

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Grant Coultman-Smith - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2056>

**Some parts of this interview  
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are  
noted in the transcript and video.

### Tape 1

00:37 **Okay, if you would like to give us the brief introduction please.**

Okay I was born on 17th August 1949 in Hobart. My father was a military man. We were then transferred to Melbourne where I went to East Oakleigh State School followed by the Oakleigh High School

01:00 where I repeated leaving which in these years is year 11, then left. I joined the regular army in March 1968 and I served in Malaysia and the Vietnam and I was finally discharged from the army in 1978 whereupon I went through a period of itinerant employment for about 15 months and

01:30 joined the Victorian Police and I've been with the Victorian Police ever since. I'm now at the rank of sergeant and Mt Waverley Police Station. Also in 1980 I enlisted in the Army Reserve. I reached the I suppose the heady heights of warrant officer class 2, company sergeant major with 56 RVR and decided I needed the extra time

02:00 to continue my studies so I resigned from the Army Reserve in 93. I embarked on a study in emergency management culminating in a Masters Degree via Charles Sturt University in 2002. That's the current state of play.

**Would you be able to give us a brief outline of your military career?**

Yes I joined

02:30 March 68. I did the normal corps training at Ingleburn [NSW]. I was then posted to Canungra on the demo platoon. They asked for volunteers to join 8 Battalion in Malaysia and I put my hand up and then went to Malaysia for approximately 5 months I think it was. I came home and

03:00 went to Vietnam with 8 in November 1969, returning home in November '70. Went to, was posted to Puckapunyal as joint instructor - Nasho Basher - and I was there for a short while and did a clerks course and went to Centre of Army Records for a short time and in '73 I was

03:30 posted to 6 Battalion. In 1976 I did an air portability team leaders course which engendered some interest in aerial delivery, transferred to transport and spent time with 176 Air Despatch Squadron and then took a posting as temporary sergeant as the chief clerk

04:00 of Singleton Transport Unit, whereupon I decided that I had had enough and took my discharge and came back to Melbourne. I was discharged in June '78.

**Okay. Now what we will do is. That's a fairly good introduction. We'll go back to your pre-war life.**

04:30 **So if we can start now from the pre-war era of your life. Perhaps give us a rundown please of your parent's background.**

My father was a journalist with the Mercury newspaper. Pre-Second World War he joined the militia in

the field ambulance

- 05:00 capacity. When the Second World War started he was a sergeant. He then did the old knife and fork course and became a lieutenant and ended up as a supply officer on Thursday Island. Post war he was demobbed but they were looking for journalists because they were starting up the army public relations.
- 05:30 They hadn't had until that stage so he basically put his hand up. Went in as a captain, passed his majority and topped the Commonwealth 18 months later and was subsequently sent to Japan in charge of all Commonwealth public relations in Japan and he stayed there for two years. Came home as a major and was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Held
- 06:00 various positions and he resigned in I think it was '78, no 72 he resigned. Retired to Tasmania whereupon he took up various part time posts I suppose as a political troubleshooter for the Tasmanian government.
- 06:30 He died in October '78. My mother. She was basically my mother I guess but she survived him for a while. She died in '96 in Tasmania.

**Did your father ever talk about his war experiences?**

His great regret

- 07:00 was he never had a combat position. Unbeknownst to the powers that be while he was in Japan he used to cross over and take his rank off and go out on patrols in Korea with the infantry and that was his claim to fame for himself, he felt he was a soldier, he had to do something. He would have really loved an infantry command, of course which he could never have,
- 07:30 and that's why he supported me in my endeavours even though I originally failed to get into Duntroon, but that didn't worry him, as long as I was a soldier and a good one he didn't care.

**Can you tell us about your childhood, in your first early days, when you were growing up, where did you first, you were in Hobart?**

Yeah,

**But you grew up in suburban Melbourne?**

Yeah when I was 5 my father was posted to Melbourne.

**08:00 Whereabouts in Melbourne?**

Oakleigh, so I hadn't moved far. It is now with in the Municipality of Monash so I really can't escape it. But I grew up in Oakleigh, a normal childhood I guess, used to play footy in the street, all the good stuff, Cowboys and Indians, I went to Oakleigh High School. I played football not very well.

- 08:30 I played cricket not very well. I was a keen archer I was very good at that, in fact I, probably in about 1967 I came third in the Victorian Target Shoot Championships which I thought was rather good. That was something I gave up when I joined the army and never took it back up again, it was a normal childhood, normal troubles with girls. I was shy and retiring and
- 09:00 really didn't have the guts to open my mouth, but that changed.

**We'll get to that later.**

But I can't think of any real problems.

**What was life like in the, I suppose your memory would be more clearly in the late fifties?**

Simpler, very simple. Knew what right and wrong was there was

- 09:30 no hint of drugs or anything like that, there was still the only thing we lived in the shadow of was the possibility of the bomb, but that was very quite, there was no real demonstrations until we got into the sixties. And of course I tended to see the world from fathers point of view, which I've often said sometimes his
- 10:00 opinions were a little to the right of Attila The Hun, but he was a good man, he was honest and he expected honesty, he expected, me especially, to do my best. And if my best was being a private soldier, or maybe just passing at school, if that was my
- 10:30 best, that was fair enough, as long as I did it he didn't mind. And he also introduced me to I suppose multi-culturalism, in his position as both a journalist and as a soldier he had contact with a lot of people from Africa, Philipppines, Sri Lanka, India, so I had people walking through my house that were anything from
- 11:00 Japanese through to Africans that were so black they were blue. I was introduced to all of this, so as far as I was concerned they were just more people, which helped me a lot when I was growing up and getting out in the world that I found I didn't have a discriminatory bone in my body which has helped

me, especially with my work in the police force. As far as I was concerned people just had better sunbans than I had.

- 11:30 But that was it. They ate different food and had different customs but that was about it. You just accepted it and got on with it. If you didn't like the way they did things well that was the way they did things and it was no skin off my nose.

**When did you encounter these different cultures? What period are we talking here? After Vietnam?**

No.

**Before Vietnam.**

Before Vietnam. From the time I was about

- 12:00 I suppose 10 or 11 years old. We had all these different types of people living in the house basically. They would come over to stay and they would be on a trip from somewhere and they would be staying in the spare bedroom for a couple of weeks. I just got used to it. Actually it was a good introduction to the differences in people.

**Yeah it sounds very interesting. So what about school?**

- 12:30 **At school at Oakleigh can you tell us about what the curriculum was like say in terms of the history sort of thing of Australia?**

History was British history mainly. There was a bit of modern history. We had a little bit of Australia in it but it wasn't all that much. It was more European, British history. The modern history had a bit of Australia, a bit of America.

- 13:00 It was mainly I suppose from 1800s onwards was termed modern history. It was fairly shallow.

**Not like now.**

No. Even now they don't teach Australian history.

**Was Empire an important thing at that time for you? British Empire?**

It was there but I suppose I've always been

- 13:30 a closet Republican. I love the pomp and the ceremony and all that stuff involved in the British military system but and the Queen and all that type of stuff but I always believed we should be running our own race and we would when we were ready. There's no rush.

**Your father I take it would have been a monarchist in the other end?**

- 14:00 No. He felt the same as I did. He was a realist and his idea was also when we were ready we would become a republic. He knew it, he supported it but he didn't, he was afraid when the Australian Labor Party first got in in 1972 that was the path we would rush into and it didn't happen which was a good thing for him

- 14:30 but other than that.

**At school did they teach you much about the First or Second World War?**

Not really. I learned all that from the books my father had and also from speaking to him and his friends. I learned very little at school.

**Were times tough during the 50s?**

I didn't think so. I was just a kid

- 15:00 I know that when I look back at it now the standard of living we had for a colonel seems rather low when you look back at it but it didn't really seem tough I guess. As kids we seemed to have everything we wanted. So no, not really.

**Now, of course when you are entering the 1960s there are major changes.**

- 15:30 **The wild 60s. How did you perform?**

I grew my hair, much to my father's disgust. When the Beatles came on the scene I saved up and got myself a pair of Beatle boots. Had longish hair and thought I was rather cool but it was still my intention to join the army as soon as I could, as soon as I finished school.

- 16:00 But I went through the flower power bit. I dressed like it. I had an afro at one stage and grew.

**Have you got the photo of that?**

No, I haven't. I wish I did. I had a beard, no moustache, just a beard and I used to smoke a pipe especially in my final year at school. I thought I was very cool.

**A pipe.**

A pipe yes. The old

16:30 corduroy jacket and turtleneck sweater and all that cool stuff.

**So what were the major changes that were taking place? When you look back now in that teenage period as far as Australia was concerned? You know teenage culture and society at the time, what was happening there?**

I suppose it became more open and we started to express ourselves

17:00 whereas before until you reached 18 or whenever you started to work for a living you kept your mouth shut. Students, university students especially they just got on with it and basically didn't have a say. Once the 60s hit the whole thing turned over I guess and the youth became the vocal majority

17:30 and it was a shock to the system especially for people our parents' age. They weren't used to it and of course, there was all the condemnation and all that type of stuff. It's the same type of thing that America had when rock 'n' roll came out. It's the Devil's music and it wouldn't last. Wrong. So

18:00 it was different. I suppose I didn't actually experience the difference that much because I grew with it so when the 60s hit I was I suppose in 1960 I was 11 going onto 12. I sort of come into the 60s at the right age. I didn't really see

18:30 a difference as such. I'm only surmising what I've been told from people who are slightly older than me at the time. But it was interesting.

**Who were your role models at that time outside people you knew, popular celebrities and things like that?**

Neil Fraser, the tennis player. In fact I

19:00 shared a plane with him. He looked after me. I finished my school and my father was posted to Brisbane and I basically went unaccompanied, flew unaccompanied from Melbourne to Brisbane and that was 1960 I think, 1959 I think and Neil Fraser was on the plane and he basically looked after me all the way to Brisbane. It's funny I've run into him since.

19:30 It's my new mother-in-law's friend is actually now married to Neil Fraser so everything comes around. Apart from that I had no real role models. I was into the Beatles. I was into the Rolling Stones which disgusted my father somewhat. He hated the Rolling Stones, as most parents did. That's why we went for them but

20:00 I didn't have any real role models. I think my main role model was my father. My aim in life was to be as good as him at the time. So I set my standards fairly high.

**Now coming towards the mid 60s when did you start to develop an understanding of**

20:30 **the Australian region? Like the problems that were taking place? The Indonesian confrontation? Because you were already military inclined in that sense. Or Vietnam for that matter because it was starting to bubble?**

It was starting to bubble up. I got a lot of my information from my father who had his finger on the pulse and from the newspaper reports because we didn't have television. The only time we had television

21:00 was school holidays. I knew it was happening. A lot of my opinions were mainly I suppose a mirror of my father's in a lot of regard although I did have my own opinions and there were times when I argued with him which he appreciated. We'd have the odd political argument

21:30 but most of the time I would say, I went along with his opinions. I suppose he was my mirror to the world I guess.

**Would you say you were politically inclined in that sense?**

I would say so. I was always, I suppose, conservative politically, although artistically I was probably

22:00 more radical but politically I was conservative.

**What was Oakleigh like at that time? You lived there pretty well the whole of the 60s is that right?**

Yeah except for the two years in Queensland. All of the 60s I lived there. It was a strange place in one respect. I think we had the first Greeks living

22:30 two doors day and when they moved in the people saying, "Bloody Greeks. The wogs moved in." And the old man marched down to their place and knocked on the door and said, "G'day. Welcome to the neighbourhood. This is who I am, who are you? Any time you've got a problem come up and see me." So

as a result I learned to eat Greek food very early in the piece. But that was the way he was.

23:00 He took people as individuals. He didn't worry about their ethnic origin, the colour of their skin, the language they spoke. He took them as individuals and as a result so did I. We had a lot of Greeks and Italians move into the area which was interesting. It did cause a few problems at school.

23:30 Called wogs and spics and dagos and all that good stuff but it wasn't a bad place.

**I mean you would have been involved in the early period of multiculturalism if you like?**

Yes.

**What was it like going to school with different nationalities for almost the first time really?**

I didn't see it as a problem. Other people did

24:00 but that was mainly through their parents opinions I guess but I didn't see it as a huge problem. I just got on with people. It was good. I was eating different foods it was great.

**Was Oakleigh a fairly Anglo Saxon sort of area?**

It was until I suppose the late 50s

24:30 and then there was a rather large influx of Greeks and followed by Italians or the other way around I'm not quite sure. I remember being rather impressed. A family moved in and brought a block of land near us it was crawling, they were Italians. It was crawling with Italians and this house just went up in about two months and there was about four families living in it

25:00 and I said to the old man, "God what are they all living in there for?" He said, "They are not stupid. Now they are all working until one of them is going to move out and then they will build a house for that one and they will all hook in and build that house. Once they've got that one built the next one will move out and they will build that house. This family's got it all sorted out." And I thought, "Oh yeah, good way to do it." Different ways of seeing things and the potatoes

25:30 in the front yard that was always strange. Or the vegie patch in the front yard. You always kept your vegie patch in the backyard. But later on it also made your lawn grow so well.

**I'll just there for a second. You were saying before about your father's service in Korea he went unofficially on some patrols?**

Yep.

**How openly did**

26:00 **he speak to you of these things?**

Quite openly once I suppose I was older and my mother was able to handle the fact that he did it.

**How was your mother's view towards the military?**

She accepted the fact that I was going. She didn't want me to go but that was the way things were done. She was a, I suppose she grew up pre-Second World War

26:30 and had been right through that and understood what had to be done. As far as she was concerned that was part of life.

**So when your father's military career though were there aspects that she disliked that she spoke about?**

Disliked him being away especially in Japan because she knew he had a girlfriend over there.

27:00 But she always said, there are photos of her. I've seen photos of her, of the girl in Japan and my mother's claim to fame was, "That's what he had in Japan but he came home to me." They were both quite open about that but she didn't like him being away because it was difficult, her being alone with two boys.

**Your brother, was he an older brother or younger brother?**

Younger brother.

27:30 **How did he view the army and things like that?**

My brother was a strange kid, still is. We've had a bit of a falling out so we don't talk but he was always his mother's favourite in the way that he was molly coddled a lot more than I was.

28:00 He eventually joined the army because he was trying to, the navy sorry because he was trying to prove something to his father but he actually wanted to slap the old man in the face so he joined the navy. What he didn't realise was that the old man was as pleased as punch that he had actually made the decision and done something. He couldn't care what it was, but

28:30 he was a strange kid I guess and we don't get on all that much. I haven't spoken to him since '96. I can't see it happening in the near future. We had a falling out over my mother's estate so that's that.

**So you were complete opposites in that sense?**

We were. He's in advertising. There are strange people in advertising.

29:00 He's five years my junior, so we never really had anything in common except our parents.

**Now coming to what was it, the fifth form, wasn't it? That's when you sort of left school and - ?**

I repeated it.

**You repeated fifth form.**

I repeated it and got the prerequisites to pass it and then left.

29:30 That was in '67.

**Would you say that at that time you were really interested in school or you just wanted to get it over and done with?**

I just wanted to get it over and done with. I wasn't terribly good at it. Art, English, geography and history I was a world beater, but the rest of the stuff I was just useless. The maths etc I was just absolutely useless so I didn't enjoy it and as a result I failed.

30:00 Since then I've found that I'm not stupid. I had enough education to get me a Duntroon Scholarship which was what I was trying to do. I failed that. I didn't quite make the grade into that so I just joined up with the hope that maybe I would get into Portsea later. That didn't eventuate but that's the way things go.

30:30 **So when the Vietnam started in Australia as you know beefed up it's strength then in a major way, obviously you would have talked about this with your Dad. Can you tell us about some of these conversations you had about that?**

Well the thing was with when conscription started I was lucky enough to be privy to the reasons conscription started. It wasn't Vietnam

31:00 it was Indonesia. When Indonesia went into West Irian [West Papua], they put more people on the ground than we had in the population of Australia almost and it frightened the living Christ out of the hierarchy and that's the reason conscription started. Vietnam just happened to happen along at an opportune moment I guess. Everybody equates Vietnam with conscription because of that but it wasn't the reason at all.

31:30 But I was I suppose well informed I thought by my father for the reasons for Vietnam. I believed in it. I believed in the Domino Theory at that stage [theory that Communism spreads through neighbouring states]. I believed that we had to do something and that we had been requested by the South Vietnamese government as an associate of the SEATO Treaty [South East Asian Treaty Organisation].

32:00 So I believed in what we were doing.

**And your father viewed it in the same light?**

Yep.

**Tell us about how communism was viewed amongst yourself and your father. Was it seen as an evil sort of threat?**

Yes. It was seen as a threat. As an evil threat. World domination. That was the way it was viewed as I suppose most people in that time would have viewed communism

32:30 so that's the way I viewed it. It was something to be stopped.

**There was that thing about the yellow wave or the yellow peril.**

Yellow peril, yep.

**Marching down hordes and that sort of thing.**

The Domino Theory. Once one falls, the rest will fall.

**Was there a feeling through yourself and your father that there was going to be a potential invasion of Australia**

33:00 **again?**

I suppose the possibility was there. We thought of it that there could be the possibility although he was realistic to realise that it wasn't something that would happen in the short term. There was the long

term possibility unless something happened but he also said, "Politics change

33:30 and it could just peter out or it could get stronger. So we've got to do something about it now." And that was the attitude.

**So when the Vietnam commitment started your father was totally for?**

Yep, he was for it and so was I.

**So once you passed the fifth grade you were absolutely determined to join the army?**

Yep, as soon as I

34:00 well I was 18 when I finished fifth form and the following March I joined. March '68.

**18? So what was it like getting on that - ?**

On the bus.

**No before the bus. Actually I wanted to get to, if you could tell us about the enlistment process. How did you go about it?**

Oh my God.

**I'm jogging your mind here.**

You're pulling the memory a bit.

34:30 It was the normal stuff. One hand on the left knacker and cough and all that good stuff and do a psych test. I got through all that.

**What sort of questions did they ask in that?**

I can't remember. You know are you ever prone, if you are standing on a tall building do you want to jump off? All that good stuff. I remember that one. Psych tests haven't changed that much since then.

35:00 **So you must have been perplexed by some of these questions?**

Oh yes. They were strange.

**Now I remember some of the other veterans telling us that one of the sergeants would come up and say, "If you want to join the army at the test if asked why you want to join don't say that you want to kill people." Was that some of the things?**

Yes that was mentioned.

**So when you**

35:30 **eventually got to like the recruiting depot what, can you tell us about the types of people who were joining up at that stage? What were you seeing around you?**

There were all kinds being a regular. You know it wasn't just a big mass intake. We all met down at the old Flinders Lane recruiting office it was, jumped on a bus to Wagga Wagga.

36:00 Away we went. I was wide-eyed and bushy tailed. I kept my mouth shut and I was suppose I was apprehensive. It was the first time I had really been away from home. It was excitement mixed with trepidation I would say. I didn't know what I was in for. I had done 18 months in the old

36:30 CMF [Citizens Military Force] at that stage so I had an inkling what I was in for but I wasn't physically prepared for it. I wasn't all that fit and that affected the way I viewed my recruit training.

**What do you mean? In what way?**

Well I found it hard. I found it extremely hard and I also found that

37:00 believe it or not that I have a problem with authority and I wanted to be a soldier. That was strange so I had to come to terms with that also. These asshole corporals who thought their shit didn't stink and they were God. I remember in recruit training our wardrobe had to be a certain way

37:30 and I got sick of it not being right and being trashed by the corporal so I stayed up all night and I got the ruler out and I measured everything. Everything was perfect, and you could bounce a 20c piece, a 2 bob piece about that high off my bed. I slept on the floor so I didn't muck my bed up. Inspection came the next morning and it took him 10 minutes.

38:00 He just ripped everything out of my wardrobe and threw it on the floor. He said, "Next time, squeeze your toothpaste from the bottom," and walked out. I shoved everything back in and he never looked at my room again after that. I always remember that. Bastard. Utter prick he was.

**Now the bus ride up. We forgot that.**

38:30 Oh the bus ride up.

**Where did you do your recruit training by the way?**

Kapooka at Wagga.

**So the bus went up to Kapooka from Melbourne?**

I don't know. I remember, I can distinctly remember turning left off the Hume Highway to go to Wagga but that's all I can remember about the bus trip itself.

**What about the people on board the bus?**

I've got no memory of

39:00 them except when I got to Kapooka I found that the platoon commander of one of the platoons was the big brother of one of the blokes I went to school with which didn't impress me much because I made the mistake of saying 'G'day' to him and got my head bitten off. Recruit training.

39:30 I did everything everybody else did. Distented [?UNCLEAR] guard duty. I hated that. I had trouble with the ropes but finally passed that. I got through. It was hard. Started smoking. In recruit training was when I started smoking but nope, there's. I remember we had one bloke we had to bath severely which he didn't

40:00 but forcefully. But other than that I didn't have a problem really. I got through it.

**He wouldn't bathe this guy?**

He stank. So we bathed him. I didn't but some of the boys did. I tended to take a backward seat, back seat and didn't want to become involved in too much. I was still going through a period of trepidation.

40:30 I wanted to keep my nose clean and keep out of the spotlight.

**With recruit training you have probably seen the film Full Metal Jacket?**

Yeah.

**Is that an accurate sort of expression there?**

From what I've heard from speaking with Americans for their system it seemed to be pretty close. The rest of the movie was utter shit but from speaking

41:00 with some American friends I have it was reasonably close. But that wasn't our system. Our system was different.

**But did they make you feel like you are nothing in the sense of I remember the drill sergeant saying "You are maggots," etc etc. Things like that.**

No.

**And coming up to your face and?**

All that's done, but they never made me anyway feel

41:30 I was nothing. They might have a go at you and it was mainly you're letting the side down, you're letting the team down, so you've got to pick your game up. There was a little bit of it but it wasn't just slam into us that you were a piece of shit like the Americans do it. We're not that bad and we produce better soldiers.

## Tape 2

00:31 **The 60s were free and open and a crazy time we are being shown in film and books and so on. What was the reality?**

Well they keep on saying, if you can remember the 60s, you weren't there. The reality was it was new, it was fresh. We had a say

01:00 it was innocent and it was simple. It started to get complicated after that but it seemed to be simple and had a ball. It was good.

**Was there in the sense lawlessness at the time?**

No. No lawlessness. They started with the demonstrations against Vietnam.

01:30 There was no real lawlessness.



**Things like drink driving and so on they were part of the culture back then.**

Yeah. They were the days when well if you went out on the grog you had to drive home because you were obviously too pissed to walk. There was never a real problem. Of course there were less cars on the road. Cars were more solid and they didn't go as fast, so

02:00 I think that could be the main difference.

**From those free times and so on how big a difference was it to actually join the army into strict regiment whilst most of society joined these free goings on?**

Well I did it by choice.

02:30 I had always been regimented at home so I was no real problem to me. It was something I wanted to do. I had no regrets.

**Did you understand how regimented it would be before you went?**

Yep. I just found I didn't like being told what to do by idiots

03:00 but that was something I had to live with also.

**Before you joined up did you father inform you much about what it would be like through training and so on?**

Oh yes he gave me an inkling of what I was going to be like.

**What did he tell you?**

Just that it was going to be hard, I had to do what I was told. I would be yelled at, I would be abused. I would be run until I dropped. All that type of good stuff.

03:30 **Just to get it clear from what you are telling us you joined up primarily because of your father is that right?**

I'd say so. Ever since I was 5, I wanted to be a soldier. I didn't have any other ambition at all.

**And how different was this from your other mates in the street and school?**

They were going into banks and wanted to be accountants, mechanics.

04:00 All the normal day to day professions I guess. I was the only one that wanted to join the army.

**Why didn't any of those so called normal professions appeal to you?**

I don't know. I think I was just single minded from the time I was a kid that I wanted to be a soldier and that was it.

**How did they treat you about wanting**

04:30 **to be a soldier, your mates ?**

It was accepted. That was what I was going to do. I knew that Fred was going to be an accountant, John was going to join a bank. I was going to join the army. That's the way it was.

**When you joined up you didn't join to go to Vietnam did you?**

No. I just joined the army. Vietnam just happened to be on at the time.

05:00 **Did you have inkling you would be going to Vietnam?**

Yeah. I figured that it would be a natural progression.

**And how did you feel about that possibility?**

I thought that's what I'm trained for. I may as well go over there and do my job.

**And once you got into training you found it harder than you expected or about the same or?**

Initially it was harder than I expected. Once I got

05:30 through my recruit training into infantry corps training it was easier. Recruit training quite often was mindless. Corps training, you had a direction.

**While you are going through the initial training was there any guys from World War II involved in that?**

Maybe

06:00 I didn't notice but the older warrant officers probably. I didn't have anything to do with them.

**What was the best thing about that early training that you enjoyed?**

The day I left when I graduated. That was the best day. There's no day that stands out.

06:30 There was just a grind and I was glad to be out of it. I was the right marker on the graduation parade which I thought was pretty good.

**Excellent. Wanting to be a soldier from the age of 5 and then actually being it, was it what you had dreamed and hoped? Did it fit the dream?**

Yes and no. It's hard to quantify really.

07:00 Parts of it yes and others no.

**What parts were yes?**

Camaraderie. That was the main thing. There was no, I was never one in pursuit of glory so that wasn't a factor but I didn't realise prior to joining that the

07:30 army has a propensity for promoting idiots and I seemed to run into quite a few but that of course is my opinion. I ran into a few and I have an unfortunate manner that I tend to rub people like that up the wrong way which just doesn't help.

**You can name names if you want or if you don't want**

08:00 **or just the circumstance but what was the biggest idiot like and what did he do to rub you up the wrong way?**

The biggest idiot. I'd prefer not to go into that.

**You don't have to name names, just the circumstance.**

There are a few. I've run into a few idiots and a few people

08:30 that I have rubbed up the wrong way and in some respects some of the people I've rubbed up the wrong way was because I was an idiot so it can balance out.

**But these idiotic things.**

I suppose little men with big ideas who did absolutely nothing and had been nowhere and were trying to justify their existence.

09:00 They can be a problem.

**Would they be a problem in such of pedantic little issues and so on. Would that be the problem?**

Pedantic little issues. Telling fibs about what they have done, how good they are and trying to justify the fact that they weren't somewhere where

09:30 they think they should have been. What we call LOBs - left out of battle and trying to make out that they weren't or justify the fact that they were left out where as a matter of course everybody has got a job to do. Just because you're not in the infantry doesn't mean you are not serving. Some people don't see it that way.

10:00 They try and make themselves a little bit more important than they actually are. I think we all have a propensity to do that. Just a little.

**Do you think they were insecure in their positions?**

Probably. Maybe not insecure in their positions but disappointed in themselves

10:30 for not aspiring to what they think they should of instead of coming to terms with what they actually did they think they should have done better and they travel with that and they take that out on other people.

**By the end of the course did people have any respect for them or greater respect for them at all?**

Not really.

11:00 The idiots remained the idiots. The majority of the instructors were good and that kind of balanced out the affects of the idiots. You tend to gravitate towards the advice of the people that you knew weren't idiots.

**So there were only a couple?**

Only a couple. There was always one or two.

**I think everywhere you go.**

Everywhere

11:30 you go.

**How do you get by them throughout training? Do you avoid them or do you, what do you do?**

You try. If you can't avoid them you keep your mouth shut and just play the game. They leave you alone as long as you are playing the game.

**What would they do to people who wouldn't play the game? What were some of their punishments?**

Their type of thing was

12:00 humiliation. They, I think one of the favourite tricks was to get someone squat on top of a fence, flap their arms and go squawk, squawk I'm a dickhead. Stuff like that. Just humiliation. It wasn't necessary.

**Could you see any purpose in that at all?**

No. None whatsoever.

12:30 **Quite strange. Was there other things like that that they did?**

Other similar things. It's hard to bring them up actually because there is a lot of stuff like that. The humiliation. "You are bloody useless. You dickhead. Blah, blah, blah. I'm glad I'm not going into combat with you, you'd get me killed." Good character-

13:00 building stuff but there weren't many of them. Most of the stuff, the hard stuff you could see the purpose for it. It was hard, it was fair, it didn't stop it being hard but it was fair from the majority of them.

**Did you have a guy through training that was being constantly picked on or couldn't take it?**

Yeah we had a couple that went over the wall.

13:30 They couldn't take it anymore and did a bunk, disappeared. A couple of them I think we would have packed their bags for them and did us a favour. There is always the cluster, the one that fucks up every bloody time and draws attention to you and because of his stuff ups, he was making life difficult for the rest of us and we lost a couple of those

14:00 which was a good thing.

**With these guys would you say that they were, the bastardisation was occurring with them or something?**

I would say there was an element of that, yeah. The bastardisation was usually done by the idiots who thought that was the way to do things. It wasn't endemic.

14:30 **With a guy like that if he was stuffing up they would punish the rest of the crew. So how would the rest of the crew help the guy that was stuffing up?**

Thump the living shit out of him. Simple. After he had been spoken to a few times and after he kept on stuffing up and making it difficult for the rest of us we just fix him up. Simple. If that didn't work

15:00 they would go over the wall or we would get them back squadded into another squad, another platoon. Easy.

**When you said they left was that their own choice or would the army kick them out? What would be the process?**

Well they could be, it could be their own choice to go over the wall or it could be they have had the whisper in their ear that if they don't something terrible was going to happen to them so they went over the wall.

15:30 Deserted. AWL [absent without leave]. Gone. Over the hill.

**Would they be chased down at all or were they happy they were gone?**

Some would be chased down by the MPs [military police]. Others, they would have a look at the paperwork and, "Yeah, scrub him off."

**That process of that initial training and finding out the weak ones and so on**

16:00 **that's a necessary part of finding out who can handle battle.**

Oh yeah. That's why it's got to be hard. It sorts people out.

**For example you wouldn't want that guy to be with you in the middle of the jungle in Vietnam.**

No. I want people beside me that I can rely on. I don't have to like them but just as long as I can rely on

them.

16:30 **At initial training were you with Nashos [national servicemen] at all or just with regulars?**

No. I was regulars all the way through. I forget when. I think at corps training I met a couple of Nashos up at Ingleburn but for most of the time I was with the regulars.

**So after the initial training did you select where you wanted to go or they select or what was the process?**

You get

17:00 Three choices of what corps you want to go to and I selected infantry. That was it. I just wanted to be an infantrymen.

**Why?**

Good question. Now that I look back on it. It is a good question. I wanted to be a soldier. It was my belief that infantrymen are the soldiers. It's still my belief.

17:30 Everybody else supports the infantrymen.

**You wanted to be at the pointy end, at the front?**

Yep. I think it could have been a desire to prove myself to myself more than anything else. To prove that I could cut the mustard.

**Is it a case if you are an infantrymen if you can handle that you can handle anything?**

Yeah

18:00 I believe so.

**Just the process at the end when you get three choices and so on. So you can go to artillery and so on. What are the other choices that you could have put down?**

Artillery, armoured corps, signals, engineers, catering corps, ordnance, transport. In those days it was the service corps, medical corps.

18:30 **And would you get what you requested generally or would they?**

Usually depending on what the allocation was. Of course some areas they didn't have much in the way of a requirement whereas infantry always did. The arms were usually got what you wanted with the artillery, armoured, infantry and even the engineers you usually got what you wanted.

**What were the requirements**

19:00 **for infantry?**

None. No requirements really.

**Just put your hand up.**

Just put your hand up same as the others. They usually liked the performers to go to armoured corps for some strange corps.

**Because it's more technical or?**

Probably.

**When you finished what was**

19:30 **the break up? Did most people go to infantry or?**

The majority of people ended up in infantry because that's where the greatest need was.

**So then you get to infantry training at, sorry where was it?**

Ingleburn.

**Ingleburn.**

It was cold. It's out in the middle of nowhere on the edge of Sydney and at one stage I think we were living in tents in the freezing cold

20:00 and the hot water didn't work. It was a wonderful place. Truly wonderful. I lasted there, that was nine weeks there and during that time Simon Townsend was in custody. He was a conscientious objector. I remember being his guard for a while and that was interesting.

**You were his guard?**

Yeah for a little while.

20:30 **What was the infantrymen's perspective of Simon Townsend?**

We didn't like him but he was an interesting bloke. I got talking with him and he was a reasonable bloke. I didn't agree with what he was doing but I could recognise the fact that he was committed to what he was doing. He believed in what he was doing as opposed to some of the others who were just using it to get out of Nashos.

21:00 He really did believe that it was wrong so I had a little bit of respect for him for that. I didn't like what he was doing. I thought it was a bit of a slap in the face for the rest of us especially the Nashos who were in but he was all right.

**Why was it a slap in the face?**

They weren't prepared, the Nashos even though they didn't want to be there they were prepared to do their training

21:30 and do what they had to do. Do their time and get out so therefore he should have had to do exactly the same.

**When you talked to him was it about the issues of the day?**

Yeah we had a bit of a chat about the issues. We agreed to disagree on most of the issues but he was a reasonable bloke. I didn't hold any

22:00 animosity towards him. I didn't like what he was doing but I could handle that. I know we had a few demonstrators out at the front gate and we got to the stage where we had to point arms with bayonets to stop them at one stage while he was in.

**And this is before you even went to Vietnam you had these troubles.**

22:30 Even before I went.

**With Simon Townsend did the other guards, how did they treat him and did they ask what the hell are you doing?**

The majority thought he was just a piece of shit. I suppose I was lucky enough to have my father's guidance in most things where you take people as individuals and you find out what they are about before you

23:00 condemn them.

**That was my next question actually, your upbringing and sort of putting yourself in other peoples shoes.**

Yeah I had the ability to see the other side or to appreciate other people's point of view which was good.

**Did any of the other guards get stuck into him or anything like that?**

I think he might

23:30 have copped a couple of clips across the ear I'm not sure. I'm unaware of exactly what happen but I know something did happen. I wasn't involved in any of it and it didn't happen any time I was acting as guard so I couldn't say but you heard about it.

**And how long was he there?**

24:00 I think he was there for about a period of four weeks before he transferred to somewhere else. I think so. I'm not sure. I know they wanted to get them out of there because he had gone on a hunger strike and he refused to bath and that sort of stuff and I think it may have been four weeks. We are going back. We are looking at '68 now. It's a fair while ago.

24:30 **You must have had people that weren't high profile conscientious objectors is that right?**

We didn't have any in the cells while I was there.

**So you only had Simon Townsend?**

Yeah.

**How high profile was he back then?**

Well he was the high profile conscientious objector of the day. There was another bloke named White [school teacher Bill White] if I remember correctly. I don't know what happened with him

25:00 but Simon was the, I think he was really the only genuine one.

**Even though you disagreed with his views did you respect him as a man?**

I think I respected him for standing on his dignity as it were and taking it through to the nth degree that he had to. Taking the punishment and doing what

25:30 he had to do instead of saying, "Okay." He had the courage of his convictions. You've got to respect that. Whether you like it or agree with it or not.

**And the people at the gate protesting what were the orders in relation to dealing with them?**

Don't let them through. It was a difficult situation because we didn't know

26:00 what was happening. The corporals were scared shitless because if something went wrong they knew they would be blamed for it when it probably wasn't their fault. But it was basically just form a line and don't let them in. I remember we fixed bayonets and

26:30 were told to point arms and I remember one of the protesters had my bayonet right there and I thought and my thought at that stage was, "I'll teach you, you bastard." He sort of went white and disappeared somewhere else. They jumped up and down and screamed and yelled and nobody was pushing against anything. They probably didn't want to push against the bayonets I don't know

27:00 but nobody was hurling anything except abuse at us. So it was as far as demonstrations go probably a good one.

**How many were there?**

There would have been a couple of hundred out there I guess from memory.

**And was there news media covering the event or anything like that?**

I don't think there was actually. I don't remember seeing any cameras out.

27:30 There may have been. I don't remember seeing anything on the news about it. There could have been. There could have been photographers out there I don't know because I know the army had it's own photographers out.

**Probably just wondering what you were doing at the time.**

I didn't feel comfortable but

28:00 it was a job that had to be done.

**What was uncomfortable about it?**

There seemed to be something about, I suppose I was afraid that it would go too far. I don't know how far it would go or what would happen. There's just that little bit of fear that it would all turn to shit on us that's all.

28:30 **Did it feel a bit strange to in a way that you were taking up arms against other Australians when?**

Yeah but I look at it from the point of view that it was necessary because they were I suppose attacking us. We were just there. We weren't doing anything.

29:00 We were just there and it was a first realisation that there were some very vocal people who disagreed with what we were doing in Vietnam and I thought most of them were ratbags for the demonstration type thing. I knew they were out there and I didn't come to the realisation of exactly what they were doing until I was over there.

29:30 **We will speak much more about that later but how militant were they?**

They didn't appear to be over militant in that instance that I can remember. I know that we were afraid that they would try and breach the line but that was it. There was a lot of yelling and shouting but there was no pushing. There was no attempt to breach the line

30:00 or anything like that. They didn't throw things at us. They weren't militant in that respect.

**How hard is it to remain calm in those situations because a false move could, you know, you don't know what's going to happen?**

You don't know what's going to happen. It's a scary thing. You don't know what's going to happen next. You've just got to hope that the people who are guiding you

30:30 know what they're doing. Some baggy arse private.

**That day you felt everybody was under control and did their job well?**

Everybody did their job well including the demonstrators for that one. Nobody got hurt. From my current police perspective a demonstration like that would be extremely successful for both sides.

31:00 **In a situation like that to you would have to have a bit of compassion not to charge. Is it**

**compassion or what is it?**

I don't know. I tended to think that they were the idiot fringe at the time so I don't know whether it would be compassion

31:30 or just a hope that you didn't have to hurt anybody or it could have been a bit if somebody got hurt then stiff it was their fault. But there was no other feeling. I don't recall feeling anything specific.

**With, it must have been, how polar opposite is the army to**

32:00 **what the demonstrators are like? Just what they are wearing and the way they are dressed. Are they opposite people in a way?**

Oh yeah. Seen as completely opposite.

**And also in the 60s, there were a lot of demonstrations in America and so on and many of them got out of hand.**

Yes.

**Did you know about them before this demonstration?**

I think I knew about Kent State.

32:30 I didn't know much about it but I knew it had all turned to shit and basically what had happened but not why or how. That was the sum total of my knowledge I guess.

**And do you think events like those are in the back of the soldier's minds not to let something like that happen?**

Probably they would have been in the back of the hierarchy's mind

33:00 because the majority of us weren't thinking that deeply.

**With the training how close are the soldiers coming together? What's the bonding between them?**

During infantry training we did tend to bond because we were learning the section tactics and the fact that you've got to look after your mate

33:30 because he's going to look after you and we did bond a little bit on that. Not terribly much because we knew at the end of our nine weeks we would be going to different battalions but we did form relationships I guess.

**Was the drinking culture a part of that bonding experience?**

Oh yes. We enjoyed a drink. It's all part of it. It all was in those days.

34:00 **At this point are you forming close relationships at all?**

Not really. You may. The possibility was there. You probably would if you were going to the same battalion as somebody and if you, from that you went to the same platoon for instance. In that battalion you would form a close relationship

34:30 possibly then but other than that, no.

**And this training was it easier than your initial training?**

It was more intense tactically but there was less bullshit. We were getting into the tactics side of things. What we had to do out in the bush rather than jumping up and down on parade grounds and the rest of the bullshit.

35:00 **Would you say as you go through the army and this initial training they slowly and slowly give you more and more respect?**

Yep. Yes certainly.

**And gaining that respect, how does that it affect the soldiers morale and - ?**

It bumps you up. You start to feel that 'yes, I am worth something. I've achieved this. I can do anything'.

**Do you think in a way they have to kick you down to pull you back up to**

35:30 **make you feel stronger?**

In some respects yes. They don't follow the complete destruction model that the Yanks seem to or did. I don't know whether they still do it but there are certain things where they have to build you up.

**So in infantry were they giving you guerrilla training and jungle training?**

Yeah. We get a fair amount of it and that

- 36:00 was intensified later on. It was basic infantry so then the battalion wherever we went we could further our education as it would.
- Besides giving you this guerrilla training did you know at that time that you were going to Vietnam?**
- Oh yeah. I knew I would go at some stage. With whom I didn't know.
- So how much of the training was the old type**
- 36:30 **trench warfare and how much the jungle training? Was it a mix or?**
- There was no trench warfare. It was mainly, mainly jungle type training from experiences in Malaysia onwards.
- Did you know at that point if there were any World War II guys from Kokoda or anything like that involved in the training?**
- Not as far as I can remember. There may have been.
- 37:00 **Did it seem to you at the time when you were doing jungle training that this was a bit of a shift in focus from previous years and generations or?**
- No I wouldn't have thought of it that way. This was what we had to learn to do what we had to do.
- And how confronting was the training you went through and how did you take to that type of**
- 37:30 **warfare in training?**
- In training I guess I took to it like a duck to water. It was hard. There were different things we had to learn from our basic recruit training. It was a step up. You know we did the primary school now we are doing the secondary college and advancing to the diploma level. So
- 38:00 it wasn't confronting as such.
- It sounds like it gave you a great sense of accomplishment as you were progressing through the army?**
- It did.
- At this point in time are you thinking about what the real thing is going to be like?**
- Oh yeah. You always imagine it. You try and talk to some instructions who have been there
- 38:30 if you can and listen to their warries [tall stories or 'I was there' stories] and you talk amongst yourselves and imagine what it's going to be like. You find out that it's nothing like that.
- But you don't know that at the time do you?**
- No.
- So after the nine weeks there where did you move on to?**
- I was, my father in his wisdom decided I needed as much preparation
- 39:00 as possible and arranged for me to be posted to Canungra on the demo platoon which pissed me off greatly. So I went to Canungra on the demo platoon for a while and that's when they asked for volunteers to go to Malaysia to join 8 Battalion.
- Just quickly, how did he organise that?**
- Well being a colonel he could pull a few strings.
- 39:30 **What did you want to happen? Where did you want to go?**
- I wanted to go to a battalion and go to Vietnam.

## Tape 3

- 00:31 **Okay tell us about your training at Canungra?**
- A short period of demo platoon. Getting out there in brightly coloured painted helmet liners so the troops could see who you were and what position you were and doing contact drills out in the open so you could be seen which direction anybody went, the guns to a higher ground and all
- 01:00 the contact drills. Acting as enemy for the courses coming through preparatory for Vietnam which was



interesting and I think I did that for about 3 months at the most. I forget exactly how long before I went to Malaysia with 8 Battalion or joined 8 Battalion in Malaysia.

**Can you tell us about**

01:30 **the Canungra training? What was learned from the previous campaigns like Papua New Guinea, Malaya and so forth, Indonesia ?**

More it was at that stage we were talking about 68 we were learning from people who had already been to Vietnam so the things from previous campaigns we basically went by the

02:00 wayside. There was concentration on exactly what we were going to be facing in Vietnam. Booby traps, mines, tactics. It was all geared from experiences already learnt in Vietnam

**Can you tell us about the booby traps and about that they said you might encounter there?**

Trip wires with the grenades on the end. Pangi pits [mantraps armed with sharpened stakes] and stakes

02:30 in trees, the claymore mines hidden in facsimiles of knots in trees all that type of thing. Little anti-personnel mines and jumping jacks.

**Claymore mines hidden in trees.**

Yeah we learned that covered in mud so it looked like a big knot in the tree or a nest of some description.

03:00 They used those.

**What about is it stakes in trees, sharpened stakes?**

Sharpened stakes or the bamboo pulled back so you trip the wire and they come through at waist level.

**Were you surprised initially at these sort of tactics?**

No because we had an inkling of basically what went

03:30 on during corps training. This was just I suppose a step up from corps training. We went through sneaker ranges and things like that.

**Sneaker ranges?**

Yeah. You walk down a track and targets pop up at the side of the track and a bloke walks behind with a control board and he can

04:00 pull a switch or push a button and a certain target pop up for a certain amount of time and down again. He can activate them at will.

**And this is done individually?**

Yeah.

**Every private had this opportunity?**

Yeah.

**How long was this course? This particular sneaker range course?**

It was part of the.

**What I mean was when you were timed did it go for half an hour**

04:30 **or something like that?**

No it was the course itself was probably 50 m long. There is no time limit on it but you went through it as if you were patrolling at patrol speed, watching your arcs and doing everything tactically. Waiting for a target.

**How difficult was it?**

05:00 At first very difficult but once you learned what to expect and what you were doing and you did it again and again you could almost drop targets without looking at them. You could be looking at that direction and a target would pop up and you would see it out the corner of your eye and you wouldn't even look at it and you would drop it with three shots. We were that good.

05:30 **How much actual, now I know the Australian army as opposed to the American army emphasises individual training a lot more so can you tell us about the weapons handling and that sort of tactical training as well. Aspects regarding lessons they learned from Vietnam and instructors had sort of spoken about at Canungra? You talk about the booby traps and that sort of thing, what about tactical scenarios?**

06:00 Well we did contact drills, constantly did contact drills. Contact left, contact front, contact right, rear, ambush drills. They are instilled into us so as soon as something happened you knew what you had to do. It was instinctive and we learned these as a section.

**What tactics did they talk**

06:30 **about in regard to the VC [Viet Cong] and NVA [North Vietnamese Army] how they were operating?**

They told us they operated mainly by ambush and there was very little actually said about exactly what they did. It was a lot of innuendo. That they operate in small groups, they use ambush tactics,

07:00 they fight at night, they use the villages at night. But as a private soldier there is very little we needed to know although I was a member of the intelligence section of the battalion after that and I probably knew a little bit more than your normal private soldier would about tactics and how they operated and where they were likely to operate. What type of terrain

07:30 they favoured but that was later.

**That was in Vietnam itself wasn't it?**

And just prior to going after I left Malaysia.

**Now actually when you left or when you joined the army unit before you left for Vietnam the Tet Offensive took place [A major offensive by North Vietnamese forces during the Tet New Year holiday period, 30 January 1968]. What was your view of the war then, that it was unwinnable? A lot of the men were talking about that?**

08:00 No. I had no feeling that it was unwinnable. It wasn't until I got over there that I started to think of why don't the politicians keep their noses out of it and let us fight it but other than that I thought we were there for a reason so this happened. We actually beat them on the ground, which we did. We decimated the Viet Cong and we

08:30 basically destroyed their viability as a concentrated fighting force for the rest of the war but that was never recognised.

**Are you referring to D445? [A Viet Cong Local Force or Provincial Battalion]**

Yeah, them too. But the Viet Cong as a whole after Tet had to be bolstered up by the North Vietnamese Regulars between us and the Americans we completely destroyed them.

09:00 But it was the only information that people got was via the media and Neil Davis [Australian war correspondent] to this day still regrets that film he took of the Viet Cong commander being executed in the street. To the day he died he regretted that.

**Why was that?**

Because it didn't tell the story.

**What was the story of that particular scene?**

The story was that the South Vietnamese

09:30 I think he was a police chief he had just learned that the Viet Cong had just butchered a majority of his family I believe is the story and he just reacted and you don't hear about that.

**It was just the image.**

Yeah.

**After your training at Canungra obviously you were**

10:00 **fairly well prepared as an infantryman.**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us what happened after that?**

I joined 8 Battalion in Malaysia joined the garrison in Malaysia. I went into the intelligence section and where I suppose I started producing maps and increased my learning in marking skills and processing of intelligence

10:30 and the dissemination to the companies.

**This was 8 Battalion RAR of course. Tell us about your first day in Malaysia.**

I was a radical dresser for the army and I turned up in a pair of bolero flares with silver buttons and chains on the pleats and a bright apricot Errol Flynn-type shirt.

11:00 with the big sleeves and I've gone into the mess and this blokes looked at me. You'll have to excuse my language and he's looked at me and said, "God, you would have to be some sort of psychedelic cunt, wouldn't you?" And the name stuck. I've been known as 'Psychedelic' ever since. That stuck.

**That's an interesting name in the army.**

11:30 Yeah. It got shortened to Psycho. Some People thought for the other reason but it was Psychedelic.

**When you first stepped off the plane apart from your attire what was your immediate reaction to Malaysia?**

It was bloody hot and humid. It was like sucking air through red hot steel wool. That was my first impression of it.

12:00 It was hot and it was sticky but I got used to it.

**And your purpose in Malaysia was it like a bit of an induction into Vietnam?**

I guess so. That was my idea of it. I knew 8 Battalion was returning from Malaysia in '69, April '69

12:30 and was slotted for Vietnam in November so in my mind I was killing two birds with one stone. I was acclimatising myself with getting further training and ready for Vietnam.

**You stayed three months in Malaysia.**

Three to four months.

**What were the places that you visited in the period there whether army camps or towns or cities ?**

I went up to Seremban.

13:00 Seremban, Malacca and Singapore. That was it.

**What was your impressions of it?**

I loved the place.

**Tell us why.**

I don't know. I loved the climate. I loved the atmosphere. I just loved it.

**What about the women?**

I didn't have all that much to do with the women actually. I didn't have all that much time. I was in the shit

13:30 too much.

**What do you mean in the shit?**

I was confined to barracks a couple of times while I was there which is a pretty good effort in three months. I spent four weeks I reckon of that, doing CB. I had very little to do with the women. Drank a bit though.

**How did you find the status of the 8 Battalion? Was it almost permanently stationed there?**

It had been there

14:00 for two years, almost two years which was the tour of duty for Malaysia in those days.

**Now obviously you must have found this out later when you went to Vietnam but when a battalion goes overseas do they start taking up some of the traits of the people whether it be lifestyle, cultural changes were the changes going on. What were some of the changes that you saw in the 8 Battalion that were different to what you saw in Australia for instance?**

Well we were in a different place.

14:30 A different lifestyle. Open barracks, concrete barracks with huge fans in the ceiling. The chow wallah was in a shed out the back and he kicked things for you and he used to kick on his tin shed about 3.00 in the morning and ask for a fried egg sandwich. Washing and ironing was done for you so the lifestyle was pretty

15:00 Good in Malaysia. When we came home it all changed of course.

**So you felt spoilt.**

I didn't feel spoilt. I thought it was rather good. I didn't feel spoilt at all.

**By army standards that is -**

It was different. It was good. I enjoyed it. I would have liked to have stayed longer but the battalion

returned home in April.

- 15:30 **Of course the emergency was well and truly over by then but there was still some skirmishes action going on here and there?**
- There was a problem brewing with the ethnic Chinese at the time and towards the end of the tour if the whites had to go into town they were always escorted because of safety reasons. There were a few problems brewing.
- 16:00 Everything exploded in Singapore just as we were leaving. Other than that.
- As you were leaving?**
- Yeah.
- Well why**
- Or just after we left I think. Everything just exploded in Singapore. They had riots, Chinese riots etc. There were a few problems. There were threats made and some people were threatened with attack in Malacca.
- 16:30 Nothing actually happened.
- Were you involved in the intelligence there?**
- Yeah.
- This is where you were trained?**
- Just in the intelligence section of the battalion.
- I see. How did you get caught up in that?**
- Because I could draw. Simple as that, because I had a bit of talent as an artist it was found out and I was put straight
- 17:00 in the intelligence section because I could draw and I could draw pretty pictures.
- What were you meant to draw?**
- Like invitations to the officers' mess do. Invitations to the battalion commander's dinner. Stuff like that.
- Ceremonial.**
- All that good stuff so that's why I was placed in the intelligence section. I didn't have a say in it
- Was there anything actually to do with real intelligence there?**
- 17:30 Oh yeah.
- What sort of things?**
- We got information. We prepared all the battle maps for the battalions and marked them all up for the companies and the platoons.
- When you say battle maps what do you mean?**
- If there was an operation coming up or in Malaysia an exercise we had, we were working on information using the Gurkhas [Nepali regiment of the British Army] as enemy and we would get the information in
- 18:00 and mark up the maps on the current positions. Positions of the battalions, the sub units, suspected enemy locations and that's disseminated to the companies prior to the operation happening.
- There is a part of the operational orders.**
- Yep.
- I see.**
- We prepared all the battle maps. We prepared all the intelligence summaries.
- 18:30 **How would you gather these intelligence summaries?**
- A lot of it does come down from Taskforce headquarters. Most of it comes down from Taskforce. We get very little of it from our own sources as we didn't have any but we relied on Taskforce who would get theirs from the Yanks etc.
- I guess it was higher strategic.**
- And they would get it from intelligence who had their own sources.
- What about patrols?**

19:00 A lot of it would come from patrols as well.

**Your own battalion patrols?**

Yep.

**How important was ground intelligence? What did you learn from your training in Malaysia?**

Terrain and jungle conditions. That was the most valuable thing I learned. How to operate in the heat and the jungle with the bugs. The constant moisture. So if you were in the dry season

19:30 you sweated like hell. If it was the wet season you got wet. You were still hot. You got used to operating in that.

**So what are the differences between your experience in Malaysia and Canungra? What is the jungle like in Canungra compared to Malaysia? What's the difference?**

One's scrub and the other is jungle.

**Canungra is scrub.**

It's real rainforestry scrub. Good learning point, but it's just scrub

20:00 whereupon in Malaysia I hit real jungle. The real stuff. The real temperature.

**What's it like? You've done some patrols there I take it in Malaysia?**

Yep.

**Was this like standard patrolling or this was just training?**

On exercise training.

**You patrolled alongside Ghurkhas.**

We used them as enemy most of the time.

**That would have been a challenge. Tell us about the Ghurkhas. How did the Aussies view them?**

20:30 A lot of respect. Those little blokes. We were had an exercise on a mountain called Bhuket Jono. Bhuket being mountain of course and it must have been a 60 degree slope and it was a bastard of a thing. It took us three days to get up it. We set up a fire base at the top of this thing. The first thing the Ghurkhas did was run through us. Up and down the other side. Just ran through it

21:00 and we thought "Jesus these little bastards are fit." I'm sitting on gun picket and I decided I needed a smoke so I got my smokes out and I'm just getting ready to get down into the pit to light my smoke to conceal the flame and this hand came out from beside me and lit my cigarette. It was a Ghurkha. He had been sitting beside me for five minutes. I didn't even know he was there.

21:30 We had a little chat about how things went and another one of the companies had a contact obviously with his mates with someone else and I've looked in that direction and looked back at him and he's gone. Just like that. They were fantastic. Unbelievable soldiers. No wonder the Japanese were terrified of them. They were excellent.

**You trained with them using them as**

22:00 **enemies. Tell us about that. What was that experience like?**

Well just somebody to use as enemy I suppose.

**But you were both trying to out manoeuvre each other. That was the aim.**

Well they had a set script to stick to in order to get us to do certain things I guess. As enemy you have a script but it was good having live enemy as it were.

22:30 **What were they like to practice fighting against? Was there anything in particular you were impressed by?**

No. Just their fitness and I suppose their endurance more than anything else impressed me.

**What about their combat capabilities?**

Well we didn't really have a chance to test it really because they were playing enemy to a script.

**You would have been probably seen**

23:00 **their training, the operational doctrine for instance. You would have come across that. How similar was their training regime compared to the Australian soldiers?**

It was mainly British. British-orientated, India.

**And how different was that to what you saw? Whatever you saw how different was it to the Australian way of fighting?**

I couldn't really comment because they had evolved their own methods

23:30 through time and necessity and I didn't really think about it actually. I just recognised their fitness and endurance and how good they were. I was extremely glad we weren't fighting against them.

**Do you think they were up to scratch?**

They would have done us like a dinner.

**You really think so.**

Oh yes.

**Did most Aussies feel that way?**

I believe so.

24:00 **So there was real respect for the Ghurkhas?**

Oh yeah.

**It must mean something coming from Australians I suppose. So what else did you get a chance to do while you were in Malaysia? What other sort of military sort of related duties or civilian and social?**

We paraded a lot. Nothing really social. Went out drinking and that was it. Fought with the Poms.

24:30 **Fought with the Poms.**

Oh yes. Always fought with the Poms.

**Which battalion of English were there?**

I forget who was over there at the same time. We had a strip, what we called the strip. A strip of bars outside the base area and we used to get down there us and the Kiwis and Poms and the Poms would always say the wrong thing and a fight would start. We would fight the Poms.

25:00 That's what you did. But other than that. I was there I suppose too brief a time to really do all that much plus I was in the shit half of it which didn't help much. Although a mate of mine who actually lives in Melbourne he and I were on CB together one two-week

25:30 period. We finished CB and we had a taxi waiting on the other side of the footy ground. Off CB, into the taxi and down on the piss and back there for first parade next morning.

**And you could handle it?**

Oh yeah. We did it.

**You got drunk?**

Oh yeah of course.

**And you could handle the drill the next morning?**

Oh yeah. We were fit. That's the difference. I couldn't do it now.

26:00 It takes me about a week to get over one night on the piss now but then we were that fit it didn't bother us.

**Was there much of a brothel culture in Malaysia?**

I'm not sure. I didn't get into it all that much. There were bar girls and all that sort of stuff but I didn't get into the brothel side of things so I can't say. I don't know if there was or not.

26:30 **I think there were.**

There probably would have been. You would expect so but I didn't get involved in it.

**What sort of information did you hear about Vietnam while you were in Malaysia?**

Not much really. The fact that thing were happening. That the jungle was similar.

27:00 That's about it. We got told about the Phuoc Tuy Province and what to expect when we were there but other than that not much. There were constant tactical updates of course.

**And by this stage were you eager to actually get to Vietnam?**

Yeah I think we were.

27:30 **What was the talk about? Had 8 Battalion actually been there?**

No.

**So no one you knew at the time in Malaysia had actually been there?**

I don't know what the talk was. I don't think we actually talked about it all that much. It was a given that we were going.

**Compared to now at that stage '69. We are getting to 1969.**

28:00 **The Australian army had a fair amount of casualties. When I mean a fair casualties, it must have crossed the 200 threshold by that stage.**

It may have.

**During action in 68 or 69.**

It may have.

**I think that was the peak at that time. In any case we are talking about a couple of hundred by this stage or more. What was the reaction amongst the army at that time**

28:30 **to that sort of level of casualties? Now if you lose 10 or 20 guys it's different.**

It didn't bother us. We knew there was a possibility because that's the type of business we were in but it didn't bother us unduly. We didn't say, "Oh dear, we've had this many killed we are all going to die." You just accepted it.

**What about the American losses? You must have heard about that?**

We heard a little bit about it but that was just the Yanks

29:00 and we knew the way the Yanks operated. They were all idiots. You know poorly trained, poorly motivated, poorly led and didn't want to be there and they were dying in droves because of it but we knew we fought our war a lot differently.

**So tell us what happened after Malaysia. After you did your six month stint there?**

Came home.

29:30 We started gearing up for Vietnam. Started exercising. Went back to Canungra as a unit and did the jungle training as a unit. Did a special intelligence course down at South Australia at Woodside.

**What did that involve?**

Methods of gathering intelligence.

30:00 How to interpret certain things. Just more intense. I suppose improving the skills we already had by just the basic stuff we had been doing in Malaysia and.

**Was this field intelligence by the way?**

Yeah.

**So getting out there in front sort of situation?**

We didn't. Just getting the information

30:30 in. The information would come to us.

**At battalion level?**

At battalion level and we would work on it and do our predictions and advise the hierarchy as it were. Advise the CO [commanding officer] what's going on. I think we did that for three weeks.

**You said you didn't have an initial choice going to intelligence.**

No I was told that was where I was going.

**So what did you think about it**

31:00 **after getting - ? I remember you telling me before you wanted to go to infantry and you saw that as being the -**

It was okay. I enjoyed my time there in intelligence. I was still going out patrolling but my main job was the gathering and dissemination of intelligence to keep the battalion operational and being able to achieve what they

31:30 set out to achieve.

**Were you in charge of the intelligence section?**

No. I was only a private.

**So this was especially geared for Vietnam this course down in South Australia?**

Yeah.

**Anything in particular they told you about Vietnam. I mean obviously all this training at Canungra and the intelligence course in South Australia was all designed for the mission and deployment in Vietnam. So what did they tell you about**

32:00 **the political situation, the history of Vietnam, the customs of Vietnam, the people things like that.**

We were told a little about the customs of the people and the political situation. We were told about the split between the two Vietnams [north and south] and why it happened and about Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem, First President of South Vietnam, 1955-63] and about Ky [Nguyen Cao Ky, South Vietnamese Prime Minister, 1965-67] and Thieu [Nguyen Van Thieu, South Vietnamese President 1967-75] who was the current President and it was all insurgence about the Viet Cong and North

32:30 Vietnamese wanting to take over the democratically run South which of course it wasn't democratic at all. That was basically all we were told politically. We were told what the go was and it was our job to support the South Vietnamese in Phuoc Tuy Province. We had a job to do and we would be running into people like D445, the remnants of it. They had been allowed to reform.

33:00 What was it? 747 or 447 Regiment or something like that that were in the area? I forget which now but the Chow Duk Company [?] was another little unit. Viet Cong unit. So we were told that these were the people we would be dealing with and these were their basic tactics and so on.

33:30 **Looking back was it accurate what they told you?**

It wasn't bad. It wasn't too bad at all. Of course nothing is as accurate as personal experience so everybody's experience was different. It was interesting and it got us going and we knew what to expect basically.

**How long did you have**

34:00 **training here before you went to Vietnam after you were in Malaysia?**

I came back in April, end of April and we were gone in November the same year. So I suppose six months.

**How did your father react and your mother, family, friends?**

My father was proud of me. My mother was worried which is normal, as mothers do. My father was proud of me.

34:30 **Did you meet, obviously you would have met up with him before you left?**

Oh yeah I had pre-embarkation leave and while I was in Brisbane every now and again I would go home for the weekend anyway so I would see them then. That's if I wasn't down at Surfers Paradise with a car full of tarts.

35:00 **Tell us about that.**

Weekends are great. Down to Surfers. Hire a Moke and take a whole stack of tarts down and find a motel and play tag. It was good. It was good to be young.

**I agree. I agree with you fervently.**

35:30 **So I mean before you left I mean the anti-war movement was really peaking. It's in its, moratorium against conscription.**

All that crap.

**Yeah. I mean what was going through your mind at that stage? Casualties coming in, a lot of wounded back.**

We hated them really because of what was happening but you didn't think about it all that much because it wasn't directly affecting us at that stage

36:00 so we really didn't think about it before we went.

**Were they seen as bludgers?**

Yeah.

**As bums?**



Bludgers. Nothing better to do - 'Get a job, son'. All this type of stuff but other than that we didn't really think about them. We had our own problems at that stage.

#### **So now come departure to Vietnam**

#### **36:30 tell us how you took off from sunny Surfers Paradise to?**

I went over on the advance party. I waved goodbye to the battalion down at the dock on the HMAS Sydney and then we got on the plane which we drank dry before we got to Darwin from Brisbane, which was a pretty good effort and we stopped off at Singapore where we all got off the plane. We had to wear civilian shirts over our uniform

37:00 so we didn't look like soldiers. There was some political arrangement with Lee Kwan Yew [Prime Minister of Singapore, 1965-90] at the time. We weren't allowed to be seen as soldiers getting off the plane going to Vietnam. Then in Saigon at Tan Son Nhut Airport which was a hive of activity. It was huge. Onto a Caribou, we flew to Nui Dat.

37:30 From Nui Dat strip we were trucked out to 9 Battalion. They had our position and we started assimilating ourselves and getting used to what was happening before the main body of the battalion arrived. During that time one of the lieutenants, one of their lieutenants was fragged [the assassination of an officer by his own troops] by one of his members which was very interesting.

#### **Australian army?**

Yeah.

38:00 That was a bit of a shock to the system, I must admit.

#### **Before you continue there I just want to recap on what you said about Vietnam. What was your first impression when you arrived in Vietnam, Saigon?**

Hot and it was frenetic. It was all happening. Scared shitless not knowing what was going to happen but

38:30 the anticipation was high as well. It was a feeling of adventure because there I was getting in harms way and I didn't know what to expect. I had an open mind about what to expect and Tan Son Nhut airport was nothing like I expected and got jumped in the Caribou and landed at

39:00 Luscombe Field in Nui Dat and I suppose the set up there as we drove through was what I expected a Taskforce setup.

#### **Why wasn't Tan Son Nhut airport, what were you expecting at Tan Son Nhut airport?**

I didn't know. I had no expectations. I suppose I'm used to landing at an airport, a civilian airport and at Tan Son Nhut airport there were planes taking off. There were B52 bombers

39:30 and there's helicopters, jet fighters. Everything was happening at once. It was huge. Absolutely bloody huge and I had no idea that's what it was going to be like.

#### **So it left you in shock and awe?**

I suppose mainly awe more than the shock. I was uncertain. I get a bit of worry. I thought "Shit what is going to happen now?"

40:00 It was interesting.

#### **So a good point for us to stop and take a lunch break now.**

## **Tape 4**

#### **00:31 Just stepped off the plane in Saigon. What was the smell like? Was it confronting at all?**

Not really at that stage. It was more an airport, exhaust fumes, petrol fumes type smell. We hadn't got into the town at that stage so we weren't hit with the Vietnam smell as it were.

#### **What were you told**

#### **01:00 the enemy would look like before you got to Vietnam?**

They all dressed in black pyjamas. I got off the aeroplane at Tan Son Nhut and thought, "Fuck they are all dressed in black pyjamas!" They didn't bother to explain to most of us that everybody wore black pyjamas so it was a bit of a shock to the system. You soon worked it out.

#### **It's funny now but at the time**

01:30 it must have been a bit disorientating.

It was. It was a bit of a shock to the system. We very quickly worked it out but initially, yeah.

**So how long did you actually stay in Saigon?**

Probably no more than an hour.

**And just that hour could you see a bit of the war or what were you seeing at that point?**

All we were seeing were soldiers

02:00 both some of ours, mainly Americans, South Vietnamese and aeroplanes and that was about it.

**How impressive was the operation at that point?**

It just looked big. It looked huge.

**Was it comforting in a way?**

I guess so. I didn't think about it in those terms just that it was big.

02:30 **So where did you go to next?**

I went by Caribou to Nui Dat.

**And what was that ride like?**

Just an aeroplane ride. Looking out the window, looking at the country.

**Compared to what you were told in training and stuff seeing the country from above did you, could you relate?**

03:00 Yes paddy fields and jungle.

**And lots of people in black pyjamas.**

Yeah.

**So Nui Dat. You arrive there and can you describe the place for us?**

Luscombe Field was this bloody big bit of bitumen with a hill behind it. We were met by trucks and we were trucked into the battalion area which was

03:30 right up the other end of the taskforce area and that was it. It was hot. It was dusty. We didn't know what to expect. What was happening just that we were going.

**And the buildings themselves, what type of buildings did they have?**

Tin sheds mainly. In the taskforce area just tin sheds, tents, wooden huts

04:00 that was it. That's your normal military style buildings really.

**And how long were you staying there this time?**

We just moved straight through to the battalion area which was to be my home for 12 months or just over.

**When you reached the battalion area and you have gone through this journey to get there**

04:30 **any apprehensions at all or were you happy the way things were going?**

At this stage we were. It was a bit unnerving because we were taking over from another unit and they were still in situ when we got there and we just organised ourselves hoochies [tents].

**What unit was that?**

That was 9th Battalion we were taking over from.

**Did you talk to them about what was happening?**

Yeah we talked to them, but you get the usual

05:00 thing, you know. "You'll be sorry," and "You've got 365 [days] and a wakey. You poor bastard." All the normal shit but nobody explained things to us. They explained how each section was running and where everything was in the building and then we just basically took it over and started running it ourselves.

**They wouldn't tell you what it was like to patrol**

05:30 **or the conditions?**

They just said it was hot, it was wet and sticky. That was all.

**So what was life like in the area there and day to day living?**

It was hot and it was sticky and dusty. It wasn't bad. We were living in tents with the sand bags around then. Wooden floor on the bottom. A bed and an old

06:00 locker and that was it but it wasn't bad. That's what we expected.

**When you are in those conditions together do you sort of bond even closer then?**

Yeah I think so. Living on top of one another you tend to.

**And at this point do you have two or three mates that you are bonding with?**

Part of the intel [intelligence] section there was a group

06:30 of us that we were fairly close. We split up when we got there because the interpreters went to the different companies and worked out of there but we used to see them when they came back in. The rest of stuck pretty well much together. We knew what we expected of each other. We knew what our jobs were and we got on with it.

**The conditions of the camp what sanitary conditions do you have?**

07:00 Normal big hole in the ground with thunderboxes over the top. That was it with a shed around it. The blow fly burnt out even now and again.

**Would that happen when a guy was on the thunderbox?**

No. It could be rather traumatic. No.

**Showers? What showers did you have?**

07:30 Just cold water showers.

**So how long was it there before they started sending you on patrols and so on? What was your position there?**

I'm just trying to think. We got there in November. I think we did our first operation in December and then through,

08:00 I'm just trying to think. The first operation I think was in December. I didn't go out on that one. I was back in Nui Dat, back in the battalion area. I was doing all the briefings for the admin company and support personnel to keep them up to scratch what was happening every day. It was all right.

**And how would you get that info that**

08:30 **kept them up to scratch?**

I would receive the intelligence summaries through from the battalion echelon area and from taskforce headquarters which I would tee up and let them know what the battalion was doing and what was happening here and there so that the support personnel were kept informed.

**Would that also be American intelligence or?**

09:00 There would be some American intelligence but it mainly revolved around what the battalion was doing at the time and what they were encountering out in the scrub.

**And what were they encountering out there?**

They were running into the odd VC and a few contacts here and there. I think we lost our first bloke on the first op [operation]. Yeah I think he was actually a Rhodesian this bloke.

09:30 A machine gunner or something like that. He copped it on the first op. They had a couple of little stoushes but nothing serious.

**Do you remember how he copped it?**

No. No.

**Was that the first death that you had in the war?**

Yeah. That was the first one. We thought "Oh shit.

10:00 That's not good." And then got on with it.

**How much time do you have to think about it, it obviously affects anybody but do you really have time to soak it up?**

Not really. If you are out in the bush you have even less time. I had other things to do. I was busy. So I just got on with it. I said, "Oh dear it's sad."

10:30 But it happens.

**How much can they really teach you in training and I suppose those early parts of the army in dealing with fatalities?**

They can't. They can't. There is no way known that they can adequately prepare you. You can do all the training you like. You can go into battle inoculation with the whiz bangs

11:00 going off around you but when the shit hits the fan it's totally different.

**What can they, they can't fully prepare you but is there anything they can do to help you just a little bit?**

Not really. I don't think so. You've just got to deal with it in your own way at the time. You either get on with it or you don't.

11:30 Simple.

**So what was the first operation you went on yourself?**

It was Fire Support Base Patt that we were at up north. There is, I was working out of the fire base as the intelligence rep at the fire base

12:00 and that's when the Long Hais happened. They had an Operation Hammersley I think, I'm not sure and we were operating a quarry for the engineers down south near the Long Hai mountains and we had Charlie Company down there looking after it

12:30 and they got attacked by D445 and it rolled from there and what we were doing up the north of the province, we completely switched it and moved down into Long Hai. A full battalion operation moved straight down into the Long Hai and tried to take them out which is a bit scary. They had a huge bunker system in there and I think on the

13:00 third day we lost 11, 8 of ours and 3 engineer mini-teams in a mining incident. The third day or was it near the end I forget but it was pretty nasty. We lost a few wounded and a few minor incidents where people were injured but 3 engineers and 8 of ours just in one second.

13:30 It was a bit traumatic. Luckily I didn't see it happen. I don't know how I would have reacted if I was on the spot when it happened but apparently the people handled themselves extremely well. But that was our big, the battalion's big action. The Long Hais. On the 28th February 1970.

14:00 It was celebrated every year or remembered rather than celebrated. After that I went to B Company.

**Before B Company. On the Long Hai what was your actual role and where were you?**

My role was still intelligence. I wasn't on the, I didn't get to

14:30 the front line as it were at that stage. I was still in the background doing the intelligence work which was irking me. I was both annoyed and relieved at the same time. I wanted to be out there with the troops getting into it and I was bloody glad I wasn't at the same time so a bit of a conflict there. After that

15:00 things changed with the battalion. We became far more serious about what we were doing and even though we were a professional unit when we arrived we became extremely more so after that.

**Because reality sets in?**

Oh yes. It was a bit reality blast that one. Up until then we had lost one.

15:30 **Did you know any of the guys who got killed?**

Yeah. Mainly knew of them, but I knew their names.

**How much is it sinking in what war is really like out there?**

At this stage. I knew it wasn't nice. I knew it was nasty but it was still what I did for a living

16:00 and I think that was my attitude through the whole thing. It was traumatic. Of course it was and I got scared. Everybody does. If they don't they are crazy.

**When that happened how does the battalion react? Do they have ceremonies for them or what is the next step for the dead?**

16:30 We had a, after the operation we had a ceremony. I don't remember much about it actually. I know we had something and we used that from then on it became more important the battalion birthday which is in June, August I think. But I think that was

17:00 the benchmark.

**Did you know any of the guys who actually saw it happen?**

Yeah.

**How did they react?**

They seemed fine. They didn't have any overt reaction to it. People got on with it. Later on maybe but not at the time.

**Was that part of the training to get you to get on with it?**

17:30 Maybe it's part of the training but also part of the make up. We are like that. Australians are like that. Something goes wrong you adapt and you get on with it.

**It seems, hard to put this but it seems a little bit like history is repeating itself with your father who was behind the front lines and wanted to get in the action. The same thing is happening to**

18:00 **you. What is your take on that?**

It was happening at that stage but it was remedied later.

**But did you realise that while you were there from your father's example the same thing?**

Nope. I didn't even think about it. I knew I had a job to do and it was a very important job and without my input and my teams input

18:30 the battalion couldn't function. We knew that.

**Were you working alone or with other intelligence officers?**

Mainly with others but occasionally we would be one up out on a fire base somewhere acting as the intelligence officer, doing the briefings and giving the information in and making sure that the fire base commander

19:00 knew exactly what was going on.

**It seemed like a very, very important job.**

It was a fairly responsible job for a private I thought.

**That's what I mean.**

That's the way it was. That's what we did.

**And the others were privates too?**

Yeah we had a couple of corporals. I think we had one corporal, lance corporal and the rest were privates and a sergeant looking after us.

19:30 **And you weren't that trained for the job were you?**

Not really. We were trained fairly well. We done the special operator intelligence course down at Woodside in South Australia and we had been doing it, well I had been doing it for twelve months before we went over so we were fairly good at what we did.

**How much is**

20:00 **common sense and intuition a part of that job?**

A fair bit. You've got to act on the solid intelligence. You can't afford to try and be too intuitive because we don't have the big picture. We are working local. There is a little bit. Someone could say "Well where do you think he's going to go next." "Well if I was him I would go over here."

20:30 And one of the other blokes would say "Yeah I agree with that" or "No, I don't agree with that. He'll go down here." But if you get a consensus of a few of us saying "Yeah he'll shoot up this way and that's where I think he's going to concentrate" then you give that information to the CO but you qualify it as intuition only. We just happen to agree and mainly we were right. Occasionally we were way off

21:00 and it wasn't acted on, luckily, but mostly we were fairly close.

**How do you sort the good intelligence from the bad that you are getting?**

You really don't know, it's bad intelligence until it all goes wrong. Until after the fact most of the time but you've just got to judge what you think is reliable and what isn't and you go with the most

21:30 reliable.

**Would you have sources that say for instance in the past have passed on bad information and you disregard them in the future?**

No we weren't dealing with intelligence at that level. We were mainly dealing with intelligence that was passed down to us. We weren't out there using or developing our own resources. It was all passed down

to us.

22:00 We weren't in the position to do that. We weren't an intelligence gathering organisation. We were mainly I suppose an interpreting and collating organisation for the battalion itself so we would just take what we were given and hope that at taskforce and above they had it right.

**Would any of the higher up intelligence officers visit the site?**

Oh yeah occasionally we would get

22:30 visits from people. We very rarely ever saw any members from actual intelligence corps. Most of them were either at taskforce or at Saigon.

**Did you see any CIA [American Central Intelligence Agency] or anything like that?**

No.

**So you are sort of behind the desk at this stage. Is that fair to say?**

Behind a desk but I'm still patrolling. Everybody had to do their share

23:00 of what we called the TAOR patrols [tactical area of responsibility patrols] around the perimeter of Nui Dat. We had our own responsibility and if you were in you still had the responsibility of patrolling on a roster system.

**Tell us about those patrols. What were they like and the formations and so on? What details can you give us?**

You usually go out as a section or a platoon patrol depending on your strength

23:30 at the time but you would be allotted an area and you would go out and you would ambush. You would come back in the next morning. So you would be allotted a point as an ambush point. A likely track or something like that that was possible the enemy would be using it during the night. That's all.

**And what position**

24:00 **would you take on that patrol?**

It varied. I could be the machine gunner. A couple of times I carried the gun out. Forward scout or merely a rifleman.

**Do you recall your first patrol and the emotions of that?**

I know I was scared

24:30 and I felt like I should have eyes in the back of my head. I was extremely aware of what was around me and I was even, I was more aware because the blokes that I was patrolling with I'd never worked with before. All the cooks and bottle washers etc

25:00 all had to patrol. So you would have within the battalion you would have them all over the place. The clerks, drivers whatever they were being utilised out in the scrub so you may not have worked with them before which is a bit scary in itself because you didn't know what they were likely to do.

**Did you recognise them from around base at least?**

Oh yeah.

25:30 We had known each other from around the base. Sometimes you didn't. You hadn't seen them before because the way the companies are situated they all had their own individual areas and very rarely is there any mixing. Not because we don't like each other but we have our own areas to control and usually stick to our company or in my case the battalion headquarters area.

26:00 **Really just to make it clear for the tape. The cook of course is trained just as well as any other of the men and so on.**

Well everybody in the battalion had to go through Canungra. It didn't matter if they were a cook, a bottle washer, a driver or whatever. They had to go through jungle training centre and pass it before they went overseas so at least they had a modicum of infantry knowledge and they were utilised as infantrymen on these

26:30 TAOR patrols. That's tactical area of responsibility - TAOR.

**So on this first patrol you must feel a lot of emotions going through you and?**

I think all of us were shitting ourselves. We didn't know what was going to go on. The section commander he didn't know what was going to happen. It was the first time he had ever taken one out so we were all green. Nothing happened.

27:00 Although we used to see them at a distance. They used to carry lamps the VC. In some cases there are a

lot of fireflies about and they would frighten the living shit out of you because you would see these lights and they were bloody fireflies.

**Got a strange thing here, mate.**

27:30 **What's going on? Okay we are back on. You are talking about the first patrol and the lights of these lamps and so on. Tell us that again.**

It was well known that the VC tended to travel with lamps and at night and we were up in the Nui Dinh mountains.

28:00 The ones opposite Nui Dat and knowing this we have set up the ambush position and all that and I'm on picket and I see all these bloody lights and I think "Oh fuck. How are we going to handle all these bloody people" and I'm just about to pull the communication cord to the section commander, and they started to dance around a bit and I thought, "You idiot. They are bloody fireflies."

28:30 But up until then they had frightened the living shit out of us and plus we had been told there were tigers around as well and every now and again you would see two of them go plonk and they would be about tiger eye width or what we considered was tiger eye width and you would be looking at these two fireflies and think "Shit it's a tiger. I'm going to get eaten here."

**The enemy is not bad enough do you think?**

Yeah.

29:00 **Did you actually see a tiger out on patrol?**

No but later on we knew there was one. A couple actually patrolling around one of our fire bases.

**And when you went on patrol how long would they last?**

They were overnights. Leave before last light and come back after first light. Leave after evening stand to and come before after morning stand to.

29:30 **And how much area would be covered in that?**

It depends on the distance. Probably a couple of kilometres out. It depends how far we had to go and what point had been designated.

**On that first patrol being out all night was there stress for the entire night or at what time did you start to relax a little bit?**

I suppose about 5 minutes after I got back inside

30:00 the wire I started to relax. The first night I was, I must admit I was shitting myself all night. There were two things. One there was the fear of the bastards actually being out there and two, if the shit hit the fan I would fail. They were the two. I think the second was more

30:30 severe than the first. I could handle. I expected the Nogs [North Vietnamese] to be out there but I wasn't, put it this way I wasn't prepared to fail if they were out there. That was the greatest pressure I think was to make sure I didn't fail.

**Do you know if that's how the other guys felt?**

No I don't. I know later on when

31:00 I was part of an infantry section full time it was. Their greatest fear was letting your mate down. Out there, I suppose it would have been but not having worked with these blokes before I couldn't say.

**Also just thinking about it when you go on patrol you can't talk much to them.**

No.

**So you can't even get to know these guys at all can you out there?**

No. You don't talk at all.

31:30 Everything is done at a very soft whisper close up or by hand signals.

**So how was working together? Did it work professionally or?**

It seemed to work out all right. Everybody had done their drills so when it came to set up the harbour it was fairly easy to set up. The section commander went around and positioned everybody properly when we set the ambush and

32:00 we just waited. Nothing happened and we came home.

**Was there a patrol where you had action at this point?**

Not at this point no.

**This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.**

35:34 **With the lack of action after that did it seem to you that the VC sort of got the message?**

No it was, they were wary of us because of the way we operated. We knew that they were out there. The fact that the lack of action meant that they were getting smarter and they were avoiding us

36:00 which made him even more dangerous.

**Would there, how far would they be able to infiltrate the area?**

I don't believe we had anybody infiltrate Nui Dat itself but they were all around there. They were in the hamlets and the towns and the mountains. They were always around.

36:30 **Was the patrols and so on more a defensive strategy rather than going out and finding them and attacking them?**

Yeah. Normal base security type arrangement. It worked in with the H & I fire from the artillery [harassment and interdiction - random artillery fire to deny territory to an enemy that he might find useful; not specifically targeted] that they used to call in the DFs [direction finders] every now and again and whoof around the hills a bit and

37:00 at likely spots. Same type of thing.

**How often would a patrol actually be sent right out to find them or?**

That was usually part of an operation whereas the company would send a patrol out. They would all be out and the sections of the platoons would be patrolling, looking for them.

37:30 This was mainly defensive, the TAOR patrols.

**Do you as an intelligence officer did you have an estimate on how many were out there?**

We were told we had the Chow Duk Company [?]. We had D445. We had 274 Regiment, I think it was, North Vietnamese and other small groups. We basically knew how many

38:00 there were within reason of course because you can never know for sure. We knew they were out there. We knew what they were doing and basically, their basic area of operation.

**How many were there?**

God you are testing my memory. D445 was, had worked back up to almost full battalion strength.

38:30 274 Regiment was mainly North Vietnamese we believed. We never had a full estimate on them that I can remember. We probably did and the Cho Nuk Company was just a couple of platoons of Viet Cong. Farmers by day, Viet Cong by night.

**What would happen if they made a major assault on Nui Dat all those VC?**

39:00 They would have got a very bloody nose. We had machine guns manned right around the perimeter 24 hours a day so they would have got a bloody nose.

**Was it expected that they would attack or they would just continue this guerrilla pocket?**

We didn't know. We didn't think there would be a

39:30 concerted large attack on the base because they learned that during Tet Offensive. In Saigon they tried it all over the place. They tried the two fire support bases Coral and Balmoral and been just about decimated. So they learned from that. They wouldn't try a set-piece attacks. That was our belief but we still catered for the

40:00 other side so we still even when the battalion was out the gun pits were manned so there was early warning at least.

**It sounds like the Australians were extremely focused.**

We were. We knew what we had to do. We don't have the man power to throw away like the Yanks have.

**On that we will stop and change tapes.**



## Tape 5

00:33 **The Americans.**

Yes. My opinion?

**Yes.**

The Americans. Extremely friendly and extremely generous people who in the main as infantry soldiers weren't worth feeding. They were poorly trained. They were poorly motivated.

01:00 They were poorly led, I believe.

**Can you tell us about the interaction you had with the Americans?**

It was good. In the main it was good. We didn't have many problems with them. The odd sniping that you always have.

**What do you mean the odd sniping?**

Oh have a go at them. Call them septic tanks and all that type of shit. In the main

01:30 I got on with them very well mainly the black ones.

**When and where did you come into contact with them?**

Well in Nui Dat we had Yank artillery. You would come into contact with them out in the field. You would do, sometimes you used to pass each other going out to an operation. Vung Tau we would meet them. I met them in Hong Kong on R & R [rest and recreation],

02:00 so there was a bit of interaction there.

**So socially speaking just outside the combat operational aspect you said that you generally got along with them. When you said mainly the black ones, why's that?**

Well I did. I think we used to make a point of going to the black ones because they were coolest. I don't know but we knew it used to upset some of the white ones

02:30 but we seemed to get along with them very well. I found anyway.

**What were your observations of the racial tensions between the Americans?**

You could see that there was a bit. It depended on the unit, Some of the American units there was none. Some of the others you could definitely see the divide between black and white.

**And you saw that from different units?**

Yeah. You could see it. You could see it in the way

03:00 they interacted. If you had a group. You never saw, you very rarely saw a group of mixed together out of the combat area. It was either whites or blacks. It was very rare that there was a mix and if there was then you knew that you were looking at members of a pretty good unit. Mainly they segregated themselves.

**Do you remember some of the**

03:30 **names of these units? I mean were they Marines, were they mechanised infantry or just generally speaking can you remember some of these units that you came into contact with?**

25th Infantry Division was the Big Red One, not the Big Red One - it was called The Electric Strawberry. The Big Red One was the 1st Infantry Division and the others were just general. A range of units

04:00 we saw out and about.

**A lot of the whites that you came across were they from the southern states?**

Quite a few from the southern states. Some of them I believe were there because their daddies had no influence and that's why they ended up in Vietnam. Cheap, uneducated cannon fodder.

04:30 **How would you compare the rural American from the south? Southern American from the states to a rural Australian in mentality from your experience?**

My experience was that your rural Yank especially from Texas was extremely introverted socially,

05:00 geographically and everything was big in Texas. A couple of Texans I was speaking to one day were telling me how good it was in Texas and I said, "Don't bullshit to me. We've got a ranch that's bigger than Texas." And they said "Mate. You are joking." And I said, "No. A place called Victoria Downs. It's been split into three and the biggest bit it still as big as Texas."

05:30 They wouldn't believe me. So a mate of mine had a map and he said, "That where it is and this is it's square mileage." And one of the Yanks went "Oh fuck." I said "So don't talk to me about what's big and what isn't." "Okay!"

06:00 But I still found, in the main I still found them friendly people. I didn't have much to complain about. I didn't have to fight beside them which was a bloody good thing. It would frighten the shit out of me.

**The Americans?**

Yeah.

**All right now we are talking operationally.**

Yeah.

**What were the rumours circulating about Americans and what**

06:30 **were your own experiences with Americans?**

The rumour was they were all dope. The ones that I came in contact with there was no suggestion of it. You soon worked out that yeah maybe there was in the minority but certainly in the majority that I came across there was no suggestion of it at all. But we knew their tactics were shit.

07:00 **What were their tactics?**

Arrogance I think. Except for their specialist like their Rangers and Green Berets their idea of going into an area was to make as much noise as possible and let the North Vietnamese come to them which was not the way to operate.

07:30 Our idea was that we took the war to the enemy and the more noise you make the bigger crabs you draw and that's the way they operated in the main. That's why they got the shit kicked out of them.

**What sort of stories were you or being intelligence yourself you would have more access than a normal soldier would to hear**

08:00 **information about what was happening around Phuoc Tuy Province. I mean what would you see in the news, what would you see in the newspapers, what was generally discussed?**

We didn't see news. We didn't see the newspapers.

**There wasn't any sort of local news for soldiers there?**

No. Not really. Stars and Stripes maybe, the army newspaper. What did they told you? Squat. That was just all social shit and public relations.

**So you didn't know what was happening outside Phuoc Tuy Province?**

No.

08:30 **Whether the war was going bad or good?**

No. No idea.

**That's an interesting experience.**

We probably didn't think about it. As far as we were concerned then there was no way of knowing that we ever envisaged not winning.

**With the black American**

09:00 **soldiers you came into contact with, what was the difference between them and the whites in terms of their attitude and what sort of observations could you make?**

I suppose the blacks were more fatalistic than the whites.

**More fatalistic? What do you mean?**

They realised they were just cannon fodder. The whites thought they were something a bit better than that maybe I don't know. They appeared to be more fatalistic

09:30 about it.

**How would they manifest this, how would they demonstrate it?**

Just the way they spoke. You got the impression that they quite expected to die there. They acted accordingly I guess.

**Did you make any good friends amongst them?**

No. Our interaction wasn't long enough.

**Did you notice anything about the civil rights movement**

10:00 **popping up within the American army?**

No.

**Black power.**

You heard about it but that's all you did just heard about it. Maybe that somewhere it may have happened but that's all it was. Rumour and innuendo.

**You also mentioned before, now this was rampart in American ranks, fragging.**

10:30 Yeah.

**You said when you got off at Saigon not long after settling in your base there was a fragging incident.**

There was.

**Can you tell us about that incident?**

It was 6 Platoon, B Company, 9 Battalion's platoon commander and it was - the

11:00 bloke was actually after the platoon sergeant. The platoon sergeant and platoon commander shared the tent and what had happened was the bloke who actually turned out to be my platoon commander in the end was sharing the tent because he was over in the advance party and he was supposed to be sleeping in the sergeant's tent, in the sergeant's bed. They got out, they had a do on, they got pissed and they just fell into the nearest bed and luckily Johnny Bryan, my platoon commander

11:30 moved into the other lieutenant's bed and the other lieutenant just collapsed in the sergeant's bed. The bloke who had a grudge against the sergeant he came up and he reached up, pulled the pin out of a grenade, reached through between the beds and the sandbags and just dropped a grenade on his mosquito net and just walked away. So by the time it sank down it exploded and just blew him to the shithouse.

12:00 I don't think my platoon commander even woke up. He was that pissed. Apparently his mosquito net and mattress were shredded around him. He didn't get a scratch.

**How long after you came did this happen?**

Probably about a week. Inside the first week. First couple of days, first week I'm not sure which

12:30 but we had only been there a few days.

**And that was the first casualty you'd seen?**

Well I didn't see it.

**Experienced?**

Yeah, we'd heard about it because I was in battalion headquarters and B Company was down the road.

**What went through your mind when you heard about this, the fragging incident?**

I thought "Shit. That's a bit serious. What had this bastard done?"

**What actually did, what did you actually find out?**

13:00 I never found out the full story but the sergeant had it in for this private and it was the sergeant that this bloke was after, from my memory anyway. I could be wrong. It's only about 35 years ago.

**Only. You had better get it out now before you forget when you are 70.**

13:30 **You probably knew about this happening in the Americans ranks of course.**

Yeah we had heard about it. We had heard rumours about 9 Battalion, that there were a few problems between the blokes and their officers during their tour but that was also just rumour.

**Now what do you think caused these tensions to explode to such proportions?**

I've no idea. I don't know the full story

14:00 but obviously either somebody was unbalanced or it was a build up. I know they dragged him away and locked him up. I think he got 10 or 11 years in Long Bay Gaol or something.

**Do you think out on the battlefield even though there is a set command structure and rules of engagement and so forth**

14:30 **anything can pretty well happen can't it? Even amongst your own troops?**

Yes.

**And it does?**

Yes it has been known to.

**What can happen under these circumstances?**

I suppose if you were the type of person who took an extreme dislike to somebody and wanted to do something about it in a contact situation it wouldn't be hard especially if they were

15:00 in front of you. In the heat of the moment when the shit hits the fan put one through the back of their head. If you wanted to. It's that easy.

**You reckon it happens often?**

No. I don't think so because self preservation is a more, what can I say?

15:30 Is a stronger urge than revenge most of the time and you know that you've got to rely, all of you have got to rely on each other.

**What about between differing units, A Company, B Company?**

No.

**Do you ever get a rivalry that can build up to such proportion?**

No. A friendly rivalry. Between us and the MPs yeah.

16:00 **MPs?**

Between the infantry and the MPs yeah. No it wouldn't be a problem. We would just shoot the lot of the bastards if we got an opportunity.

**But seriously how rife was the tension between the MPs and the infantry?**

Very.

**Really that bad?**

Mmm.

**And can you tell us why this sort of tension existed? What caused it?**

When we used to go down to Vung Tau for our R & C [rest in country]

16:30 which was basically the weekend off and we would get close to curfew early on in the piece the MP's they would drive around in the Land Rover and pick blokes up. Say you wanted to go back to the base and they would do the rounds and get back to base after curfew and charge the blokes they picked up with breaking curfew and it didn't go down well with us. So it got to the stage if we ever seen one and we had the opportunity

17:00 we would have shot them. We had no time for the MPs whatsoever.

**Did that ever happen to the MPs in Vietnam? Were there any incidents of fragging with MPs?**

I know we took to a few at the Grand Hotel one night but I don't think we killed anybody.

**You obviously got into a brawl with them?**

Yes there was one.

**You are here still.**

Yes.

**What about them?**

A few were sick, sore and sorry for themselves.

17:30 **So what sort of incidents would you get into a brawl with them? I mean Grand Hotel where are you referring to?**

Vung Tau.

**This was off duty.**

Yeah.

**So they were off duty as well?**

No. Just started throwing their weight around and somebody took umbrage and one of them hit one of

our people I believe and it was on and they called for

18:00 American support because we were kicking the living shit out of them.

**And American MPs came in?**

So we took them on as well.

**How many of your?**

I think there was only about 20 of us.

**Gee you are modest aren't you?**

Yeah. It was an interesting evening.

**How many MPs were there?**

18:30 Probably ended up about 40 of them I guess. But they didn't charge any of us. They couldn't find us. That was an interesting evening.

**What, generally speaking what was the background of an MP?**

I really don't know. Some of them were civilian coppers who had been National Servicemen and just continued

19:00 on being coppers basically in the army. Others I don't really know. They were attracted to it for some reason or other. We didn't call them meatheads for nothing. Some of them probably were reasonable people. I didn't run into any. As far as I was concerned they were all pricks.

19:30 **They would only operate in Vung Tau area was it?**

Yeah.

**Not in the operational area at all?**

No. They stayed quite well out of harms way which was another reason why we didn't like them because they would try and police us but then again they are sitting in a nice air conditioned area in Nui Dat, not

20:00 Nui Dat, Vung Tau and we are out there doing the hard yards. Of course that didn't go down very well either. Still hate MPs, and I'm in the police force.

**So you've really got a gripe against them?**

I can't help it.

**When did you, did you ever had a personal run in with an MP on your own accord?**

No.

**Did they treat you badly in any**

20:30 **sort of incident?**

Just getting charged for breaking curfew.

**So they were very strict on that?**

Yeah.

**Do you think they were unnecessarily strict on that?**

Yes I do. They upset a lot of people unnecessarily so whereas they could have just taken us back to base and just said, "Well, it's beyond curfew don't get caught out again fellows. See you later." And made big men of themselves and nice blokes they had to be pricks.

21:00 **With the infantry did they have any understanding unless they were infantry themselves. I think generally to be an MP you have to have some sort of background in army before that isn't it? You can't just join straight into the MPs?**

Theoretically yes but all you have to do is go to corps training and then go to the MPs. You didn't have to have any solid experience.

**So you are saying that basically they didn't have an understanding of the**

21:30 **pressures the infantry face?**

No. None whatsoever.

**That's very interesting.**

That's my belief anyway.

**Tell us about Vung Tau? Your leave there when you would go there.**

You would hit the bars, pick up a tart, pay for her and disappear for a couple of days and that was about it. Get drunk.

22:00 Have a massage and head job.

**Where was your PCOD?**

The what?

**You haven't heard of 'pussy cut off date'?**

Pussy cut off date. No I haven't heard that one. We would have 2 days, two nights and basically three days down at Vung Tau every month.

22:30 That was our weekend a month.

**So what were the types of places you could go and visit?**

If you wanted to be culturally aware there were some temples and things and mainly you would hit the bars and pick up a bar girl and root yourself stupid. That's what we did.

**The bar girl. That's an interesting term.**

Yeah, pick up the bar girls.

**These are basically hookers?**

23:00 Yeah, they worked the bars.

**And what was the, was there a system working there where the military policed in that sense? In the enforced, like the brothel system?**

Medically they used to keep an eye on it and if you got the jack from one of the girls they would close the bar down.

23:30 So the girls were very careful so I didn't get laid while I was over there. A couple of blokes did but not many.

**There was the, what was it the 'suck, fuck' clubs? They were, were they in any way different to the normal bar?**

I think there was the Oasis, which was steam bath, massage and head job place. That was rather good.

**That's a 'steam and cream'.**

Yeah. They were wonderful.

24:00 Absolutely wonderful. There's a saying that "What was your worst head job like?" and the answer to that is "Bloody magnificent."

**So that was the local language amongst the Aussies there, they call it steam and cream?**

24:30 I believe so. I don't recall hearing the steam and cream term at the time, but I've heard it since.

**And 'suck, fuck' of course?**

Yeah.

**That was just a brothel?**

Basically or you can have a hair cut and get a head job at the same time.

**Are you serious?**

I'm very serious. The most difficult haircut I ever had.

25:00 My mate was giving me a razor cut at the time. It was very hard to concentrate on this bloke wielding a razor around my head.

**You would never find it in Australia.**

No. But there would be a market for it.

**We might get around to it one day.**

Yeah why not.

**What was the cost involved?**

I forget now.

25:30 It was bugged all. We used to pay them in piastres or MPC [military payment certificates] but I forget what it was. MPC we used to pay them. I don't know how much it used to cost. I can't remember.

**How important was this association with women?**

Very.

**Why was that?**

Pressure release.

26:00 You got to forget about it for a while. Unwind. You needed time to unwind. It was only once per month.

**Was that enough?**

Probably. It depends. Probably in the greater scheme of things maybe not. It's better than nothing.

**Did the men develop, any of the soldiers that you are aware of develop any sexual disorders? When I say disorders I'm saying above the normal?**

No I don't think so.

26:30 **Excessively visiting the brothels?**

Not that I'm aware of.

**Is there such a thing under those circumstances?**

No. Well we didn't have time anyway. You are only there for, only down there for two nights.

**Were there any soldiers that deserted or AWL if you like?**

Maybe AWL. Got lost, decided to stay and root themselves stupid I don't know. None from my unit

27:00 that I can recall.

**What about the officers? What was different about the interaction with officers and soldiers? Would they go to Vung Tau, the same bars? What was their scheme?**

You very rarely saw the officers. I think they very wisely distance themselves because you can't bitch about your officers if they are there.

27:30 So the officers and the sergeants we didn't see them down in Vung Tau. They did their own thing away from us which is probably a good idea.

**Why do you say that? Why good?**

These diggers were under their command 24 hours a day and their decisions basically dictated whether we lived or

28:00 died I guess. You didn't want to live with them when you were enjoying yourself. You could unwind more and you and your mates could bitch about your sergeant or whatever and get all that off your chest. There is nothing wrong with a good bitch session like that rather than having to watch what you say because they are there. I think it's very healthy.

28:30 **So the sergeants would go their own way? They wouldn't associate with you guys?**

I never saw the sergeants down there or the officers.

**So basically anyone under sergeant? Lance corporal, corporal, privates?**

They had their own thing. You might see them in passing but we didn't go out with them.

**What sort of, can you give us an illustration of the conversations, the theme of the conversations**

29:00 **you would have with your mates? Under that sort of pressure and you've come back from the front line, you've had tension for a month and then you go to Vung Tau and screw his brains out and go back to a pub and talk to his mates and drink.**

You'd compare notes on how good your root was compared to his. Laugh a lot. Act like five year old kids.

29:30 Giggled incessantly go back and root some more. That's about it. There is no deep and meaningful discussions held.

**Was the deep and meaningful on the field? Is that why?**

Life was serious enough. You didn't need to carry on those pressures

30:00 on your off time.

**Your first month in Vietnam how long was it before you got into your first operational contact?**

I didn't have my first operational contact until I went to B Company.

**How long was that into your tour?**

Probably three months.

**So you hadn't seen any fighting up until then?**

Not first hand no.

**When you say not first hand what do you mean?**

I'd heard about it. I'd been out there and

30:30 I'd seen the results of it but I hadn't actually been shot at.

**What about a real mortar attack did you ever encounter that?**

No.

**What were the changes? What were the differences taking place in you in the first three months before your first operational contact? I mean most Vietnam vets, I get the impression when they first come to Vietnam, they are just all like all**

31:00 **the Noggies are going to be dressed in, in their own words, 'black pyjamas, those hats and AK47s'. When they come there everything suddenly changes and it is different and hang on you suddenly see the grey areas and things are. How did that change you? What were the grey areas that you saw with liaising with the population and things like that? What did you start to see unfolding?**

One,

31:30 that you didn't know who was VC and who wasn't. That was one thing, that one thing. You would look at everybody and think, "It gets dark, what are you going to be doing?" I don't know. The liaise I had with the people mainly through TAOR search or road block type incidents I didn't have any

32:00 I suppose social contact with them at that stage. I didn't, grey areas mainly the fact that you didn't know who was who and you knew that it wasn't all black and white

32:30 but you didn't think about it too much. You didn't go into a great philosophical thought process. I thought about it a bit but I tended to be a bit of a deep thinker and write poetry and all that type of good stuff but I don't think I went into it that deeply.

33:00 **Well how would you say you had changed in your first six months as a person from your experience in Vietnam?**

My life began in Vietnam.

**Why do you say that?**

Everything before that was nothing. Who I am was forged in Vietnam so therefore that's where I was born basically.

33:30 All my attitudes since. All my actions since. My thinking the lot was all forged in Vietnam I believe.

**So you are saying there was a decisive change in who you were from that point on?**

Yes. I believe so. I still retain some of the stuff I had beforehand. A lot of my father's

34:00 influence but in the main that's where I began.

**Is it, when you say that are you saying also that what your father had taught you was it, did you find that it wasn't useful?**

A lot of it was bullshit. A lot of it was useful.

34:30 A lot of the attitude was useful but a lot of what he had told me was flawed because he was seeing it from one point of view and I was seeing it from a completely different point of view. To him had I not have gone to Vietnam his information may have been accurate to me but because

35:00 I'd gone to Vietnam and I'd seen it I found out that in some respects he didn't know what he was talking about.

**So when did this realisation take place? This is a very significant thing.**



28th February 1970 when the Long Hai hit us. I think that's where it really started to dawn on me. Things started to change.

35:30 **What started to change exactly?**

I don't know. My attitudes. The fact that I no longer believed what the politicians were feeding me and kind of believed that I tended to be cannon feeder at the whim of the politicians and that I could no longer trust what they were telling me. That would have been

36:00 the most significant change in me at that time. Until then I believed what the government was telling me. The fact that we lost 11 people in one fell swoop and then they decided, "Oh dear me, we have lost too many we are going to have to pull out of here," instead of finishing the job and political interference. Let us fight the thing and get out of our way.

36:30 Everything you have been feeding us is bullshit.

**So you felt that they died for nothing in that sense, in that specific incident?**

In that sense yeah. So we just had to go back and repeat the effort.

**Do you think that if the job was done and say another couple of dozen Aussies got killed as a result but the job was done,**

37:00 **would you have preferred that?**

Yeah because at least then there would have been a result. Yes it's sad we lost all these people but we did this. Rather than we lost all these people so we ran away which is the feeling the government gave us that we were doing. We weren't. We didn't but that's the type of feeling

37:30 we were given.

**What about your view of the Vietnamese people? How did you view them from the time you arrived? What were the ground realities?**

They were strange, different. I felt I

38:00 couldn't trust them at that stage but since then my attitudes have changed. I've got no problems with the Vietnamese people. In fact I have worked with them since.

**Regardless of where they were from or who their political allegiance was to? Whether they were north or south?**

That's immaterial now. At the time it would have made a difference but now it's immaterial.

38:30 They could be Ho Chi Minh's cousin for all I care.

**Did you respect the Vietnamese?**

I respected what they could do. I hated their viciousness but I respected the fact that they were a viable fighting force and they were dangerous.

**Who did you respect more, the NVA or the**

39:00 **VC?**

The VC.

**The VC more?**

I think so. Mainly because I dealt with the VC more I guess.

**Can you tell us any instance where you saw the VC in a really brave valorous conduct in battle against the Aussies? Any particular incident that may stand out in your mind?**

Not from my point of view. No.

**Or any general types of things that you saw that**

39:30 **left an impression that these guys are good?**

There's nothing I could say because our main contacts with them were ambushes, where we caught them of guard and we decimated them. We killed the bloody lot in one foul swoop so they didn't really have the opportunity to be heroic which is a good thing from my point of view. No it's a good thing

40:00 because they don't have the opportunity to shoot back if they are dead so we don't want to give them opportunity to be heroic. There were no incidents that I can think of in that regard. Stories I've heard later on from other people and from Vietnamese themselves yeah. At that stage, no.

40:30 **Okay, well we are out of tape.**

## Tape 6

00:30 **You went to B Company. What were the reasons for that?**

I had a slight difference of opinion with the intelligence officer who was a captain at the time. We didn't see eye to eye and I basically told him he was a fuckwit so I ended up as a rifleman in B Company.

**What was it you didn't see eye to eye on?**

We had a difference of opinion

01:00 about something. I actually forget what it was all about but I do know that I called him a fuckwit which of course privates don't do to captains.

**Do you recall if it was a personal issue or just a?**

It was personal.

**And so when you went to B Company they put you in the front lines as it were?**

I got chucked in as forward scout.

01:30 **Which is what you wanted wasn't it?**

Basically yeah.

**Were you sad to leave and go to B Company?**

Apprehensive because I was going to do something different and I was definitely going to be in harms way so naturally I was apprehensive. Excited but apprehensive.

**Did the confrontation with this guy**

02:00 **did he intentionally put you in harms way as you call it?**

No. He just wanted me out of his hair.

**At that time though you would have been pretty accustomed to your job and your role.**

Yes I was.

**So it must have taken you out of a slight comfort zone in way. Is that correct to say?**

Yes. It took me right out of the comfort zone

02:30 into something completely different.

**So what was the first reaction when you went to B Company?**

Shit I don't know what I'm doing and I think I lasted as the forward scout for about 15 minutes and the section commander said,

03:00 "Get out of there!" That was the first time and I slowly learned what I should have been doing and how to do it properly. Things I'd actually forgotten since the time I had been in the intelligence section.

**So what was B Company all about? What were you doing there?**

We were patrolling. Mainly patrolling

03:30 around the area and I was lucky I was put into 6 Platoon which was Johnny Bryan was the platoon commander. He was a good boss. Bob Ritchie was the platoon sergeant and he was an arsehole. The section commander was Porky Smith and he was a extremely good man and

04:00 the people I worked with I suppose were there closest people, the closest I have ever been to people.

**How did the patrolling with B Company compare to the patrolling you were doing before?**

It was safer. The people I was with knew what they were doing. That was the difference. Everybody knew what they were doing.

04:30 They looked at me rather askance I guess when I arrived there because I was a risk. I didn't know what I was doing properly but that soon changed. You learned very quickly and picked it up and then I was at the same level of expertise as them and they knew that they could rely on me and I could certainly rely on them. There were a couple of them I didn't like but it didn't make

05:00 any difference. As long as you can rely on each other out in the scrub it doesn't matter if you like each

other or not. The majority of them I did like.

**How long did that take to get that relationship?**

Out in the scrub about a week. That's all. Once we got past that original week it was fine.

05:30 **Can you take us through that first patrol with B Company?**

It wasn't difficult. We patrolled. Just cruised through the jungle as it were on an operation. I forget the name of the operation. We found nothing at that stage and it was after I think the first operation I did with B Company I ended up going on an R & R to Hong Kong.

06:00 I did basically that operation then I was gone for six days and then I was back.

**Was it as scary that first patrol with B Company as the first patrol you ever did?**

No. I knew the people I was with were far more professional than the people I was with on the first patrol. I'd done a few patrols since the first one and you could tell the difference.

06:30 **How? What were the differences?**

Very subtle differences but the way people moved, the way they acted in the bush. You could tell immediately that you were dealing with professionals who knew exactly what they were doing. That was the difference.

07:00 **So you felt much safer with them?**

Yeah.

**Then you went to Hong Kong.**

Yeah.

**And what did you find in Hong Kong?**

Another woman that cost me quite a lot of money for six days and six nights and then went back to Vietnam. Saw the sights of Hong Kong.

07:30 Rooted myself stupid and then went back to war.

**Was there many Aussies over there?**

Yeah. A few of us went over. It was quite funny. I went through with a party from the battalion one of whom was a full lieutenant and the Yanks treated him like God because they thought he was a two star general. We were his entourage so straight onto the plane thank you very much. They are strip searching everybody else and, "Straight on, Sir, here you go."

08:00 It was quite funny.

**Why Hong Kong? Did you get a choice of where you went?**

Yeah. There was Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore. I think, I don't know whether Singapore was at that stage but it was Hong Kong, Bangkok, Australia and somewhere else but I forget where it was. I picked Hong Kong because I had never been there. It was a good enough excuse to go.

08:30 **So you had to just fill in a form and that was it?**

Yeah.

**So why didn't you choose Australia and come back home for a bit?**

I wasn't committed here, and I wanted to go somewhere different.

**Where you ready to come back to Australia yet or?**

No. I don't think I was because I was only what a third, just over a

09:00 third way through my tour.

**And that would have, that third had a big impact on you as you say?**

Yeah.

**Would it be fair to say you are still adjusting to what was happening?**

Yeah probably.

**At Hong Kong what was the set up over there like in terms of brothels and bars and so on?**

09:30 **The same as everywhere else or different?**

It seemed to be different. Booked into a hotel and next thing I know there is a knock on the door and

I'm offered a woman. What's a man to do? So I forget how much she cost me for six days and six nights, but it wasn't too much. She was mine for that period.

**Did she speak English?**

Yeah. Very good English.

10:00 **In that case for six days and six nights is it more than sex or is it sex basically?**

Probably a bit more. You go for a bit of a wander around the place. I think it is just something completely removed from where you've been and I think that's important thing. It's completely removed.

**You are still walking around in uniform?**

No in civvies.

10:30 **So you can really feel far from the action?**

Yeah.

**How much did you have a dread of going back or were you looking forward to going back?**

I wasn't looking forward to going back as such except for the fact by not going back I would be letting my mates down and that was more important to me

11:00 than anything else.

**And you had a lot of mates with you there at Hong Kong?**

No. I think I knew one of the blokes personally who came with me and I forget which hotel he was in. I didn't see him until we got back on the plane.

11:30 **You probably had someone knocking on his door.**

Probably, exactly.

**With the girl and the six days, does it ever become more than a business relationship so to speak?**

It does. I believe it does. It could have. She was a doll. Absolute doll.

12:00 **Did she expect another six days or more after that?**

No. She knew what the go was. That was her job. She did it extremely well.

**Do you know how she felt about her job and?**

Not really. I think she saw it as a

12:30 way to help her family I think because of the money. As far as I know. I got no insight into it. I wasn't delving that deep.

**So when you returned from Hong Kong you went straight back to B Company?**

Yep and straight on a chopper and out in the scrub again.

13:00 **Did it seem a little bit surreal jumping from Hong Kong straight back into the scrub?**

A little bit. I didn't worry about it. Now that I look back on it yeah but at the time no.

**That few days in Hong Kong how are you completely relaxed after it or does it just help to get your through?**

13:30 It just helps to get you through you are never completely relaxed.

**You would have to go home forever for that or - ?**

Something like that, but I'm still not completely relaxed.

**So you return back and continue with B Company?**

Yeah.

**What mixing with the locals were you having during that time?**

Not much.

14:00 Just see them basically. You wouldn't have anything to do with them. That was the job of other people.

**Which other people was that?**

The Psy Ops people [army public affairs]. People like that that were dealing with the hearts and minds of the populus.

**Did you have any inkling of what the populace thought about what was going on?**

No. Not really.

**Did you ever think to yourself what they would be thinking if you were in their shoes?**

I can't recall. I may have but I can't recall whether I did or not now.

I know that they were basically caught, the meat in the sandwich which can be rather traumatic I guess.

**How would you identify the enemy?**

In my case the North Vietnamese by their uniform. Viet Cong by the weapon or if he started shooting at me.

That's one way to identify or someone we just hit in an ambush. That's Viet Cong.

**Was that one of the hardest things about Vietnam identifying the enemy?**

Yep. I guess so.

**What role would women and children play amongst the VC?**

Exactly the same. Weapons,

they would carry weapons and fight just like the rest of them.

**So identifying the enemy, when it is women and children does it make it harder?**

I guess so. There is still this thing that you don't hurt women or children so it does make it difficult.

**That philosophy though of women and children is more a western philosophy in a way.**

Yes.

**So for them would you say it was an everyday occurrence and a part of their culture that women and children would be involved?**

Not necessarily. I think in the philosophy of the movement, yes. Of the national liberation front movement, it would have been. But the general populace, probably no.

**Did you have instances where you saw soldiers or whatever being confronted by women and children?**

No. I was lucky in that respect.

**I guess after a while you just have to realise that the enemy is the enemy no matter who they are or what age they are?**

Exactly.

**It must be very difficult for some soldiers to get their head around that?**

Yes it would be and it could affect them badly.

**Did you know of any that were affected in that way?**

No

I can't say that I do. I know people who have been affected by their service but I don't know if that was one of the reasons or some other reason.

**Isn't the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] were said to sometimes be VC by night.**

Yeah.

**What do you know about that?**

I know that it did occur. We had no, I had no personal experience of it but I know that it did occur.

**From your intelligence or from?**

From both and from word of mouth that it had happened.

**So how would that affect the trust of the ARVN that were being trained?**

It would affect it a little.

**Would it mean that they weren't going to be trained as well?**

19:00 I'm not sure. We had nothing to do with the actually training of the ARVN. That was the training team's job and we had very little interaction with the ARVN unless they were in I suppose provincial headquarters area or something like that we may run into them. But other than that no. The odd outpost here or there. Village protection.

19:30 I had very little to do with them.

**You said earlier that one way of identifying the enemy is when they fired upon you.**

Yeah it's a pretty good indication.

**Pretty good one but in some cases is that a bit late?**

Yes. Sometimes you make a judgment call and hope you are right.

20:00 Most of the time you were.

**For Australian troops that would have also been one of the first time the enemy couldn't be identified by uniform in their military history.**

Probably.

**How did they handle teaching about it and things that they hadn't really confronted before like that?**

They seemed to manage all right.

20:30 I didn't see any problems in the teachings.

**What would they say about identifying the enemy in Vietnam? Would they say those three things you told us earlier or?**

Basically. Address their weapons. If they were carrying weapons they were obviously the enemy and their actions and that was it.

21:00 Not much else you can say. If they were dressed the same as the local peasants you can't say everybody is dressed in black pyjamas shoot them.

**Did you have an occasion where you not where you didn't identify the enemy**

21:30 **correctly? I think you know of the situation I'm talking about.**

Yeah, yes. I was tailing Charlie into the rubber and I'm doing my normal rearward sweep and I see this bloke coming out of the jungle at the edge of the rubber and I see another bloke behind him and they were wearing greenish type uniform

22:00 and didn't pick the pith helmets for some reason so I waved to him. I don't know why and he waved back and he turned around and walked back into the jungle. Across the first blokes back was an RPG7 [rocket-propelled grenade] and by the time I told the section commander they were gone. They were gone. That was

22:30 I didn't know they were the vanguard of something but it was reported in. Apparently it was only a small group. I didn't even think about it. Obviously as quick as it was to wave to him and just turn around and walk off. Pretty gutsy thing for them to do to.

**Seems like a very Australian thing to do?**

G'day mate.

23:00 **You must have been happy though that it didn't progress into more?**

Yeah. I can do without the rockets being fired into the trees, thanks.

**Did you know of a lot of occurrences just like that without killings just simple misidentification?**

Yeah apparently it happened every now and again. Walk past and "G'day."

23:30 **We've also heard that they had the, the VC had the same vacation spot in was it Nui Dat?**

No Vung Tau. Around the peninsula was the most magnificent French restaurant, seafood restaurant and I was around there one day with this young lady and these people are looking at me,

- 24:00 they are all looking at me. And I started to think, "What the hell? I'm the only white person here." And I had a feeling and I thought, "We'd better leave here." And then she told me, "I forgot." I said, "Why?" and she said, "VC." And I said, "Thank you very much," and then I found out that was their R & C centre. I was in the middle of it. So as I was leaving I basically
- 24:30 drank my glass and walked out. A couple of them went cheers and we left each other alone.
- I suppose they need vacations too.**
- Everybody needs a rest.
- Somehow though just in that town you seem to get along really. You lived with each other, you seemed to**
- 25:00 **put up with each other.**
- Yeah. We had more problems with the MPs than we did with the VC in Vung Tau. You could trust the VC in Vung Tau. That's the difference.
- Doesn't say much for the MPs.**
- No
- Do you know of any soldiers at all that became friendly with VC at all while on holiday?**
- No.
- 25:30 I can't recall anything. I don't think it would have happened.
- Maybe unknowingly.**
- Maybe unknowingly. It's possible but I think we were a) too busy getting pissed and laid to worry about things like that and b) far too aware of what was going on around us despite getting pissed and laid.
- 26:00 **Just little instances like the bar one, does it sort of humanise the VC a bit for you?**
- I guess so. I guess they were always human to me. I just happen to be on the opposite side.
- And during that time were you thinking about what they were fighting for or just fighting?**
- No not really. I've always believed it wasn't my job to die for my country
- 26:30 it was my job to make him die for his. Simple as that. The fact that he was fighting for a cause he believed in was immaterial, because so was I. So that didn't come into it.
- Do you recognise, did you recognise back then that you were both fighting for causes that you think are right?**
- Yeah.
- 27:00 **Did other soldiers around you think like that?**
- I don't know. I don't think we really discussed it.
- You don't know at all if that was a majority view?**
- No. I don't know what the others were thinking along those lines at that stage.
- Many soldiers in order to**
- 27:30 **fight in their own minds at least have to dehumanise the opposition and make them the evil to cope and to get through it. Did you find that with a few soldiers that?**
- I think so, a few of them.
- And what actions would they take?**
- It's not so much what actions they took then I suppose
- 28:00 their regard since for the people that was more telling I think. That they did nothing different it's just the way they saw the opposition at the time. I didn't have to dehumanise them to kill them. That's the way I saw it. We both had jobs to do. His job was to kill me and my job was to kill him.
- 28:30 Simple. The ultimate contact sport.
- In a way is that a way of you coping keeping it simple like that?**
- Yeah, most likely.
- When you were much earlier in the day you said you were raised amongst different races and so on so I would presume with what you say earlier I don't think that you are not racist at all.**

29:00 **Do you know soldiers that were that element of racism came into them fighting?**

Yes.

**How would that show itself?**

I don't know. Just the way they spoke about the Vietnamese people. It's just the way they, you know it's one thing to refer to them as Nogs and it's another way to really put some spite into it.

29:30 They were Nogs. That's the way we described them. We were Nogs but it was in no way, as far as I was concerned we weren't dehumanising them. It was just identifying. Others took it further and some of them still hate them for some reason. Everybody's different.

**Again did you feel your views of being quite**

30:00 **open to other cultures was different to a majority of the soldiers you were fighting with?**

Probably. It was probably unusual for the times.

**Did you recognise that fact?**

A little I guess. I didn't make an issue out of it but I recognised it.

30:30 **In a way you were ahead of the game weren't you?**

Yeah I believe so.

**With the VC when you did identify them**

31:00 **just one second. What was the first major piece of action you had with B Company?**

I don't know if it was major. I had a lot of little actions rather than major.

**And the first little action you had what was that type?**

31:30 **What was that incident?**

We ran into a scout of another party and a bloke PJ Hayes all he had in his hand at the time was an M79 and with grapeshot in it and he let that off and away we went into a contact drill. He missed him. That was my first contact. One shot was fired in it. The old heart was pound, pound, pound.

32:00 I was shitting myself. We took out a small hamlet at one stage and we received a bit of fire from that. We swept through it and got nothing but I suppose Dougy Hayes got his feet blown off was a minor incident.

32:30 So I suppose that was hairy.

**And you were around for that?**

Yeah I remember that one. I still have a recurring dream about that one. We had just changed over and I was forward scout and I would have been the one who trod on it. That's my recurring dream. I hit it plink behind me and there's the drum right there ready

33:00 to blow.

**And it could have been you?**

Yeah.

**When that happened what's the first reaction of the group?**

It blew in the ground and took his feet off. We all went to ground and realised it was a mine and yelled out mine whoever it was upfront.

33:30 We started clearing. I was clearing to my left with a bayonet. I had moved to my left and I was in a little bit of a muddy patch. We were off the track. We were over here. Dougy had made the mistake of going too close to a track junction I guess. I probably would have done the same and I moved my, I'd moved into the cleared bit and the instep of my left boot,

34:00 the imprint there was three prongs. So it was close but it could have been worse. I still had my feet.

**So he just lost his feet.**

Lost his feet and most of the section got a bit of shrapnel. It didn't jump which was just as well because it would have taken half the platoon out.

34:30 **You were unharmed completely.**

Except for my arse. That was moving a little quickly.



**So in that case the mine just went off and there was no further action?**

Mmm.

**So you have a soldier down what did you do?**

We got a medivac in and choppered him out.

35:00 Secured the area first and got a chopper in and got him out and continued. Got the wounded out, the other wounded out and continued patrolling.

**Was it easy for the chopper to get in?**

Yeah.

**So it was an open area?**

It was open.

**Okay. When that happens and a mine goes up are you in a minefield or is that one off?**

35:30 Just random. Barrier mines to start with. There is a thing called a barrier minefield that was laid early on in the piece and the nogs used to get in there and lift them and use them against us. They are very cunning little bastards. Very cunning. Very innovative, I'd say.

**Which is probably what they had**

36:00 **to do with the resources they had?**

The full utilisation of the available resources. They were unbelievable.

**Just in that way soldier to soldier you have a respect for them in that way?**

I guess so. For their perseverance.

**So when the feet are**

36:30 **blown off is that rare that just the feet go?**

Usually the charge will lift it, lift the drum but this time it didn't luckily.

**His weight or?**

No it just malfunctioned. So we were lucky.

**Extremely lucky.**

Yeah.

**And what happened to him afterwards?**

He was sent home.

37:00 **Did you have further contact or anything like that?**

I haven't spoken to him for years. I believe he's still alive, but I don't know.

**Do you have any idea how he got on after the war?**

No not at all.

**How hard is it when you get him out and you have to go back to your job? How hard is that?**

You are more aware and

37:30 the - you are on edge a lot more. A lot more cautious.

**In a way, is that a sort of a wake up call?**

It can be, but also drive you crazy the extra tension, the stress. The stress levels are unbelievable after that because you think it's going to happen again.

38:00 **And I guess am I correct in saying that could be the prelude for a bigger attack or something like that?**

It can be. It can be the prelude for something else so that also puts you on edge. Luckily it wasn't.

**But your arse is still moving.**

The old sphincter is puckering rather rapidly.

38:30 **Are there precautions you take immediately after apart from being more aware so it doesn't**

**happen again? Do you change set ups or anything like that?**

The set ups were basically good. You just look for more. You do become more aware.

**We've often heard particularly in**

39:00 **patrols from forward scouts of keeping an eye out it can sort of play with your mind. You can see things moving that aren't really moving. What are your experiences of that?**

That can happen especially after an incident it can happen or after you have been at it for while. You just get tired and you start seeing things but not very often. But it can, it can happen.

39:30 **Did it happen to you at all?**

Possibly. I can't recall, but I wouldn't be at all surprised.

**Do you know if there are instances if a tree moves and opening fire? How far would the trick of the mind go?**

It's hard to say having never had it.

40:00 I can't say. Most things you see moving it at night through a starlight scope. Everything moved through those things.

**All right we'll stop there.**

## Tape 7

00:31 **Okay with your, with the differences between the Australian troops themselves like regulars and Nashos, what was the opinion of Nashos amongst the regs?**

As far as I was concerned in my unit we used to have little digs at them but as far as I was concerned there was no difference. In fact they used to call us lifers. Other than that we were doing the same job.

01:00 Lifers.

**Lifers?**

We were in the army for life.

**I see.**

But other than that, there was no real disparity.

**What about in terms of their performance, operational performance?**

Their operational performance was as good, if not better, than some regs.

**I've heard some**

01:30 **Nashos or even in books that some them felt superior because they had a civilian life.**

Yep. They had something to go back to I guess. That's one thing and in the main better educated than the regs. That was the only difference. As far as performance

02:00 went, no difference at all.

**Any troubles with Nashos?**

No. You had problems with all them, with everybody but there was no more trouble with Nashos than the regs as far as I'm concerned.

**Any people who during their tour became conscientious objectors?**

02:30 No not as far as I'm concerned. Not to my knowledge.

**What about people's political persuasions? Can you tell us about that.**

I don't think it came into anything. It was never really discussed.

03:00 I don't recall ever really discussing politics with the troops. We may hear a report about some government fuck up and we'd all have a go about it but there was nobody saying "This government's wrong" or "We've got to get Labor [Australian Labor Party] in." There was none of that. We were all in the same boat as far as we were concerned.

03:30 **Throughout your tour did you see people who couldn't cope anymore?**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us about that?**

War or combat is a one of those things that is like stress. It affects people differently. Some people can't cope and it's not a

04:00 criticism of them. They just can't cope. That's their makeup. Other people don't like it but they can cope with it. Other people like it and want more of it. You know and other people just love it. It's just a different thing so I've got nothing against people who couldn't cope.

**What was the slang**

04:30 **for people who couldn't cope? What was the slang word? Was it troppo?**

Yeah.

**Do you know people personally who were affected on the field?**

Not personally beside me but I know of a couple that I had known that weren't in my company that went troppo. One

05:00 bloke that I did know that did go troppo but in a way in that he was trying to get himself killed because he, a friend of mine, Vic Wagstaff. He stepped outside the wire one night and got himself disoriented and this bloke was on gun picket and there was reports of Viet Cong in the area and thought he was one and shot him and

05:30 Les was trying to get himself killed. He didn't succeed because of it. I've seen that happen. But there was a couple of blokes that just went troppo and couldn't cope. I can't remember who they were but I did know of them. I did actually know them but not in my company.

06:00 **What was the treatment on the field?**

Wouldn't have a clue. Just got them out as soon as possible. Call the chopper in, medivac straight away. The fear is of course that if someone has gone troppo, it can affect the other people as well, so you've got to get them out as quickly as possible.

**Most people must have been close to the edge?**

We were all close to the edge. We were living on it.

06:30 That's what we did. Live on the edge for twelve months.

**How close to the edge are we talking? When you say the edge?**

Depends on your personal makeup.

**What about yourself?**

I would say I was on the edge but I was not close to breaking but I was there.

**What sustained you?**

07:00 My own natural born insanity. I don't know. Maybe my upbringing. I've no idea.

**Your father?**

Could have been. It's possible because he was a fairly strong person. Actually I haven't thought of it.

07:30 **Do you think, thinking that you have already told us how important a role model your father was in your childhood development that you staying in Vietnam and I suppose you also did say to us that you wanted to prove to yourself that you could do this, you could handle the hardships of the infantry.**

08:00 Yes.

**That that was a major sustaining factor?**

I believe so now I think of it. Yeah.

**You also said that your opinions were changing of the place in Vietnam. Drastic changes were taking place.**

08:30 Probably in my outlook on life.

**How would you say that? In what way do you mean?**

I was more fatalistic. I became much more fatalistic. There is a saying that quite a few of us had that "I died in Vietnam and the government just forgot to tell me." Until 1987, that was true

- 09:00 I believe. I believe that I shouldn't have lived past my 21st birthday and every year I've had since then is a bonus. My attitude to life is a bit different, I tend to live it a bit more and my attitude to friendship
- 09:30 although I have very few friends but I am extremely loyal to them whereas before I had a reasonably wide circle of friends and I'm less forthcoming, I'm less trusting of people. I'm more insular and all
- 10:00 this happened over that period of time and on coming home.
- There are some movies that I wanted to bring to your attention. Have you seen the Thin Red Line by any chance?**
- Yeah.
- That is an exceptionally deep war film by any standard.**
- 10:30 **What was your own opinion of that?**
- The whole thing was bloody futile. That's what it comes down to in the end the futility of it all.
- The war you mean?**
- Yeah, or of that part of something. It was a while ago that I saw it so you are pushing the boundaries a bit.
- 11:00 **I know it was World War II but there was one statement in it, because it was particularly a deep film, that 'war poisons the soul'.**
- Yeah.
- How do you see that? Do you see that as being accurate? What are your views?**
- It can do. It can poison the soul I guess. It changed me. I don't know how poisonous it was but in some people it did
- 11:30 adversely affect them badly socially, badly. I was affected badly enough but some people just they refuse to trust the rest of mankind at all. It can happen so I guess that can poison the soul. It destroys one's faith in the human race which in itself can poison the soul.
- 12:00 **You seem Pablo Picasso's painting 'Guernica'. The bombing of Guernica, the first area bombing raid of the Spanish Civil War. The famous painting.**
- I can't recall that I have.
- I think it was the first of his surrealist paintings**
- 12:30 **where it's got fragmented bits looking up in the sky and seeing bombs raining down.**
- No.
- My point is with that is, life is shattered in that way. Life has become fragmented.**
- It can.
- Is that what you are referring to?**
- Not really.
- What are you referring to in that case?**
- The whole faith thing. That's what I'm talking about.
- 13:00 It's your faith in the human race. Your faith in religion. Your faith in your leaders.
- Did you have faith in religion when you went to Vietnam?**
- No. I had none.
- You weren't really religious at all?**
- No. I'm still to be convinced.
- What about Buddhism? Did it impact on you in any way?**
- I've read a little bit about Buddhism, and if I was to be religious,
- 13:30 I would be a Buddhist.
- Did anything in Vietnam give you that perspective?**
- No, not really. I only came across Buddhists by sight, that's the monks and I had no interaction with them whatsoever. It's only since then that I've had some interaction with Buddhists.

**Did you ever see those images of Buddhist monks burning themselves?**

Yeah.

14:00 **Did you actually see it in real life?**

No.

**Did you see it while you were in Vietnam, by the way?**

No.

**So it was only later after the war when you saw those?**

I think I saw the images prior to Vietnam because that was happening during the reign of Diem. That was prior, I think it was prior to Australian commitment actually. I saw those images plus my father used to get Life magazine so it was all in there.

**How did that impact**

14:30 **upon you?**

I thought it was a desperate act but I didn't appreciate the reasoning. You see I didn't know the history.

**When you went to Vietnam having said that and it was before the war and you did go in there did you come into a gradual realisation about that act?**

Not really, because Diem was no longer in power

15:00 and they were dealing with Thieu. Ky had gone and Thieu had taken over from Ky. It was a bit of a joke amongst the blokes that if drive past a bunch of Buddhist monks you throw them a packet of matches. There was that type of sick humour but other than that I didn't really think about it all that much.

15:30 Since, I have, but not at the time.

**Interesting you say that is because under the sort of circumstances that you were living in is that the sort of humour that prevails? It becomes a sick sense of humour?**

Oh yeah.

**Can you tell us of any other examples?**

I think it was the, I talked earlier about the

16:00 first ambush the battalion did and I went out to photograph the bodies. One of the people was in what they call the dead ant position. Feet up in the air and there is one of the diggers using it as a seat and having a brew. Brew in one hand and smoke in the other sitting down on the Ho Chi Minh sandals. That type of thing. The fact that the saying was, we shot the living shit out of one bloke. He was

16:30 having a shit at the time and we hit them and he died with his pants around his ankles having a shit so we figure we shot the shit out of him. Stuff like that. I suppose a coping mechanism. I do the same in the emergency services. Same sort of sick humour. You know you go to a rail accident where somebody's head gets cut off and it's, "He should have quit while he was ahead,"

17:00 or, "I thought he was taller than that." It's a coping mechanism, that's all.

**Did, at any time did you start to think about the enemy. There is a big question mark who is the enemy apart from the ambushes that you conduct and so forth. But**

17:30 **the Vietnamese people did you start to feel any sort of emotions about their well being?**

I don't know. We probably did because in the main we treated the civilian population reasonably well with a fair bit of empathy and compassion.

18:00 So we probably did feel for their welfare but I didn't think about it. I don't recall thinking about it but we possibly we did. We still may not have trusted them because we didn't know if we were dealing with night time Viet Cong or people who actively supported the Viet Cong. We didn't know that.

18:30 **What was your view of the ARVN?**

Not very complimentary. I thought they were show ponies. They liked looking good but wouldn't fight. There was also that feeling that some of them were actually Viet Cong as well but in the main they were show ponies, wouldn't fight and couldn't be relied upon.

19:00 So therefore you couldn't bring them into the equation at all.

**Did you serve alongside them?**

No.

**What presence did they have in Phuoc Tuy Province?**

Provincial centres, checkpoints. There was an ARVN camp I forget where it was. I know there was a big presence in

19:30 Baria from memory but other than that no, had nothing really to do with them except the liaison people we had working with us.

**Did you ever as far as the Australians were concerned, did you ever encounter**

20:00 **or hear of suicides?**

No.

**Amongst the Australian troops?**

No. None at all.

**Any desertion?**

No.

**Would AWL be classed as desertion?**

No. A couple of people went missing for a couple of days, because they were getting their rocks off [copulating] and didn't want to go back to the unit.

20:30 That was the only reason, or they would get pissed and get lost and end up on a Yank base somewhere and didn't know where they were and couldn't get back. It happens.

**But not from the front?**

No. You wouldn't let your mate down. Simple as that.

**Were there any odd bods in a platoon that just don't have any. I mean you would all have your own small groups of mates. Were there any, I presume you would have your odd guys that just don't have any real**

21:00 **mates, but know everyone.**

I suppose there were. I can't recall individually who there were. You would have the odd one or two who would be odd and it could be the fact that they were hiding the fact that they were homosexual. There were a few and that kind of made them odd because their actions were odd.

21:30 Half the time you knew anyway about it but as long as the bloke was watching your arse as it was you were watching his. It didn't matter.

**So it was known that there were homosexuals were there?**

Oh yeah. But it didn't bother anybody because if you did know most of the time you knew they were trying to hide it, so you didn't come out and say "I know you are a poofteer."

22:00 It didn't come into the equation because you knew that when the shit hit the fan you could rely on him. That was all that mattered. As far as I was concerned and most of us were concerned that was all that mattered.

**So basically under those sort of strenuous circumstances people don't really give a shit about things that they would normally care about in normal society?**

Quite often yeah. I believe so.

22:30 You know I wasn't a great rap for our Aboriginal brothers mainly because the ones that I had come into contact with were all drunks. The bloke that I shared my tent with was Aboriginal. One of the best soldiers I ever served with. I couldn't,

23:00 he wasn't a drunk. He was a bloody good soldier so he was an individual. There was a saying I had that some people hate "I don't care if people are green but it's just those dark green bastards you've got to watch." That's not true but I suppose

23:30 that's true It didn't matter that. I had blokes that were working with us that in any other situation would not be seen dead within 200 yards of any abo for instance but this bloke was their mate. That's the difference in the situation. It didn't matter. It may have changed that once they left that that they went back to their old

24:00 ways of dealing with it but there in that situation it didn't matter. Everybody was the same as far as I was concerned. As far as most of us were concerned. We had our own individual quirks. We may not have liked each other but we knew we could rely on each other and that is the difference. That is the closeness. I still miss it.

**Would you say that they were brothers?**

I'd say so.

24:30 Closer.

**Even the Aboriginal soldier?**

Yep. If one of them was to ring me up now and say, "I'm in trouble what can you do to help me?" I'd say "What do you want?" Simple as that.

**Any of those soldiers?**

Any of them. Yep.

25:00 And that's 30 odd years on and some of them I haven't seen since. It doesn't matter.

**The best guys you ever met?**

Yep.

25:30 **How strong is that bond?**

I'd die for them. I'd kill for them. Simple as that.

**Who were your best mates amongst them?**

26:00 Oh shit. Rocky. He was the gunner. PJ. He was our resident drunk. If he's still alive it's amazing. Porky who was our section commander who looked after me. Yakka. We watched each other's arse

26:30 and kept each other alive I guess. That was my section. The ones that are still alive. Yeah, they'd be the closest.

27:00 **When you think of Vietnam now and your life in Vietnam what comes to your mind?**

Them.

**What memories?**

Getting pissed together. Getting into trouble. Causing havoc.

27:30 Looking after each other. Never had the feeling since and I'll never have it again.

**After you finished your tour you wanted to, you volunteered to stay another six months or was it before you finished your tour?**

Before I finished my tour.

28:00 **Can you tell us why you chose that?**

I don't know I wanted to keep on doing it I guess. It's hard to fathom. I wanted to be promoted to lance corporal and that didn't happen either. I was going to go to another battalion or headquarters AFP [?] in Saigon. One of the two and

28:30 I got knocked back. It was all set to happen and it got knocked back for some reason but I was going to extend for another six months.

**Would you have stayed longer than that if you could of?**

If I could have probably.

**You said, it's very interesting but obviously Vietnam had a massive impact on you and has since.**

29:00 **You said that you were born there and you died there.**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us what you mean by that? I know it's not an easy answer.**

There is an old saying that while we were, when we were being treated nothing more than something you would pick up on the bottom of your boot by the government we might as well have been dead. That's where that saying came from. "I died in Vietnam, but the government just forgot to tell me."

29:30 We were treated like shit. The fact that I was born there everything that I am now I guess goes back to that. It formed what I am now so in a way I was born there.

**Would you say that it was, it has positively changed your life or it has raised questions that you haven't been able to answer since?**

All of the above.

30:00 I know who I am but there are still questions.

**When you say you died there I sense there is more than just that statement. That personally for you it is something more emotional.**

It's being

30:30 swept under the carpet by our government to whom we were nothing more than an embarrassment. We were treated like shit and forgotten and for that I will never forgive the labour party. I don't care who they are. It was all too hard. They brought us home and they got into government on the fact that they brought us home and

31:00 as soon as they did they just didn't want to know us and they carried on two successive governments until 1987 and then they finally welcomed us home so for all intents and purposes we may as well have been dead.

**What about outside the government's reaction to the war and the way you were treated during and after. As a personal experience just**

31:30 **purely personal outside that would you say that Vietnam or would you say that you died in Vietnam?**

Maybe not as such but I may as well have for that period of time I believe. I believe we all may as well have because it was

32:00 12 years. Yeah 12 or 13 years we were just forgotten. It was all just too hard.

**What would you say the, I'll come back to that question later. I want to ask how the war impacted on you but I'll come back to that later. A few more questions on your Vietnam service.**

32:30 **You were, as far as operations are concerned coordinated searches and roadblocks were as close as you would have probably got to the civilian population.**

Yeah. The rest of the time was out in the scrub in what we called search and destroy missions.

**Can you tell us about the coordinated search operations. What were the problems you encountered in that?**

Dealing with the

33:00 simple population. Trying very hard not to be the aggressor when you know you are. Clearing people out of villages and searching houses. It's difficult to stamp all over people with a hob nailed boot and pretend you are winning their hearts and minds. That was difficult because you didn't know what you were going to encounter and you didn't know whether it was going to turn

33:30 to shit or not so it was dicey.

**Yeah so did it ever actually go to shit?**

No not for us. I don't know if it ever did for any of the others either. I suppose we conducted them with more compassion than the Yanks.

34:00 We didn't just herd everybody out and burn the village for instance which some of them did. The odd zippo raid as they used to call them. That happened but with us no I don't believe so.

**The Americans had a reputation for being quite brutal?**

Yeah and a lot of that is to do with the troops they employed

34:30 I think. The mental capacity of their troops, the training and their leadership.

**Did you ever come across a situation in a cordon and search operation where I suppose, did it affect you in any way coming so close to the civilians?**

No. You are on edge,

35:00 naturally on edge but no.

**Were the civilians ever traumatised by it?**

I suppose they would have been. I didn't think about that at the time. I was more worried about me and my mates.

**How did they react to cordon and searches? I assume they would have been spot.**

Probably with more resignation than anything. They had been through it all before



35:30 so here we go again in some respects. It depended on whether they had anything to hide or not, I guess.

**How often did you find arms?**

We found on one occasion from memory.

**Where would they keep these arms?**

Holes In the ground underneath their fire.

36:00 Anywhere.

**And what would happen as a result if you found weapons?**

Whoever's hut it was the South Vietnamese that were working with us, would come in and drag them away. What happened to them after that then, I don't know. I can guess but I don't know.

**What's your guess?**

Probably tortured them. The South Vietnamese weren't very kind to their own people

36:30 and vice versa. But for such a nice gentle people they are bloody vicious.

**What other things did you see amongst the Vietnamese themselves like the VC and ARVN and so forth? What other sort of things did they do to each other, atrocities and acts of violence?**

37:00 I suppose there is one instance that has been relayed to me that they went through and inoculated a group of children and came back a week later and there was a pile of little arms in the middle of the village and the village was empty.

**You saw this?**

I didn't see it personally no. It was relayed to me.

37:30 I've no reason to doubt it. These things did happen on both sides. There's no doubt. Atrocities were committed by the Americans. Maybe atrocities were committed by the Australians I don't know. I doubt it very much because of our mindset is different but there were certainly atrocities that were committed by the Viet Cong which of course never made the papers. No one ever heard of them.

38:00 There were quite a few.

**Also you were you did some operations when you were actually inserted by chopper.**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us about those operations?**

They were interesting especially when the gunships come in first and clear the ground. The first thing is well if they are shooting there must be something

38:30 down there to shoot at. It's different because you are out in the open. You have basically been planted in the open which is not a nice feeling because you become a target and the chopper is a target. They can draw the crabs very rapidly. They are a quick way to get in and they are bloody good when you have to get out so you use them. It wasn't my decision to use them. I'm just a digger,

39:00 but they are a good mode of transport.

**Were there any memorable operations you had when you were inserted by chopper?**

I was never in one where we drew fire coming in. I've gone in under fire, supporting fire but we weren't receiving fire.

**What about the one with road working equipment?**

Oh that bloody one. That was

39:30 weird. We all loaded into the, the company loaded into these low loaders and off we went. There is an engineer convoy to sneak up on the bastards and I don't know whether it worked or not but it was a strange one. It's uncomfortable I know that much.

40:00 **That's it. We've run out of tape and we'll change -**

## **Tape 8**

00:30 **Why did you want to stay on for another six months?**

I really don't know. It seemed like a good idea at the time. I was a professional soldier. That's what I did for a living so it wasn't as if I was a Nasho going home to get out of the army. I thought it might be a good idea to stay. Join another battalion do something a little different. That's all.

01:00 **Did your 365 days go a bit quick for you?**

I don't know whether it did or not. It just seemed like a good idea at the time and there was also the opportunity should I do so I would be promoted so I thought "Oh well."

**To do that it would mean that you didn't totally dislike the situation?**

No, I didn't dislike the situation

01:30 I was in at all.

**You felt at home there in Vietnam?**

Yep.

**Was that something that was a gradual process or was it always the case?**

I think it was possibly always the case now that I think about it.

**The army life was for you?**

The army life and the

02:00 situation I was in. Even though there were times when it was scary and obviously I have probably been affected by it but I believed that's where I belonged at the time.

**Was there a possibility that you weren't looking forward to army life outside the combat situation?**

It would be a great possibility. It was proved later on

02:30 that I really wasn't a peace time soldier.

**Was that because of being I don't know if this is the right word but the excitement of the war, the adventure of the war compared to a peace time soldier?**

Yeah. I'd say so. Maybe I liked the adrenaline rush.

03:00 **And the camaraderie of your mates there?**

Yeah. I would say so.

**Would that have been the number one thing that kept you there the camaraderie or?**

Maybe not because by remaining I would have to adopt or be adopted by a new group. So although the camaraderie was fantastic

03:30 and something that I will never forget that would have still been there. They would have gone home and I would have probably transferred it to a new group and felt the same way about them too. That's more, another small group. The fact that I enjoyed what I was doing

04:00 and that atmosphere and I didn't want it to finish.

**Would you say you personally thrived on the pressure of the situation?**

I would say so at the time.

**How rare was it for soldiers to request to stay longer?**

It wasn't unheard of but it was

04:30 reasonably rare I guess. It was a done thing. It was known it could happen, you could do it.

**Did, why do you think you weren't granted that six months extra?**

I don't know. I could have had something to do with my altercation with the intelligence officer earlier.

05:00 So the fact that I did get myself into a little bit of shit before I went home. That could have had something to do with it. I could have been my own worst enemy.

**Do you think it could have been the bigger game of politics and they wanted to get soldiers back? Is that a possibility?**

Maybe. Other people were extending so I couldn't see

05:30 the problem but not being privy to the greater decisions I don't know.

**When you were leaving at what stage was the war at?**

It was the wind down. We were the first Australian battalion not to be replaced so then it become two battalions on the ground instead of three after we left. It could have something to do with why I wasn't

06:00 extended also. Now that I think of it.

**What year was that?**

That was November 1970.

**What did you think about them starting to wind down operations?**

I thought it was a mistake. I didn't think that at stage the South Vietnamese were ready

06:30 to take it over. That of course was the intent. It was the wrong move as far as I was concerned.

**What would the right move have been?**

All I can go with is what my thinking was at the time. The right move would have been to replace us with another

07:00 battalion to continue the work we had been doing.

**They should have increased the number of troops over there? Would that have helped?**

No. I don't believe so. I think we had the right mix at the time. We were covering it very well. We had our own area of operations and we were excelling at it so we didn't need to increase it. We didn't need to decrease it

07:30 either.

**And what was it like that trip, firstly waking up in that morning to come home and the goodbyes and so on?**

We didn't say goodbye to anyone really because as a unit we up and left. So I was still with all my mates until we hit Brisbane and then we went on our different ways after Brisbane.

08:00 **It must have been quite a communal experience to be all leaving at the same time?**

It was. We flew onto the Sydney on Chinook helicopters and disembarked there and away we went. Twelve day trip home.

**What about that last week leading up to all of your leaving? It must have been, was it a wild time? A happy time?**

08:30 **A relieved time? What was that last few days like?**

I remember we had to do a TAOR patrol. It was within the last week I believe and we did it from one of the bottom gun pits. We didn't leave the wire. We gave radio reports and sit reps [situation reports] and loc stats [location statistics] and all that sort of stuff off a map. We didn't go outside that wire in that last week. We said, "No,

09:00 bugger this." By this stage I was resigned to the fact that I wasn't staying. I was on the homeward mind set and we all said, "No, bugger this. We are not taking any risks. Too close."

**It would have been bad to lose someone in those last days.**

Oh yes. We were determined not to so we said, "Bugger it."

**So when you are all**

09:30 **coming back home to Brisbane what was the mood on the plane like and the ship and so on?**

It was pretty good. It was good.

**Lots of drinking, singing, carrying on. What was it?**

We were allowed one can, big bottle, can per man per day. I managed to find two blokes that didn't drink so I was right. The trouble was they used to open the cans on you and you had to drink them all before they went flat.

10:00 It was good. Interesting trip. We got up on the flight deck and got our suntans. We didn't get one in Vietnam because you were out in the scrub all the time with your sleeves down.

**How big a relief is it to be coming home? Do you feel this huge weight lift? What do you go**

10:30 **through?**

I suppose a bit of euphoria. It's good to be home. It was good to be home. It wore off. I think I had 12 weeks leave or something up my sleeve. Six weeks leave or whatever and back in to it. I became a

recruit instructor at Puckapunyal.

11:00 **Was there a bit of a sense of disappointment that you had to come home?**

Yeah. Yeah there was.

**Were you nervous about confronting friends and family after your year there?**

Yeah I was, because I realised I had changed and I realised most likely they hadn't and I ended up out of my large circle of friends

11:30 one that stuck with me. Who didn't try to judge me. Accepted that I had changed and he stuck with me.

**Still a mate to this day?**

He would be if he was still alive.

**I'm sorry. Do you think that requesting that six months was a way of putting off coming home**

12:00 **to friends and relatives knowing that you had changed?**

I don't know. It's something that is a possibility. Subliminally I may have thought that but I really thought I was doing a good job and enjoyed what I was doing and wanted to stay and do more.

**And when you landed in Brisbane all your mates go different directions.**

That was after we had our parade and marched through

12:30 Brisbane and back to our barracks and we left from there.

**And that parade was a good experience for you?**

Yeah I think so. We marched through the streets of Brisbane. Tromped over a demonstration that sat in the middle of the road. Just marched through it. They were rather worse for wear out the other end.

**Were there many demonstrators at that parade or?**

No

13:00 there wasn't. We didn't start to feel the wroth of the moratorium as it were until I got back to Melbourne.

**Were you expecting a hostile reception?**

No, not really because I believed in what I was doing over there and I was doing a job for my government. It wasn't my fault I was sent. The fact that I enjoyed what I was doing was immaterial.

13:30 The fact was the government was the one that had sent me so why should I be picked on.

**Did you have any idea knowing what the protests were before you came back?**

Oh yeah we had had a bit of an inkling. We had the HMAS Jeparit at one stage they had refused to load it. That was the one with all our beer and smokes that was sent over for us. All the comforts.

14:00 And the posties had gone on strike and refused to send mail to us and all that type of stuff. We knew that was going on. We knew there were marches against the war and all this sort of stuff but we didn't believe they were against us at that stage. I didn't anyway.

**So what was Melbourne like and the reception they gave you there?**

Well being spat on in the street and being called a murderer and a

14:30 baby killer was not a good way to be welcomed home so that was my initial experience which is a wonderful thing. It got to the stage I go to parties and because of my short hair it would be called out "Let's see what the baby killer can do without his gun," and all this type of shit.

15:00 It got to the stage and people asked me what I did and I said I was a cop, and they would leave me alone. I put up with that for some time. Occasionally I lashed out but not very often. I used to just disappear. "See you later," and go. That's what we put up with.

**That initial reaction when you were spat on was that the majority or just a section of the crowd?**

15:30 Just a section of the crowd but it was allowed to happen and I just couldn't believe that I had been out there and doing a job because my government sent me to do a job and I was the one being attacked and for a lot of us, a lot of us couldn't handle it. I was fortunate. I was a regular

16:00 soldier. I could withdraw back into the cocoon of the army and get with my mates and get drunk and tell terrible lies to each other which we did. Whereas the Nashos they virtually straight off the plane, see you later son, get on with your life which you just can't do. I was fortunate that I was a reg.

**Did you think that at the time or was that a later thought?**

16:30 Probably a later thought. Once I realised that I at least had somewhere to go which was the army and friends of mine that were Nashos. I spoke to a couple a couple of years later and realised that they had nowhere to go.

**Did you feel let down by the support of the**

17:00 **government and the army and associations?**

By the RSL [Returned and Services League], I did. I remember I went into an RSL club. "What are you doing here, son?" "I've just come back from Vietnam." "Go find yourself a real war, son, and get out." My father was a member, in fact he was the President of the Oakleigh RSL. Very proudly took me along after I came home and this bastard hooked

17:30 into me and told me to piss off and find a real war. The old man decked him, walked out and never went back. That was the RSL. I didn't join the RSL until I realised that the only way we could change it was to join it and I finally joined the RSL in about 1983, 84. That's what we put up with

18:00 and I stayed in at Richmond, the Ex-Serviceman's Club at Richmond, New South, they were the only ones that welcomed us and that was 1977, 76.

**Why do you think the welcome was so harsh?**

18:30 Because the way the war had been portrayed by the media. The vocal minority were allowed their head and we were an embarrassment to a government who were in trouble politically at that time. It was still a Liberal government and of course they were derided by

19:00 the Labor opposition who of course became the government later on, and then we were too hard to deal with. So we were basically forgotten by one political party and actively swept under the carpet by another. So we couldn't win.

**In the past returning soldiers were**

19:30 **always greeted warmly. Did you think that people were extremely naïve to understand the consequences of not doing that to the Vietnam vets?**

I don't know. All I know for sure is that we are the first soldiers in Australian history that haven't come home heroes. And that's it and by the time 1987 came around

20:00 it was too late. Much too late. Meaningful yeah but it was too late.

**You are able because you were still in the army you were still able to talk to Vietnam vets who experienced the same thing.**

Yeah.

**How much did that help you get through it all?**

It probably kept me sane. I'd say.

20:30 Kept me going.

**How long did you stay in the army after that?**

I left the army in 1978, so I was in it for about 7 or 8 years.

**Did your time in Vietnam affect relationships with women and with friends and family?**

With friends and family possibly. With women it was hard to

21:00 vet because I didn't get married until after I came home from Vietnam the first time. I don't know it probably affected the way I interacted with people.

**How was that? How did you feel that you were now acting with people?**

I'm more reticent.

**Were you more intimidating to them? Were you stronger? Were you more - ?**

21:30 I'm more intimidating now I believe. I'm colder. I don't give of myself as much as maybe I did in the past. I don't trust people as much as I used to.

**How much of that is from your actual experiences in Vietnam or how much of it is from the reception you got**

22:00 **when you returned from Vietnam?**

Probably a combination of both. I would say the worst affects would be the reception. My service in

Vietnam maybe some of the things I saw may have affected me but I would say that the reception would be the telling part of it.

**And was that a common comprehension between other Vietnam vets**

22:30 **that you know of?**

Yes. It was.

**When you talked to other guys that went through it how deep and meaningful would the discussions get or would they be very light?**

They can be deep and meaningful. It depends how depressed we are at the time I guess or whether we are trying to talk one of our people out of doing something stupid.

23:00 It depends. It depends on the situation. It depends on how much alcohol we've had I guess whether we get deep and meaningful or whether we just think of the good times. Mostly we think of the good times.

**Would you often have circumstances where someone was thinking of taking his own life and so on?**

Not as often now as we did. We went through a bad spate in the early 80s. I was

23:30 involved in the counselling, the initial part of the counselling service then and we used to talk to quite a few. Actually I was in the police force by then and just worked around the corner from the counselling service. Not so much now. I think those that are obviously left have come to terms with most of it but we are still bitter.

24:00 **Is a lot of that because they couldn't just fit back into the normal routine of life?**

A lot of it was because you weren't allowed to fit back into the normal routine of life. Whereas the Second World War the whole generation, everybody basically were in the same boat. In Vietnam there was only a few of us and therefore we were different and because of the way we were treated a few people exploded.

24:30 Then came the myth. The crazy Vietnam veterans and that's been I suppose it has proliferated since. Slowed down a little in the last couple of years but up until two years ago if you are a Vietnam veteran you are obviously crazy. Despite the success of many Vietnam veterans. All they see is the drunken, violent

25:00 idiot whereas you've got people who are corporate leaders, leaders in the police forces, leaders in the military and leaders in other pursuits which far outnumber the also-rans or the rejects. In fact societally their success rate is higher than the average in

25:30 community but that's not seen that way. It has been painted as the violent, hopeless, bitter bum which is sad.

**Are you talking through movies and media and so on?**

Movies and media yeah. These pictures colour the perception of quite a, I suppose quite a majority of the community to the stage

26:00 where it has affected people when they have been going for jobs etc. You can't employ him. He's a crazy Vietnam vet instead of something we should be proud of because we did a bloody good job. We did what our government asked us to do and we did it very well. That's what people should remember, not because people protested against it or not because of things like what the Yanks did

26:30 at My Lai or anything like that that really hit the papers [My Lai Massacre where Charlie Company, 11th Brigade of the American Division, massacred hundreds of civilians, 16 March 1968]. That's not what we should be remembered for. The job we did.

**How do you think the government should have helped returning vets?**

They should have recognised it straight away. They made it so bloody difficult for those of us who did need it, did need medical help and the psychological help that we should have

27:00 had. We just about had to go through the mill before we got any help whatsoever. We were questioned at every turn that obviously we were faking it and that pushed some people over the edge. That's what they did for us and it was all too hard. "Just go away, sonny, don't want to know you anymore."

27:30 The DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] treated us like shit. The RSL treated us like shit so we had nowhere so we ended up forming our own organisation which is now owns the RSL.

**Why did you decide to leave the army in the late '70s?**

Remember earlier today I said that I had

28:00 a slight difficulty with authority. I had a slight altercation with another captain which my marriage had

broken up at that stage and it was time to leave. 10 1/2 years it was either leave or stay so I made my decision to leave and came back to Melbourne.

**Was it a hard decision?**

Very.

28:30 **In a way did you think leaving meant you were leaving that cocoon that was helping you through your time back?**

Yep.

**It must have been I don't want to put words in your mouth but was it a scary time for you?**

It was. It was a big step I bit the bullet and thought I took a leap of faith as it were and I thought, "Oh well

29:00 if I put my mind to it there's not much I can't do."

**Was your first option joining the police force?**

No. I thought I could be salesman. Wrong. It wasn't until I met Tina that that option came up. I'd considered it with the NSW Police Force I had been accepted and decided against it. Obviously I had an aversion to brown paper bags.

29:30 Then I just shelved that idea and after I met Tina she talked me into joining. She had a friend who was in the police force at the time and between the pair of them they talked me into joining and that was 25 years ago. That was the best thing I ever did.

**How did your Vietnam experiences affect your police work?**

Actually I was welcomed in with open arms being a combat veteran and a

30:00 military person. It's probably helped me in a way that I am able to analyse pressure situations far better than I would be able to normally. I am very aware of my own limitations so I don't push things too far. It probably helped me but the pressure and the stress of the job is starting to tell

30:30 combined with the rest of it is starting to get a bit too much now. 25 years is about time I gave someone else a go I think.

**Become a fireman.**

Oh yeah every time I attend lately with a fireman was to cut a 16 year old suicide down so I don't want to become a fireman.

31:00 **You talked earlier about nightmares you had of one incident. What do you have other nightmares and how regular are they?**

That seems to be the one that's taken over for the last 10 years I guess and about three times a week and I wake up just before it blows which does great things to my sleeping patterns.

31:30 It's there and won't go away. I'm quite resigned to the fact that it won't. It's my cross.

**You wake up in a sweat and so on?**

Not necessarily in a sweat but I wake with a start and I remember that last bit. Occasionally I can remember the whole dream but mainly just the last bit.

32:00 It is the thing spinning out of the ground.

**You can still see it now I take it?**

I can hear it.

**You said that was the one that has taken over the last 10 years. Were there many were there?**

There were others like seeing bodies and some of them were things that I had heard about but not actually seen

32:30 but this one has been happening for quite some time now.

**When you first started to experience these nightmares did it shake you up? Did you start to wonder what was going on?**

It shook me up a bit. I can understand where they were coming from and I thought it will go away. The others did.

33:00 This one hasn't.

**Did you have other symptoms of PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] such as anxiety, panic attacks and so on?**

Oh yeah. I get panic attacks. Put me in a crowd and I am hopeless. I go off.

**Does that affect your work at all?**

It has. I stay away from crowds now as much as I can. When it comes up to demonstrations I decide to make myself absent

33:30 for that reason. Other than that I can control it most of the time but it's, it gets harder. The older I get the harder it gets and the worse the dream gets.

**Really? Does it get worse?**

Yeah.

**You are probably hoping for the opposite weren't you?**

Yes.

34:00 **Have you ever had counselling and so on?**

I've had a bit of counselling. I see a shrink.

**Did you find it helpful at all?**

A little but it doesn't stop the dreams though.

**Just tell me if I am going too far but did they give you techniques to overcome anxiety and so on or medication?**

Medication has been offered

34:30 but I find that if I start taking medication I turn into a zombie and the work I do is far too important for that to happen. Even know the decisions I make can or will and do affect the lives of other people so I've got to be on the ball and I manage, so far I've managed to

35:00 separate the two. So when I'm policing I concentrate on the policing. It's when I switch off that I have the problems.

**Also in police work you come across some nasty situations.**

Oh yeah.

**Can they also give you bad dreams and nightmares?**

No. I haven't had a nightmare.

35:30 You have flashbacks when certain things happen but there's nothing too serious with nightmares and stuff. I've been shot at and I've had people trying to stab me. I've seen bodies and all this type of stuff. I've seen the results of other people's violence. I've been to prangs [vehicle accidents] and suicides but it doesn't seem to worry me too much. Maybe I haven't got room. I don't know.

36:00 **How would you compare the work in the police force to the work in the army?**

I traded one war for another in some respects. The same type of thing. Long periods of boredom punctuated by short periods of extreme activity. So it's similar. It's the uncertainty of the job that keeps me going. So I don't know what's going to happen

36:30 next.

**In a way do you think joining the police force and going through all that was a similar idea to asking for another six months in Vietnam?**

Could be. It's possible. It is possible. I haven't thought about it but it is.

**Do you feel like as a Vietnam**

37:00 **veteran you are getting the respect you deserve in these later years? How do you think the public reaction to the Vietnam vets is? Has it stayed the same or changed?**

It has changed. We are getting the respect now that we should have had years ago. Probably not as much as we deserve but we are getting some. It's just that things haven't changed on the employment front. It also goes with the age thing

37:30 because they are all in their 50s now. No one wants to employ someone who A: is in their 50s and B: is a Vietnam veteran. You put the two together and you can't win. I don't have to worry about that but some of my contemporaries do.



**And the RSL, now how do you feel in their hallowed halls?**

Well we own it, so it's our RSL now,

38:00 whether they like it or not. We make the rules and we are never going to let it happen again to anybody.

**I was going to ask. How would you feel about the guys from UN action such as East Timor and Iraq and so on these days how do you think they will be treated?**

We will welcome them, because as far

38:30 as we are concerned they have done their bit. It doesn't matter if it is for two weeks, 2 years, 3 months. They have put themselves in harms way in the service of their country so therefore they deserve our respect.

**Do you think what you just said speaks for many vets from Vietnam?**

Yes I believe so. Having been through it most of us are determined

39:00 that it will never happen again.

**And even though it hasn't been, even though it hasn't been officially declared, a war in Iraq, hopefully no one will be telling those soldiers go and find a real war.**

That's right. I don't think so.

**Do you think we have started to**

39:30 **learn from our mistakes in the past?**

We are as humans condemned to repeat the past. We seem to do it at a monotonous regularity but I think that we have the Australian context I think we have learned from Vietnam. The fact that

40:00 some people say we should never have been there given the politics of the time we should have been. Just we have learned of the treatment of our soldiers and our returned servicemen. We have learned that. We have learned also that we are responsible for our own region and there are times when we will have to put our soldiers in harms way. It's inevitable.

**Well we only**

40:30 **have about a minute left and this is where we give you the floor to say anything you like or to whomever is watching this tape and the floor is yours.**

I think that I have basically said it all. I believe that we did an extremely good job with limited resources and we should be recognised for the fact that we did do a good job with limited resources. We didn't go through the difficulties

41:00 of the Kokoda, etcetera, but in that spirit I believe we performed our duties as Vietnam veterans.

**Excellent. Thank you very much, Grant.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**