being pushed aside during the selection process. I didn't quite know what I was letting myself in for with that officer selection course they had in the SAS, but I was going to make sure I was as well prepared as I could be. I don't like starting something I don't finish. So I said to myself, look, I'm going to prepare myself as

23:30 best I can. I'm going to go on this thing and I'm going to finish it. I'm not going to quit while I'm there. So if I come off it it's going to be because I'm injured, I'm carried off on a stretcher, or else I'm going to finish it. I don't want to be in a position where I just can't go on. I wanted to make sure I was as well prepared as I could. So off we went. There was a period of interviews and selection, and you had to provide full details

24:00 of your service history and go before a selection panel and so on. They eventually assembled a group, I think it was about fourteen officers, fifteen officers. And what the SAS does, is it runs a separate officer selection course for the officers before you start training with the soldiers, and start doing their selection process. Because you don't want any officers embarrassing themselves in front of the troops.

24:30 And it's also a pre-vetting process, to be frank. You knock out, select your officers prior and then send them into the troops. And you know that you've got good officers by the time you've got the selection course. Because there are some officers who turn up for SAS selection who probably aren't suited for it. I had no idea what I was letting myself in for. There were fourteen or fifteen of us that started, in the end two

25:00 of us were successful out of about the fifteen, two of us were successful. Three of us finished the course. I think the rest dropped out along the way, or were injured. Some of them were injured, terribly in a sense. They just literally wore the skin off the bottom of their feet. So it wasn't really through any lack of courage or perseverance on their part.

25:30 I think the body just gave up. And the selection course went over many weeks. You arrived in Perth, you were sort of kept separate from the rest of the regiment. You were put through a whole lot of very physically and mentally demanding exercises. You had to run incredible distances in incredible times. I think there was a standard two-mile run with combat equipment, and nine-mile runs with combat equipment.

26:00 Also forced marches of much longer duration. And then also, navigation exercises with full combat equipment. You'd go out for two or three days, no sleep, you would navigate as a group over a certain time but you were given a series of challenging tasks regularly along the way. And sometimes you'd be in charge and you'd be the commander. Other times you'd just be a rifleman in the group. And you were being looked at all the time and constantly assessed, not only when you were leading but when you weren't leading, to see if

26:30 you were attentive and awake. For anyone who has never had sleep denial. Sleep denial is a most amazing thing. After two or three days with no sleep the body breaks down, you get very lethargic, you slow down. You actually go off your food. You have trouble focussing and even reading a map, or even words, thinking straight.

27:00 Your whole processes slow down. And then it's sort of punctuated by moments where you're alert again and you're sharp, short moments, and then you drop off again. Remaining focused is very hard, particularly when you're not in charge and you're not the one leading the group. But your role can be vital to the group's survival. And these are the sorts of experiences that soldiers undergo in conflict or war, and if you can't do it in training...

27:30 So in training, what the SAS tries to do is simulate those pressures of war by keeping people awake for days and days on end. By putting them under extremely, physically demanding circumstances and how they think and how they operate and how they work as a team. See if they get short tempered if they're tired. See if they can still come up with a cogent plan, and see how they work as a group, and so on and so on. So you go through all these things. And as well as that, you'd be put in embarrassing situations. You'd

28:00 have to prepare a talk in front of an audience and the audience would be primed to rip you to shreds and make you look a fool. And how would you react to that?

**So that's like the equivalent of public humiliation?**

Oh, not quite, no. For example, you'd have to prepare a plan, a briefing on a particular problem and brief the group. And you'd go away and you'd apply all of your

28:30 abilities to coming up with a good plan. And you'd have to present that plan to an audience of senior and well-experienced people, and they'd rip your plan to shreds and expose all the flaws in your plan. Make you feel as though if you led a group of troops into war with that plan they'd all be killed.

**And how did you cope when that first happened to you?**

And often they'd be quite blunt in their criticisms.

29:00 Well, I was successful at the end of the day, but you take it all in your stride. You realise that you have to be able to respond to those sorts of things. You have to be able to deal with that, because basically, you can't be too precious. The SAS is looking for a particular type of soldier. This stereotyped image of the Arnold Schwarzenegger is not the reality.

29:30 A lot of the successful people through SAS selection are small, wiry, not at all the type you might expect from some Hollywood movie. But they're all mentally and physically tough. They're all determined and have a certain resolve. They're all able to work as part of a small team, get along with people. They're all flexible enough to sort of listen to

30:00 somebody else's contribution. You get some very, very good soldiers who are very good regimental soldiers in a battalion, like 6RAR where I came from. They're outstanding, brave capable soldiers but they just might not be suited to work in a unit like the SAS. And similarly, you'll get people in SAS who might look like mavericks and quite out of place in the mainstream army. And they might not be very successful in the mainstream army. It's a bit like trying to take carpenters and trying to turn them into plumbers. Or plumbers

30:30 and turn them into ballet dancers. You're really looking for a group of people in the SAS who can go behind the enemy lines in a small group, far and away from support and rescue. Who are quite happy to live out there on their own, just the four or five of them, survive, go through a lot of physical and mental hardship. They don't need the company of hundreds of others around them. They're happy to take a chance. They're a pretty amazing group of people. And they're equipped for that sort of thing.

**31:00 So the emphasis is much more on coping on your own, as an individual or with a much smaller group?**

The SAS goes to war generally in groups of four or five or six. Not always. It can go in much larger groups. Battalions go to war in groups of four or five hundred, or four or five thousand. It's a different ball game. So the selection process reflects that.

31:30 And particularly with the officers. You really need a group of officers who are going to be good for the men. You don't want to hand pick a group of outstanding soldiers from the army at large and then have officers in command who are not up to the job. Sporting analogies are always a bit risky, but if you take an AFL [Australian Football League] football team, if

32:00 you assemble a group of the most talented football players that you've got available in the state, to play for an AFL team you better make sure you've got a coach and a captain who can lead by example. You don't want mediocre leadership if you're going to put a group of elite people together. And so that's why the SAS runs officer selection courses to hand pick its people. There's a bit of

32:30 mystique and media hype all about that, but could I just say that, at the end of the day, you'll never meet a group of more humble... I remember when we finished our selection course, my good friend Don Higgins and I, who were the two successful candidates, had a feeling of being humbled by the whole experience. There was no sense of aren't I terrific, look I've successfully completed the SAS officer selection course. There was more a feeling of how lucky am I to still be standing? To get through this?

33:00 And I wonder why I didn't get knocked out and the others did? And when you've seen your mates carried off on a stretcher, in one case, one very good friend of mine whom I have endless respect for, he's now a general, I've never seen a bloke display more courage and perseverance on an officer selection course than he did. The blood was pouring out of his feet. The bottom of his feet just peeled off like a

33:30 scab. And he had them bandaged for three days and just kept going and going and going. And in the end he just couldn't take another step. So he was taken off the course, injured. Now there's a fine man and a

fine officer, just on the day his feet gave up. My feet were okay. I don't know how I would have gone if my feet were in the shape his were.

34:00 Maybe I prepared a little bit better. But I don't think any less of that officer because he had to leave the course because there was pus and blood pouring out of his feet. Overseas, it's no misdemeanour or no insult to be unsuccessful on SAS officer selection course. And very fine officers have stepped up to the plate and have

34:30 not been accepted or have not got through it on the day, through injury or some other purpose. At least you had the guts to have a go.

**If you are injured like that and you retire injured do you get a second opportunity?**

Yeah, you do. Well, not always. Some officers are asked, "Look, thanks for coming but there's probably not much point in you having another go." Other officers would be told, "Look, thanks for coming. You did well. You've injured yourself. You're welcome to have another go."

35:00 And other officers would be told, "Well, you've been successful." Now of those that are invited to come and have another go, some might. Some might go back from there especially, and say, "I gave it a go and I was injured. I don't think I'll bother." Life moves on. Something they've had a crack at but they don't particularly feel focused to come up and have another go. Others do come back, and then they might come back and be successful.

35:30 Some have had two or three goes and then finally get through it. So it's an interesting process. It's a process of selection but it's also a process of training. It's pretty physically and mentally demanding. But at the end of it you really do feel as if you've accomplished something, although as I said, you feel quite humbled. You're certainly fit, and I lost a lot of weight. And you haven't had much sleep for some weeks.

36:00 At the end of it you do feel that you've achieved something, but not only that. The SAS officer selection process, I can't speak for today, but back in the '70s it had such a reputation that by the time you got through it you had a little bit of street credibility in the regiment when you marched in, because people knew that fifteen started two finished. Well, these guys have at least had a go. You would then go on to either the

36:30 soldiers' selection process, that series of training and selection that the soldiers go through, and you'd go through it again with them, doing their patrol course and training. And then you'd be with the soldiers. Now it was very rare that an officer, having gotten through the officer selection course, who then started the soldiers' training and selection process, through the patrol course and all the other

37:00 course that went with that, didn't succeed with the patrol course and the other. It has happened but it's very rare. Because if an officer got through the officer selection course and all the rest of it, they would get through, although some of the soldiers might not. And I think, even with the soldiers' selection process, it was quite common for the regiment to take probably ten percent of the applicants.

37:30 That was the ratio when I was going through the process in the '70s. About ten percent would ultimately put the sandy beret on their head. About ninety percent would fall away, one way or the other. So what you finished up with, after this selection and training process, was a group of soldiers who were extraordinary. They were the best of the best. So you could do different

38:00 things to a different level than you could in 6th Battalion or in any of the other battalions. One of the things I noticed first, when I went through this whole process and then took up a job as platoon commander of a free-fall parachute group, I was allocated to A-Troop 1 Squadron, which interestingly, is the squadron that has just come back from Iraq. I

38:30 took over this troop. I had about thirty people. Our job was to parachute behind enemy lines. We were an SAS patrol, our job was to conduct surveillance, reconnaissance, assessment, recovery operations, all of those things. But our means of entry was free-fall parachute or aircraft. We were an air operations group.

**So these are the exercises that you are doing off the coast of Western Australia?**

Yeah, all over Australia and overseas. So I started

39:00 then a process where we would do a lot of time flying. I had several plane crashes during this period. I had a number of parachute emergencies. I can tell you about those in a moment.

## Tape 4

00:30 **A quick question about 6 RAR before we move on to talk more about 1 Squadron. The way you were talking this morning so strongly about mateship and camaraderie. Were you sad to leave 6 RAR?**

Yes I was. The feeling of loss when you leave a platoon or a group of soldiers is quite strong. You feel as though you're losing a family in a way.

- 01:00 And it's quite touching and you think, oh no, this is going to be really difficult. The joy is you then find another platoon. You then get a new posting and you get another group, and you find that you move on with this new group. Then when you leave them you feel as though you're losing your friends and your mates. One of the things about the army is everyone is trained to do everyone else's job.
- 01:30 And you are used to the idea of loss. You know that you're going to move on. One of the reasons I think, that the army keeps moving everybody, particularly officers, every couple of years, even with any unit it moves people around quite regularly, is in operations, if someone gets killed somebody has to step into their shoes. And there is this attitude that if Bill goes Joe can do his job.
- 02:00 And so this process of change and moving is something that's very necessary. You can't let people sort of sit in one place forever. You do need to move people. Yes, there is this sense of loss but there is this also sense of opportunity in that you make a new connection with a new commander. And this is why command as an officer is so special. This is why, as the platoon commander or the company commander, you are honoured. You're given this unique opportunity to be commander
- 02:30 of a group of soldiers. And it's something that commanders value more than anything. I found later on, when I was a regimental commander, it wasn't quite as close and as good as it had been as a platoon commander. In fact, when I think back, the greatest joy of leadership I experienced was as a platoon commander and as a troop commander in SAS, when I was immediately commanding a group of thirty men. Later on you're commanding hundreds but you're
- 03:00 dealing through other officers and you're not, you can't possibly know five hundred men as well as you know thirty. And the challenges are different. So you move on. So I moved on from my platoon in 6 RAR to my platoon in Headquarters 3 Brigade, and then to my troop in SAS. And I was fortunate to command platoons or troops in three different units at three different times. I had a lot of time as a troop and platoon commander,
- 03:30 more than most. So I was very lucky that, in that respect, I had more time as a platoon commander and a troop commander, and it was a great joy.

**And the platoon that you were commanding, did the men pretty much stay the same or did they change?**

People came and went. Generally the core group was the same. The key people were the same. But I would say, in 6 RAR and in A Company 1 Platoon, I had

- 04:00 a group of about thirty-two or three, I think. In the year and a quarter that I was a platoon commander we probably had about a twenty percent change over. The group built up a little for Malaysia. We had some extras come in and then they left after Malaysia. But the core group was about seventy-five percent to ninety percent the same. And in my troop in SASR [Special Air Service Regiment] similarly, about seventy percent, seventy-five percent
- 04:30 were the same the year after. There were a few changes but most of the people were the same. So you get to know each other pretty well, and they get to know you.

**And did they mainly call you 'boss'?**

Yeah, that would be the usual sort of term. Particularly in SAS. In the battalion more people would call you sir. In SAS

- 05:00 you'd get a bit of that but mainly it was boss, or whatever. Generally first names weren't used, even in SAS. People would not call you Marty or Martin, generally. Your fellow officers would but not the soldiers. And generally you wouldn't call them by their first names. Sometimes you would depending
- 05:30 on the circumstances, but quite often you'd refer to them as Trooper Jones or Trooper Block, particularly in a group. One on one, once you get out in the bush, it's different story. You'd probably call them Fred or John or Tony, on patrol. It's much more intimate. They'd probably call you boss. But everybody's different in that respect. Different officers have different ways of doing things.
- 06:00 Some officers encourage soldiers to call them by their christian names, others are a bit more formal and like to be called sir. I was never particularly one for formality. But most people call me boss, or whatever. But at the same time, there's a term in the army, familiarity breeds contempt. And it wasn't so much an issue in SAS because it's a different situation. But certainly in the battalion, and later in
- 06:30 my career I saw circumstances where officers got so chummy with the troops, to the point where they'd be out drinking together every night, that it actually created some problems for them. Because I have seen cases where officers then had difficulty commanding the next day, after they'd become so familiar with the troops, that they couldn't draw the line
- 07:00 between their friendship with the troops and their responsibility to command, and perhaps make some tough and unpopular decisions. So, as an officer you were always walking this line, depending on the group of troops you're commanding, both on an individual basis, with every individual one of them, but

also as a group, between command and familiarity. And you need to have the balance right because you can go too far one

07:30 way or the other. You can be too aloof, too distant and too imperious, but you can also be too familiar, too close and too matey to the point where you lose respect. Now at the end of the day, in war and also in dangerous training, which is very much an issue in SAS, SASR particularly, where we had a lot of soldiers killed and injured in training over many years, soldiers don't necessarily want to

08:00 be best mates with the commander. What they want to know is that the commander is competent, that the commander is capable, that the commander is going to make the right decisions to get the job done without risking their life unnecessarily. And that the boss is a reasonable, sensible and decent bloke. They don't need him to be their best mate. I think some officers struggle to make that distinction but I think ninety-nine

08:30 point nine percent of officers find their own way to get the balance right. And that is a challenge of command. And it's quite unique to the military, where, frankly it's not like a normal job. You can't just say to an employee, "Oh well look, don't bother coming into work today. You're sacked." The employee can't necessarily say,

09:00 "I don't like the boss. I'm leaving." Or even if the boss and the employee don't get along maybe that will result in some lost customer sales, or maybe something won't go particularly well in the factory that day but nobody's life will be at risk. Nobody will die as a consequence of that failure. No one will be injured. No one else's life will be put at risk. In the army it's quite a different ball game. If you're the captain of an aircraft and you're not doing your job correctly, and the aircraft crashes and everybody's killed, well

09:30 that's the end of the story. And it's the same on an SAS patrol or a rifle platoon on operations. So, as a commander you need to get that balance right. And my view is that soldiers want to be led safely to get the mission accomplished. They don't necessarily want their commander to be their best mate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. So you've got to be focused on the real purpose

10:00 of being as a commander.

**It's an interesting balance to get right.**

Yeah, and no formula will work uniformly for everybody. There's no one size fits all. Every leader in the military, whether they're a platoon commander or whether they're a section commander, a company commander, a regimental commander, a commander of the army, whoever they are, whether they're on a navy ship

10:30 or an air force plane, or a tank, they have to work it out in accordance with certain principals of leadership, and their own personality and the nature of the organisation and the group of soldiers they're commanding. They have to find this balance. And different services do it in different ways. From my observations, I've worked on submarines, I've worked on patrol boats and larger ships quite a bit with special forces, the navy has a slightly different way of doing things. They tend to be a bit more formal.

11:00 A bit stricter in many ways. But then they've learned to be that way through hard knocks. Ships run aground, whole crews perish at sea. And you run a tight ship, keep everyone alive and get the job done. And so that approach, a really strict approach might not always work in a group of soldiers in the jungle, for example. A more casual approach might be required. So wherever the calling is, whatever the nature of the job at hand

11:30 and the nature of the crew, then the commanders may define their own way of leading. And sometimes that may require formality and strictness, and other times it will require a casual approach. But you can go too far one way or the other.

**Earlier you mentioned that with 1 Squadron you began to**

12:00 **undertake some air training.**

Well, A Troop 1 Squadron was having, as its primary mission, reconnaissance, surveillance war roles for the squadron. Anything - raids, whatever was required. Our speciality, in terms of infiltration and exfiltration, was air. And that meant mainly parachuting. There were

12:30 two other troops in the squadron. One's focus was on water operations, they were inflatables, canoes, any means of water operation, diving. The other troop was a land operations troop, and its vehicle-mounted role was its primary infiltration and exfiltration method. So we had these three troops with different capabilities. 3 Squadron was the same. At this stage counter terrorism hadn't really arrived in SAS. This was 1978. So yes, I started that line of training.

13:00 Obviously our weapons training and our field training was paramount. Our war roles training was the principal of what we had. But we did spend a lot of time with aircraft. I went off and did a free-fall parachute course. I'd already done a parachute course when I was in 6 RAR so I'd learned how to jump with a static line. And I then started the process of learning how to become a free-fall parachute instructor, which is ultimately where I finished up. So I started a process here in 1978, where I finished up,

- 13:30 along with others, doing hundreds and hundreds of jumps, in both training and operational training circumstances, using all sorts of aircraft. And we were perfecting the art of inserting an SAS patrol, behind enemy lines clandestinely, and making sure that we could all get our combat equipment, our weapons, our explosives, our communications on board. Rig up, get out there, infiltrate, get behind enemy lines.
- 14:00 Pack our things away, do our job and then exfiltrate by air. And do it competently, stay together. Do it in such a way that we all landed at the same time and spot in one piece, without injury, etcetera. So this is mid '70s, parachuting at that stage still at its beginning. Free-fall parachuting only really took off as a sport in the '60s really. And although it was used in World War II,
- 14:30 the sort of parachuting you saw in World War II was what we call static line. That is where people hook onto a cable in the aircraft, they jump out a door and the static line pulls the parachute out for them and they land. It's usually conducted at very low level, a thousand feet or even lower, and it's pretty much automatic. A minimal amount of training is required. And all SAS soldiers do that, everybody. Free-fall is something totally different again.
- 15:00 This occurs anything up to thirty thousand feet. This is jumping out without a static line. It is free-falling through the air for a certain period and then deploying, usually manually, the parachute together. And then gliding away with high performance parachutes, these square, mattress shaped parachutes that you see, that can do anything up to thirty miles an hour. They're quite fast. You glide away and then you land together. Pack up your gear and off you go on your mission. Requires a much higher level of skill,
- 15:30 a much higher level of training and intensity of training, and a lot more practise. It involves a lot more technology and a far greater degree of commitment in terms of training effort and operational effort, to pull off successfully. So it's a much more complicated process. And it was that process that was almost exclusively perfected in the SAS. The parachute school obviously ran this sort of training, and now there are other military people that do this work.
- 16:00 But at that time, in the mid '70s, the only unit in the Australian Defence Force that was really maintaining a capability to insert people using this method was the SAS. And I was commander of one of the two troops that had as it's mission, to perfect that capability. And it was pretty amazing stuff. You had to overcome your fears. You went off to Williamtown in Newcastle, to the army parachute school, and they threw you out of planes with gay abandon. Going up
- 16:30 to twelve, thirteen thousand feet. And I still remember my first free-fall jump, wondering what was going to happen to me when I stepped off the ramp. You just sort of pirouette off the back of a C30 Hercules aircraft from ten thousand feet, and way you go, through the clouds. And you sort of leave your stomach up there at twelve thousand feet and off you go. And the first couple of jumps you usually tumble a bit and fall about and it's all a bit horrifying. But the parachute school has
- 17:00 a motto which dispels fear. And by the time you do your first jump you've had a couple of weeks of ground training and theory, and you've done all the practice, and you've really had it ground into you. You know so much about it by the time you take your first jump that you really do feel as though you have the knowledge. And you know what to expect to some degree. You've had simulation and you've jumped off towers and things. So you've been pretty well prepared and that helps you to get through it. So you can over come your fear, and it
- 17:30 is pretty terrifying. And then you get people who refuse to do it and sort of say, "Look this isn't for me. I thought it might be but it's not." Usually when people come forward to do free-fall training they've thought that through and they usually do get through it. To be good at it, that's another thing. And to be good at it with kilograms and kilograms of combat equipment and machine guns, weapons, ammunition and communications, all the stuff that a soldier needs to do his job, and to then jump out with all that stuff
- 18:00 attached to you, takes what would otherwise be quite good fun, and turns it into a bit of a nightmare. Particularly when you're doing it at night through cloud, on oxygen, all this sort of thing. So it can get pretty complex. So I did the parachute free-fall course initially, and then over the next twelve months I did a free-fall stick commander's course, and then finished up doing static line stick commander's course. And ultimately doing a free-fall dispatcher's course. And then, in the end, parachute instructor's course. And a
- 18:30 free-fall instructor's course at the end. So I went through the whole gamut of training. It took months. But at the end of it you really know how to instruct people how to open their parachute and how to do it yourself. And it puts you in a better position to work with the men you're commanding in your troop, to get the job done.
- 19:00 **The aim of when you send in a group of five men behind enemy lines to free-fall parachute in, how do you land close enough together?**
- Well, first of all, you exit the aircraft together, you aim to fall at the same rate and speed together, you open your parachutes together. The idea then is that you aim your
- 19:30 parachutes in the same direction, because they have a glide capability. They can do twenty to thirty miles an hour depending on the nature of the parachute. And you aim to glide and group together, and

then to land as a group in a space not much bigger than say, a radius of twenty-five metres. Now to do that there's a lead, there's techniques. One of you is usually the leader, the patrol commander, or someone else who is nominated. The others stack up in the sky behind them. And you have ways and techniques that you use

20:00 to measure your speed and your rate of descent and so on. Select your leading point. And you obviously land upwind of where you're trying to land, of your target, and that's all worked out in conjunction with the air force. And off you go. So with a bit of training and a bit of practice, you can actually perfect this technique in landing on the leader, if you like, so that you then are close together. Now remember, this might be at night, so you have to introduce innovations like some sort of low-level illumination. You might introduce innovations like

20:30 man to man air communications, radios. You might have other innovations that you use. You might have a stores bundle, carrying combat equipment. Its got automatic parachutes that somebody's controlling electronically ahead of you. You might aim to group on the stores bundle. There's a range of different methods that you can use. But with a bit of practice, with a bit of perfection and a little bit of perseverance you can get a group to a point where they can pretty reliably jump out. And during the course

21:00 of my time in SAS, I went to Britain. I jumped with the Brits and the French. I jumped with the Americans. I did a HALO course, a High Altitude, Low Opening, low altitude, high opening, where you're on oxygen at thirty thousand feet on a consol, and you're exiting an aircraft, on one occasion, at twenty-nine thousand feet. You're dressed up like an astronaut really. And you are falling, falling and then you open your parachute at three thousand feet and off you glide.

21:30 There's a lot of technology and a lot of training required, but you can actually get to the point, and the benefit of all this is you can even open at thirty thousand feet, with the right equipment, and glide a very long way to a landing point. So what this means is, for example, you could exit an aircraft in international airspace and you could almost glide across a border. Or you could exit an aircraft many kilometres away from the intended landing point on a known aircraft route,

22:00 a known commercial aircraft route. And you could exit people on that known commercial aircraft route and they could glide many, many kilometres away to land clandestinely at a point undetected. So there's various ways. You could jump off shore and land on an island, without an aircraft having to come anywhere near the island. There's a number of different ways that this method could be used.

**So your activities I would imagine, would rely very heavily on the met man?**

Very much so.

22:30 In certain conditions you can't jump. Normally thirteen knots was regarded as a sort of limit. But with these more advanced parachutes you can take it much higher. You could probably go to twenty knots, or even beyond that in the right circumstances.

**How much training did you get to do with wind currents and up drafts?**

Quite a lot. In the process of doing your parachute instructor's you'd spend months basically working on this together. So you would

23:00 work out how to spot, how to calculate a release point around the known desired landing point. You would get used to, over there, working with the air force on meteorology and making sure that you arrived at the right point in the sky and landed at the right point on the ground. But to a degree you are dependant on the air force to deliver you to the right point in the sky. Particularly on tactical operations, because obviously in the middle of the night you can't be sticking your head out the

23:30 side of the door trying to work out where you are. But they are a very, very professional group. And using their technology on their aircraft can actually get you pretty reliably to the right point in the sky, using known meteorology to make sure that you've got the best possible chance of landing at the right point on the ground. So there's quite a lot of technology involved in all of this. And it's a matter of working cooperatively with the air force so that you give your patrol the best chance to arrive at the right point on the ground. And of course,

24:00 it does cause you to be in aircraft a lot. And in my personal case that nearly ended in catastrophe on numerous occasions. So I had an interesting run with aircraft. In late 1978, after I'd come back from my initial parachute course, I was involved in one crash involving a Iroquois helicopter off Swanbourne, where there were five of us parachuting off this helicopter. We were at about seven-and-a-half thousand feet, Swanbourne in Perth,

24:30 basically a beach site. So it's where the SAS is based. We were at about seven-and-a-half, eight thousand feet, rotating up to do a jump, on a Sunday morning of all times. And the aircraft, in a sense blew up. It had a major compression stall and fell from the sky like a brick. The lights were flashing, the bells were ringing, it was a complete mayday. The pilot of the aircraft ordered us to abandon the aircraft because we were crashing.

25:00 And seven of us, five of we SAS officers had to leave the aircraft on orders of the captain. Interestingly, we were all officers, which I might say, later became the substance of quite some mirth from the soldiers. Because there we are, five officers on an aircraft and the thing blows up. But we went out. Two

made it to the shore, three landed at sea, including myself.

- 25:30 The helicopter went on to do a successful emergency crash landing. The crew stayed on board. I fell into the ocean. It was a Sunday morning about nine o'clock. I had no life preserver, I had no flotation equipment. I was totally rugged up in tracksuits and flying suits and jumpsuits and so on. The parachute landed on top of me with dozens of little suspension lines in the water, that go up through the parachute, falling around me.
- 26:00 I quickly became entangled within a short period of time, bobbing around in the ocean, I had my left arm and my left leg lashed together with suspension lines. So I'm trying to swim with one arm and one leg, and even my other leg was slightly tied up, so I couldn't swim. They did what they could to get the helicopter flying again. And I still don't know how they did, but they realised that a couple of us were drowning. And
- 26:30 in a very brave act actually, these people having just crashed this helicopter carried out some sort of emergency repair. I don't know what it was but they got the thing somehow flying again. Although, with some difficulty. And they came out and they tried to rescue me. And they hoisted me up and they got me out of the water, but I was so tangled in the parachute. The parachute was full of water, and they'd get me half way up and the weight of the water in the parachute, around which I was tangled,
- 27:00 was so great it pulled me out of the harness. You've probably seen these harnesses that get lowered. This happened three times. On the third occasion, I got as far as the ramp, and I was half on the ramp and they were trying to cut the lines. They were just so tangled there was no hope. In the end he came in for a fourth attempt and I just waved him off. And I remember this all quite clearly, at this stage I was still conscious. And he went away. And I remember this silence as the helicopter went away.
- 27:30 And this helicopter had a known engine problem, it was misfiring. It was a very brave crew to even attempt this. They could have crashed, and they somehow, in an emergency sense, got this thing flying again. At that stage I looked around in the ocean there, and I thought at that stage it was probably my day to die. For the first time I realised it was probably now at a crisis point. Up until now
- 28:00 I had been fighting for my life. I'd struggled to get on this helicopter. I'd struggled to stay afloat. I'd struggled. And there was just this quiet of the wind and the waves. I knew I was done for. I thought I was done for and I probably was. And then I remember the parachute becoming waterlogged, it pulled me down and it started to suck me under the water, the weight of the thing. It sank effectively. I felt this huge pulling of me down into the water.
- 28:30 And instead of floating up to the waves, there was quite a swell, I'd just stay there and the wave would go over me. And then I'd perhaps get a gasp of air in the trough and then the next wave would come. I was on my way down. And at that stage I started to pass out, I was drowning. And I must have been looking at the sun through the water, but I remember a bright light above me.
- 29:00 And I had an out of body experience, which I've since read is very symptomatic of drowning. The bright light. I rose out of my body. I could see myself struggling and floating in the water. I'd taken on an enormous amount of water, as reported in the hospital. I was virtually done for. It stops becoming a movie at this point and it starts to become a slide show. And I
- 29:30 see snaps. I can remember still, snaps of what was happening, a bit like a slide show rather than a movie. And I remember hearing the helicopter again. And the crewman, who probably saved my life, could see that I was under water. He inflated his life vest and jumped into the water and swam over to me with his life preserving equipment, and floating ocean gear. And he got to me and hung onto my arm. He managed to get his hand onto my arm. And he undoubtedly saved my life
- 30:00 because the helicopter then went, and this crewman then, with all his flotation gear, fortunately he had plenty of it so I understand, although I can't remember the details of that, managed to hang onto my arm enough to stop me from just going down completely. I was in very deep water. I would have just gone down and been down there. I don't know how they would have recovered the body. They probably would have had to dive for it. And somehow
- 30:30 that kept me sufficiently afloat, with the odd gasp. At this stage I was unconscious. So this struggle went on for about another twenty minutes apparently, as he was holding on to me. At this stage, about forty minutes had expired. They managed to attract the attention of a passing fishing boat. And the passing fishing boat came over and they managed to haul me on board. They fished me out using a suspension line. And I remember snapshots of that,
- 31:00 being hauled onto the boat. I remember passing up a lot of water. And then once on the boat I just remember this incredible, my body just gave up. I must have psychologically realised that I was still alive, now that I was on the deck of the boat, lying on the floor of the boat. And I must have thought; it's all right now,
- 31:30 I could stop fighting for my life. So I must have relaxed. They were CPR-ing [Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation] me and I must have passed up a lot of water and stuff, I was unconscious then. And there was consideration then about hoisting me onto another helicopter because I was dying. They were doing CPR and trying to resuscitate me. There was concern about whether I was going to live or die.

- 32:00 But I was unconscious for all this, fortunately. I probably would have been quite concerned about myself. They got me to shore. They got me to hospital. They carried out the relevant life saving processes that were required. And the only thing I remember is waking up in the hospital, some hours later, on a ventilator, which is one of these things that sucks the water out of you. And I'm on a cold slab of some
- 32:30 kind. I don't know what it was but it was freezing. And I just remember the consciousness of coming through too. And I remember my instant thought with the ventilator, with this thing over my face, on this cold slab. I remember thinking immediately, well obviously I've been bad because I've died and I've gone on to hell, and I'm down there and this thing's got me. Whatever this thing that's got me. And there was disorientation of, well am I dead or am I alive? Where am I? What world am I in here? And there was a doctor and
- 33:00 a nurse and they were working on me. I sort of came to, and I was still passing stuff up. I think they'd got most of it, of the water, at that stage. I then slipped in and out of consciousness for a while. And I really woke up the next day in hospital sort of okay. And I couldn't move a muscle, I couldn't even lift my arm, I couldn't even lift my leg. I couldn't move. And this
- 33:30 is sort of consistent with people fighting for their lives, the adrenaline pumps, and you hear about women lifting cars off their children, finding this incredible strength. And it's the same thing, you've used everything. And for a couple of days I virtually couldn't move. About the second day I could shuffle about. But I was lucky to be alive that day.
- 34:00 And one of the guys who was with me is now the head of surf lifesaving in New South Wales. Actually, one of my fellow officers. And another one is a well-known businessman in Melbourne. I got through that one. I probably should have died that day but I lived. And you take it in your stride. I look back on it and the amusing thing about it is, about four or five days later, when I was eventually released from hospital and I was okay, I'd had no brain damage, although I remember I did become a politician, I remark now,
- 34:30 so maybe there was some brain damage. But I was quite okay. I was doing a counter terrorist course at the time, with the SAS, and I arrived back mid week. I think I was back there Wednesday or something. I thought well, I may as well go to work. I can walk. So I was a bit sore and battered and bruised. I went to the lecture that was on that morning and I just shuffled in, sat down. Nobody said anything
- 35:00 or made any comment. Everyone knew what had happened. It had been the subject of major work for a couple of days. I just sat down and the guy giving the lecture was, I think Red Webb, he just paused for a minute, looked at me and said, "We're all very pleased to see you sir." And carried on with the lecture, as if nothing had happened. It was very little, just got on with the business. So I just remember the way he said,
- 35:30 "Very good to see you sir. Now we'll just get on with the lecture." And you're a bit like that in the unit. Because there are other cases where, there were others that died in training that were less lucky than me. I was lucky. And I owe my life to the crewman who stuck his neck out to jump into the water to hang onto me.

**So you had come down quite a way from shore?**

Oh, yeah I was about probably a couple of kilometres out.

- 36:00 I had a round parachute called a Para Canada. It didn't go very fast. There were three of us that had that type of parachute, and we had very little performance, so we all landed in the water. There were two others that had Ram parachutes that were much faster, they just made the beach. But the three of us that had the old technology finished up in the water. The other two were okay, interestingly. They managed to cut away from their parachutes early.
- 36:30 And I think a surfboard rider picked one up and the other guy got picked up by another craft. And they were also both very, very strong swimmers. They were both water operators. Perhaps because of my inexperience at parachuting, perhaps just a range of factors, I couldn't get out of the parachute. It was a rig with which I was unfamiliar, I hadn't been trained in. And, you know, I just got into bother. But that's
- 37:00 how you die sometimes if you're not properly prepared or if you have a bit of bad luck on the day.

**Did you have an opportunity to say thanks to the...?**

Well, you know, I can tell you this now, I did. Because the air force crew were working with us for some months, and I got an opportunity to thank them personally. But this crew, the pilot and the load master, should have received a bravery award in my view,

- 37:30 but the whole thing was covered up. And I reckon that the whole thing was covered up because a few mistakes had been made. The aircraft was flying over water, we didn't have life preservers on. There were certain rules and regulations that were supposed to have been followed that hadn't been. The aircraft was supposed to have certain equipment on board, which it didn't have on, because a few of the rules had been broken that day. Even in regard to parachute safety; a few
- 38:00 of the rules that we were supposed to follow had been broken by the people running the event on that

day. Now that wasn't me, I was one of the participants. But the drop zone safety officer...maybe they're listening to this. But it was a long time ago so we're not wanting to go back and revisit it. But some mistakes were made. And I think the pilot and the crewman should have been put in for a bravery award, but they couldn't be because they probably would have been court martialled before they got the bravery award, because of technical mistakes that were made, in terms of what they had on board.

- 38:30 There would have been an investigation. There would have been trouble, and so on and so forth. So in the end the whole thing was sort of brushed over. No one died on the day, and I fully recovered so it was all okay. Had I died there would have been a full investigation of course. Years later we had the Blackhawks crash together, and all those people were killed and there was a big investigation. On that day it was a near miss. But the interesting side of it, from a family point of view was that,
- 39:00 my mother, when this happened I think they thought that they were going to lose me. I think they thought that I was going to die. And the army has a system of notifying next of kin of casualties. It's a very effective system. The minute someone's called very seriously ill, which means you've got a very remote chance of survival, a notification of casualties system moves. So the next of kin, in that case I was young, I was only twenty-three or twenty-four, my mother was my next of kin.
- 39:30 The system moved to notify your next of kin. And on this particular occasion the media had gotten on to it too, because this had happened off a public beach. And I think the local media were on to it. The Channel Nine helicopter was out there, and there was a chance that the names and the events could have gotten out. So the noticode [?] system moved. My mother was at home here in Adelaide this Sunday, and there's a knock at the door. And she opens the door, and there's the duty officer,
- 40:00 who happened to be a classmate of mine from Duntroon, with whom I'd graduated, a member of the artillery corps, in his sand brown and his uniform. He was the duty officer. A padre and a civil officer, you know, a welfare officer. And they said, "Are you the mother of Martin Hamilton-Smith?" And so she just said, "He's dead isn't he?" And they said, "Well, no. He's not dead. But he's very seriously ill and there's a
- 40:30 better than average chance that he will be dying." And they had to go through the whole process of counselling her and explaining what had happened, and they didn't have much information to work with themselves. They'd only received a flash from Perth saying, "This has happened, this guy's seriously injured and may not make it. And you better go and let his mother know before she sees it on TV." And I think she found that a bit of an ordeal. And gratefully, the regimental second in command was able to give her a call
- 41:00 later that afternoon, by this time I'd woken up on the ventilator, and say I was stable. So she was able to be reassured that I was going to make it through. But from her point of view, she tells me, it was quite an ordeal. And my good mate, John Russell, who was the duty officer on the day, said afterwards, years later, "Look, I never thought when we graduated that I was going to go around and knock on your mother's door and tell her that you probably weren't going to make it." I only tell that story because that's what happened to me.
- 41:30 But there have been dozens of stories like that in the SAS, during training activities, where people in some cases have died and other cases they've had a near miss. Sometimes rules have been broken. But if you want to maintain a regiment that can go and do things as we've just seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, then you have to train to a very high level. And although this was a period of peace, I guess that the point that I was trying to make in telling that story, was that in a sense, it wasn't a period of peace too. Since the training
- 42:00 was going on and the operational capabilities that were being maintained..

## Tape 5

- 00:33 **You mentioned that you were doing a counter terrorism course at that time. What's the background to that?**

What happened was that in 1978 there was that Hilton bombing in Sydney. People were killed. The prime minister at the time was Malcolm Fraser. He said, "Look, we've got to raise a counter terrorist capability and do it really quickly." It was resolved that the best organisation to maintain that capability

- 01:00 was the army, and the SAS was given the job. So we started training, in 1978, in counter terrorism almost immediately. And started training in a team. It was pretty elementary. We didn't really know exactly where to start with this. But I was there at the very outset of it, and I did one of those early courses. Then what was decided was that one officer and one sergeant would go to the British SAS in Hereford, in Great Britain, to learn how the Brits were doing it. Because the Brits had been in Northern
- 01:30 Ireland for along time. They were maintaining a really good counter terrorist capability and we'd learn how they were doing it. And we'd come back and we'd model our own capability. Now I was nominated as the officer to do that. So myself and a sergeant, a good mate of mine to this day, went off in early 1979 to Britain, where we were attached to the British SAS in Hereford.

02:00 Which was a great experience in itself. And we worked with them for the rest of 1979 learning the ropes, if you like, in counter terrorism. We did other things as well. I did some high altitude parachute training. We did some mountain warfare work. Things like that. We did a lot of close quarter combat and shooting. But mainly the focus of our being there was to learn about counter terrorism. Shortly after I left the Brits had Prince's Gate, the Iranian Embassy siege in London.

02:30 Which was an absolute shoot out between Iranian terrorists and the British SAS. It happened within weeks of me leaving. But we came back at the end of 1979 and I was appointed to command the SAS's first counter terrorist team, in 1980.

**What were the key elements that you learnt from the British SAS in counter terrorism?**

New methods of close quarter combat training. New methods in how to shoot with pistols, sub-machine guns

03:00 and use other devices and weapons. Stun grenades, communications equipment, body armour. A whole range of other devices that they were using, vehicles, counter terrorist vehicles, methods of assault and method of entry techniques. There were a whole lot of practices and techniques. They had a lot of operational experience from Ireland, a lot of people who'd been involved in conflicts in Ireland. And we got involved in a lot of that. So there were a lot of

03:30 techniques to be brought back, a lot of command and control methods. We were able to observe how they work with civilian police, how the command control of an incident unfolded while it was being conducted. A lot of that sort of thing. There was a wealth of information that we were able to bring back and use as the start line to training our own capability. A hand picked group of people were put together from within the regiment. So we've got the

04:00 SAS Regiment and then we've got this other group that was put together from within it, to be the first counter terrorist team. And could I just say, each of those guys were absolutely outstanding. This was an absolutely new step for the regiment. We put this capability together at speed because the nation was calling on it to be done. We had to go out as a defence force and buy a lot of equipment, Magnum Cox sub-machine guns, pistols,

04:30 body armour, communications equipment, vehicles. I mean, all sorts of things were put together. We had to build range facilities and special resources to train on, in Perth mainly. And we had to get this capability happening. We had a team come out from Hereford to help us through that initial period. But really myself and Lee Alver, the sergeant who'd come with me, were principals in helping get this moving along with others

05:00 in the tac [tactical] wing, Captain Greg Morks at the time, and others, very pivotal in getting the thing happening. For the rest of 1980 we maintained that team capability, and we were on line at a few hours notice to move and to respond in the event of a national counter terrorist crisis. And that's right back in 1980 which, given the prominence of terrorism today, since September 11, is worth remembering. Right back then, in 1980 our SAS was maintaining this capability. Now what it involved was breaking every rule in the book in regards

05:30 to (UNCLEAR rain) safety. There's no way you could maintain this capability without training people to an extraordinarily high warlike standard of training. We had to do close quarter combat training, moving in rooms the size of this room. Firing and moving together without shooting each other, but shooting the enemy. Shooting the terrorists and rescuing the hostages. So we had to throw the safety book out basically, and start again and write our own safety rules,

06:00 if we were to produce a standard at the end that was ready for operations. So this was like a warlike role. This was like sending our troops to war, except they were standing by in Perth ready to respond when an embassy was hijacked overseas, or when a Qantas aircraft was seized and held at Tullamarine or Mascot airport, these people, we would have been there, this team that I was commanding, ready to resolve that incident, as a matter of last resort when it

06:30 went beyond the capabilities of the police. So in a way, this transition in the late '70s, the early '80s, really marked the reawakening, if you like, of a new war role for the defence force, out of Vietnam in the early '70s, through this period in the '70s when it was no clear mission, to now. Suddenly terrorism and international terrorists became the enemy. They were a shooting enemy. They were all around the world. They could have

07:00 been shooting at any time, in Australia, or in our embassies overseas. And lined up against them was this group within the SAS. So we really saw the emergence of this new conflict, this war of terror. And it really started in 1979 and 1980. And since that time, this capability has been maintained seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, fifty-two weeks a year, over in the west, until today. And it's still there right now.

**Can I ask why it's being maintained in the west when some of our greatest threat would be on the east coast?**

The reality is that's where the

07:30 capability was located. That's where the SAS Regiment was located back then. As it so happens now,

another group had been raised in the eastern coast, out of Holsworthy, using one of the commando regiments. So there is now a capability in the east. But what we had was plans in place to move within hours, that group to the eastern states, if an incident occurred, using air force aircraft or civilian aircraft, whichever was the most readily available.

08:00 So we could have had that capability over here within hours, twenty-four hours a day if it was required. And we pre-positioned equipment, vehicles and so on in every state. So that you just brought the troops in, picked up the gear, boom off you went. So it was a pretty highly developed capability.

**There's a shift of thinking here and, as you said, a rewriting of the rule book. How did the, say for example, the police react to this?**

Well initially there was a debate,

08:30 of which I was a part and certainly a witness to, between the Federal government and the State governments as to who should take responsibility for this. In Germany the capability was in the hands of their Federal police, called GSG9 [German Special Group]. And the police maintained this option of last resort. In Britain it was the SAS. In Australia, after a period of discussion and debate it was decided that the army would provide the capability of last resort. And that the state police forces would provide

09:00 initial responses through things like Star Force and that SOG [Special Operations Group], and these various other tactical response groups the police force maintain. But the thinking was a group of terrorists are like an armed group of soldiers that come in with machine guns, rockets. They're a highly trained, developed group. If you're going to go against them, the thinking was, you need soldiers to go against them not police officers. There were certain states, like Queensland I think, Joe Bjelke-Petersen and his commissioner were very keen to have the capability in Queensland.

09:30 I think initially they were a little resistant. Some other states, I think Victoria was initially of the view that the Victorian police should provide this capability. We had all the police commissioners and the ministers of police come over to Perth for a demonstration. I ran that demonstration as the tactical commander but it was hosted by the commanding officer of the regiment, and by the now governor general actually, Michael Jeffrey, who was at that time the director of special action forces. And Mike Jeffrey and the SAS Regiment

10:00 more broadly, showed people what we could do, provided a venue to talk the issues through. And at the end of the day, it was resolved that clearly, this was the way to go. That the SAS needed to provide the capability. We worked out a way through the National Counter Terrorist Plan, for the states to work with the Federal government effectively. And we developed what became the National Counter Terrorist Plan, which is still in affect today, although it's had many alterations and revisions. And so that's where we were by the end of 1980.

10:30 In fact, by early 1980. So it was quite an interesting and dynamic period. And this involved all levels of government, Federal, State and Local. It involved all police commissioners. It involved the Federal Police. And of course, it involved the military fully. And the SAS became the host venue for a lot of these discussions and these deliberations. So I was fortunate indeed, to be the tactical commander of that first tactical assault group, which was based around 1 Squadron SASR.

11:00 Sort of a combination of A Troop and B Troop.

**As you said, you learnt a lot from British counter terrorism. From my experience of living in England there is the great threat of bombs in public, and terrorism isn't necessarily a hostage situation. How does the relationship with secret intelligence work?**

Well, obviously there's a very close relationship between

11:30 intelligence providers and the people who will have to be called in and resolve an incident, as a matter of last resort. That relationship exists in the UK between their defence force and their intelligence services, MI6 and MI5. A close relationship exists here between the Australian Defence Force and ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] and ASIS [Australian Secret Intelligence Service], the two secret intelligence services here

12:00 in Australia. ASIS being primarily charged with gathering foreign intelligence, and ASIO with local intelligence. And it's been a matter of considerable public debate. A lot of resources have gone into the area recently, in the last few years, to beef it up. By comparison, back in 1980 we were operating on a shoestring when you consider the sort of resources that are going into it today. But it's been recognised now that terrorism has grown to the point where it needs a massive response from government

12:30 and from the defence force. Back then, what we provided was a very, very competent response. But it was still not seen as a major defence force role. I think it's now seen as a principal. A very, very important role. Terrorists are now seen as perhaps the major enemy we face. Back then we were still talking about Missourians and defence of continental Australia, and terrorism seemed to be a sideline threat if you like, or a secondary threat. It's certainly changed. But it's important

13:00 for this work that you're doing, particularly, to get on the record that really it was back then in 1979 and 1980 when this capability was being honed, in which I was involved, that terrorism and the response to it really became a prime consideration for the nation. And that capability was set up in

those early days, by me and those who followed and that

13:30 first team and all the teams that followed. And it's been perfected today into probably one of the best counter terrorist capability in the world, without question.

**And in those early days, what kind of threats were you dealing with?**

Apart from the Hilton bombing there were assassination attempts. The Turkish Consul was shot at one stage. There were various other threats from time to time. There were concerns about Commonwealth heads of government meetings here in Australia, Queen's visits, various other events that were

14:00 at risk, it seemed at the time. There was also concern about hijacking of aircraft and seizure of embassies. Various other nations were subject to bombings and embassy sieges. All through, you might recall, the '80s there were hijackings going on and shootouts going on. Terrorism was very prominent. But it didn't seem to involve Australia. And it didn't seem to involve America very much either. They were surprisingly

14:30 unattacked, if you like. Surprisingly removed from it all until September 11. Of course, that changes everything. I remember there was the 1972 attack on the Munich Olympic Games by PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organisation]. So there were all these terrorist groups out there that were perceived as a threat here. And we knew who they were, we knew a lot of their names. We trained to fight them. We knew what weapons and equipment they used. The targets we fired at during our training were of these people.

15:00 We knew their modus operandi. We'd studied in depth how they hijacked aircraft, how they seized embassies. We understood their tactics. We developed a system of tactics with which to respond. We got the right weapons together. We practised with entries and explosives. We knew how to graft apart and pull walls down to get in and rescue hostages. How to get our people in so that we could rescue the hostages and apprehend the terrorists. So all of those things were perfected. Now in the process of that

15:30 we injured a lot of people. And this is another thing I talked earlier about, the responsibilities of command. There are a number, thinking back twenty-five years now, of people that have been involved in maintaining this operational capability, who have been seriously injured. We've had people shot dead. When my team handed over to the second team, one of the guys was shot in the head by one of his mates during a training accident. We've had people

16:00 drown in the Bass Strait. We've had people crash in helicopters with the Blackhawk crash. We've had people with their hands blown off. We've had people lose their hearing. We've had others who've suffered gunshot wounds, explosive wounds, car accidents. All connected directly to the counter terrorist capability and the risks we've been taking since 1980. There have been more dead and wounded through this counter terrorist capability in SAS, than

16:30 in all its previous conflicts combined, through that regiment. And not only that, the defence force, there've been more people killed or injured in the SAS since Vietnam, maintaining this capability, than I think in the entire Australian Defence Force on its operations since Vietnam. More than in Timor. More than Iraq. More than in Afghanistan. All killed and injured in the SAS, maintaining this capability. You only need to count the bodies

17:00 in the Blackhawk crashes alone. The problem is, is the system compensating these people adequately, and their wives and widows for the injuries and the loss of life that's occurred? Now I know, because I was a commander at that time, that rules were broken on the range. Rules were broken in respect of aircraft and explosives. When I say that rules were broken I mean that new rules were written. And we took

17:30 chances, we took risks to get the job done. People have since been injured. And I think there is a responsibility here that we have to make sure that these people are looked after. One of the interesting things about this period is that the army, up until this time, had this expeditionary force mentality. The idea was unless you went off to World War I, unless you went off to World War II, as part of an Australian Imperial Force, even subsequently to Korea, to Malaya, to Indonesia,

18:00 to Vietnam, unless you went off overseas, you hadn't really served. Now what counter terrorism brought to the table was the concept that you could actually be on operations whilst not leaving the country. That the war, that is terrorists, could actually come to you. That you could be fighting at Tullamarine or Mascot airport, on the streets of Brisbane, in a terrorist response to a terrorist incident.

18:30 And it's greyed the black and white of what's war and what's not war. What's an operational commitment, an operational deployment and what isn't. Now these young men that have been maintaining this capability in SAS have been fighting for their country, in my view, since 1980, and been maintaining a capability. They haven't sailed off to a foreign shore in order to do it but they've been maintaining that capability. And I think the country is now realising that it needs to rethink the paradigm.

19:00 And rethink the way it looks at war service and operational service. And ask itself whether counter terrorism isn't on a level with the sort of conflicts we've been involved with through Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, that it isn't war in another guise. And perhaps it is. I know this debate is

19:30 going on at the moment within government and within the community. But I think, as terrorism becomes more prolific, the question of what is, and what isn't, a war, becomes harder to define.

**Having spoken to men that have served overseas they've often spoken about boredom and trying to remain alert. How do you keep a**

20:00 **counter terrorism squadron alert when there could be very quiet periods?**

That's right. We were always on a few hours notice to move. So we carried pages and had recall procedures in place to bring people in at very short notice. Remember, this is before the days of mobile phones. So there was a degree of immediacy to everything we were doing. For example, you couldn't go away on a holiday for the year that you were on line,

20:30 if you were going to be more than a few hours drive from barracks. So there was an immediate impact on families, and an immediate impact on the lives of the soldiers. Quite apart from that, the intensity of the training. My quick answer to your question is training. The intensity of the training that we were conducting was such that people were focused every day they came to work. Shooting three to four times a week. In those days all of us could pull a pistol out and fire unaimed

21:00 shots to the head, probably with a double tap and be reasonably confident of hitting the target, anything up to fifteen metres, perhaps twenty metres, depending. And with aimed shots from much further. With a pistol, a sub-machine gun, we were all first class shots with a sub-machine gun and the pistol. And very confident with our explosives and our methods of entry. Now all of that is dangerous work. So it wasn't boring coming to work.

21:30 You were coming to work and people were shooting, firing and doing their thing. We experimented a lot with new technologies, thermal arcs, cutting devices, mechanical devices for improvising opening doors and objects, methods of entry. We would go on exercises. We'd simulate a hijack. We used to go out to Perth International Airport quite regularly, in the early hours of the morning, and walk over aircraft, 747s, unseen. We'd obviously arrange it through

22:00 the appropriate channels, but everyone else was sleeping at home and the lads would be pouring over the 747, taking off the windows, opening the doors, getting familiar with what's inside. We'd set up live firing exercises where we'd have an exercise terrorist group as the enemy and we would respond to that. A lot of the firing was live firing. It was very dangerous work and people could be accidentally shot or killed at any time. And some were. Some of our own people have been. So the

22:30 risk of injury was always there. But if you didn't training to that level, getting back to the football analogy, if an AFL football team didn't go out and train hard it wouldn't have a hope of winning the grand final. And sometimes people get injured in training. How many times do you pick up the paper and you hear so and so's had an injury in training and won't be playing this week? There are similarities with a group of soldiers. If you don't go out and train as you are going to fight, when you have to fight you will die. Because you haven't trained.

23:00 People can't shoot straight. People aren't used to shooting and carrying out their close quarter combat in realistic conditions. You make mistakes and people get killed. So you have to take calculated risks in training, in order to insure that on the day, when you go in shooting that you're going to get the job done and get it done safely. And so accidents will occur, for all of those reasons. There wasn't a lot of time to get bored during training. What was a problem was, what I'd loosely

23:30 call, morale. In that, this was very hard on the families. For a wife it meant, and for the kids it meant that Dad couldn't go away for a two-week camp down the coast while he was on team. It meant that he was under enormous pressure during the day and during the evenings. Quite often he would work on weekends. There was virtually very little time off, and the pressure built. Now these were hand picked guys

24:00 but the wives and families have to carry the can too. And they're not, they didn't join the SAS after all. And so it put the families under enormous pressures. I remember on a couple of occasions, we'd be away for a while, on one occasion I remember coming home, we landed at the airport. On this occasion a couple of the wives had come to meet the soldiers. And one of my, we'd only been away a short time, but it was towards the end of our tour so the pressure was mounting. And as soon as she saw her husband she just burst into tears.

24:30 Now we had been away for a few days, but it had only been three or four days, but she saw him and she just burst into tears. And it was as if he'd come home from World War I almost. She was just an uncontrollable wreck of tears because he'd come back safely from this particular activity. And I remember being shocked by it. Thinking, why is she crying? I was single at the time.

25:00 I didn't understand the pressures as much as he did. But it put a lot of the families under pressure. And this sort of training does that. There's not a lot of time to be bored in the SAS, particularly doing this sort of work. The regiment's got a way of making sure that it keeps people busy. Later, when I was working in the Middle East, involved in peacekeeping, boredom was an issue. But that was a separate campaign and a separate situation.

25:30 **You had to hand over the command of this squadron. How was that?**

It was a troop actually. At this stage it was a troop capability. At the end, I think we had a nine-month tour in 1980. Then what we did was we entered into about a six-week period of hand over training to the next troop. And the next troop, from memory, came from within the same squadron. It was the alternate troop. So we trained them up.

- 26:00 Now it was during this period of cross over training that we lost our first casualty. The incoming team was working up and we'd been training them. A particular patrol or particular team was due to go into the killing house. We used to call the indoor shooting range the shooting house. It was a complex like a two-storeyed building. You could go into any room. You could fire. The walls
- 26:30 would catch the bullets. You could blow the windows off and then rebuild them and blow them off again. It was designed as an indoor shooting and method of entry range. A team was waiting to go in for a live firing exercise. There were terrorists, there were explosives, there were things set up. And they'd been practising their pistols, double taps. I wasn't present at that time, I wasn't actually in the room so I can't describe the full
- 27:00 details. But at the end of the day two soldiers went in and one accidentally double tapped his mate in the head instead of the target. His mate, Corporal Peewee Williamson, who'd been a commando was killed instantly. And it was an horrific accident. somehow this
- 27:30 soldier managed, without even realising what he was doing, to take a pistol out of his holster, take the safety catch off and put two shots into his mate's head. Those shots were supposed to go into a target, but you're dealing with a group of people under enormous pressure. I think we'd had some flawed training practices. I think
- 28:00 what we'd done to simulate training, prior to that, with weapons cleared, with no ammunition, in completely safe circumstances men would practise shooting at moving targets if you like, using each other. This is quite common practice with soldiers, with an aiming disk. There are training methods where you do actually aim a rifle at another person but there's never any ammunition involved. It's a training practice and you use it in the early stages of training. But the
- 28:30 fact that you did that might have created some sort of a mental gap where somehow, some lapse, he might have somehow thought it was a training event or something like that, it wasn't live ammunition in there and he might have forgotten there was live ammunition in the pistol. Whatever. The net result was that he killed his friend. There was an investigation. It was looked into, it was an accident.
- 29:00 To his great credit, the soldier went on to serve with great distinction, that soldier that had fired the shots, in the regiment. To its great credit, the SAS Regiment managed to gather around this tragedy and understand that it wasn't the fault only of the man who'd fired the shot, but it was really a weakness in the system, the training system, that had perhaps contributed towards the accident. And we buried Peewee and the soldier that fired the shots
- 29:30 rose above the accident and went on to serve with great distinction within the regiment. And the regiment learned from that mistake, and that particular mistake never happened again, and we changed the system. But there were other deaths, parachuting, diving, shooting, explosives. There have been a range. Aircraft accidents, and in each case there's been a mistake. There's always a mistake if someone dies.
- 30:00 But when you're dealing in this sort of work you have to accept that you'll make mistakes. When most of us make mistakes, no one dies. We can say, "I'm sorry." And we can go out and we can do it better next time. But in counter terrorist work, and in most SAS work if you make a big mistake somebody's going to get injured or killed. Now this isn't
- 30:30 Vietnam, this isn't Tobruk, this isn't Gallipoli. But Australian soldiers have been dying in SAS in these sorts of accidents, whilst maintaining an operational capability to defend the nation from terrorists. It's a war. It's been a war between us and terrorists. And it's been going on since 1980. It's a different war. It's one
- 31:00 that until recent years we haven't been quite accustomed to, until September 11. But we've been fighting this war since 1980.

**Looking at that situation with Peewee. You had created or been a part of the foundations here, and now you were handing it over and it was your first fatality. How did that impact on you as leader and as a human being?**

When I first got the news there was a bit of disbelief. By then I had

- 31:30 trouble dealing with it, as everyone did. It was actually quite interesting, the initial dynamic, because the SAS Regiment had actually killed its own in Vietnam. There were a couple of incidents where friendly fire had resulted in the death of a patrol member. In almost every case, the soldier that fired the shot had some difficulty settling in to
- 32:00 getting on with life. And a lot of the other troops had some difficulty going back out into the field with that man because he'd fired the fatal shot. And this presents a dynamic for soldiers in war. When someone of your own accidentally makes a mistake and fires a shot that kills one of his mates, can you

forgive and can you forget? And this issue came up again when Peewee was shot. The initial

32:30 reaction from the troops, I think, was one of; well, look it could have been anyone who fired the shot, there was a weakness in the system. And I think the attitude hardened to one of, well he's going to have to go, to the soldier that fired the shot. He won't be able to stay. And I got involved in the debate at that stage, when I saw those attitudes harden. And I remember going to see the commanding officer and the officer commanding the squadron at that time,

33:00 and I argued with him that no, he should stay. That the regiment has to get around this attitude. The regiment has to recognise that it was a weakness in the system. Anyone could have fired the shot. This young bloke who'd fired the shot had been in my troop from the start. He'd been in A Troop. He was a good soldier. As it turned out he was coming on line with the new team. He wasn't in my troop, we were on counter terrorism. But he had been when we were in parachuting. I knew him well. He was an outstanding soldier. He fired the shots,

33:30 but really, there was a weakness in the system in my view. In the way we were training, and anyone could have fired the shot. And I argued strongly that we should ensure, provided that he was mentally up to staying, that he got support. And in the end, that argument won the day. And I think the regiment put it behind them. And the soldier went on subsequently, to be a squadron sergeant major and performed creditably and with great distinction. But

34:00 he's got a personal demon that he'll always be wrestling with, for the remainder of his life. And it wasn't his fault. The army, the SAS and counter terrorism, war in general, puts people in these positions. How often has that happened in conflict? We talk about friendly fire. The estimates are as high as twenty percent to one, troops killed by friendly fire. How often

34:30 has an Australian soldier accidentally killed his mate in Gallipoli, in El Alamein. I put it to you that it's happened regularly. And those people have had to come back and wrestle with their demons. But in the dark, in the confusion, with limited training, and in some cases in fearing for your life, not being able to see through the smoke and haze, accidents happen.

**Did you feel at all responsible for that glitch in the system?**

35:00 Yes I did. But it was my team training the new team. We passed on the same training methods that we'd used when we were trained. There hadn't been a mistake up at that point. This was a combination of a lapse of concentration on the part of the soldier that fired the shots,

35:30 a fault of the training system. It was a combination of factors, probably pressure and stress. When that mistake occurred we realised we had a problem. And that's how life is sometimes. You don't realise you've got a problem until something happens. You often don't realise you need to put a stop sign up at the intersection until there's been a couple of crashes there. Then you realise it's a black spot. It's no different. Often you don't realise until something happens for the first time. And you have to examine

36:00 it, understand what went wrong. You don't realise what you were doing wrong. And we were dealing with weapons and ammunition. I would regularly, during demonstrations, stand inches apart from targets while my men came in and fired multiple rounds into those targets. They'd be no further away than there, and had total confidence that they would hit the target and not shoot me. And that was just putting on

36:30 demonstrations during normal close quarter combat. We were regularly moving and shooting together, and rounds were going within inches of each other. We would sit people down in an aircraft type simulator and fire over their heads, a question of inches above their heads knowing that we'd be engaging the (UNCLEAR tar) on a daily basis. This was very dangerous work. On this day something went wrong. And we realised we needed to revisit the problem. And we changed the training

37:00 system, improved the system. And we made it better while at the same time not sacrificing operational readiness. Whenever you have a soldier, now this soldier wasn't in my command, he was in the next troop but he was a mate as we all were. We were all in the same squadron. If you are a commander and you lose a soldier or you even have

37:30 a soldier injured, you ask yourself, "Did I cause that? Could I have prevented that?" How did Rommel feel at El Alamein after he lost the second battle and thousands of his troops had been slaughtered? How did some of our battalion commanders or company commanders feel when they assaulted bunker systems in

38:00 Vietnam and they decided to say, take the left approach instead of the right approach, and using the left approach they ran into the jaws of machine guns fired by Viet Cong and lost soldiers? If they'd gone the other way they might have had a clean run. You make these judgements on the day. And you might have got it right and you might have got it wrong, but all you can do is make the best judgement and introduce the best training methods and conduct things the best way you can,

38:30 hoping that all will be well. At the end of the day, you'll get some decisions right, you'll get some decisions wrong. But if you agonise over your mistakes you'll rip yourself to pieces. If you revisit every decision you make, particularly where there's been an injury or a death, and take all that blame on yourself, then how do you go on as a commander? And it's never completely anybody's fault, usually.

39:00 It's a combination of factors that have caused a fatality or a death. So you just have to go on.

**And after the handover where did you move on to?**

I then became operations officer of 3 Squadron, 3 SAS Squadron in war roles. So I went off counter terrorism and I went

39:30 back to war roles or training for green roles, which is planning for situations like Afghanistan and Iraq. And I spent my final year as the operations off [officer] of 3 Squadron. And an interesting year it was, except I had a couple more plane crashes. One in Townsville, an aircraft that ran out of fuel actually and crashed in a paddock. And ironically, one of the captains, my fellow SAS officer, on that flight with me, was one of the same

40:00 captains that had been on the helicopter flight when we bailed out and nearly drowned. So after that, I think at one stage I was getting on an aircraft to go parachuting, the troops got on with me and they set up, as a bit of a joke, to all stand up and get off the aircraft. And they all walked off and left me sitting on my own. And they said, "We're not going flying with you sir. Only joking." And all came back on again. We had a Caribou

40:30 in Townsville that crashed in a paddock, running out of fuel, in fog. A C1-30 that hit birds at nearly two hundred feet, and went into the trees. We had a Chinook helicopter that had a hydraulics failure and crashed on the airfield at Williamtown. So there were a series of events. But each one of those, one walked away from and no one was seriously hurt or injured so they're the good ones. But

41:00 when the two Blackhawks crashed that was one that people didn't get a way from. But on one occasion, this is when I was ops officer of 3 Squadron, this is the crash of a helicopter and the death of people in Rockhampton, servicemen.

## Tape 6

00:31 **Just to touch back on SAS for a moment. I understand that you as such, were never called out to an operation but you were brought up to a fairly high level of intelligence a few times. Can you tell me about those times?**

That's right. The capability for counter terrorism was raised effectively in 1979, 1980 and the

01:00 first full on team that we maintained was 1980. During that time, up until the time I left in early '82, there was no deployment. There was no terrorist deployment, there was no terrorist incident that required a response from the counter terrorist team. However, during the '80s, and during this early period, there were a couple of stand bys. The Commonwealth heads of government meeting, which I think was

01:30 in 1982 or 1981. 1981. CHOGM [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting] in Melbourne, I think it was required, the deployment of the team to the eastern states, to stand by for that. There've been a number, if you like, of stand ups. Where the regiment's been called to a higher degree of readiness than it might have otherwise been. Gratefully, in Australia, we've not been, in this twenty-four years or so since the capability's been

02:00 raised, called out to broker an aircraft hostage or a siege, or deploy overseas to an Australian embassy or any of those things. There have been, I think, quite a few scares. In that time there's been intelligence, and it was coming in while I was there as well, indicating higher levels of threat, at particular times. And I think now, since September 11, there'd be even more of that, I imagine. But the team hasn't

02:30 actually had to fire a shot in anger, so to speak, at terrorists in Australia so far. But of course, there's been the need to go to Afghanistan, the need to go to Iraq and get involved in these other issues, Timor, Somalia and a whole lot of things the regiment's becoming involved in subsequently, that it required them to deploy on operations, but not in Australia. But the point of it is, if you have a force like this,

03:00 up and ready to go at a few hours notice, to move, fully trained, armed, equipped, operating at that level then you are maintaining a lethal force capability, and with all the dangers that go with that. It's during that operational period, when these people have actually been on line, they've actually come on at a certain time and gone off at a certain time, say a nine to ten month tour. While they've actually been on those operations, that most of the fatalities and accidents have occurred,

03:30 during that period of deployment, on readiness to go. A parallel might be, for example, in Vietnam the Australian Task Force maintained ready action forces to go, at the base at Vung Tau, ready to deploy into the field to rescue people in trouble. Some of those teams might never have deployed or they might have, depending on the situation. And it's a bit like a ready reaction force

04:00 except that instead of it being Vietnam, it's in Perth, and it's been ready to go at a few hours notice

should it be needed. And since September 11 we've seen how easily it could be needed. But gratefully, there hasn't been a major shooting event here in Australia as a consequence. And let's hope there never is.

**Can you just give us an example of being put on stand by? Can you remember any time**

**04:30 that you were ready to go but you didn't actually get out?**

No. I can't recall that there was any particular incident that required us to stand to and deploy to the east, in anticipation that there'd be an attack. In my time on team, that didn't happen, in 1980. It may have happened subsequently, I don't know. But in 1980, during the nine months or ten months I was on team, it didn't happen, fortunately.

05:00 There was one funny incident. I recall getting up one morning and turning on the radio, and I was just getting ready to go to work and the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] piped up with the seven a.m. news, saying, "The SAS counter terrorist team just deployed to the eastern states to protect the Queen," who was out here on a Royal visit, "in response to a threat that's emerged." And I remember sitting there, being the commander of this team, thinking, oh my God, did they? Heavens. And I missed it? I quickly jumped in the car and raced off to work and

05:30 I was very pleased to see all the vehicles and the troops lined up when I got there. And people going to work as normal. I think an overly enthusiastic journalist had got a bit carried away with themselves. But there is a capability there to step up, if you like, I'm sure. And there was that capability there when I was on the team. It's just that the threat level didn't get to that point.

**And why do you think the SAS had a reputation of being phantoms of the jungle?**

06:00 I think it's probably a label that emerged during Vietnam. But also, to a lesser extent, during Borneo and the Malaysian confrontation. Particularly Borneo, the confrontation with Indonesia. The regiment was adept at operating in the jungle. We had, I think, two hundred and fifty kills in Vietnam confirmed. But the regiment didn't lose a single man

06:30 directly as a consequence of enemy fire, whilst on operations. There were a couple died of wounds, there were a few accidents and a couple of self-inflicted casualties in the sense of friendly casualties. We had a very high level of success. And I think that was a reflection of the fact that people had this experience of Malaysia and the confrontation, and possibly Korea, to draw on. But also New Guinea, people used to go for build up training there. But I think we just developed a level of

07:00 expertise at patrolling and operating effectively in the jungle, that was of a very, very high standard. And that was reflected in the results. Our people used to move around out there, undetected, and get the outcomes. We were quite feared by the Viet Cong, very effective. Unlike some other countries in that conflict, who relied a little bit more on firepower and manoeuvre. Our people used to just go out there and get the job done. And I think that 'Phantom of the

07:30 Jungle' unseen, unheard, but effective, is a label that really emerged during that Vietnam period. Which when you think about it, is a very prolonged period of conflict. It was really from the mid '60s right through, well we really went to Vietnam in '62, '63. There were even people there earlier than that. And didn't come out until '72 or so. It was really a ten, eleven-year war. The longest war we've ever been involved in. Except perhaps the war of terror.

**And how did you feel**

**08:00 in a sense, leaving the SAS?**

I felt it was like a chapter of my life that was coming to an end as a junior officer. I knew I would be going back to special forces again. I didn't quite know when and where. I also had a sense that, I'd been a lieutenant or a captain for all this period while at 6 RAR, I was

08:30 a young officer, and I knew that I was going off probably to my final posting as a captain. That I'd become a major, that I'd become more senior. And I did have this sense of foreboding that I was getting further away from real soldiering. And perhaps a little bit of disappointment. I was going off to a desk job, that was fine, it was my turn to do that. But you joined the army to be a soldier and peace was breaking out all around the place in the 1980's. And the Cold War

09:00 was still on, but from Australia's point of view it didn't seem to be likely to be a major conflict during the '80s. So I didn't really know where I was heading after that. I'd also left a couple of good friends behind too. In my last year in SAS I lost a very good friend, Sergeant Ewan Miller, who was one of three killed in the Philippines in Subic Bay, when one of the American aircraft,

09:30 we were working with the Americans in the Philippines, cart wheeled into Subic Bay. I was operations officer of 3 Squadron, and we lost those three soldiers. There were twenty-four killed in all. One survivor I think, on the entire aircraft. And Ewan had been a very good mate of mine. He was a Vietnam vet, and my girlfriend and his girlfriend were best mates. And I unfortunately got the job of having to go and tell her that

10:00 her fiancé was dead. And it's a job I never really want to do again. There's no mystery about that, it's a

very unpleasant thing, and particularly when you are so close to the people. And there'd been other friends there who'd either moved off on posting or who, one way or the other, you'd sort of lost. One of the guys I got to know very well in

10:30 22 SAS, was subsequently killed in Northern Ireland. And you make these friends and things happen to them, and you go your way and they go theirs. And you think, you're leaving, in a sense, those connections behind you and moving on into the future. But such is the nature of military service. You know that some challenge lies around the corner and off you go. And that's what I did.

**You mentioned that**

11:00 **3 Squadron were, in effect, undertaking war roles. Or you mentioned the term green roles.**

The squadron that was involved in counter terrorism is very much an urban and counter terrorism role. It's sometimes just referred to as a black role, you wear black. And it's just a term that sort of emerged. And the green roles were regarded more as your war fighting roles, or your jungle roles, or your bush roles. And it's just a

11:30 colloquial term that sprang up in the region to describe the different types of work. Green roles were considered to be conventional war fighting roles, and black roles were seen to be as counter terrorist. Just a bit of local colloquialism. And 3 Squadron was focused on war roles. So we were back to patrolling. I was operations officer of the squadron. It was my job to work with the officer commanding the squadron, to issue orders and

12:00 missions to patrols, and then to run the radio communications headquarters for the squadron when they were in the field. And they would radio back and report their results. And we deployed on a number of major exercises and participated in a range of activities with Americans, with other Australian troops, where we practised how we would conduct reconnaissance, surveillance, harassment, and raids in war, should it occur.

**And where were you based?**

Based in Perth but we worked all over the place.

12:30 The squadron sent troops to the Philippines, as I've mentioned. We sent people to, I think Malaysia, at the time. We went to the United States. We participated in a major exercise up at Rockhampton. A Kangaroo exercise as Orange Force. So I was in the Orange Force headquarters. And that was interesting because that was challenging work.

13:00 We were screening along the coast while the Americans landed and did an amphibious assault. And we had to report what we saw. It was an exercise situation. Still, with these major exercises people get killed and injured. There was another close call for the squadron. We'd had a pretty bad year that year because we'd had a few people killed in accidents, and on this particularly occasion, the squadron commander and I went to, we had a gunship,

13:30 we had two slicks, which are sort of helicopters ready to carry troops, and a couple of gun ships. We had these gunship teams, and slicks were going off to pick up patrols. One was going to pick up a blue patrol, which was one of our SAS patrols which was working for Blue Force. And the other one was going to pick up an orange patrol, which was working with Orange Force. The OC and I were going out on missions in the morning to pick troops up with these helicopters. And this particular

14:00 morning we sat there at the LZ [Landing Zone], and there were two groups of helicopters cranked up. One was going to pick up the blue patrol and one was going to pick up the orange patrol. And they were both flying tactically low level. And he said to me, "Where shall we go Martin? Shall we go blue or shall we go orange?" And I said, "Well, we went blue yesterday. Let's go orange." So we hopped in the orange helicopter and off we flew. And the blue helicopter crash landed on its approach to pick up our patrol, and the pilot and

14:30 co-pilot were killed. I think one of the crewmen survived. It went straight into a hillside. And I remember as we were flying, we got the word of the accident. And the thing that worried us most of all, we were desperate to know, whether it had already picked up the patrol. If it had already picked up the patrol and crashed on the way back, our people were on board. And all we heard was that the chopper was down and that there'd been deaths.

15:00 And so we had a very anxious fifteen minutes to twenty minutes while we flew back to base, and quickly raced off to the squadron headquarters to find out where our people were. Gratefully they were still waiting on the LZ to be picked up, wondering what had happened to the helicopter. That could have been one of our patrols that went in that day. And that's partly why I say, what happened with the Blackhawks, when so many young men were killed,

15:30 had nearly happened on a number of occasions. There had been a number of close calls regularly. So it just reminds me that we should value the work these young people are doing. They're taking risks every day. But on the occasion of the Blackhawk crash, a large number of people were killed in one mid air collision. I saw numerous close calls. And every officer that served with me, and subsequently, would have seen similar close calls. It's just the nature of the work.

**You mentioned earlier there**

**16:00 was a chopper crash up at Townsville?**

That's the one. On that particular occasion. There've been others on and off. But most of them you're lucky. Sometimes it doesn't fall your way. But these dangers are there in training as much as they are on operations. It can be a bit hazardous being a peacetime soldier

16:30 sometimes too, particularly in a unit like the SASR. Which is part of the reason why I have the view that the system, if you like, need to look at those soldiers who have been injured or killed, and their families, maintaining this so called capability in peacetime, and be sure that we're looking after our people. I was lucky. I served in the SAS for a period and walked away without a scratch.

17:00 But there are others, including soldiers that served with me who walked away with physical and psychological scars. And I think the country owes them a duty of care, irrespective of whether they deployed overseas to a foreign battlefield, or whether they maintained operational capability back in Perth. And that's just a personal conviction and a personal message that I carry to people when I speak to them, and I've lobbied actively for since I've been involved in politics.

**17:30 What sort of duty of care would you like to be put in place?**

I just think that if you are a mother or a wife or a son or a daughter of a serviceman who has been killed, because he's been shot or blown up or died in a helicopter crash, it doesn't really matter to you whether it happened in Vietnam or it happened in Timor or it happened in Iraq. Or

18:00 whether it happened whilst he was on line and on duty in the counter terrorist force, standing by in Perth to respond to a hijacking, or a terrorist incident during the Olympic Games, or whatever. The fact is you've lost your husband, or your father. Or if he's in a wheelchair. And I just think if you try to say, "Look, one soldier in a wheelchair is different because

18:30 his injury occurred overseas on a so-called operation. And this other soldier alongside him, is in a wheelchair because he was involved in a helicopter crash or a shooting accident, whilst on line for counter terrorism." It's a thin line. They're both brave young soldiers who injured themselves or died serving their nation. And we have to step outside the paradigm that says that one is essentially different to the other. And

19:00 I particularly think that, where it's not just a training accident, there'll always be accidents in training. The police have accidents in training, air force, navy, everyone has accidents in training. That's sort of something different, I think, if you are maintaining the counter terrorist capability. I think the SAS is a bit unique, is the point that I'm making. I think some of the missions that they have based, even out of Perth, such as counter terrorism, are inherently different and are warlike in my view. Even though they are occurring in Perth.

**19:30 What happened to you next? You were in 3 Squadron...**

I served in 3 Squadron until the beginning of 1982. Then it was my turn to go off that, Sydney, to Headquarters Field Force Command, to a staff position in the headquarters. Field force command in Sydney was the command

20:00 that commanded the army's fighting troops. So there's a training command that commands the training establishments, and there was a field force command that commanded the fighting troops. There was always a need for young officers with recent operational experience, to go there. There was always an SAS captain there. So I moved there. I spent two years as a staff officer in operations and plan. And during that period I decided I

20:30 needed to keep my mind busy, so I started a masters degree in history at the University of New South Wales, in Kensington. I had two years, I knew I'd be in a staff position there. And I developed an intense interest, in my SAS time, in guerrilla warfare. So I made the focus of my studies the study of guerrilla warfare. And I completed a sub-thesis on Vietnam. My sub-thesis was on Australia's involvement in counter insurgency programmes

21:00 in Vietnam, from 1961 to '64. Which sounds like a fairly focused topic, and it was indeed. And I only looked at the period up until the Australian government decided to send combat troops to Vietnam. It was that early period. In the very early stages of the Vietnam War when we were involved with special forces and CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and others, in working up in the mountains with Montagnard highlanders in the highlands of Vietnam,

21:30 training them to fight against the North Vietnamese. And there's actually quite a history there of Australians working, and an excellent book's been written about it by Barry Peterson, called 'Tiger Men'. It's almost a little bit 'Apocalypse Now' in terms of what happened. Essentially we were sending people off, young soldiers, officers, off into the mountains of Vietnam to work

22:00 with the CIA, with large amounts of money and weapons, to train villagers to fight the North Vietnamese, in quite an extensive programme. Organised under the auspices of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam. So I really studied this period intensely. Interviewed a lot of people. Spoke to

a lot of Vietnam veterans. Dragged information out. Looked up archives. Looked at the official histories. Examined newspapers and official records that have since been released. And really pursued that. I published in

22:30 international and national journals on that subject. I also looked at revolutionary warfare in China. And compared it as a model with revolutionary warfare in Vietnam. And then wrote a large piece for a British journal on that. I looked at US foreign policy in Asia. I looked at the histories of the Communist parties in Indonesia and Malaysia and other places. And I found that two years quite intellectually stimulating.

23:00 It sort of furthered my interest in the history of warfare, and what Clausewitz, the great military strategist described as the implementation of policy by other means. Which was his perspective of war. Nothing but politics in another way. Nothing but the extension of politics in another form. Because we're living in a world now, and I think we're seeing this since September 11, where suddenly we're hearing a lot about SAS and special

23:30 forces and these great capabilities that we've been able to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan and Timor. And we're realising that there's a lot of grey. And this is very relevant to Australia. We had World War I and World War II which, if you like, were major total wars. Now the sorts of things that we're involved in today aren't declared war. We haven't declared World War Three. We're really involved in more limited conflicts that have, not only a requirement for tanks and planes and navy ships,

24:00 and these big capabilities, but they also have a requirement for more surgical, smaller, more highly trained minimalist capabilities, like the SAS. We're finding a greater need for these things. That's why the government and the defence force has grown these capabilities enormously. We've got far more special forces now than we ever had before. They've realised that in some wars you need a sledgehammer, whereas in other wars a

24:30 scalpel is more appropriate. And that's where special forces come into it. So I spent those two years in Sydney, studying this whole issue, before then going off to command the 1st Commando Company in Sydney, which is the sister regiment of the SAS. I took up that position in '84 and '85.

**I'd just like to touch on that point that you mention. We**

25:00 **haven't declared World War III but in this era of security concerns do you feel like we are in a way, living a type of World War III?**

Well, when we were working with counter terrorism there was a term that sprung up. I think it might have been from Che Guevara, or writers around that time, "One man's

25:30 terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." And it warrants thinking about. Ever since David and Goliath, I suppose, small, overwhelmed people have resorted to guerrilla warfare as a way to strike back against a much larger empire or force. So guerrilla warfare, and you could call it terrorism is nothing new. It's been around since

26:00 the Gauls rode up against the Romans. Since the Huns came down and swamped the Roman Empire. The Spanish employed guerrilla warfare with great effect against Napoleon. The Boers against the British in South Africa. Guerrilla warfare is nothing new. Some of the terrorists of today would probably see themselves as guerrillas defending their cause. And they would probably see themselves as

26:30 performing that cause honourably. Now, we tend to see terrorists attacking innocent civilians as a terrible act on inhumanity, and it is. But it's interesting to put yourself in the shoes of the other party and have another look at the world, and you sometimes see a different picture. So yes, I think we have moved into a new paradigm. We have

27:00 moved into a new stage of human conflict. Fighting wars against innocent civilians is nothing new. Let's not forget the fire bombing of Hamburg and Dresden. Let's not forget the way the Germans bombed London. All sides in major conflicts have been very happy to kill civilians during war. Look at what the Russians did in Poland. Look at what the Nazis did in

27:30 Russia. And of course, killing civilians occurred in Vietnam. Let's not forget Hiroshima. There's plenty of examples. Let's not forget what the Nazis did to the Jews. Where does it end. Civilians have regularly been a target in war, and it's inhumane. Now for terrorists, civilians are still a target whether they're in Bali or whether they're in the

28:00 Twin Towers in New York, on September 11. The terrorists that committed those acts would see those civilians as probably legitimate targets. Now they're wrong in thinking that way. And it's inhumane to think that way. They're innocent civilians. But to their mind, in their world, they're striking a blow for whatever particular political nuttery appeals to them, is in their hearts. So

28:30 you're going to get more of this. We're going to get more of this terrorism, we're going to get more attacks against civilians. We're going to get more attacks by people who feel they can't possibly muster the conventional force to strike at a major power, like America or Europe or Australia. But they can muster force of another kind - being clandestine, acting as guerrillas. By planting bombs, by assassinating people, by putting bombs in bars in Bali, they can achieve a political outcome. Getting back to Clausewitz,

29:00 they can extend politics by other means, get a political outcome without having to man and maintain a huge army. So this is the way. It's not completely a new thing, it's not just a modern thing. It's an evolution of something that's been with us for hundreds of years. It's guerrilla warfare, or terrorism, if you like, in another form, in a new form. And I think we're going to see more of it. And interestingly, it knows no national boundaries.

29:30 It doesn't have a return address on the envelope. Whichever particular group of nuts and fanatics want to re-invent the world in their own image, it's whatever they feel is appropriate. It's not just al-Qaeda who wants to attack New York on September 11 or put bombs in Bali. You had the Oklahoma bombings committed by terrorists, idiots,

30:00 American citizens from within, rising up against what they perceive to be state dominance. So it is a way for the weak to strike against the strong. And it warrants study and it warrants careful, thoughtful analysis. And I was interested in the mid '80s, and I remain interested in it today. There's no easy answers. But this is the business

30:30 of the SAS. It's the business of special forces. There are a lot of well-educated, smart people in defence today, giving these matters a lot of thought. And a lot of that has evolved through this history, this transitional period, as I said, from the end of Vietnam to where we are today. These capabilities that we're crafting to deal with those challenges, have been evolved and developed by people in my generation who've thought about these issues

31:00 during this period in the '70s, and the '80s, and '90s, and are now sort of crafting our responses.

**So you went on to become, and spend ten years with the 1st Commando Regiment?**

Well, actually I had two years as the officer commanding a commando company. That was based in Sydney. So I was a company commander. This is your next level of command.

31:30 The commando company's an interesting one. It's a mixture of regular and reserve soldiers. And a lot of SAS people go to commandos and then go back to SAS. And people go from commandos. In fact, Peewee Williamson, who I mentioned was shot and killed in SAS, was a former commando. So was Ewan Miller, my friend I mentioned to you. So there was a flow of people. Now we have a 3rd Commando Regiment, which is based in Holsworthy and which now provides the

32:00 counter terrorist capability east. So we've got these two commando regiments and the SAS regiment, together comprise the army elements of our special forces. I commanded a company there. Then I went to training commander for two years. And then staff college for a year, as senior commander of the staff college. And then I went back to the commando regiment as CO of the regiment, as a lieutenant colonel. So I had those four years with commando, two as a company commander and then later, two as the

32:30 regimental commander, which means that you've got the three companies under command. The two companies and their signal squadron.

**When you were CO of the commando regiment, what were the capabilities of the regiment?**

Well, the 1st Commando Regiment was based out of Sydney. And we had a company in Sydney, a company in Melbourne and a signals squadron in Melbourne. So we were spread around a little bit. As I said, there's a combination of reserves and regulars. So your

33:00 command structure, a lot of your key appointments, a lot of your key people, and in the case of the signals squadron particularly, a lot of your soldiers, your ordinary rank and file were regular soldiers. You'd have a mixture then of reservist, at the sort of trooper level or the commando riflemen level, rounding it out. Some of those reservists were ex-regulars. Some of them were selected from elsewhere within the

33:30 defence force or within the reserves. They all went through a commando selection course like the SAS selection course. The officers went through an officers' selection course. It was similar protocols but a sister regiment. And if there was a difference, the commando regiment, being a sister regiment to the SAS, is structured differently. The commandos work as a large force where the SAS work in groups of four or five or small patrols,

34:00 designed to do reconnaissance and surveillance work in small groups. The commandos tend to work in much larger groups. You might get groups of company strength or more, between a hundred and two hundred people. Much more heavily armed. Still special forces. The idea is they dovetail with SAS. SAS might go in and do the reconnaissance, identify the target, stake, get out, do all the preparation and planning if you like, send the information back. Then the commandos might come in as a large force and

34:30 destroy the target, or if it was a prisoner of war camp, rescue the prisoners and do the actually hard-hitting. One's a scalpel, one's a sledgehammer. And they work together like that. Both special forces. SAS wear a sandy beret, they have a slightly different organisational culture and selection process and training system. The commandos have a green beret, they have again, slightly different culture, traditions and methods. But there is this relationship and this exchange of people between the two. So

35:00 the actual nature of the work they do is closely related, and they fit together very, very well. That was a great two years being in command. Although being a unit commander I suppose, is the goal you set for

yourself as a cadet when you start at Duntroon. You say to yourself, "My immediate visibility is to be a platoon commander." Then beyond that you think, maybe when I'm twenty-seven or twenty-eight I might get to be a company commander. And then maybe when I'm

- 35:30 thirty-five or thirty-six I might get to be a regimental or a battalion commander, and hope for that, knowing that not everyone's going to be fortunate enough to get that position because there's not enough commands around for everybody. And I was very, very lucky, and humbled, to be successful in winning one of those positions. So I had two years as a commander of a regiment. But as I said earlier, very rewarding in many ways but also, in a sense,
- 36:00 not as close to soldiers as you were as a platoon commander. Also the army at this time, this is 1991, '92, long before Timor, even Somalia, our battalion commitment over there, Somalia, coming out of this period of extended peace in the '80s, where the only thing going on was counter terrorism, and that wasn't sort of, at that time, really recognised as a major role.
- 36:30 The army was still shrinking. Remember this forty-four thousand-man army I joined in 1971, was heading towards twenty-five thousand when I left in '95. So at that stage there would have only been twenty-seven or twenty-eight thousand people in that army. It was after a period of cuts to budgets and various reorganisations. I'd have to have say that, in my view, the army as a whole was in decline.
- 37:00 I remember having a lot of battles as a commanding officer, over resources, ammunition, flying hours, training days, track kilometres, support, ship support. Any support you needed had to be justified and re-justified and justified again. So in my view, this period of the late '80s and early '90s was a period of decline for the army. Budgets were very tight.
- 37:30 Numbers were being reduced. It was a pretty depressing time. And I can think of better times to be a commanding officer, to be brutally honest. And no operational missions that were apparent. I was still involved as the CO of the Commando Regiment at that time, as part of the National Counter Terrorist Plan. When there was a terrorist incident and the SAS deployed I was also to deploy. And my
- 38:00 group would operate the State Crisis Centre and be the defence reps at the State Crisis Centre. So I was still involved in that counter terrorist plan. And having once commanded the counter terrorist team, I understood what went on. So I was still involved in that. But there were no other missions or operational deployments in those two years. We had some fantastic training, we had some great exercises. We participated in one of the major Kangaroo exercises as the enemy, where I was the land component commander for the invasion of the
- 38:30 North of Australia. That was pretty interesting. I had my regiment, an SAS squadron and two rifle companies under my command. And it was my job to invade the North of Australia. That was 1992. I flew from Cairns to Derby, in fact beyond Derby, nearly down to Broome, many times, backwards and forwards along the coastline. Drove the area. Stomped every patch. Looking at avenues of attack, ways to
- 39:00 approach the north. Ways to invade, ways to harass. We had a submarine, a few patrol boats, some commercial shipping and a number of aircraft in Orange Force, who were based over there on the western coast of Western Australia. And we had the whole of the defence force as blue. And my job as the land component commander was to devise the attack for Australia. I felt very much like the commander of the Japanese Forces in 1941, ready to invade.
- 39:30 And that was pretty interesting. I landed SAS people all over the north, near Wyndham right across to Weipa, all through the Tindal area. You certainly get to know your country. And you get to operate in some pretty amazing situations and some pretty rough climate, pretty rough terrain. But the troop did very, very well. We had a pretty useful exercise. And I think the defence force,
- 40:00 who were our enemy after all, we were enemy for them, I think got some benefit out of it. We were able to show them what commandos and SAS could do. And how many people we could tie up in the north.

## Tape 7

- 00:33 An interesting point, thinking back to my time with the SAS, and subsequently with commandos, and later peacekeeping in the Middle East, soldiers had to make the transition from the old way of thinking about war to the new way of thinking about war. And that was brought home to me in the SAS when, for example, the generation of soldiers in the SAS that had served in Vietnam had to adapt
- 01:00 to the new mission of counter terrorism. And people that had spent their whole lives in the jungle, and who were accomplished and brave and awarded, in many cases, as soldiers, for their bravery in Vietnam, suddenly had to learn how to work and operate in a new environment. And that was an urban environment, a counter terrorist environment, a more modern environment, where the threat was harder to pin down. Close quarter combat in urban areas was the issue. A whole new dynamic. And the interesting thing I
- 01:30 found was that while some of the soldiers made that transition very easily, a lot of them had a great deal

of difficulty with it. And some, frankly, didn't cope. I know I lost one of my team commanders in the first counter terrorist team. He was my sniper commander actually who, after about three or four months on team decided he wanted to retire. Accomplished Vietnam veteran and a very good soldier. A bit older than the

02:00 other soldiers. But I think he just found it was all a bit too much. It just involved so many new dynamics, and new skills and different capabilities. And he wasn't coping with it very well. Now that I look back I can see that he wasn't coping. So he stepped aside and somebody else stepped into his shoes. And that's interesting, because conversely, a lot of young soldiers that had never been to Vietnam, and I suppose in a sense I was one of them, as the commander, but I had soldiers in my

02:30 first counter terrorist team that were in this same position, they'd never been to Vietnam, they were all youngsters, revelling in this new environment. This was their world. This was the world, they were kids that had grown up in the '60s and '70s and they found themselves, it was 1980 and they were in a world of terrorism, of sub-machine guns and pistols, of a new dynamic. A modern type of conflict. And some of them then

03:00 turned out to revel in this environment and did very, very well. They achieved terrific results. They turned out to be fantastic with their skills. They thrived in this new environment. They established themselves in it and it really gave them something to hang their hat on, so to speak. And in many respects, some of these people outperformed the Vietnam veterans in this new field. And I think it gave them a confidence. That this was something that they could do and they could do well. It was a levelling effect. It was like a completely

03:30 new mission. It was like taking a team of rugby players that were really excellent rugby players and putting them all onto the soccer field, still playing the game, but in a totally different environment, with new rules. And some people that had been really good at one weren't good with the other, and people that weren't good at the other were good at one. And so it went on. That was an interesting transition. And when we spoke about this within the regiment, and discussed it, the Vietnam vets made the same point. That when the regiment

04:00 switched from the confrontation with Indonesia in the mid '60s to Vietnam, the same thing happened. A lot of the people that were very good and very experienced fighting against Indonesia during confrontation, and that type of conflict, had trouble with Vietnam because it was a totally different ball game. And I think this is a thing about transitional periods. It does call on people to reach within and come up with a new way of responses and capabilities.

04:30 And it's just different. I think that's an interesting difference between this new conflict of counter terrorism and these modern conflicts, compared to the Vietnam period.

**Can I just pick up what you were saying before about the exercises. You were talking about the simulated exercises that you were going through with the commando regiment. I just want to go through**

05:00 **the logistics of undertaking an exercise of that proportion.**

Before I became the CO of the commando regiment I was at staff college, well immediately I was at headquarters special forces. But then, prior to that, I was at staff college. As you become a senior officer, you start to go up to unit command and beyond, you really need to get involved in the business of the army at war. And at staff college we did a lot of exercises and

05:30 modelled at lot of exercises. Had what you might call war games but they're really simulated exercises. Some were computer assisted where you would start to consider some of the broader and more complex problems of taking an army to war. And a lot of those problems are structural, a lot of them are strategic and tactical, but a lot of them are logistical. For example, our final war game at staff college involves a simulated

06:00 invasion of Australia by a very large force. And a couple of Australia divisions have to defend the North of Australia, and you fight this battle down through from Darwin, south as you try to defend the North of Australia being invaded. This was all occurring on a map board, a model board with teams on both sides, and people are given appointments on both sides, as both the enemy and blue and orange. You crunch the numbers. But when you go through these sorts of things you start to face up to some very real issues. And these are challenges for Australia.

06:30 Like, how do you raise an army in Australia of say, a hundred thousand men? Now remember that during World War II we nearly had a million people, just over a million people under arms. How do you raise an army of just a hundred thousand in short order, in a short period of time, when you're standing army is only twenty-five thousand? And you think

07:00 about how many training establishments would we need to set up. How many instructors would we need? How many uniforms would we need? How many rifles? How many training areas? How much ammunition would we need to train that number of soldiers? How many base camps, blankets, bars of soap, ration packs? How many trucks full of water would we need to provide to revitalise and maintain, for this army of a hundred thousand men? You start to get a measure of the logistics involved.

07:30 And you quickly realise that you could chew up your entire standing army of twenty-five thousand

people just training the seventy-five thousand that are coming, without putting anything into the field, if you follow me. It's a massive problem. Expanding that army to defend Australia from an attack by a major opponent, wherever that might come from. Even if it was an army of terrorists descending on the North of Australia or descending

- 08:00 on Australia. presents some really interesting challenges. And it makes you realise how difficult it is to do just that. Maintain an army in the field whilst training a new army. while you need reserves and so on. Of course. just aside from that. once you've raised this army, maintaining it. Just think about the problems in Iraq they're going through right now. Let's say you've got an army in the field of a hundred thousand men. Three meals a day
- 08:30 and a good day's supply of water for a hundred thousand men. How many trucks or how many trainloads of food, water, uniforms and supplies, let alone ammunition, fuel etcetera. do you need to ship forward every day to feed an army of a hundred thousand men, or an army of two hundred thousand men? It's a massive logistical exercise. You've got a massive
- 09:00 stream of ships, trucks, planes bringing everything forward. And then of course, the waste and the recycling, a lot of the casualties coming back if you're taking casualties. Just field hospitals. How do you manage a medical system where you might go for months with no casualties and then suddenly have five percent of your force of a hundred thousand men, five thousand men suddenly needing critical medical attention?
- 09:30 I would put to you that fifty critically injured people in a train crash in Adelaide would probably tie up every major hospital in the city for days. We had trouble coping with Bali. Just with the people with burns. And they were spreading them around, from Perth to Melbourne, all over the place. Just so that hospital system could cope. Imagine having to cope with five thousand seriously wounded soldiers during a battle, all in the space of twenty-four hours.
- 10:00 You start to get a grip of the sort of logistics that you need. The sort of medical backup, the sort of resources you need. Now, during this period of the '70s and the '80s, when I was a captain, a major and then a lieutenant colonel, we were wrestling with a lot of these problems. And a lot of the study and the work and the preparation that was being done in the '80s and early '90s, is about these issues, at staff colleges. And during exercises, like the Kangaroo series of exercises, were all about
- 10:30 working out these sort of logistics. And all of that we saw putting into good effect in Timor and in Afghanistan and in Iraq, where we've deployed troops. Particularly in Timor, which was a massive logistical feat, where you needed to provide all this (UNCLEAR), and all this backup and support. So the business of running an army in peacetime and an army in wartime is very much about logistics. Very much about command control and communications. And very much about
- 11:00 maintaining capabilities in the field and getting all that right. And this period of the '80s and early '90s, was largely a period when a lot of these things were being given a great deal of consideration. And of course, something must have worked because it all came together in Timor. There were a lot of mistakes and a lot of things that could have been done better, but it all worked and it worked for good reason.

**And during that time...**

- 11:30 **what were the major challenges that you could see was facing the defence forces or the army specifically?**
- Well, the main challenge facing the defence force and the army as a whole, during the '80s, in my view, was that it was simply withering on the vine. To be perfectly frank, I think that successive governments, and I think both major political parties are at fault here,
- 12:00 but successive governments saw, not without reason, because I think there was reason, that defence was a low priority. The percentage of GDP[Gross Domestic Product] that you needed to spend on defence was progressively cut from, I think somewhere up towards three percent, at the time of the end of the Vietnam War, two point five percent, down to around one point five percent. It was dramatically slashed. Numbers were chopped back. Air force aircraft,
- 12:30 air force operations were cut back. The navy was cut back. We saw the end of the fleet air arm and the Melbourne aircraft carrier. The whole thing was cut back. And it was just cut back and cut back until it was cut back to the bone. SAS was an area where there was some growth. But across the defence forces as a whole, I think things languished in the '80s and early '90s, due to the lack of political will. And as I said, not without reason. A nation has to decide whether to spend its money on health and education
- 13:00 or defence etcetera, and it's just a matter of balance. The [Berlin]Wall came down too. Communism collapsed and the Cold War took some of the puff out of the need for defence spending. There was an expectation of a peace dividend. But of course, that all changed so quickly, didn't it?

**So when you were doing these logistical exercises were you taking into consideration the budget constraints you were working with?**

Very much so. Particularly in peacetime. And what stood out to you was this wasn't going to work at all. In

- 13:30 a major conflict it wasn't going to work at all. We had too few troops. Our logistical infrastructure was too narrow and too confined. We wouldn't be able to support a major conflict very easily with the resources that we had. So you needed a large reserve, and you needed an ability to expand rapidly if the resources were being pumped in. Now all of those things remain a challenge. And to me, I'm just
- 14:00 astounded at how outstandingly well the defence force has done in Timor, in Afghanistan, in Iraq and in the Solomons, even in New Guinea. The work rate that the ADF [Australian Defence Force] has been putting in since about 1996, through to the current day, just beggars belief. And I think it says much about the quality of the people in the Australian Defence Force and the lessons that were learned during the '70s and '80s in way
- 14:30 of preparation. It says massive amounts about that effort. And it highlights the mistakes made by governments throughout the '80s and early '90s, when resources were whipped out of defence. And I think that's being redressed now. I think the current government's putting a lot more money back in. I realise that we need to spend more. Defence needs to be a bit more of a priority. The problems are now being fixed but
- 15:00 the defence force languished in the '80s, in my view. And to go from an army of nine battalions to an army of four battalions effectively, was silly nonsense and has been found to be so. And now we're stepping back and going the other way. And we need to go a lot further in my view.

**We've been talking about these periods of transition. In the early '90s**

- 15:30 **Australia was becoming quite vocal in the peacekeeping forces or quite prominent. How did you move into peacekeeping work?**
- Well, there seemed to be a recognition across the nation, especially in government in the early '90s, that Australia had to fulfil its international obligations. I think the '80s was partly a period of isolation. We'd always had people in Lebanon and
- 16:00 the Middle East with UNTSO [United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation]. We'd had people involved in various UN missions as observers. But we hadn't really contributed any significant contribution. Then came the Gulf War. The first Gulf War, when as you know, Bob Hawke contributed some navy ships and some divers and some other resources to that first Gulf War. Now, I was in defence headquarters in 1989 and 1990, before I went into command the commando regiment in '91 and '92. And I was involved in the
- 16:30 repairing of Australia's strategic planning in 1990, which was the major strategic planning document, and a whole lot of strategic thinking was going on about the future of the Australian Defence Force. If I'd walked into an office in Canberra back then, and I'd said that the next major conflict that we were likely to be involved in would be a major limited war in the Middle East, during which we would be part of a coalition invading Kuwait and expelling Iraq, you would have been laughed out of every office in Canberra. People would have looked at you as
- 17:00 if you'd taken leave of your senses. And within twelve months that's exactly what we were doing. And if there's a message in that, it is a message for government and for strategic planners everywhere, is that you do simply not know what lies around the corner. You simply do not know where circumstances and fate will take the nation. And when maintaining an army, a navy and an air force, you must maintain a balanced array of capabilities
- 17:30 that are flexible and responsive and are adequate to meet whatever might be around the corner. Now, making those judgements is difficult. But I think we were caught out. The only capabilities that we could provide back at the first Gulf War was navy. We were asked for F1-11's. Our F1-11's didn't have the technology on board to inter-operate with the Americans. We were asked for land forces, I was in defence at the time, our tanks weren't inter-operable with the Americans.
- 18:00 We didn't have the right technologies. We didn't have enough armoured fighting vehicles that would have worked with the Americans. We would have been useless, because we would have been ill-equipped and ill-resourced to participate in that first Gulf War, from a ground troop point of view. We had the wrong capabilities. Things had been wound down. So we made a token contribution through our ships, which was good. We played our part in that first Gulf War.
- 18:30 I think that first Gulf War made Australia realise it had to be prepared to be part of the international community in addressing global issues. And after that Gulf War there was a greater willingness on the part of government to get involved in things. I think one example of that was our involvement in Somalia, where we sent a battalion off, I think it was in late '92, '93 to work with the UN in Somalia.
- 19:00 And our troops performed remarkably well. I think it was a Townsville based battalion. And around the same time the government decided, it was asked and it decided that it would recommit to the multi-national force of observers in Sinai, Egypt. Now we'd been part of the multi-national force of observers in the Sinai back in the 1970s but we'd pulled out. We had some helicopters over there. The government decided that it would send troops
- 19:30 back into the Middle East, back into the Sinai, back into the MFO [Multi-National Force of Observers], to help maintain that peace. Now the MFO is a barrier force between Egypt and Israel. It occupies the Sinai. It comprises of three battalions; a Fijian battalion, an American battalion and a Colombian

battalion. Then there are eight other contingents that provide aircraft, command and communications, and other resources to the force to make it work.

- 20:00 It came out of the Camp David accords. Without that peace between Egypt and Israel there's no peace in the Middle East. Remember the '67 War, the Yom Kippur War, and so it goes on. We were asked to replace the British who were withdrawing a contingent of just under thirty, I think it was, twenty-seven or twenty-eight people. A small group. But we would fulfil key appointments within the force. And I was to be the commander. I was called while
- 20:30 I was finishing up command of the commando regiment. I was looking for a posting. And I couldn't believe my good fortune when I was offered another unit command. But not only that, overseas in the Middle East doing an operational role, this is what you want when you're an officer. You just want to be doing your job. So I leapt at it with open arms. I went over to Egypt. I did a reconnaissance. I travelled to Sinai, had a look around, set it all up. Went to Rome where the force was based. Talked to
- 21:00 the senior commanders and said, "Right, we'll do it." Came back and made recommendations. Raised, selected the group, raised them in Sydney at Randwick, trained them. A lot of preparation. And then we took our contingent of twenty-seven or eight, over there. I was the commander of the Australian contingent, a new unit in the order of battle. ASC [?Australian Sinai Contingent] MFO Sinai. And as well as being the CO of the Australians, I was to fulfil the position of assistant chief of staff to the entire force,
- 21:30 which was a three thousand, three hundred person group. So theoretically there was a Dutch general in command. There was an American number two, a full colonel, chief of staff and then there was me, technically number three, as the assistant chief of staff. And then the contingent commanders. So I was in a privileged position in that I was technically number three, in a sense, of the force. And right next to the general and the chief of staff who knew what was going on. I had
- 22:00 a number of officers that filled key positions in security, in running the base, a number of other functions. And soldiers spread around in communications, in administration, in logistics, in operational roles right across the Sinai. But mainly out of the base at El Gorah, south of El Arish. And we were there for a year. I perhaps, in a foolhardy sense,
- 22:30 thought that after my reconnaissance a year's tour would be adequate, we'd manage. That, that would be enough for the troops to deal with. I think in retrospect, I made a mistake on that. It was too long. A year to be away from home, peacekeeping in the Middle East was too long. I probably should have made it six months. But I agreed to a year, and we went. We came into the position, I think the
- 23:00 second week of January 1993. And the contingent left and was home for Christmas. So we left about the second or third week of December. So they were there for the whole year. It was a pretty interesting year, in fact, for everybody concerned. There were some highs there were some lows. It was a very important role. I was able to travel freely to Israel, to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv. Move around extensively through diplomatic circles, through
- 23:30 UN circles, through upper military circles, including the Israeli military. Similarly I was able to get to Cairo. Work with the Egyptians, move with the Egyptian military circles and diplomatic circles there. And also with international organisations. As well as being in the Sinai, which was owned by the MFO in effect, and see a pretty good part of Egypt and Israel, the Middle East, Palestine generally. And it opened my eyes to the nature of the problems of the Middle East.
- 24:00 We did some things cooperatively with the Australians in UNTSO, the UN Truce Observer [Supervision] Organisation. We weren't UN we were MFO. It was a different peacekeeping group. We got together with the other Aussies and we realised that there are these Aussies all over the place keeping the peace, helping to keep things under wraps. Helping to keep things quiet and non-violent so the peacemakers can get on with trying to bring
- 24:30 about treaties and agreements, so that situations don't escalate and get out of control. So all up it was a pretty interesting year.
- You say there were highs and lows. I don't know which one to ask first, a high or a low.**
- I think there was a lot of excitement amongst the contingent when we were training and equipping and getting ready to go. We deployed with our weapons, we prepared to fight if we had to.
- 25:00 It was the first time we'd been part of the contingent for some time, of this MFO. Although Aussies had been there before, many years before. This was the first time that we'd been there for quite some period. And we didn't know what to expect. So we were well trained. Once we got there, people settled in. We were living in a camp behind wire, guarding ourselves against terrorists. Some of the contingent were moving around the Sinai working in the outposts, and so on and so forth. We
- 25:30 were all getting around. And it was all very new for the first couple of months. I think after about three or four months people settled into a certain rhythm. After about five or six months boredom started to set in for a lot of people. And this is the thing about peacekeeping, it's not all excitement. It's not all drama. It tends to be about ninety-nine percent boredom, punctuated by about one percent
- 26:00 of sheer terror when you're getting shot at. And although the cases of being shot at in Egypt were

minimal, I think in the time I was there, there was a mine incident, and I think one of the MFO vehicles was fired at by some sort of a rocket launcher, but no one was injured. There were some odd shots fired at our outposts but nothing that seemed well-aimed and well-targeted. And

- 26:30 as far as I can recollect, there were no deaths or injuries in my time there, from anywhere within the force. And couple of brush ups with the Palestinians and the Israelis, but nothing that got out of control. So essentially it was a fairly benign environment for the troops. Their lives generally weren't at risk but they were fulfilling an important role, knowing that at any time the whole world and the Middle East could
- 27:00 turn into absolute abject chaos. And there was always the ongoing risk, whenever you were in Israel, of terrorist attack or getting caught up in some blue between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There were certain areas you weren't to go to, out of bounds because they were pretty dangerous. The challenge, the main low
- 27:30 there was the problem of boredom for people, keeping people motivated. And that I found to be a real leadership challenge, a very big leadership challenge. Because when people get bored they get a bit depressed. They get a bit dejected. I had problems with marital breakdown within the contingent. I found that of the twenty-six or seven or so that I think I had there,
- 28:00 I had about four people that experienced marital breakdown during the period they were away. Of the ones that were married, which was about sixteen or seventeen, and that's a pretty high ratio. It's over twenty percent. And it was about the same, as I've subsequently found out, in Cambodia, because we were also simultaneously
- 28:30 as an army involved in the Cambodia, post Pol Pot, peacekeeping arrangement. In fact, an Australian General Sanderson was commanding that one. We had Somalia, we had Cambodia and we had the Sinai going on, as well as a couple of other little things happening. I had to send one young soldier home, he'd just married before he left, due to marital breakdown, and have him replaced. And another one eventually went home as well, at about the half way mark. And then
- 29:00 two others soldiered on through the year. But one had his wife leave him and the other one was going home to an uncertain future. And this is a factor that I raised with my general at the time, which he was absolutely fantastic about it, and very supportive of, and I know fought hard on our behalf to resolve. The expectations of soldiers today are different to the expectations of soldiers in World War II.
- 29:30 in World War II, it was a larger global war. The men went off for four or five years. The women stayed home. There was a sense of duty. Sure there were 'Dear Johns' and marriages broke up and problems. But I think the traditional values of the '40s were different to the traditional values of the 1990s, when I was over there with these young soldiers. For
- 30:00 example the wives in 1941, '42, '43 might have been happy to stay at home for four or five years and keep the home fires burning while the men were off fighting the war. But the wives and husbands, because I had three female soldiers in my contingent and one of them was married, in the 1990s were a little less inclined to stay at home and keep the home fires burning while their husbands
- 30:30 or wives went off to war, so to speak, or to peacekeeping. There was, I think, a bit of a perception from some of the wives that the men had volunteered for this. It wasn't World War II, it was peacekeeping, they could have got out of it if they'd wanted to. They volunteered for it, they wanted to go off, and while they went off for the year they left the wife at home with the kids. And there were kids to be taken to school, and sick kids, and lawns to be mowed, and cars to be maintained, and all the things
- 31:00 to be done back home. And the man wasn't there to help. And so quite understandably this was a huge burden on the partner, because he or she had to cope on their own while their husband was off overseas for a year. And this gets back to the point, I think that my decision to agree to a twelve month commitment from these young soldiers was wrong. In fact, I recommended at the end of my tour, that it revert to six months.
- 31:30 A six month tour of duty. And General Murray Blake, my commander at the time, agreed to that. He was a fantastic commander and very, very supportive and responsive, and I was proud to serve under his command. And I think subsequently, it was knocked back to six months. I think that's better both for the soldiers, from a boredom point of view and also from the family. So we had this situation where the soldiers were over there in the Sinai, bored out of their minds for a period, and
- 32:00 missing their families. And the wives were home carrying the can with the kids. It's a pretty rough situation. We'd negotiated a mid term break so some of the men came home for a couple of weeks in the middle. Some of them got their wives to come over to the Middle East. But it wasn't the same. It was very hard on the families. And I think a message from that is, in this transition period, this Vietnam period, I'm sure it was equally
- 32:30 tough for the wives during Vietnam as well, but the young women today that are married to these young soldiers, have different expectations. They've got their own careers happening. Women have changed and the defence force needs to recognise that community standards have changed. And if you're going to send troops off to Egypt for a year, if you're going to send them off peacekeeping, or if you're going to send them off to Iraq and Afghanistan for extended periods of time, firstly you've got to get the tour

of duty right.

- 33:00 It's got to be not too short but not too long. But secondly, you have to make sure that there's something in it for the family. Now maybe, and most often that's probably a financial compensation package that allows for that. If a soldier can say to his wife, "Look darling, I'm going away for six months or a year. It's going to be very hard for you. But I'm going to be paid so well that when I come back we'll have a deposit for a house."
- 33:30 Or, "When I come back we'll have enough to buy a new car or send the kids to a better school or go on some nice things together, build that extra room on." I think the partner and the wife can then say, "Well look, the system's looking after us. They care about me too." And similarly, I think the support arrangements back home need to be right. If a male soldier goes off and leaves his wife and kids at home and there's
- 34:00 a death in the family or one of the children gets terribly ill or there's a crisis, or the mother and wife has a crisis, someone needs to be there of a welfare nature, to help her out through those things, help her cope while her husband's away. And for a female soldier, she'll have the same issues with a male husband at home, particularly if he's got the kids. So the welfare system needs to be responsive in a way that it wasn't required to some degree, during World War II, because the values
- 34:30 were different in the community then. Now I think the army's learnt from this. I note with interest that the soldiers going off to Iraq and Afghanistan now seem to be better compensated than my soldiers were. In 1993 my soldiers I think, got the sum total for their efforts, of their normal pay plus, I think it was something like around about twenty-four dollars or thirty dollars a week.
- 35:00 It wasn't much. It was a pittance really. It was a very small amount of money that they got. Now one phone call home per week to Australia would use thirty dollars. So if a soldier rang his wife from Egypt once a week he'd use every bit of extra money he got just ringing home. It was nonsense to be frank.
- 35:30 And I complained about it most vociferously, that the allowances just simply weren't enough to make it worthwhile for the family. And I think the marital breakdown that occurred were partly a reflection of that. So as the commander I felt very frustrated that I couldn't deliver more for my soldiers, in the way of conditions of service and allowances and benefits for them and their families. The system did everything it possibly could to provide
- 36:00 the welfare support for the families it could. I think everything that could be done was done. But we are coming up against bureaucracy, and arguments from bureaucrats in the defence headquarters about the allowance, "Oh, you can't do that, you can't do this. That's too generous because if you give this to the guys in Egypt, then we'll have to give those people over there that." And it wasn't as if you were getting shot at every day in Egypt, so they were arguing, "If the navy go to sea they don't get any extra.
- 36:30 They just go to sea. Why are you having trouble coping?" Well, I just say back to them, "Look, you just need to recognise that family values have changed and the community has changed out there. If the defence force doesn't catch up with that they will find it harder and harder to keep their people." Because wives will say to their husbands, "Darling, get out of the army. It's too difficult for our family." And you've got to have the right package. The interesting thing about being a soldier at this time
- 37:00 is that there is an unwritten contract in your employment document that says, "And by the way, if required you will give your life for your country with no necessary compensation." You have to be prepared to go off and do these things. Leave home for a year, go to Egypt, go to Iraq, go to Afghanistan, if duty calls. And if need be, put your life on the line. And that's as stressful for wives and children as it is for
- 37:30 the husbands and mothers that are over there doing it. So that was a frustration, as I said. Boredom for the soldiers, keeping them entertained. We introduced some novel ideas. Everywhere'd have range practices regularly, so we'd get down to the rifle range and shoot our rifles. Get people out on the ground. I organised Sinai safaris to get people out in the four-wheel drives, out into the Sinai. We had guides take us out. I encouraged people to visit Cairo during their free time, and Palestine,
- 38:00 to learn about the local culture and to try and get engaged with the local culture. There were a range of other activities that we did. We did a lot of sport. We tried to get together as a contingent regularly, because we were spread around with the other nationalities. We made a point of trying to get together at least once a week and do something together. We used to have a morning tea every week, where everyone would come in from out in the field and get together and we'd try and do something together. I tried to make sure that people were getting their
- 38:30 mail, were getting paid. That people were getting their administration right. I was very concerned over there about the quality of the food and water. I think the level of illness woefully high over there, which I credit to the fact that the quality of the food and water was not as good as it could have been. I did everything I possibly could to try and make sure that
- 39:00 that was fixed. But we were part of this bigger force. I was very upset with the multinational force of observers at that time, in the way that they, I think, didn't do enough for soldiers. Not just the Australians but all the soldiers. This is a civilian run organisation that's funded by Egypt, Israel and the United States. And each of those three nations

- 39:30 contributed money towards it. And they were always looking to cut costs. Same thing, run things efficiently, do more with less. And one of the things I discovered, as the chief of staff, that they were doing, was there was a store, almost like a PX [American canteen unit], we call it on the base. Where when people came in from the field they could go and buy some luxury items like CDs or some items of clothing or some magazines. Even some supplementary food to supplement their rations.
- 40:00 You know, cameras, these sorts of goods. And what the MFO was doing, was secretly putting a commission on the costs of those goods to the soldiers, and using the proceeds to fund the soldiers' gymnasium and their recreational facilities. So in essence, the force was getting out of having to pay for a gym and pay for basketballs and
- 40:30 footballs and various other recreational items for the soldiers, which was important for morale, by putting a premium on the goods that were being sold at the store, that the soldiers were paying for out of their meagre allowances. And using the proceeds to plough back into their sporting equipment. And I was just outraged by this. Because they had a budget for those things, funded by Egypt, Israel and the United States. They had a budget to pay for those things. And
- 41:00 whilst they were receiving that money, that money was not being used to provide those things. The soldiers were being made to pay for it by this premium that was being put on the things they bought. It was an absolute outrage. And I revealed it to General Blake and he was as outraged as I was. So we did everything we could together, to try and turn it around. But we were in the clutches of the MFO. But I think that was, to be
- 41:30 perfectly frank, wrong for the MFO to do that. When I found out about it, being the chief of staff, I had to do a bit of investigating, and I uncovered the facts as that what was going on. I made myself most unpopular with the MFO over that very issue. Because what I knew was that some of the civilians, I'm probably libelling people here, some of the civilians who were running the MFO in Rome, were living in luxury villas. And in fact,
- 42:00 I know that the force was spending a million US dollars alone just for security for the...

## Tape 8

- 00:35 **Before we go back to talking about Sinai. I would just like to touch on your time with special forces in Thailand and Malaysia. What was involved in those trips?**
- The SAS and the commando regiment had been involved in helping to improve and develop our relationships with Indonesia and Malaysia and Thailand, through
- 01:00 defence cooperation programmes that are organised by defence. Well, first of all, I had the joy of going to Indonesia while I was at Duntroon actually, on an exchange with the Indonesian academy for training officer cadets, that was interesting, back in 1974. Because we'd been at war with Indonesia in 1966, it was interesting to go there during this thaw of relations that was occurring in the Whitlam years. But that was Indonesia.
- 01:30 Later, while at headquarters special forces, I took a group to Malaysia to help Malay Special Forces to set up their special warfare school, down in Malacca, they have a school there. They run special forces training. They have a diving capability, parachuting, patrolling and various other capabilities. And we've helped them to build that. We've helped them to set it up. We've helped them with equipment, with expertise.
- 02:00 And I was involved in that programme, and with other SAS officers went over there. And we spent time helping them to reorganise what they were doing and do it better. We've had a good relationship with Malaysian Special Forces over the years. They've come to Australia while I was in the SAS and commandos, they came over and visited us and we exercised with them. And we went over there and worked with them. And they're terrific. And it was great to go back there, after having served there in 1976 at Butterworth, and to see how Malaysia had changed.
- 02:30 It was really quite an amazing step forward. They'd revolutionised the place. That was in 1990. Then when I was CO of the commando regiment, we were involved in a programme helping Thai Special Forces and joint exercises with Thai Special Forces. They were also coming out to SAS for counter terrorist training as well. We helped them set up their counter terrorist capability. By this stage our capability was second to none and we'd been involved in helping a number
- 03:00 of our neighbours establish competent counter terrorist forces and capabilities. And Thailand was no exception. But we were also involved in exercising regularly with the Thais. And I took a group of commandos and SAS to Thailand. And we had a pretty good period of training and exercise with them.

### **What sort of field exercises did you do with them?**

Well, we were in the field. We were

- 03:30 conducting field exercises. We were doing parachuting, a whole lot of special forces skills training. A group of Thais came to Australia and we would go there. And the whole gamut of special forces training was being run cooperatively. They have a base at Lop Buri, north east of Bangkok. We'd go up there and operate out of that base. But on subsequent trips to Thailand with
- 04:00 this programme of cooperation, we worked not only in the Lop Buri area but also Surat Thani, which is in the south of the country. And worked with Thai Special Forces on hearts and minds programmes in the south. It was interesting to go and get involved in this because the Thai Special Forces are working in the same southern
- 04:30 regions of Thailand, along the border with Malaysia, that I was hearing about when I was in Malaysia in 1976, where the Malays were working in the same districts but on the other side of the border. But they were operating against separatists that were predominantly Muslim, who don't like the central government, which they see as being, in the case of Thailand, non-Muslim and
- 05:00 heretic. There's always been these breakaway sort of pressures down south. They're ethnically and religiously quite different. And in some of these villages, the Thai Army was being shot at. Some of the villages had been pacified. And I noticed what they were doing while I was with them. I was working on my own a little bit at this stage, with them. We were going into the villages where they'd send in a propaganda team of
- 05:30 actors into the village. They would have a sideshow, like a puppeteer show and various other theatrical acts. And they'd entertain the village. And they tell the village that, " In a few days time, when the government's going to come with doctors and nurses, they're going to sort of help you. Sort of come and administer some services to you." So they used the puppeteering as an opportunity to, if you like, break the ice and get into the village. And then a few days later we'd come in.
- 06:00 One of the med caps [medical capabilities] I was working with in this particular village Kaolin, we had a couple of doctors, a stack of nurses and dentists, and psychological operations people. We sort of descended on the village. The puppeteers and actors had told them that we were coming, so people had come down from the hamlets. And they'd literally throw a dental chair in the middle of the village. It's all earth, dirt tracks, remote. Just throw a dental chair
- 06:30 in the middle of the village square. Not that it was really a village square but in amongst the huts. And there'd be a line of people and they'd just all sit down in the dental chair, and the dentist had a bucket, just pulling teeth out. There were no fillings or anything fancy. It was just urgent pulling out of rotten teeth and basic medical attention. And while that was going on there were other officers working with the village leaders on community problems. There'd be a little bit of engineering going on. They'd come in with a bit of
- 07:00 earth moving equipment and help move some heavy things, clear roads, whatever needed doing. Clear some vegetation. And a doctor and nurses would be seeing people with medical problems, which was quite touching because some of the problems were, the general standard of health was atrocious. There was one woman there I recall, she'd come down from a hamlet with very advanced breast cancer. Her upper chest was virtually
- 07:30 rotted away. She probably only had a couple of weeks to live. And the doctor, on seeing this understood that there was nothing that he could do for her but her whole family had brought her, and there was sort of some hope that there'd be some magic performed that would somehow save her life. He prescribed two weeks of aspirin for her. And went to a great deal of fuss to write out
- 08:00 instructions and made a big deal of handing it over to her, clearly knowing that there was absolutely nothing that he could do. But there was an expectation that something would be done and something could be done. And he just prescribed aspirin for two weeks, knowing full well that she'd be dead probably, by the time... But the family felt as though they'd been given some help and it was all he could do. There was obviously no point. Little things like that.
- 08:30 That was interesting seeing that because the Thai government understood that if you can deliver some services to these people, make yourself relevant, that they might look on you favourably. This particular village was one where the Thai Army was getting shot at just a short time before. It was a very hostile village. There's a bit of a message in all that, with what's going on in Iraq, and what's going on in other trouble spots.
- 09:00 And I saw it again in Egypt. I arrived there the first time, just after the '92 earthquake, just before we arrived with our contingent. When the earthquake occurred the mosques were the main source of welfare and support to the diseased and homeless, and the refugees and the starving. And the government was number two in terms of providing support, emergency services and
- 09:30 nourishment for the displaced. And when you've got someone other than the government, being the primary source of care and help to people in need, then people will naturally give their allegiance to that agency ahead of you. And there's a message in all that, in the way you approach these issues where you have dislocated and distressed communities. And that is if a particular fanatical group or a particular religious group
- 10:00 or a particular political group is providing the first line of support to those people in need, and not the

government, then don't be surprised if they don't look favourably on the government. So as a government you've got to make yourself relevant. And I think what Thai Special Forces were doing with the, and American Special Forces were there helping them, I might hasten to add, and there were other military exercises and activities going on concurrently with all this. They were putting that to effect. And this is something that special forces understand,

- 10:30 and that we actually train for and that we actually do. As I mentioned, when I was studying guerrilla warfare, what you need to understand to turn around an insurgency, you need to really understand that as a government, if you want to have credibility you've got to be seen to be doing something that's credible. You've got to be seen to be delivering services and providing security and making things happen for people. Otherwise what hope have you? And as I said, there's messages in all that on how we approach
- 11:00 the problems before us today. So that was pretty interesting working with the Thais. And the Thais, should I say, there were some other interesting things going on in Thailand when I was there, that make me stop and think. You become aware of other activities going on around you. Cause for concern. And you notice that the vast majority of Thai generals are multi-millionaires. And you wonder where that money's coming from. And then you hear about
- 11:30 timber being smuggled across the Cambodian border by the Thai Army, and antiquities and crocodile skins and various other things. Even drugs coming over from the Laos border, channelled by people with military connections, into Bangkok and then exported, and commissions being paid. And you realise the level of corruption that exists in some of these countries that beggars belief. And you keep in mind that the Thais are fighting five wars as we speak. They're fighting
- 12:00 in Cambodia, they're fighting on the Laos border, they're fighting in Burma, with the Karen, they've got this problem with some separatists, and they've also got pirates in the Gulf of Siam. They've got massive problems and they're fighting them all, and trying to make them all work. But there are some issues from within up there, in terms of corruption, that are pretty scary. And as an Australian soldier, when you are confronted with this, it's a bit of a shock, because our
- 12:30 value system is quite different. And it's pretty scary when you see what's going on, even though the best efforts are undertaken to keep it from you. You don't have to be terribly smart to realise who's on the take. And I've seen other examples of that go on in other regional countries that I visited. It's a cause for concern when you're operating in these countries.
- 13:00 **And how did you find the US units or contingencies that were there during those visits?**
- It's curious that you should ask that because there's one thing that stands out, and that is that the second time that I went over there I was pretty much working on my own. I was there
- 13:30 to observe what was, in essence, an operation and exercise going on between the Americans and the Thais. And we were there as an observer. And I was the official observer going around and working with the exercise and seeing what was going on. And I found a bit of resistance from the Americans actually, to my presence there. There was a bit of...They had things going on with the Thais they didn't want sort of, to be reported. And they didn't
- 14:00 want anyone else muscling in on them. They were a little bit protective of their relationship with the Thais. And we have a pretty good relationship with the Thais. We were having our own activities going on with the Thais and we were getting along pretty swimmingly with the Thais. And one particular American senior commander asked to see me. And the conversation went along the lines of, "Well, Colonel Hamilton-Smith tell me again what you are doing here?" And I said,
- 14:30 "Well General, I'm here because our governments have agreed that I should be here. And we're allies and we're working with the Thais on special forces matters to help Thailand be a better country." And he said, "What do you hope to get out of this?" And I could see he was very, very defensive. And I remember fronting him straight up and I said, "Look General, we fought together in World War I and
- 15:00 we fought together in World War II. In fact, we've fought together in just about every conflict since, and now we're in Thailand. I don't think you need to worry about Australia. We're batting for the same team." And after that I didn't have a problem. I think he, it just sort of went away. We had a coffee and a bit of a laugh. I think after that the resistance that had been in the air sort of dissipated.
- 15:30 Because it is a long relationship and sometimes you do need to just remind people about that. But I think, that was 1991, and you can see how that relationship has developed since. And I'm sure those sorts of a stand-off probably wouldn't happen now. I think the relationship's strong, as it should be with a country of such similar values, common values.
- 16:00 **That's interesting that you undertook an observing role because you were then going to join up later with the MFOs. MFOs were established in '81. And you then went to Sinai in '93. So it's quite a long way down the track from when they were first established. What do you think was the strategic relevance of the MFOs in Sinai by the time**
- 16:30 **you joined in '93?**

Well, interestingly quite relevant. In fact, I would say that the peace between Egypt and Israel undermines peace in the entire region. Remember that before the Camp David accords there'd been all these major wars, the war of '48, the war of '56, the famous six day war of '67, during which Israel seized the Sinai. And then the Yom Kippur War of '72, when Egypt counter attacked across the [Suez] Canal and

- 17:00 seized part of it back. And then the Israelis launched across the northern Suez and made a move on Cairo. There was a big stalemate. But it gave Egypt some credibility back. The fact that they'd recaptured part of the Sinai, that they'd forced Israel to the negotiating table was most important. Egypt saved a lot of face through the Yom Kippur War, and sees the Yom Kippur War as a great victory. So when Anwar Sadat travelled to Israel and said, "Let there be peace."
- 17:30 And they sat down around the table and negotiated an outcome where the Sinai would be given back to Egypt, provided the MFO was established as a neutral umpire to keep the parties apart. Really Egypt and Israel decided that they would stop fighting each other. Now once you took Egypt away from that encirclement of Israel, you really took the lid of the pressure cooker. And you allowed the gasses to escape, because up until then Egypt was fully surrounded.
- 18:00 You could never hope to annihilate Israel while Egypt was out of the battle because it's really the entire western and southern sector of what we know as Israel. So it's that peace that undermines, sorry, that underpins the peace in the whole region. If Egypt was ever to fall into the hands of fundamentalists then again, that would raise the possibility of a combined Arab encirclement of Israel. With all the
- 18:30 insecurities and risks of broader conflict that, that would entail. So it is actually a pretty important role. The parties do want to stay apart. But I wouldn't underestimate the scope for that relationship to fall apart. Now if the relationship fell apart then the MFO would be gone, it would be overrun in an instant, as the UN was in 1956 during the second major war. But there are fundamentalists, extremists who were operating in Egypt when I was there. There were major battles in
- 19:00 Asyut. I was seeing classified reports back and forth of battles involving up to two, three thousand troops on both sides, in Asyut, which is a region about half way down the Nile, between Cairo and the antipodes of Aswan. And hundreds of people were getting killed. Now this war's unreported. You don't hear about this in the Western media, these major battles going on in Egypt between fundamentalists and the established government of Egypt.
- 19:30 There are people in Egypt who would rip down the pyramids and the antiquities and carve the stones to build mosques. They regard the antiquities, pyramids, as pagan symbols of an immoral culture of the past. And they would transform Egypt into a Taliban style regime. Now those pressures are being kept at bay, but as we've seen since September 11, they can explode at any time.
- 20:00 So the MFO does perform a pretty important role. Now the fact that they want to be peaceful, they don't want to fight, means the MFO gratefully, is not being shot at by both sides. You're there as a neutral umpire to keep the parties apart, a bit like a referee would keep two boxers apart, sitting in the corner of the ring. But if both of them stood up and were determined to punch each others' lights out, there's nothing the referee could do
- 20:30 to stop it. It's a little bit like that. But we're there to blow the whistle if anybody stands up. Not that Israel relies on us, when they've got that much electronic surveillance and aircraft and radar systems arced up there. When they turned all their electronic surveillance measures on, the lights in my office would flicker. I was thirteen kilometres from the border. So the electromagnetic spectrum is occupied by Israel looking into Egypt,
- 21:00 making sure they've got fighters flying in circles twenty-four hours a day, ready to respond to an attack. They don't take our word for it. We're simply there as a barrier between the parties. So it is a valued and an important role that you provide. Israel and Egypt actually like the MFO. They own it you see. They jointly, with the Americans, fund it. It's not the UN. Particularly Israel likes the arrangement. They don't like the UN. They feel that the UN's been hijacked by the
- 21:30 third world and by anti-Israeli interests. And they're far less trustful of the UN than they are of the MFO, which they feel is far more responsive to the government of Israel, the government of Egypt and the government of America, and a bit easier to manage. It's not a bad peacekeeping model. So it is an important role. Yes, it was created in '81, '82 after the Camp David accords. As I said, Australia was there in those early '80s with helicopters. That got too expensive.
- 22:00 I think they came out in about '85 or so. But then this decision was made to go back in again in 1993, with a new commitment. And that's when we went back in. And we're still there today, still working, gratefully. Because if it falls apart between Egypt and Israel then we're in for a major war in the Middle East. And keep in mind that there are people that would happily cut the throat of every man, woman and child in Israel and throw the carcasses into the Mediterranean. And equally, there are
- 22:30 fanatics in Israel that would happily eject every Palestinian from what they perceive to be greater Israel, and take by force all which they see is theirs, with equal force and ruthlessness. So there are fanatics on both sides. It's a pressure cooker. And you need to keep the lid off the kettle. Interestingly, I had a conversation with, and this is what happens to Australians when they're working in this area,

- 23:00 but I remember having a conversation with a Muslim friend there, on one occasion, who said to me, at the time the Bosnian War was going on, and you might recall the Serbian Christians were massacring Bosnians in Srebrenica and other places. And he said to me, "Martin, you Christians will never come and save the Bosnian Muslims will you?" And I said, "Why is that Mohamed?" And he said, "Remember what you did to us during the Crusades." I said,
- 23:30 "Excuse me?" I felt like ringing home and talking to my grandma and saying, "Look, do we have anybody on the Crusades?" He said, "No, you Christians came out here and you tried to wipe us out." When you actually look at the history of the Crusades you can actually understand the point he was making. Because the Crusades were a pretty bloody affair. Successive Christian armies with papal sanction being sent out to the Middle East to conquer Muslims. They raped, they pillaged, they murdered. They did it all. And descended onto Jerusalem.
- 24:00 In 1196 they massacred every man, woman and child in the city, regardless of ethnicity or religion. They were a ruthless lot. And the perception in the Middle East is that it was Christians trying to wipe out Muslims. If you're a poor boy or girl, it's even worse for you if you're a girl, growing up in a little village somewhere in the Middle East. It can be Afghanistan, it could be Iraq, it could be the Sinai. If you have no access to TV, no access to a library, if you're a girl you won't have been
- 24:30 able to have an education. And you've been brought up on this Crusader view of history, by the religious leaders in your village. It's very easy to feel, when you see a Christian army of a million men in Saudi Arabia, ready to invade Iraq, that it's just another Crusade. And when you've got Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein jumping up and saying, "We're the new Saladin." The Muslim general who defended the Muslims from the Crusaders. It's very
- 25:00 easy for you to think that this is an evil Christian plot to further dominate Islam. And so one needs to put oneself in the shoes of these poorly educated people that have been misled, and who've been denied an education. Because it's a very small step from there to say, "I'll put a bomb in a bar in Bali." Or "I'll fly a plane into the World Trade Centre." I'll defend my culture from the Christian infidel. It's a very easy step.
- 25:30 When the only women that you've ever known are robbed from the moment of puberty, and where clitoral mutilation is a practice that pervades up to seventy or eighty percent of the female population. And when you have certain expectations about the way things will be and you see the magazines and the culture and all these things coming out of the West, you believe it to be an immoral, pervasive
- 26:00 evil that threatens to undermine the very fabric of your society. So you actually see yourself as a defender not an aggressor. So the people we might call a terrorist, to their fanatical friends is a defender of the faith. Standing up against this evil, pervasive Western influence, which of course, they think is corrupt and terrible. They think all Western women are prostitutes, they think that we're terribly evil, that all we want to do is
- 26:30 massacre and kill. They think we're shockers. Now we know that's not so. They don't understand us. And we don't understand them. The difference is, we have an opportunity to go to school. We have an opportunity to experience an open and free media. We can go to the library or the internet and we can test what we're being told against other facts. And we can make an independent judgement based on a range of information sources.
- 27:00 But when you're living in a little village somewhere in the middle of the Sinai, or the middle of Egypt or the middle of Iraq or Afghanistan, you've got access to none of those things. If you're a woman you're not even allowed to go to school, you're ignorant. You've only got word of mouth. So it's easy for you to be misled. And it's easy for you to be misled by Taliban like fanatics into doing evil things, and thinking of shadows when there's no shadows to be seen.

### **Well you've described**

- 27:30 **part of the role was to be like an umpire. In what ways did you maintain your neutrality?**
- Neutrality's vital. So for a start, you would not side with one party or the other and I made a point of that. The MFO mission had certain protocols and certain jobs to do.
- 28:00 Everybody had their part to play in the whole process. We had observers flying around in helicopters. Our job was to insure that the army on both sides didn't encroach into the Sinai beyond the agreements of the accord from Camp David. That everyone stuck to their agreements and no one was massing troops. So we would obviously report to each side what we saw. There were regular meetings or regular reports that were submitted. Went to social events and functions of both sides equally. We would never express any favouritism
- 28:30 or political view to either side. You are a neutral umpire. Your job is to be completely single-handed and independent in the way you deal with people. And to keep good offices and good relationships open with both sides. You only exist there by the good will of both sides. And you're only there so long as both sides want you. If either side doesn't want you then they can over run you in a short time. In fact, I had an emergency evacuation plan drafted as soon as we got there.
- 29:00 I insisted on taking my own independent means of communication, so I had satellite communications

and a couple of my soldiers qualified to operate it, so that at any time, and once a week I had a regular coms check with home. We normally used phone, but at any time I could go and set up the satellite modem straight to Australia, in the field. And set it up in the paddock. And we used to test it regularly. We'd call up and have a chat, just make sure it was all working. I insisted

29:30 everybody had weapons. We used to practise with those weapons. We went out and reconnoitred the airfield. We had a complete evacuation plan ready. I had arrangements in place that I'd brief to headquarters in Australia, that if one side or the other decided that they wanted to have a war, and if we couldn't extract from the Sinai under the auspices of the MFO for one reason or another, I had my twenty-eight or twenty-nine people all set to go down to the airfield, set up an air landing ground,

30:00 and hopefully if we could bring in Australian C1-30s and extract us and get us out of there. So we had our own emergency evacuation plan in place should it all fall apart in the Middle East. Which it can always do at any time. So if ever we needed to get out of there I made sure we had a plan to get out of there on our own, without needing anybody else's help. Having said that, in all likelihood we would have been able to get out of there with the MFO. But

30:30 what happened in '56 with the UN, was the UN was over run in fairly dramatic circumstances. There were quite a number of casualties. So if you get in between two armies that are determined to kill each other, the fact that you might be wearing an MFO beret won't necessarily guarantee you much protection.

**The Sinai Peninsula is quite a sizeable area of land. And it was the MFO**

31:00 **divided into three zones.**

That's right. It's a space not much different to Tasmania. It's about the size of Tasmania, the Sinai. And pretty much the same shape interestingly. And what we had, if you imagine the eastern side of Tasmania as the border with Israel, we had three battalions stretched along that border. And they were a barrier right along the border. And then we had other

31:30 observers and helicopters and aircraft flying around the rest of the Sinai, observing the Egypt Army and the Israeli Army. Just reporting back on what they saw. So it really was an observer role. It was a classic peacekeeping role. We weren't a force there designed as a barrier force to, by force of arms, keep people apart. We didn't have the capability to do that. Although we were three thousand we had armies of hundreds of thousands around us. We would have been quickly overrun if there was any desire by either side to

32:00 attack the other. But we had enough troops on the ground to maintain checkpoints on all the roads, to monitor what was coming in and going out, to be aware of what was happening, but within certain strict guidelines. For example, we were to report what the Egyptian and the Israeli armies were amassing. But as you've seen most recently in the media, terrorists are managing to smuggle explosives through the Sinai and dig them through tunnels into

32:30 Gaza, from the Egyptian side, and kill Israelis with bombs. So somehow or other terrorists are getting explosives through the Sinai as we speak. Burrowing under the border through tunnels and delivering it to Gaza. So that stuff's getting through. Now the MFO would not have, as its mission, the interception of such activities. And would have no power to deal with such activities. And therefore, would not attempt to do so.

33:00 That would not be its mission, I would think. That would be expected of the Egyptians by the Israelis. So there's certain rules there about what you can and can't do. So peacekeeping is a bit of a challenge. You've got to keep good offices with both sides. You've got to be generally impartial, even though the injustices you may see lead you to favour one side of the other, you can't show that. You're an

33:30 umpire. You can't get onto the footy field and start giving free kicks to one side because you think they're a group of battlers and you think the other side's got it over them. You have to get out there and do what you're there to do. Which is to make sure that the game is played in accordance with the agreed rules.

**I'd like to talk more to you about how to understand the other side. But before I ask you that, the MFO was a multinational organisation...**

Eleven nations.

**So how did those eleven**

34:00 **nations work together?**

That's a good question. Well, we had, as I said Colombia, America and Fiji providing most of the troops. They were the three battalions. And I think we had France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Uruguay, The Netherlands, and one other that just slips me at that moment. So the language of the force was English.

34:30 However, Spanish was obviously important because of the Colombians. And Portuguese was also important because of the Uruguayans. And then of course, you had the French and the Italians and the Dutch who mainly spoke English. So the language of the force was English. And that's how we

communicated. There were standard operating procedures. It ran like a normal army. It ran like a brigade. Remember a number of these countries were members

35:00 of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation]. And the Australians and New Zealanders were part of ANZUS [Australia, New Zealand United States Treaty]. And there are agreed protocols between the Australians and New Zealanders, and the Americans and the Brits, the ABCAs [American British Canadian Australian]. Certain standards and procedures. So basically the procedures that we used were pretty similar, certainly for the Australians. We were used to working with the Americans, with the Kiwis. We were familiar with NATO practises. So we understood the way the French and the Italians,

35:30 some of the other Europeans functioned. The Fijians, well we've had a long relationship with the Fijians. We know the Fijians. And they're pretty much based on our system, as well, of doing business in terms of rank structures and hierarchies. But there was a lot of common ground. And we contingent commanders used to have weekly meetings with the general. We'd just sort of sit down, with a bit of give and take, everybody worked out ways to get along. And obviously, each contingent was responsible for its own discipline.

36:00 **So the contingent from Australia was roughly twenty-four...**

I think it was twenty-eight.

**Twenty-eight. So the contingencies from the other nations were they roughly the same size?**

Some of them were quite small, like ours. I think the French provided two fixed wing aircraft.

36:30 They probably had a smaller number of people I think, than we did. The Italians provided two patrol boats down at Sharm el Sheikh. I think they had about eighty. Then you had little contingents. The Uruguayans provided a squadron of engineers, I think they were about a hundred. The Dutch military police and communicators, they were a relatively small contingent, about fifty.

37:00 So the Kiwis provided a contingent a bit smaller than ours. I think they were about twenty-one, twenty-two. So a number of contingents were less than a hundred. Then you had the big contingents of the United States, Fiji and Colombia. They each had about five or six hundred there, a battalion group with the relevant logistics. And the Americans had most of the logistics. They had quite a large number of troops. The Americans

37:30 probably would have had a thousand or so. At least a thousand of the force would have been American. And they provided a lot of the logistics. So it was a pretty interesting working environment. You had to learn to get along. And that actually created some issues too. And there were some serious issues. I actually had to counsel a couple of my own soldiers about that. For instance,

38:00 the Australians were confronted for the first time, with the issue of black Americans versus white Americans. Now the American military, this is a sensitive issue in America generally, as we know from the civil rights riots and Martin Luther King, and the entire struggle for civil liberties and civil rights in America, that was a raging national debate. And there are strict rules and laws in America about equality,

38:30 discrimination a whole range of issues. And the Americans are very, very sensitive to ensure that everything they do is on an equitable basis and there's no discrimination. And they will jump immediately on to any issue of racial discrimination. They celebrate Martin Luther King Day, which is a national holiday. This is a pretty touchy issue. I remember

39:00 one issue that emerged where one of my officers, who was responsible for administration. His job was to allocate rooms to people who came through the camp, aircrew, people like that, who came through the camp and needed accommodation. He'd have to find them a place to bunk down. And he had a certain number of Atco type huts that he could throw people into. On this particular occasion,

39:30 a black American senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] fronted for a room. And for one reason or another wasn't happy with the accommodation he was given, or felt that somebody else had gotten better accommodation than him. He made a snide remark to my officer along the lines of, "Well, I can see why I've got the worst accommodation because I'm black. And you've given the best accommodation to

40:00 the white guy." Which was a pretty aggressive thing to say. Now anyone else might have turned the other cheek and just said, "Well look, no, that's not the case. It was done alphabetically," or whatever. And would have just dealt with it. But instead, my officer took him on and wanted to have an argument about it. "No, that's not the case. I'm not discriminating." Wanted to make a big issue of it. And it turned into a major disagreement. And he came to me

40:30 really upset and wanted me to take this up with the American commander. And how dare that NCO accuse him of racial prejudice, and all that sort of thing. And it was a big drama. He tried to make a big issue about it. He was wanting to charge the sergeant with an offence, accusing him of being racist or something like that.

41:00 I just said to him, "Look, I don't think you want to make a big issue out of this." It was just a no-winner to try and have a white Australian officer charge an American black sergeant with racial discrimination

because he'd said, as an aside, "You've given me the bad accommodation." It just would have gone...

- 41:30 You would have had, the black American contingent would have seen it as an affront. It would have just blown up into a major issue. It wouldn't have helped the relationships between the Australians and the Americans generally. It would have created a problem for the American commander because although, to be fair, my officer probably had a point. The fellow had made an inappropriate remark. He wasn't racist.
- 42:00 It was a no win... and I

## Tape 9

- 00:33 There was no point in me going to the general and to the American commander and saying, "Look, I want one of my majors to charge one of your black NCOs with an offence of accusing him of being racist." Court proceedings and a court martial and all that sort of thing, and develop a major incident on the camp. I just said to my officer, "Look, ease up. Don't take things personally. Just remember that the
- 01:00 Americans fought a bloody civil war over this issue. And just remember that they're a bit touchy. And sometimes, just like we're having issues with reconciliation in Australia, the odd remarks going to be made. Don't be too sensitive. Don't be too thin skinned. Put the incident behind you and don't make a big issue of it. Turn the other cheek." He was most upset with me.
- 01:30 He really wanted me to take it further. And he probably would have taken the view that I should have, that I failed to show leadership. But in the interests of the whole of the Australian contingent, and our relationships with the Americans and with all the other contingents, I could see that was an issue that was going to go nowhere. It was going to do nothing but create further problems. Similarly, I had to encourage
- 02:00 some members of my contingent to leave the camp and get out there and mix with the community, mix with the Jewish community and with the Arab community, understand the issues from both sides. Because there's a natural tendency to favour people who are of a similar culture to you, a similar Western culture. I really encouraged my contingent to get out there and mix with the Palestinians and mix with the Arabs, as I did with the Israelis.
- 02:30 Because they needed to mix with everybody. And take time to benefit from their experience in the Middle East and learn from it. Most people did that. They got out there and they really tried to engage with the communities. And they came back I think, broadly aware of what the problems are. And I've stayed in touch with a number of these fine young soldiers, and they've gone on to
- 03:00 further careers in the army and done really well. In fact, one of them's right here in Adelaide, one of the girls I had on the contingent, is based right here, promoted to warrant officer class 2, chief clerk of a unit here. And still on the regular army, just got back from East Timor. Still thinks quite fondly of her time there and learned an enormous amount from it.
- It was also a time of which there was the threat of chemical and biological weapons. How real was that?**
- Well, it was very real. We all had gas masks. We were
- 03:30 all ready to go with biological protection. When I was there in '93, remember the first Gulf War was in '91. Saddam Hussein was shooting scud missiles into Israel. In fact, I developed quite a sound relationship with the ambassadors in both countries, Egypt and Israel. And particularly Bill Fisher, the ambassador in Israel, who's now standing representative for the nation. We were both runners. So we used to go for runs. And when I was up in Tel Aviv
- 04:00 we'd be running along the beach and he would say. "You see that hill over there? A scud missile landed over there in 1991 and wiped out that building." The whole embassy was on tenterhooks. So it was only a year or two before that, the missiles had been flying into Egypt. And there was a real concern that they'd fly into the Sinai and there'd be some effort to try and disrupt this relationship. Because with all that's going on in Afghanistan, Osama bin Ladin, they're all trying to dislodge the relationship between Egypt and Israel.
- 04:30 If you can dislodge that relationship, cause moderate Muslim countries like Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, if you can cause them to collapse and fall to fundamentalism, then you can awaken the whole region and restart the conflict with Israel, the war, let's get rid of Israel, that these fanatics would like to pursue. And so there was a concern and we were concerned about it. And the biological threat is
- 05:00 really profound. And it scares me to high heaven, that terrorists would ever get their hands on weapons of mass destruction. I know what they can do. You can fit enough biological material into an esky to annihilate a good part of a city like Adelaide, and with very primitive means of distribution. And when you can do that, you can never allow that material to get into their hands,

05:30 let alone nuclear. That's a real challenge.

**In your time in Sinai what personal challenges did you find with your role as a leader?**

I think keeping everyone motivated for the year was difficult, particularly because we weren't working as an homogenous group. We were split up and spread about. It needed people to be fairly self motivated and independent. Most of the contingent were. There were a couple who missed that sense of being part of a team, the Aussie team. They felt isolated culturally.

06:00 They were out there working with other nationalities. But as I said, we used to have these devices of getting together. And we had an Aussie club on the base camp. So when people were there we got together with the Kiwis, and we worked together pretty well with them. It was interesting when you're in these environments who your friends become. I found the Aussies and the Kiwis were ribbing each other all the time, and often there'd be the odd scuffle and the odd disagreement and the odd gripe,

06:30 until a third party got involved. The minute a third nation started picking on a Kiwi, the Aussie were the first ones to back the Kiwi up, and vice versa. It was a bit like sibling rivalry. You'd find the Aussies and the Kiwis sort of arguing amongst themselves as mates would. But as soon as anyone else got involved they stuck together like glue. And you realise how close and warm the relationship is with New Zealand when you are in these situations. And interestingly, we also had

07:00 a very close relationship with the Fijians, and I felt a very close friendship with the Fijian battalion commander. I think the Fijians saw the Kiwis and the Aussies as their friends. And the three countries were a part of that South Pacific presence in the MFO. I think we looked to each other quite a bit. And there was quite a strong bond there, that was interesting, watching that develop.

**The dynamics of working with so many other countries would have been....**

Yeah, it was.

07:30 I remember having the Colombian contingent commander coming to see me, most distressed, on one occasion. And as he always did, he brought three or four of his staff officers with him. He said, "Martin, I've got something very, very important I need to discuss with you." There was tremendous gravity. Assistant chief of staff. So I'm sitting in my office and they all come in and I arrange chairs for them all and they all sat down. He said, "Martin, this is my problem. Yesterday you referred to me as Colonel Alvera.

08:00 And I want you to know that the proper gender description of my name is Colonel Alvero, not Alvera. And I've come to ask you if you could be careful in future to ensure that you call me Colonel Alvero, because it's very embarrassing to be described as a woman." And I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was like this big moment. The amount of preparation that had gone into this. And I said, "Look Alvero. I'll be very happy to ensure

08:30 that I'm extremely careful of the language I use in future." So little things like that, particularly people's sensitivities. I really enjoyed the multiculturalism of being in the MFO. I've always enjoyed the cultural diversity wherever I find it. So for me it was just a joy, being exposed to all of that. But to be fair, some in the contingent found it very difficult.

09:00 I know I had to impose certain rules of behaviour. For example, one or two in the contingent thought they'd develop a few nick names, as Aussies do, for different national groups, describe a particular national group in an uncomplimentary, sort of supposedly funny. I think 'rag head' was one of the terms that was used.

09:30 It was clearly intended for the Bedouin population and I had to jump immediately on that, and pull them in and say, "Right, that's not going to continue. You might think it's funny but I can assure you that no one else does. So I don't want to hear that again." And little things like that, that might seem funny to the Aussie sense of humour but can be very easily misinterpreted. So there were some issues there

10:00 where the Aussie sense of humour had to be pulled into check as people realised the sensitivities of what they were dealing with. There were challenges like that. As I said, the boredom. It was an interesting time for me too, in that this was my twenty-second or third year in the army. I'd commanded twice. I'd been at staff college, I was being cleared for promotion.

10:30 I was looking at promotion to full colonel. I was about to be cleared for promotion. I think I was coming up for that the following year. I had to decide whether I wanted to stay in the army and be a general or whether I wanted to leave and try my hand at some small business or some other career. I turned forty while I was in the Sinai. And I found being in the desert a time for reflection. You had a lot of time on your own. I kept a diary, daily.

11:00 I thought a lot of things through about my life and where I was going. There I was, sitting in the desert, I was forty, I was a lieutenant colonel, I was looking at being a general perhaps. I was still single, hadn't settled down. I'd been moving all my life, as one does in the army, every two or three years. I thought maybe it's time for me to move on. I was a bit frustrated and annoyed, although I enjoyed my time in Egypt and I had a mission in Egypt, I knew that I was going back to

11:30 an army that was essentially at peace, and I could see no prospect that there'd be much happening. Who

could have foretold what subsequently happened. And I think I was getting a little bit disengaged and annoyed with the way the army was going. Not through its own fault but simply the fact that budgets had been cut, numbers had been cut. I'd found my time as CO of the commandos a little bit frustrating as a consequence of all the budget cuts, funding cuts.

12:00 And everything seemed to be cut, cut, cut. The army at that stage was an army of twenty-six or twenty-seven thousand. It had been forty-four thousand when I joined the army. I thought what am I going to command? A general of what? If I do stay in and try to become a general will I be commanding a desk somewhere? So I started to have all these thoughts. And I think I resolved that what I needed to do when I came back from Egypt, was to perhaps take some time out. Maybe have a year off. Take long service leave, after all that's what it's there for, and

12:30 just think about a life after the army and whether I was really committed enough to go ahead and finish my career. If I was going to change, that was the time, forty. And start another career. So when I got back and I was offered a post in Sydney to, first of all headquarters land commander, and then later as chief of staff of 2 Division.

13:00 And just on reflection, I just didn't think the jobs that I was being offered were what I wanted to do.

**Before we leave Sinai you mentioned before about impartiality. I just wanted to know if you had any examples of how that was really tested?**

Yes it was. I'll give you an example. In the Northern Sinai there's a village called Yamit.

13:30 And the Egyptians would always say to me, "Martin come and see Yamit. Come and see what the Israelis did to us in Yamit." So I jumped in a helicopter one day and I flew down there. I met the Egyptian liaison officers down there and they toured me through Yamit. Now when the Israelis occupied the Sinai they built Yamit. And they turned Yamit into a bountiful farming wonderland. They grew some of the biggest

14:00 tomatoes the world has ever seen. They took them off to France and showed them and won awards. They introduced irrigation, they managed the water. They really turned it into a vibrant farming land. And they built this massive town. It probably accommodated about two thousand families. And they lived there from the time they occupied the Sinai in '67, '68, right through until the Accords in '81. And when they handed back the Sinai the Israelis destroyed the entire town. And the Egyptians said to me, "Look what they did." They

14:30 blew up every building. They knocked down every building. They ripped up the pipes and the cable work. They took down the overhead telephone lines. They scoured the roads. They destroyed everything. They even put a slab of dynamite in every toilet pan and blew up the china. They left nothing for the Egyptians. Nothing. So that when the Egyptians were finally able to occupy this area again it was just rubble. The streets of Yamit are rubble. And they said to

15:00 me, the Egyptian, "Look at this. This is typical of the bloody minded Israelis who leave nothing but destruction and death wherever they go. We could have moved hundreds, perhaps thousands of families here. Bedouin who roam the desert homeless could have been located here. We could have taken over the farms. We could have taken over the infrastructure that they'd built, instead they ripped it up and destroyed the farms and ruined Yamit. And this is typical of the bloody minded Israelis who care for no one,

15:30 who have no heart. Who bring nothing but death and destruction." And they wanted me to agree with them. You could see that they were trying to get me to side with them in this moral conflict. And I listened and I nodded and I took it all on board. I said, "Look, thank you for that and we'll talk about this again." So I flew back to camp, and then

16:00 later on I drove across the border at Rafa. And I caught up with the Israeli Army liaison officers, and I said to them, "Tell me the story of Yamit." They said, "Well, our people had been living there for thirteen years. They'd had their children there. They'd owned this land. It was their farming land. It had been their homes. We told them they had to leave, it was an occupied settlement in occupied territory. We had to load them at bayonet point onto trucks and make them leave. We made them watch while we destroyed the town so they knew there was no going back.

16:30 But not only that, if we'd left Yamit there the Palestinians would have occupied it with refugee families. They would have turned it into an armed refugee camp from which they would have launched mortar and missile attacks across the border at Gaza. Which they would have used as a base to attack and kill Israeli farmers as they've been doing in Lebanon, and as they're presently doing with suicide bombers from the West. So we had to destroy Yamit. Or we would have

17:00 simply created an armed Palestinian camp." Now who's right and who's wrong? I ask you. The answer is there's no answer. No one's fully right and no one's fully wrong. And it depends on whose shoes you're standing in as to how you view the story of Yamit. Now there are dozens of Yamits around the border in the occupied territories. There's others on the border between Syria

17:30 and Israel. Nobody's completely right and nobody's completely wrong in all of this. And as a peacekeeper you have to listen to both sides of the story, not jump to conclusions. It's very easy to go with the side that seems to be the underdog at the time. And I suppose to be fair, I suppose that's, in many ways, the Palestinians.

- 18:00 But then you have to remember what happened to the Jewish people during the Holocaust. You have to remember the attitudes. You have to remember the stories that were told around the family dinner table, by grandparents to their grandchildren, about the concentration camps. And you have to remember a people who were systematically slaughtered by the million, and who feel that no one is ever going to defend them except themselves. No one will stand up for them except themselves.
- 18:30 And they're prepared to fight and die so that their grandchildren will live. They're desperate people. And no one's wholly right and no one's wholly wrong. What you have to hope is that the younger generations will sort it out. So as a peacekeeper you have to try and keep an open mind, that's not easy, particularly when people are dying and you can see who's doing the shooting. But they're the challenges of peacekeeping. It's not always easy. It's
- 19:00 always difficult. And that's why your peacekeepers need to get in and get out and be replaced with new people, so that you remain, to the extent that you can, as a force at least, an impartial umpire, which is what you need to be.
- Returning to your long service leave here in Australia and the dilemma you were coming to about where you were going**
- 19:30 **to go now? What made you make that final decision to leave the army?**
- Well, I think that there are certain cross roads that you come to in life. And I think with any profession and career there's certain cross roads. The vision I set when I was a cadet at Duntroon was to immediately be a platoon commander. But probably I
- 20:00 could see down the road, perhaps to that point of being a battalion commander or a regiment commander. Beyond that I needed to stop, gather myself up and have a look ahead. And I got to be a platoon commander and a troop commander for a long period of time, given the circumstances, nearly four years of being a platoon commander and a troop commander. I'd had a good run in both the battalion, 3 Brigade as defence platoon commander and SAS. Then I had a good run as a company
- 20:30 commander for a couple of years. Then a good two years as a regimental commander. And the icing on the cake I got to raise, train and equip and command a unit overseas on a peacekeeping mission. And then I guess it was time to stop and look ahead and say, "Well, what now?" I was a lieutenant colonel. A fairly senior one, coming up for a promotion to full colonel and then perhaps one star beyond, if things worked. But
- 21:00 of what? It just seemed to me that defence at that time had stalled a bit. As I said, the numbers had shrunk, the money was gone, there seemed to be no commitment from government. Okay, I managed to go to Sinai and we had Somalia going and we had Cambodia going. There were some glimmers there that you would be peacekeeping. But I had to ask myself whether I'd be spending my time if I stayed, most of my time in Canberra commanding a desk or whether I'd be getting to work with soldiers again. And the
- 21:30 experience I'd had as a regimental commander, with all that arguing for resources and all that time chewed up fighting a bureaucratic war instead of being out with your troops training and equipping. We were just such a small army, I was underwhelmed by the opportunity of being a general, simply because I was concerned that I might finish up being a general of a desk instead of being a general
- 22:00 commanding troops. Because we simply were too small. We were shrinking. Now, had I known, as I said, what was coming with Timor, with Afghanistan and Iraq I may have stayed. But I was also very aware that it's one of these turning points in life. I'd turned forty. I had a bit of a forty crisis. You know, stop and have a rethink. Yeah. It was a combination of things. A couple of events in your personal life, an age milestone and a career milestone, and a lot of things happening. And you sit down and you say,
- 22:30 "Look, what now?" And I'd bought a business, a childcare business, actually a couple of years before I left the army. In fact, I bought the business when I was in Canberra, about three or four years before I left the army. So while I was head of the commandos I had this business going. And it was remote. I was simply the proprietor, someone else was running it. It was here in Adelaide. But the last couple of years I was in the army I was making more money out of the business than I was in the army. So I could see this business clearly had,
- 23:00 and that was just as the owner, as the proprietor, an investor. Really I wasn't involved in the day to day management. I paid someone to do that. Look if I'm making more money doing this in the last two years than being in the army, perhaps there's another challenge and another opportunity waiting out there for me. And that is to see if I can build that business up. And make it a successful business and apply the leadership and management skills that I've learnt in the army to some new challenge. And in the back of my mind, I suppose I thought that perhaps later, I could do
- 23:30 more for the defence force and for the nation in politics than I could even by staying in the army. So I thought well I'll take a year off and I'll think that through. So I took a year of long service leave in 1994. And I worked on my business in that year. I built that business up and I could see by the end of that year that what I had was a really vibrant business that could be expanded. So at the end of that year I told the army, "Look, it's probably time for me to go." I went inactive. I'm still technically

- 24:00 in the army but I'm on the inactive reserve. So it's the World War III list I call it. Come World War III they'll probably dust me off. And I expanded that business from one business into six businesses. We expanded from South Australia to New South Wales. I took it to a national business. I had about a hundred and twenty staff. Became a multi million dollar turn over business. And it became quite a large and vibrant business. And then it was going to public float, or some people I was involved in were
- 24:30 going towards a public float with their business in the childcare sector. And around the time an opportunity came up for me to go into parliament. In 1997 these people were looking to buy, so essentially I sold my businesses out to the public floats and went into politics. So I suppose it was one of these things of, look, you've got one life, you've got a limited amount of time. Do you want to stay in the army and commit the whole of your working life to that or do you want to try some new adventure? And I guess, being a bit of an adventurer,
- 25:00 I thought, well I'll take a gamble. I'll leave, I'll take the chance of failure. I'll get out of here and have a go and if I win, I win, and if I fail, I fail. And with a bit of hard work and a bit of luck and a lot of support from a lot of other people, I managed to be successful.

**When you moved into civilian life and became inactive what did you miss about the army?**

Well, first of all I think, on reflection, when I left I was a bit angry. I was angry at the decline that I'd seen in the army

- 25:30 over the twenty-two years or so that I'd been involved in it. The cutbacks in people. The cutbacks in money. The fighting over resources. I was angry at some of our leaders in the army. For example, I felt that my troops in Egypt should have had better allowances. I felt somehow that some of the soldiers were being let down a bit by the system. And
- 26:00 although I had outstanding support from my general, I think he and I were both hitting a brick wall in Canberra trying to get Canberra to come to the party and recognise that soldiers needed better pay and conditions. So I just felt that it had become a big bureaucratic nightmare. I'd been involved in strategic planning when I was in Canberra. It was quite apparent what needed to be done to fix this problem, and I was disappointed with the government of the day.
- 26:30 In fact, that's probably one of the reasons I got involved in politics. I was bitterly disappointed with the Keating and Hawke, Beasley regime in defence. And the continuous cuts, the lack of strategic vision. This home land defence of Australia concept that was clearly set to fail. Where what we needed to be doing is what we're doing now. We needed to be out there, to be engaged in the region. To have a lot of special forces. We needed a bigger army and navy and air force, with more money and more resources. It was vibrant and growing and interactive.
- 27:00 An extension of our foreign policy. An extension of our nation rather than this sort of Dad's Army at home, sort of behind the barbed wire fence defending Alice Springs from World War III. Out-dated thinking. So I was a bit angry. So when I left I thought, that's it. I went on my year's leave without pay, or long service leave I'm sorry. I said, "That's it. I'm going to go. I'm going to set up the business." And I really cut myself off.
- 27:30 I went away from the army. I didn't remain in touch with people. I just walked away from it and I just totally threw myself into the business. People wrote to me, I didn't reply. I lost touch with friends. I sort of almost cut myself off from it. Now maybe that was because I was having a problem letting go. Maybe I really missed it and I was angry. So
- 28:00 as a consequence, I just sort of walked away from it and turned my back. Maybe I was angry at myself for not going on. I don't know. But I wanted nothing to do with the army. I just went right away. About three years later somebody rang me up, just before Anzac Day, from the SAS Association, a Vietnam vet. And he said, "Marty. We hear you're in town. Remember the regiment?"
- 28:30 We want you to come and march on Anzac Day with us." And these were a nice bunch of guys. And so I went along and had a few beers and caught up with these guys. And I found that there was a group of people here, some of whom I knew from my own service, some of whom I'd never met. But we'd all served in the SAS Regiment together. Some of them were Vietnam vets. Some of them were Korea veterans. They were ancient compared to me.
- 29:00 I was probably one of the young ones, although there were a few younger than me. There were a number of them that I knew. We had this wonderful thing in common and that was that we'd all served the nation in the army. And not only that, but we'd all served in the same regiment. And we were all on special forces. There was a tremendous camaraderie, it was just such a wonderful bunch of guys. We had breakfast and I went and marched with them. And I've marched ever since with them and stayed in touch. We have an annual dinner.
- 29:30 And I think that sort of broke the ice for me a little bit. And then I thought well, this is a bit silly and I started getting back in touch with people. I started to get less focused on building the business and what I was doing and started to remember this continuum. Although, I'd never lost touch with my old Duntroon buddies, I lost touch with some others. I got back in touch with those people and I just re-established those connections. I sort of got over it. I started to then get interested in becoming a defence analyst. I thought look, now that I'm over that I'm going to turn

- 30:00 this anger and disappointment over. The fact that the government's not doing anything with defence and I'm become a defence commentator, I'm going to actually try and do something about it. So I started working with the media as a commentator on defence issues. And then I thought no, I'll go one step further I'm going to get involved in politics. I'm going to try and change the country for the better. And I've been very active in defence issues since. Although the opportunity presented for me was State parliament not Federal parliament.
- 30:30 And I needed to take that opportunity. I've been very active at getting involved with and lobbying my Federal colleagues on a whole range of defence issues. I've been quite involved in debates within my party, my political party, the Liberal Party. And also amongst, and with my Federal colleagues about what we should and shouldn't be doing in Timor, in Afghanistan, in Iraq. I've spoken to the parliament, I've gone to the press and I've been quite active in that area. So in a way I feel like I'm still doing something
- 31:00 for soldiers and still doing something for the army, and making a contribution. And so, in a sense, I feel that I'm not still in the army but still sort of making a contribution but at a different level. And we'll see how things work out. But in the fullness of time, hopefully I've made a small contribution to addressing some of the concerns that I had when I was in the army. But as a politician rather than a general.
- 31:30 **How would you like the men of the SAS Regiment to be remembered?**
- I think the men of the SAS are probably in the same basket as all the men and women in the defence force. And that is that they've all served their country with pride. They love their country.
- 32:00 They're a pretty amazing group of young people. Mostly young when they're serving. They throw themselves at it without worrying about themselves. I'd like them to be remembered as determined and faithful servants of people of the country, doing their best to keep it free. There's a lot in this country that I have found, not only through my military service and the
- 32:30 places I've been, and the things I've seen, but also since I've been a politician. There's a lot of people in this country that take it for granted. There's a lot of things about this country that we think are just our God-given right. I have people come and see me complaining about things that would seem inconsequential when you've seen people starving and having their homes burnt down.
- 33:00 Refugees and wives of soldiers who've lost their husbands. Wherever you've got somebody coming to see you, because they're really angry, because they can't get their daughter into medical school in Year 12 and it's an outrage. Some little bit of inconsequential nonsense about this or that. You feel like saying to them. "Look,
- 33:30 go and get a life." But not only that. I don't mean to demean these little problems, because these little issues are important to those people. They are important to them. But I think the point is, people need to keep life in perspective. What may seem like big problems at the time, in the fullness of what's going on in the world, aren't big problems at all. You just need to keep things in perspective. What the soldiers of the SAS are doing are
- 34:00 keeping us free. They're keeping, and the defence force generally. They're holding off these challenges. And we've had a few. You talk to people, this country could have been overrun by the Japanese. All sorts of chaos could descend on this nation at any time. If a great nation like Germany, one of the finest and most remarkable cultures in the modern world, can fall to the evil of Nazism then any country can fall apart at the seams.
- 34:30 Unless you're strong, unless you're resolved and unless you have people like the soldiers of the SAS that are prepared to go out there and stand up for their country, what have you got? And they're the same young blokes who went to Gallipoli, the same young blokes who went to World War II, the same young blokes who went to Vietnam. And now they're in Iraq. It's the same young blokes doing the same work for the people of Australia, as the government
- 35:00 of the day calls it at the time. There was an argument raging about whether or not we should have gone to World War I. There was an argument raging about whether or not we should have stayed out of World War II. There's always an argument raging about whether or not you should stay out of a conflict. There was an argument raging now about whether or not we should have gone to the Gulf. It's always easy to go and hide under a rock, but what you've got to do, at the end of the day, is stand up for what your nation represents and what you believe in. And there's a group of people there who are prepared
- 35:30 to put their lives on the line to do that. And a number of them have. And they do it partly for them, to be fair, because they're adventurous and they see it as an exciting life. But at the end of the day, you don't die because you want to have an exciting life. You take these risks because you feel that there's a sense of purpose behind what you're doing, that is a greater cause. And that's this country. They're nationalists,
- 36:00 these guys. They're big supporters of Australia. And that's why they do what they do.

**And for yourself. Looking back on your military career, it may be hard to pin point one moment, but what do you feel as being your proudest achievement?**

That's an interesting question. I don't think I'd point to any particular individual achievement and say,

- 36:30 "Hey, that was me. Wasn't that fantastic. I made a difference." I think there were a number of things. If there was probably one period in my military service where I felt that things were really happening, it was probably that period leading up to the raising of the 1st Counter Terrorist Force. That period with 22 SAS in the UK, where myself and my sergeant went over and we learnt about how to do it. Then we came back and virtually
- 37:00 raised this counter terrorist capability that is now so prominent, from nothing really. Now it wasn't just me that did that, don't think that for a minute. I was just the man, the officer who had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time, and I got to command this team. There were a whole lot of mates, a whole lot of contributors within the regiment, and up the chain of command, who brought that capability together. But if there's one,
- 37:30 I suppose, achievement that I can look back on and think that was pretty special, it was probably commanding that 1st Counter Terrorist Team that the country had ever seen, within the SAS, and getting that capability going. Getting the training methods and the range practices and all the rules, and standing procedures in place for that very first team. And to actually get a really incredibly, world class capability up. So that by the end of 1980 we could actually hand over to Team 2 a (UNCLEAR cawtlet) capability
- 38:00 and a counter terrorist capability, that was second to none, really. It was pretty remarkable. And it was world class. And I suppose, as the commander of that, the inaugural commander if you like, I feel that was probably a pretty special moment. It wasn't without its difficulties. I think I made an absolute pest of myself on a number of occasions, to my commanding officer and my officer commanding the squadron. I probably, on reflection, was a bit of a hungry
- 38:30 young man. Keen to get on with the job. But when you're given a mission that's what you have to do isn't it? You just get on with it. I think that was pretty special. In terms of memories, as with life, the memories are about people and not places. The good memories are about the mateship you made at Duntroon, throughout your career. Lifetime friends.
- 39:00 About the soldiers you had serve with you. There's a number of them that stands out. The ones you lost through accidents or through other issues. And then of course, there's the odd things you regret. The accident that could have been averted if you'd approached things differently. The mistakes you made. But if you don't make mistakes in life you learn nothing. And you have to accept
- 39:30 that, for every success there's been mistakes along the path. And I think too, I would say as a general thing, the younger I was and the earlier it was, the more interesting and exciting it was. As I went on, it became more of a cerebral experience rather than an emotional one.
- 40:00 When you're a young officer, you know, armies are manned by young men. There is a time when you need to move aside. And that time arrived for me as it does for all.

**Are there any last words that you'd like to leave?**

I'm proud of our army.

- 40:30 Proud of the young men and women that man it. I think they're as good as they've ever been. Even the ones I meet today, and I stay in touch with the military and what is happening. And I think they're every bit as good as, in fact, they're probably better educated, fitter and stronger than they've ever been. And at a time when a lot of people like to be critical of young people, I see a lot exemplified within the defence force and within the army. To be proud of
- 41:00 our young people. I think there are some fine examples of young people there. We tend to look to our sporting people. There's this other group of young Australians we've got good reason to be proud of. And I think they're out there right now working at the grass roots level in the army, navy and air force.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**