Australians at War Film Archive

Kevin Wigg (Wiggy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Would you like to give us a brief introduction please starting from where you were born?**

Yes. I was born in Moreland in Melbourne, Victoria, at the Sacred Heart Hospital. I went to several schools in Victoria. I went to

01:00 West Brunswick School, I went to a school in Murray - my Dad moved around quite a bit so we followed him - although he wasn't in the Department Of Defence, but he did move a bit. So I went to four or five different state schools. I left school at the Brunswick Tech was my last school. I went to form three where I left to start an apprenticeship. I couldn't start the apprenticeship for three or four months so my parents

01:30 got me a job at the age of probably fourteen or fifteen delivering telegrams around the city on foot. My apprenticeship started. I was an apprentice sheet metal worker and hot water engineer in Glenhuntley. I finished my apprenticeship as a first class tradesman and I then joined the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I spent five years in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

02:00 I moved from there because of ill health from a particular fire. I went across to the Victorian Civil Ambulance and became a driver with the Victorian Civil Ambulance for a couple of years. The shift work there was horrendous. So I got out of that and eventually I drove buses and trucks in the meantime as part time. Eventually joined the army in 1968.

02:30 And spent twenty-four years in the army. I retired out of the army in 1989 if my memory serves me right where I took up a job with the Shell Company of Australia as a trainee development officer for transport and aviation. After that we formed our own company called Semcon Petroleum

03:00 Transport Trainers and which we still have which employs my two sons. My wife is the business manager and we brought a property out here at Graytown which was just a little mud brick house in the bush. With our own blood, sweat and tears, we turned it into a vineyard. We now have our own wine on the market called Aynsley Crossing Red Clay Ridge Shiraz. And we're happy to retire

03:30 here. I guess that's a looking glass view from birth to present time.

Good on you. That's good stuff. By the way, I'm from Coburg.

Are you? Good.

So I know that area very well.

Yeah. Moreland Road.

So that was a great introduction. We'll move back to the pre-war segment of your life and talk about your childhood, but firstly could you give us a rundown

04:00 **on your parents, background on your parents.**

My father came over from England at a very young age by himself - like eighteen or nineteen. I think he bummed around. In those days it was Depression days. Him and his offsider rode a motor bike around the country, shearing, picking, all those sorts of things. My mother was French.

04:30 My mother and father - my mother had been married previously to my father to a radio announcer who seems to have just disappeared. I couldn't get any information about him off my mother before she passed away. So that's the sort of secret closet stuff. So yes they married - my father married my mother at a fairly late age. As I said, she'd already been married and had one daughter.

05:00 I have a step sister. Then myself and my twin sister were born in 1942 in Brunswick. Near the corner of Pearson Street and Albion Street if you know Coburg and yeah so that was my childhood days. My mother had to work all her life as did my father.

05:30 The had a real hard life. The first family car was the car that I had. They never had a car in their whole entire life. We trammed and trained it everywhere as kids. My father passed away from - he was a lagger and laggers insulated pipe work, steam pipes and of course in those days they did it with asbestos so of course he eventually died of asbestosis-related cancer.

06:00 My mother survived him until she was 95 or 96. When she got to ninety I don't suppose it matters too much whether you die at ninety three, four, five or six. Then of course there's my twin sister and myself surviving in the family. My mother and father in those days - I couldn't find out too much about my father. Obviously I had grandparents

06:30 which I never ever met because he was the only one that came over from England and because the family was over there and they'd be all passed away now. I think I've got photographs of my grandmother or grandfather but yeah apart from that it was - I guess when your parents come from overseas and they don't follow with their family the family ties aren't there like they are if the families all in Australia. Like I said, I would think it would be devastating if my

07:00 grandchildren couldn't see their grandmother or grandfather, but in our era it was nothing. We just grew up in a world that it didn't really matter. I mean, "Here's a photograph of your grandfather and he's in England. Here's your grandmother" and that was it. We were brought up in that sort of world. But I would think these days it'd be devastating for me not to be able to see my grandchildren. That might have been the case with them in England.

07:30 So that's my Mum and Dad.

Was your father in World War II?

No. My Dad didn't serve. He was called up, but he got meningitis. Had about six months on the wooden board, almost died, so he missed out. All my uncles went to war. My mother's brothers of which there were five, all of them were killed in the war except for one.

08:00 **During the Second World War?**

Yeah. They were all killed except for one brother who survived. That's the only - in my family, it's my mother's side who were the only ones who went to war.

I don't think we've heard that for some time. A whole lot of brothers.

Four out of the five.

It's almost like Saving Private Ryan [a Hollywood movie].

Yeah. But I don't think they did that.

Yeah.

08:30 I don't think that happened. I mean, it might happen now, but I do believe that they tried to keep them in units together and they tried to do the best they could for them. But I don't think it mattered too much if two or three went out of five. There were lots of stories where the whole families are wiped out - all of the boys - and none of the boys came home. Fairly devastating for parents I suppose.

How did

09:00 **that affect your mother?**

I was only little so that sort of thing I wouldn't have been able to pick whether it affected her or not. Only being a small kid at that stage.

Later on did you?

No. I don't know that it did. Maybe she'd got over it by then. Everybody probably was seen to do their duty and that's what the cost was and there were so many others that lost members of the family I suppose it wasn't an isolated case

09:30 and they got on with life. I just think that era of people get on with life a lot better than they do these days - just from my observations any way. But I never heard her whinge, or a I never saw a tear. Cause by those stages, maybe she did and because I was a kid too busy with other things, preoccupied with mine, I never saw those things. So maybe she went into her room and did it by herself. But I never saw it.

10:00 I mean I just knew that she had photographs of all the boys in their uniforms and as I grew up and got older I learnt that all of them had gone except for one.

Did that intrigue you?

No. I just thought, "Well gee that's a bit of bad luck. Fancy that happening to you". But then in those days there were lots of other

10:30 people who lost two or three members of their family. So it was to me I guess as a kid the accepted

thing. It was part of life, and that's what happened. You just got on with it. So I never sat and spent any time thinking about it. It didn't - I would have only been nine, ten, eleven and if you remember back when you were nine, ten, eleven

11:00 life was a gay abandon, wasn't it? It was just your thing. Over there something was else happening and it was nothing to do with you. Anybody who was thirty-five was ready to die. They were oldies and you were never going to get to thirty-five. So when someone you heard - I mean we used to look in the paper and someone'd say, "Oh look at that bloke, passed away, he was fifty-two. Oh well he had a good go, didn't he, at fifty-two?"

11:30 And now you're sixty-two you realise that he went before his time, but you were never going to get to fifty-two anyway, so what did it matter. So if you found out that someone's family had lost three or four during the war then you said, "Well the guy died doing the right thing for his country and it happened to everybody". There was a lot of people I knew it happened to so yeah it was just the accepted thing in those days. I don't think it'd be the accepted thing now. Where the Department of Defence are now in Egypt

12:00 and places that they've been to and that would be a devastating thing. We didn't have the media following people around in a war anyway. So half of that stuff wasn't known, was it? Now we can see the action. We can almost see people being killed on the battlefield with the media now and if they found out that the whole family had been shot and never came home that'd be a devastating thing. I think that'd be blown up by the media and everybody'd be up in arms and where it wasn't before

12:30 and it happened. I'll bet that sort of thing happened week after week during the big wards, during the Great War [First World War] and World War II and that would have been something - nothing in those days. Just accepted. Well look how many they went over the trenches at Gallipoli and were just wiped out. That was no big deal was it? You think about what would happen today if soldiers were ordered out of a trench by the hundreds and just shot down in two paces.

13:00 It just wouldn't be allowed. So I think times have changed and things have changed.

When did you start to develop an appreciation of the Second World War?

Only a half a dozen years ago I suppose. I mean where you sit and reflect on what you did, how the war was run, where you were and what the conflict was and then you reflect back on family

13:30 members and how they died and you read books on things, you start to get interested in what was the outcome twenty-five years ago to the outcome now. And if you trace it back, like I said, from World War I through to what's happening now, I mean some of the atrocities that happened back there would never happen now. And I don't know whether that's because the media follows everybody around or whether because

14:00 attitudes have changed. It's certainly one or the other. It's funny how in later life you start to take an interest in what's happened. Because certainly even while I was in my years in the army I never bothered reading about the history of the different wars. Sure, our training included that. I mean, it was tactics and what happened, but I never took it onboard as a

14:30 serious sort of a study. And maybe it's now because I do a lot of flying and I've got a lot of time by myself. I spend a lot of time away from home with the business and I've got a lot of time to reflect and a lot of time to read and probably that's why now that I make these comparisons where I wouldn't have made before. And I've often said to Penny I just can't imagine how anybody can order hundreds of men out of a trench knowing that

15:00 two paces later they were going to be dead. I mean, it's ridiculous. You just wonder why, how it could happen. But, there you go, it did. It was the accepted thing. So it's not a big interest with me, but it's just something that I've taken particular note of. And it disturbs me that it actually was allowed to happen.

15:30 **You were growing up in Brunswick, weren't you?**

I did, yeah.

That was your early childhood years. Tell us about Brunswick.

Well Brunswick was a rough neck - always was a rough neck place. It was the blood house at the corner of Albion Street and Sydney Road. My father -

16:00 I used to have to walk on the opposite side of the road when we walked past there because someone was always getting thrown out with a broken bottle over their head. Brunswick was fairly hard. It was certainly a blue-collar worker area. It was a labourer, working-class man's area. It was certainly chalk and cheese from Brunswick to Toorak or Brunswick to Malvern and South Yarra and places like that. My mother's sister lived in Malvern. That was seen

16:30 to be about five hundred classes above anyone that lived in Brunswick. But, no, I enjoyed it. I had a lot of good mates in Brunswick. My father and mother were the caretakers of the West Brunswick State School that I went to. The caretaker had a house just across the road from the school. So I went to school there, played football for the school.

17:00 Our Friday night ritual was to walk up to the picture theatre at Pearson Street every Friday night and see a Friday night movie. We made our own billy carts and went down that great big hill at the Albion Street hill the other side of Melville Road that just goes down like that. We were always whipping down there in billy carts that we'd made, pinching the

17:30 pram wheels off your sister's pram or ball bearings from your father's whatever. I spent nearly all, most of my later years of my younger life if you like, from ten years on, was spent in the Brunswick area. I was in the 3rd Brunswick Scouts. I rode my bike to the Brunswick Tech.

18:00 We always hung around down the Merry Creek as kids do. Found a body floating in the creek there one day an pedalled me bike all the way to Sydney Road to the Police Station thinking I was going to get a ride in the patrol car and the old police sergeant there shoved me in a little old Standard 10, his own private little car, and we went to the place at about twenty kilometres an hour. By the time we got there everybody else was there anyway.

18:30 I remember the policeman knocking on the door. My father answered the door and the policeman said, I heard him say, "Does Kevin Wigg live here?" And my father said, "Why? What's the boy been up to now?" And of course what had happened, there was a ten shilling reward for finding this person. I think it was a pound and I got ten bob and I think my mate got ten bob and he was there to give us the ten bob. My father was, "Yeah, what's the boy been up to now?"

19:00 They were my early days in Brunswick.

You used to be in trouble with the cops did you?

No. I never ever was. Apart from on the way to the picture theatre there used to be a suitcase and handbag shop just near the corner of Albion Street and Sydney Road and the guy used to stack up all his suitcases against the window, stacked really high. And we'd get there, pushing on the window like this until

19:30 the suitcases kept rocking. They finally all fell over the window and the whole stack was just a pile and we did it one Saturday arvo too often and the police were sitting in a car across the road and they sprung us. So we weren't then committed any crime really, but they took us away and frightened the buggery out of us and locked us in a cell for ten minutes and let us out again and we went to the pictures like this. So this bloke was obviously getting sick of

20:00 coming to the shop on Monday to find his suitcases all in a big pile. That was my days in Brunswick. I played footy there and then my mother bought a house off my sister in Malvern and we had about a five hundred percent upper class move to Malvern. I was working in Glenhuntly in those days, an apprentice. I played football with the Glenhuntly

20:30 in the federal league for half a dozen years until I finished my time and joined the fire brigade. I finished my apprenticeship. And of course it was my mother and father's last house in Malvern.

Were your family going through economic problems at that stage?

They never ever had all that much money. I wouldn't say that they were - had economic problems

21:00 But they never ever had an abundance of money. They always had enough money to meet the needs. But things had to be saved for. We wouldn't just be able to go out to tea every night of the week or two nights of the week. It'd be a special thing if we went out for tea. My father did what everybody else did. Got off the train at the railway station and went to the pub for an hour. In those days it was six o'clock closing and everybody

21:30 went to, all the guys on the way home stopped in for a beer. That sort of thing doesn't happen now, more's the pity. But they'd get in there and all their cronies'd [mates] be there, all the mates'd be there and this bloke'd have his own corner and no-one was allowed in there. That was his corner. And it was Joe's corner. And everybody had their own little groups. There'd be half a dozen blokes drinking together there, another half a dozen over here and they wouldn't get there till five o'clock from work and the thing'd close at six anyway.

22:00 And they'd buy a couple of big bottles of beer, into the Gladstone bag and off he'd come home. And then we'd sit and have a glass of beer at night at the table with tea. But there wasn't an abundance of money. Like I said, they never owned a car. My father never had a license. But yeah money was short. They both had to work nearly all their entire life.

Was Brunswick a - what was Brunswick like as far as a

22:30 **ethnic composition was concerned?**

There wasn't when I was a kid there. The ethnic community didn't come till later on. I'm sorry, we had next door neighbours who were Italian or Greek. I think they might have been Italian, but there were only a few of them there. They were dotted here and there, not like they are now. Like that area there now is very prevalent with

23:00 ethnic community. Don't they choose certain areas, don't they, and take them on as their own? You go

up Sydney Road, Brunswick, now and you can eat food from all over the world whereas before you could get fish and chips and pies. The culture's certainly changed. But, no, they weren't. I don't remember seeing all that many of them apart from those that lived next door to us.

23:30 I have noticed a change. Because I'm in and out of the area still. Not often. But because my job entails me driving all over the place I go through all these suburbs and you notice the changes. There are less pie shops and fish and chips shops than there used to be.

Can you recognise Brunswick though?

It's exactly the same. Albion Street's the same, the Anstey railway station is exactly the same. Drive down little skinny Albion

24:00 Street to get to the school at Pearson Street on the corner where I went to school. It's all exactly the same. The houses are the same. The road's never been made wider. The only thing that's not happening is the little "loaf o' bread" bus going up and down Dawson Street. There used to be a little tiny bus that looked like a half high tin loaf of bread on wheels. I don't think that's there any more. But, no, Brunswick is exactly the same

24:30 as it used to be when I was a kid there. The streets are the same, the houses are the same. Some of the houses all the fronts have been ripped out and made modern. Some of them are exactly the same. But, no, I don't see all the much difference in Brunswick at all apart from the style of people that live there. And the shops. The shops are all now suited for those people who live there of course. So it's suited for the type

25:00 of food of the people that live there, the style of clothes that they wear, all that sort of thing - that's what's changed to meet the demand of the culture of the people that live there. But that's the only change that I see in Brunswick. Oh, and the Padua Theatre's not there any more. The picture theatre's not there next to the police station. I don't know what it is. It's just a big open - must be something there. I went past there the other day. The old haunts are there any more

25:30 There's nobody closing the railway gates manually, kicking the bar and closing the gate.

Remember the arguments with the train drivers and those guys?

Yes. That's right. All that's gone now. The guy used to sit in that little hut all day and run out and open the gate or close the gate. But apart from those things that have changed there's no all that much of a change to Brunswick I don't think.

26:00 **You joined the Metropolitan Fire Brigade - this was while you were doing an apprenticeship or after?**

No. I finished my apprenticeship. I just got sick of working in a factory and clocking a card and I was looking for something a bit different. Something that was going to take me outside, something that I knew I wasn't going to do before I even got there. Like, when you work like that in a factory you know exactly what you're going to do

26:30 tomorrow. While you're going home that night you know what you're going to be doing tomorrow because the job you were doing is still half finished on the bench and you think, 'I'm back to that tomorrow'. It must be like somebody who works on an assembly line. Like, every day. On Saturday they know what they're going to be doing on Monday. I didn't want to do that. I wanted something that was going to be different, something that would be different every day, something that you wouldn't know what the future held until it happened. So I saw

27:00 that as best being fulfilled with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. So I left and joined the fire brigade, went to Eastern Hill Fire Station for my training.

What was that like?

Yeah. It was very challenging. They find out very quickly whether you've got claustrophobia or whether you suffer from being up high or stuck in a little hole.

27:30 They had drain pipes that they'd shove you down with blindfolds on and breathing apparatuses so that you got the feel of this only being able to move that far and pushing the breathing apparatus along in front of you to feel around so that I guess when you got into that situation then you'd already done it and you weren't going to panic and if you did panic, now's the time to panic because they could break the pipe away where you were and just pull you out.

28:00 And then they had the big tower which went up ten storeys and a ladder with a hook on the end of it. It was just a one string ladder, not like the two string ladder, just a single string in the middle and your footings across like that with a great big steel hook on the end. The idea was you leaned out the first storey window and you use the steel hook to smash the window on the next floor. And then you hook the hook on the window ledge and you

28:30 swung out and climbed the ladder. If you climbed the ladder too slowly it would swing from side to side, but if you ran up it fast the ladder would only move like that. And then of course you break the glass away, get in the window, and you do the same, lift it up to the next one, smash it. The idea of that was

that the Magyar ladder [fixed ladders such as fire escapes] that they had in those days only went up a hundred and forty six feet. It was the biggest ladder in the southern hemisphere, but it only went to a hundred and forty six feet. So because there were buildings that were far taller than that, so after

29:00 the hundred and forty-six feet the only way up was via these ladders. Yeah so that was an experience. I actually fell from the eighth floor there into a big net. Luckily they had the net there. I actually fell on the edge of the net and fell out of the net and cracked my head on the concrete and woke up across the road at Saint Vincent's hospital after being unconscious and splitting my head open.

29:30 I must have fell out too far and just bounced off the edge of the net and knocked myself out on the concrete. So that was a bit of an experience falling backwards from the eighth floor.

So you were looking for some adventure, is that why you chose that?

I suppose so. In my younger days then you like to - I didn't want to waste my life away in a factory. I needed to get out and see what the rest of the world was doing.

30:00 I guess adventure's the right word. There were so many things that happened too. It certainly was what I was looking for. We went to so many places and so many different things from getting people off window ledges that were asleep. They'd sleepwalked and sat on the window ledge. Someone saw them sitting up there in the middle of the night and we'd go and get them down. All of those sorts of things. From getting cats out of trees to the dreaded

30:30 smell of somebody burning inside a house when you pulled up out the front, all those sort of things were things that you weren't going to see in any other walk of life. It was just an introduction to life, I suppose. All the tragedies that happen and all the wonderful things that happen that you get to see if you're in those sort of jobs.

How long were you with the fire brigade?

Five years. I would have

31:00 I think retired in the fire brigade. I would have spent my whole entire life in the fire brigade - till retirement age anyway - if I hadn't had to leave. I was bitterly disappointed when I had to leave, but life goes on. And they did the right thing by me by ringing the chief officer of the Victorian Civil Ambulance and allowing me to get straight in there. It wasn't a transfer as such, but it was - they made the way easy for me to just

31:30 leave one and go straight to the other. They did the right thing there. Yeah. That wasn't too good. But you get to see all those things. The only reason I had to go was because of my voice. I took in too much smoke at a fairly large fire and my voice went. I lost my voice for nearly six months. And it was the Brigade medical

32:00 officer then who suggested that it might be time to transfer out to something else because if it happened again I might lose my voice all together. So I took his advice and left the fire brigade and went to the Victorian Civil Ambulance.

You lost your voice for almost six completely?

Yeah. Like to a whisper. That's all I could do.

For six months.

Yeah. Five and a half months I think it was all told by the time I started to get my

32:30 voice back and when I did get it back it was my throat was sore to speak. But I eventually got it back but it's never been the same as you can hear. So discretion was the better part of valour. They didn't say you had to go, they said, "It's probably advisable for you to get out of it now". But they didn't say, "We are going to retire you out". They left the decision to me.

33:00 **What sort of other things did you see as doing your career as a fireman?**

Lots of things I suppose. The fire that I lost my voice in was at the William Booth Memorial. It was a Salvation Army Home for old blokes. It was a warehouse in Little Bourke or Little Collins that had been turned

33:30 into - it was a huge warehouse, it had partitioned rooms made out of three plywood partitions, but only went seven or eight feet high and then they had wire netting over that in case something fell from the main ceiling. So it was like a rabbit warren in there, little corridors everywhere. It was only one fellow who went to bed, fell asleep smoking and the rest of them were all - there were twenty-eight of them asphyxiated.

34:00 They all went down the little passage and you could see their handprints on the paint later on in the light of day. And they'd gone down and come into an open area like this and if they'd have turned right they'd have fallen down the stairs - the whole lot of them. They were all on a daisy chain of course hanging on to each other and just remember you can't see anything, it's full of smoke. And they must have been groping away like this in mid air. And right opposite the passageway was

34:30 the door to the toilet block. And of course they all went in there and couldn't get out. Once they got in there they couldn't find the door out again. We found them all slumped in the middle of the floor. There was only one person actually burnt to death and that was the guy who'd gone to sleep smoking. The rest of them were just all asphyxiated. And of course what happened, what made it worse for me or for all of us, was in those days the only breathing apparatus

35:00 we carried was for noxious stuff like if it was acid. Any other time if you went in the smoke you just copped it. Nowadays you don't do anything unless they strap on the oxygen bottle. They didn't have those things in those days. They had an old proto breathing apparatus with caustic balls in a bag which is to repurify your breath and that was only used if you knew

35:30 that there was some chemical in there that you might be breathing in. But other than that you just went in and copped it. And of course what happened is they pressed the button for the disaster plan and of course they had something like fifty nurses, ambulances, all sorts of stuff all down in Little Collins Street or wherever it was. Of course, what would normally happen, we would carry a person down the stairs to

36:00 outside to get some fresh air. But what was happening is, each time we came down with a body we'd only get to the bottom of the smoke line and there would be somebody there to take them off us and we'd be back into it again so we never got any fresh air at all. Of course, by the time you've gone up and down three or four times, like you're dry retching, you're past the vomiting stage by now, you're just dry retching. You know you've got to go back because there's more up there and you can't tell whether they're dead or alive. All you can do is

36:30 get them and bring them down as fast as you can. Because we couldn't get out as normal into the fresh air before we went back in again, that's what did the damage to me. So I often used to say to my mates in the fire brigade, "I can't work this out because everybody else is running out of the building and we're running in. There's got to be something wrong with that. Don't you think there's something funny going on?

37:00 Why are they running out and we're running in?" We saw all sorts of things from burnt bodies in houses, children that were burnt, adults that were burnt. You'd be frightened to open the door because you'd know when you got in the street if there was someone in the house because it was a different smell of course. And then you'd go through the house looking and

37:30 lots of times, most of the time you'd find them behind the door. The door'd be pushed back and you'd open the door and there they'd be. I always remember one day I opened the door and I thought there was a body there, a person there and it was one of those dressmaking dummies on a stand. It was all burnt. I suppose there's got to be a comical side in everything hasn't there?

Was it difficult to

38:00 **absorb that?**

Look, I really think if you're outside that area, if you're not doing that job, you worry about having to see those sort of things, but when you're actually employed to do the job - it's like being in the army, you take it. I think that's got a lot to do with because you've got friends around you. You've got other firemen, in this case, around you. And

38:30 they're probably feeling exactly the same, but no-one shows it. It's all the bravado, it's all if that's what it is, and you just try not to stop and think about it. It's happened and you're there to get anybody out that might still be alive or to do what you can do, put the fire out, do what's going to happen. If you're going to be thinking like that, that something might happen to you, you wouldn't do it. What's the point? If you're going to stand at the outside of a place

39:00 and not want to go in then you better go and find another job I suppose. But I never had any bad sleep or any bad nights about anything that happened to me through the fire brigade. Like I said, probably because you'd come back as a group and talk about it. We would do our own debrief. We didn't need anybody to run a debrief. We'd do that ourself. We'd come back. Often we would be disturbed from our tea, from our meal. And we'd come back and have the meal and

39:30 reheat the meal and then we'd talk about what just happened. And probably that's a good way to do it because it's all spoken about and gone straight away. You don't go home and start thinking about what might have happened or what happened because it's all already been discussed in a group. Which is probably good. Probably group therapy and we didn't even know it in those days.

Also, at this time would have been the 1960s, the infamous 1960s, can you tell us

40:00 **about how this era was so different from the preceding eras? What were the changes that were taking place - that explosion of expression and sexuality, all this stuff going on in the Sixties?**

I don't know. Somebody else asked me that and I couldn't answer them. I grew through it and lived through it of course, we went through all the stove pipe pants and zippers in the pants,

40:30 all of that sort of stuff, Grecian 2000 [hair product] in the hair and people being outspoken more than they were, the dance crazes changing. Yeah. People were doing things that would be frowned on a few

years back. But I don't know what changed that. I don't know. Somebody else asked me that. It was just something that happened. It just seemed to

41:00 sneak in when you weren't looking. But they were good years, I might add. They were certainly better years than they are now.

Do you think the expression there was greater than it is now?

What do you mean by that?

When you say about this outburst of people doing new things, being more outspoken, all this was pretty much new to the whole world. You look at now it's almost like we've returned to conservatism.

41:30 Yeah. It's probably not that so much. I'm referring to the days then when your child could still play on the street. Your kid could play cricket under the street light until it was time to go to bed without any fear that when you look out the window he going to be gone, or she'd be gone. You didn't open your front door to a shotgun blast. The gangsters kept it in the gangster thing.

42:00 Unless you were in their circle you didn't even know it was going on. Kids that were ...

Tape 2

00:30 **Can you describe the differences between the fifties [1950s] and the sixties [1960s]?**

I'm just trying to think where I was in the fifties and the sixties.

01:00 I think the fifties were still more conservative if you like. There were a lot of things that were a no no that became alright in the sixties. Like in the fifties perhaps even in the early sixties, but I always remember that there was no way that you would be living with a female if you weren't

01:30 married in the fifties. That was taboo. You didn't go and live with anybody till you were married. And I don't - if it was happening in the fifties I certainly didn't know about it. But you didn't stop off on the motel on the way home or stay overnight in a motel. Girls weren't allowed to be out after a certain time. That was the biggest thing I could ever - like, you'd get her home by ten o'clock or else.

02:00 And if you sat outside in the car for a while then the porch light'd start going on and off. Time to get in here, dear. That's the sort of thing I remember with the fifties. I remember that my twenty-first birthday had to be held on a farm at my step sister's place. Because it was out of Bacchus Marsh at Anakie, because it was so far away - in those days,

02:30 like Bacchus Marsh is a nothing drive now, but then it was. All my friends and my twin sister's friends were all coming and staying the night. The boys were staying in the shearing shed and the girls were staying in the house with the mums. But the girl that I wanted to take, there was no way in the world that she was allowed to stay overnight. Even my mother rang and said, "Look, everything'll be all right. I'll make sure it's all above board". No way.

03:00 You imagine that sort of thing later on. It became even into the early sixties all that changed and people were starting to live with each other and now it's just become the norm. There's a lot of people consider that living with someone before you marry them is quite the norm. Because you find out whether you're compatible before you get a divorce. There's no damage done, I suppose, is there?

03:30 You get a practise go I suppose. But in my day, in those younger days in the fifties for example you never really got to find out what it was like to live with a partner. You only saw them on a Saturday or Sunday, didn't you? You weren't allowed to have any long time alone with them, actually live together. That's why I reckon so many marriages went wrong

04:00 because they didn't find out that they were really not compatible until such time as they did spend a lot of time together by themselves and then they realised that, "Oh Jesus, look we're really not meant for each other" but it's too late. And in those days also, particularly the Catholic religion, you just didn't get a divorce, did you? You put up with it. The priest said, "Go home and make it work" and that's all there is to it. And that's what your parents said, "Go home and make it work".

04:30 And a lot of people lived and suffered. They wasted their life away living because of what someone might say if they got divorced. And as it went through into the sixties and the seventies [1970s] and eighties [1980s] and of course now it's just the norm. But I don't know - I can't remember great differences except for - the only differences I would look at would be as a teenager. Because that's what I was then.

05:00 A teenager. I remember my life was just a gay abandon. Life was just fantastic. We didn't have any money, but life was fantastic. I got four pound nine and six a week as an apprentice. What the hell could you do with four pound nine [shillings] and six [pence] a week now? I mean, convert that into dollars,

and I know you just can't double it, but it's not much money. You had enough to buy yourself - we always broke three days or four days before payday. Have to go and bum money

05:30 off Mum or Dad. I was always in debt. I was always owing my parents money from one week to the other. But life was good. I had a saxophone under the bed that I couldn't afford to pay the payments for. I had a car out the front that I was flat out paying the payments for, but it was good. And everybody - there was no TV of course.

06:00 TV came in, what, 1956 in time for the Olympics in Melbourne. But prior to that there was no TV so everybody went out and you went to picnics and barbecues and all that sort of stuff. Nobody that I knew had a new car. That's what I remember about the Fifties and Sixties. And as we went into the Sixties as I said

06:30 we - things started to change because we were starting to have a different culture of people come to Australia, weren't we? There were Chinese shops appearing with Chinese restaurants, although there were Chinese restaurants in the Fifties, I know. We always used to go and get dim sims and things, but there were more people, different cultures coming to Australia and therefore different foods

07:00 were available. We were moving towards then poker machines and ten o'clock closing and all those sorts of things instead of pubs being a main bar with marble tiles on the floor and blokes standing their swilling beer because it's five to six [closing time was 6pm at one stage]. They started to have lounges with carpets and proper chairs and meals you could have and a little

07:30 bit of entertainment. We started to become a little bit more cultured. The old Aussie "she'll be right, mate" attitude, snap the neck of a bottle and we'll skull it - we were starting to get a bit more culture. In those days if you were caught - if a bloke was caught drinking a glass of wine, well he was a faggot, wasn't he, there was something wrong with the bloke. A bloody sook. You drank a beer and the only wine you had was you might have bought a bottle of bloody Porphyry Pearl.

08:00 Spatlese Lexia or Star Wine or something for the girlfriend to go to the drive in. But you wouldn't drink it. You'd have your big long necks of beer or your stubbies or something - didn't have stubbies - or cans of beer. And we didn't have an appreciation of wine at all. We weren't that sort of people, were we, in the fifties and sixties? Certainly the fifties. And then I guess

08:30 we grew up culture wise. I guess we didn't do that by ourself. I'm quite convinced that if we didn't have all these different cultures come to Australia we would still be drinking beer out of a bottle and eating pies at the footy and hot dogs and I'm sure we would still be doing that. And I don't know that that's not bad. I suppose you could speak to a lot of Australians - I think that

09:00 you wouldn't get the new, the younger generation to agree to that statement that I just made because they would see that as being uncultured, uncouth. But if you spoke to a lot of people my age I'm sure that a lot of them would say, "Take me back to the fifties and the pies and the bloody pasties and the 1956 Chiko Roll. Take me back

09:30 to there, I loved it". Nobody was bashing anybody on the head. Your kids could play in the street. I don't know what it was, but it was just, life was good. You weren't afraid to walk with your wife to the movies on a Friday night. Nobody was going to leap out of the …

With all these various cultures coming to Australia, was there an element of racism about it at the time or … ?

10:00 We used to call the Italians 'Dagoes' didn't we? Dagoes and wogs, but that was I reckon more of a term of endearment than anything else. It certainly wasn't a vicious infliction on any of them. And all the ones that I knew accepted. They thought it was great. Well it was Nino Cullotta, wasn't it, he wrote that book - well it was his pen name

10:30 anyway, They're A Weird Mob. He makes reference to that. To 'dago bastard' and 'bloody wog' but unlike today where if you use those terminologies now they were be more likely to be hurtful or taken as hurtful than they were then. I mean, you used to work with an Italian, "Come on, you dago bastard,

11:00 give me that bloody spanner. Jesus you wogs are all the same". Or "You Pommy bastard". All those things weren't vicious statements and they were accepted that way. I don't remember any real racism. Sure there were people that I knew that were, "What do they want to be bloody bringing them here for? They're taking our jobs". But we

11:30 didn't understand in those days that Australia had to grow. We weren't going anywhere, we weren't making babies as fast as we should. We weren't get anywhere. We couldn't build buildings because we didn't have enough bloody workers and I don't think a lot of people didn't - I certainly didn't understand those elements. Like, why do we have to have these people come here? We have to have people come here to grow. My only argument with that now at the very moment is that we should

12:00 be more careful of those we choose to come here. Not don't have anybody come here. We have to be a bit more careful who comes here. I think the selection had to be a bit more tighter so we don't get some of those who are already obviously here. But those days that sort of stuff wasn't an issue. Terrorism. What was that? And the bloke who you called a wog was probably your mate.

12:30 He was probably the bloke you drank a beer with at the pub. But like I said, I'm sure - well you wouldn't be allowed to use those, I mean, it's all frowned upon now isn't it? And somebody once said to me - and we told jokes about wogs, didn't we? We still do things about that. We always do it. And it's always a joke about the Irish or the Kiwis [New Zealanders]. And somebody said not long ago to me,

13:00 "You can get into serious trouble now for telling those sort of jokes about people" - their nationality or their affliction or whatever it might be. And I think that's bad. Because if we can't express ourselves openly with each other then it's all going to be built up inside and we're going to get a real racism problem. But while we're able to express it out and I can tell a joke about your something and you can tell a

13:30 joke about - I mean, it's the same joke. We just change the nationality, don't we? While we're doing that it's out in the open and it's all good clean stuff. And if we're going to be made to be not a allowed to do that I just think that's going bad places.

How hard was it for all these cultures to get in this melting pot during the Sixties and get along with each other - not only Australians and other nationalities, but the other nationalities themselves? What did you see?

14:00 I think that was helped by the different clubs that opened. They had the Italian Club and the German Club and all those sorts of clubs opened. In the early days with the pubs these people were pushed into a main bar area where they either got on or they punched each others' lights out, but eventually they got on.

14:30 To my knowledge, what I saw, mind you it was my younger day and you don't see - if it was happening to me now I'd be studying it, but in those days you didn't bother about it. What happened over there was what happened over there. But I reckon they tended to live in their own little groups.. The Italians that lived next door to us, there were about eight of them. The only people that ever visited were Italian rellies or Italian friends. I

15:00 never ever saw Chinese people going out to dinner with Italians or whatever other culture it might be. They all tended to stay in their own little groups. I think they still do that today. Apart from a working environment that brings them together. But I don't think they would purposely go out to meet. I don't think a Vietnamese person - or let's just say Asian -

15:30 would go out of their way to go to dinner with an Croatian. And vice versa. I just don't think that happens. I still think they've got their own community. That's why Springvale is like it is today I suppose. And Parramatta and places like that. Because they seem to go, they make their own area, don't they? And then every shop down Springvale Road is all Asian

16:00 cuisine because they're all there. I don't think that's happening today. I don't think they're in the melting pot now apart from a minority of them who are thrown together because of a working environment because they're all - take a big place like General Motors Holden, then there's a whole heap of ethnic people working there all from all over the world and they're working on the same assembly line, they're having their lunch together in the lunchroom, aren't they?

16:30 They're being forced together. I suppose there's a lot of friendships grow out of that where it's a mixed culture, social thing. And certainly General Motors Holden and Ford and places like that and Myers, the bigger places, they have their own social clubs and they have their own outings and of course they're put together in a melting pot like that. But I don't think they jump in the pot by themselves. I didn't see them do it then and I don't see them doing it now. I don't see them doing it anyway. I might be wrong but I certainly don't see that

17:00 all these different cultures jumping into the same pot together. Do you?

Some.

Yeah. I don't think it's a big think.

You get a bit of both. Half of them want to stay together and half of them - it's less and less in groups, I feel, now. It's more integration happening. But it depends on the individual.

Yeah. There are those people who want to. There are those people who want to get out of their own

17:30 culture - not so much culture, but they want to get out and meet people like Australians or Europeans whatever the term you want to use, but it's not their own kind. 'They want to get outside their own circle and meet people. But I just don't see hundreds of them jumping into the pot to mix with others.

Looking back, I myself, from the eighties to the nineties [1990s] to

18:00 **now, you sort of just live through it and things happen and then I guess in twenty years time they'll be defining decades. When you're actually living through the fifties and sixties, do you notice the change that is happening around you?**

I don't suppose you do. You don't say, "Oh look at that. Suddenly yesterday we weren't allowed to do this, but today we are".

18:30 You live through, like you say, the currency change [from imperial to metric]. You were there when it went from pounds, shillings and pence to dollars. Those are the sort of - you can paint a line for that, can't you? You can say, "Tomorrow we're not allowed to use the two bob bit but we're into the dollar coin". That's a definite thing that happens. But things that change slowly, I just think you work through them. You don't know they've happened until you sit here talking to you now,

19:00 say, "Oh yeah I remember back then we used to do that and you remember when you couldn't do that?" But yeah as you live through it I didn't see - you see there's changes in the clothing, you start wearing different clothing, someone has the balls to wear something for the first time - they've got to haven't they? And everyone goes, "Er, look at that, gee that's a bit out" and then the next thing you know there's someone else wearing them and the next thing you know they got it in a shop window and next thing you're wearing it.

19:30 Yeah. "I'm not wearing that until half the population's wearing it. I'm not having people stare at me". And haircuts change. We went from the skinhead crew-cut to short back and sides to starting to if you had your hair over your ears it wasn't seen to be a bad thing. But like years ago you went to the barber and you had a short back and sides,

20:00 mate, and that was it. The girls had the hair over their ears and you didn't. And if you did even your mates are going "Dear me". But that's slowly changed as well. But you don't notice it because it's not a painted line where tomorrow you won't be able to get a short back and sides. Tomorrow it's long hair. It just slowly sneaks up on you. See, you look at me now I've got a hole in my ear.

20:30 In those days - even with my boys as my boys grew up I said, "The first one that comes home here with a bloody earring is out". It wasn't done in those day. Because I was a retired RSM, regimental sergeant major, warrant officer class one. Jesus, for me to have an earring you've got to be joking. I would be looking at soldiers' ears to see if they had a hole put in their ear. It just wasn't done. My boys

21:00 even to today when I went and got this ear pierced my boys said, "The old man's lost his marbles. What the hell's he doing?" I said to them, "I'm growing my hair long and I'm getting a hole in my ear". "Fair dinkum?" "Yeah." "We'll believe it when we see it." And I said, "I'm sixty-two now and I've had a disciplined life nearly all of my life and it's time now for me to be able to do some of the things that I want to do.

21:30 And if I want to get a hole in my ear or if I want to grow my hair slightly longer than normal then, bugger it, I'm going to do it. And then that's been accepted. That's nothing. No-one'll say, "Now he's growing his hair long, what's wrong with him?" Because half the population in males have got long hair haven't they? But changes happen very slowly and I certainly didn't notice them. I don't suppose you would have noticed them

22:00 either. As it sneaks along you just go with it, don't you? It's just a slow process, it's like somebody I don't know who's sitting in the sun getting a suntan. You don't just look down and go "Oh beauty I can go in now". Do you? It's not one hour and you're done. It slowly happens to you. You don't notice it until

22:30 it's already happened and you come inside and go under the shower and "Oh Jesus" and you can see you're all red. But it's already happened, but it happened so slowly you didn't notice it until it already happened. And I reckon living through the fifties and sixties was similar to laying on the beach getting a suntan.

After you were a fire fighter you moved on to ambulances, is that correct?

Yeah.

Can you tell us about that time of your life?

23:00 Yes. I went across to Victorian Civil Ambulance and then of course that was where you start to see the other side. You really start to then see the down side of life I suppose, the bad side, the unfortunate side of life. But that was another experience in my life where again you have to accept what you see and it's no good

23:30 showing any emotion at the scene of an accident and you don't because you've got a job to do. It's amazing. If you've got something to do and you are trained to do that job then nothing else matters. It's like the fire brigade. I mean, nothing else matters. It's like, "Geez, why would you go run in there?" Well because you're trained and everybody has a job to do and everybody does it. And afterwards you go, "Oh fancy going in there. God, I'd have to have rocks in my head". But you've already done it because your training

24:00 does that and you've only got one thing on the mind. It's like at the scene of an accident. You've got a job to do. And someone's life depends on that. It's no good you carrying away or getting emotional about the thing and you don't because your training allows you to just do the job you've got to do. And we saw as you can imagine you'd see all sorts of things from people overdosing. In those days

24:30 I don't know - I shouldn't say in those days, it's probably still happening. It's just that I'm not in the system any more but it seemed to me that there were quite a few overdoses in Australia, in Victoria. And we always knew whether they'd been successful or not because if the police were sitting in the car out the front then the person in there was no longer with us. But if the police were inside the house

then

25:00 whoever was in there, it was only an attempted suicide and they were still alive and well. That's how we used to gauge it because they wouldn't stay in the house. If the person had passed away they would go and sit in the car. Yeah. And sometimes you see the same dude who had about five goes. You just wonder whether he's really fair dinkum about it. Like, one particular guy had slashed his wrists, he'd taken an overdose

25:30 and he'd jumped off a chair with a thing round his neck. Now the cord broke, he didn't take enough tablets and by the time we got there the bleeding had stopped and it had started to dry. The dry blood. So you've got to say to yourself, like this guy's had about five things at once but neither of them have been enough. So I don't know, what is he doing, is it attention seeking or what's happening? Or we used to get the one where the husband or the wife'd say,

26:00 "Well that's it. I've had this. I'm taking an overdose. I'm taking the pills". Or she'd come running out of the bedroom saying, "I've just swallowed twenty-five mogadon and he'd say, "Yeah yeah" like she's done it twenty times before. And woke up with a headache. So this time he doesn't - "Yeah yeah well go to bloody bed". And of course she's dead. By the time he goes to bed it's too bloody late. She's actually done it this time. Because she's done it that many times and he's said, "Yeah"

26:30 And finally it's happened. It's amazing the stories. And then of course what I suppose the most disturbing in that was that when you went to the mortuary which used to be in Spencer Street extension and on a Monday morning or particularly if it was a long weekend it'd be the Tuesday then they'd have these bodies stacked up everywhere and they were flat out doing post mortems and the buzz saw'd be going, buzzing the tops of the head off, they'd be slicing them open and

27:00 if you were going in with someone the swinging doors would swing open when they'd bring somebody else out stitched up like a bloody chaff bag and you could see in there. And they'd be in there a dozen of them and they'd be slicing. Someone, the whole chest'd be open and the top of someone's head would be off. Yeah. Monday or Tuesday was always a big day at the mortuary and I guess looking down the retrospectoscope [using hindsight] now, all of those things

27:30 really - unbeknownst to me - prepared me for my tour in South Vietnam.

How were you trained for this work?

We spent about a week - no I don't think I did. I think I had two days training because I'd come from the fire brigade and I suppose that must have said we'd already seen a whole lot of stuff.

28:00 And I had the First Aid Certificate anyway. I had to spend two days upgrading my certificate and then go to night classes for I think nearly two months to upgrade to maternity for childbirth and all those sort of things which I wouldn't have been normally trained for. But apart from that nothing. At the end of the car you went and you just were faced with it I suppose. You survived whether you liked it or you didn't.

28:30 You left if you didn't like it.

How would you compare being a fire-fighter to being in the ambulance?

I would have rathered been a fire-fighter. It was probably more dangerous but it was - the work was more varied. The shift work was pretty good. The ambulance shift work was lousy. It was more of a cushy job I suppose the ambulance. You were always neatly dressed

29:00 in tie and shirt and pants. You hardly got dirty. It was a clean job. Inside the ambulance was bloody spotless obviously. Everything smelt of metho [methylated spirits]. And everything was just so clean. It was just a pristine, clean job. But I would have rathered the fire brigade. The fire brigade I thought was more a he man or manly job than an ambo.

29:30 The ambo to me was - and if there's any females that are going to watch this tape then they're not going to like what I'm about to say, but there's blue jobs and there's pink jobs and I know there's a lot of pink people that can do blue jobs and there's a lot of blue people that can do pink jobs. But what's the point of me doing the cooking in the bloody scones in here while my wife's out there chopping

30:00 wood. I know that chopping wood's a blue job, but I know that if I'm not around she can go and do that blue job and she knows that she's not there that I can do this pink job with the scones, but if we're sensible about it we fit in, don't we? And it's better for me to be doing this particular blue job and her that pink job because we're both available and you've got to be sensible about it. I just think work is the same. And as far

30:30 the ambulance is concerned I just saw that being a fire-fighter was a blue job and the ambulance was a pink job. Whilst we could do both - or there's a lot of women couldn't have been a fireman just because of their build, their make up and there's a lot of women that could. There's a lot of women that you could put into a fireman's uniform these days and you wouldn't know that they weren't a male. Because they're those sort of people.

31:00 I don't mean they're ugly. I mean, they're those sort of people. They're gung-ho. They might be female,

but they might as well have been male.

Did you find the things you saw in the ambo distressing or … ?

To start with I did. But then like I said you suddenly realise, “Look I’m here” and the guy I worked with to start with was fantastic. He’d give you a dig in the ribs and say,

31:30 “Don’t just bloody stand there. You know what you’re supposed to be doing”. I’d then away I’d go. I only needed a couple of digs in the ribs then. But yeah there were some horrific things obviously that you say, but you just can’t stop and start thinking about it. Look, you stop and start thinking about it and you think “Oh Jesus, someone’s going to get a telephone call now to say that

32:00 their father’s or husband’s not coming home from work. Jesus, someone’s going to be getting a phone call to say that their brother’s been killed or whatever it might be” and if you’re going to start to stop and think like that then there’s no hope. I don’t mean there’s no hope for you in the world in other aspects. You’ve got to get on with life, haven’t you? We just, Penny just lost a little puppy the other day who I ran over the thing in the ute.

32:30 And I mean I felt really bad about that and I still do and she was devastated and she’ll take some time to get over that, but life has to go on. And if we sit every night and think about that then we’re never going to go anywhere. And life’s like that. The world is a bowl of roses isn’t it, until life interferes? And that’s it, that’s what happens. Life interferes.

What did you first know about what was happening in Vietnam?

33:00 I was in the regular army of course before Vietnam started - was I? 1968 I joined. So when did Vietnam start - 1965. So no it was already going and I knew absolutely nothing about it until I joined the army. It was there in the distance. Nobody had really made a big deal about it because national service hadn’t started, you see. So nobody was too

33:30 concerned about it because it was the regular soldier who was going and that was what he was getting paid for anyway. And a lot of people considered that we shouldn’t be there anyway, but to my knowledge it wasn’t blown out of style until later on when the ballot came in. That’s what really blew it. The fact that it wasn’t a ballot anyway.

34:00 To my mind if you’re going to have conscription, and that’s what they called it, then everybody goes unless you got bloody flat feet or there’s something wrong with you. Conscription is I go, you go, he goes. If you’re going to have a ballot and draw people’s marbles out of a bloody barrel, that is not conscription. And that was the biggest problem because the lady next door wanted to know why your son is boozing in the backyard having a barbecue while her son is over there as a conscript. Why isn’t he going? Because

34:30 his marble never came out. To my mind I’ll never ever be convinced otherwise that there wouldn’t have been the problem they had with national servicemen if they’d have played it right. They just were too bloody weak. They called it conscription. It was the conscription you’re having when you’re not having a conscription. They were too bloody weak to say, “Conscription’s conscription and there’s no marbles in the bloody barrel, out you go, boy.

35:00 Everyone goes and that’s it”. And that’s what caused all this tension with everybody.

Do you think they could have got the numbers through a call for volunteers?

They may have. That might have been the first way to go. But certainly if the decision was for national service - mind you I think if they brought it in now it’d do some people a lot of good because we’ve got a lot of boneheads out there who needs some discipline and I know

35:30 a lot of guys that were national servicemen that would admit to you now that they are a better person for the service they did. And some of them would have been behind bars by now or destitute if it hadn’t been for that year or couple of years that they spent in the service. And some of them will admit that and others won’t. But yeah that was the biggest problem that happened with that. One in all in. And this marble business was just rubbish.

36:00 It was just pussy footing around the edges and that’s what caused all the problems.

Why did you actually decide to join the army?

I joined the army because like I said I would still be in the fire brigade - I wouldn’t because I’m too old now, but I would have retired from there. I went to the ambulance because of medical reasons. And the ambulance was shocking - the shiftwork was just horrendous. Like there was about

36:30 three different day shifts, two different afternoon shifts. You couldn’t keep up with it. At least in the fire brigade you had your roster and you knew what you were doing every day of the week for a month and you could plan to go to a wedding. People used to plan things around your roster, like we do now with our workers, but you didn’t know from one week to the other. You’d come in and say, “I’m on afternoon shift, but I’m on a three o’clock start. Oh, tomorrow I’m on the five o’clock

37:00 start”. It was absolutely ridiculous. Anyway I stuck that out for a while and then the end came when

what finally made the decision was that we were taking a patient into Prince Henry Hospital in St Kilda Road. And it was only a transfer patient, it wasn't an accident victim, and it was a really stinking hot day. We'd got into the hospital in a lift and we'd both of us had taken our caps off

37:30 and put on the trolley of the patient, down near the patient's feet who was under a blanket of course and we just put our two caps there. Well by the time we got back to the car we'd been reported and we both had to front the chief officer for being incorrectly dressed in the hospital. Some bugger had - probably some cranky old matron or somebody in there had dirked us for being incorrectly dressed and we had our hats off. That was, I said, "Righto,

38:00 that's it, I've had it. I'm not putting up with this lot. The things we do out on the road and the things we do and someone's going to dirk us for not having our hat on in the hospital, like you got to be joking". So that was me. I said, "Right, that's it. I'm not putting up with all this shift work if someone's going to do that to me" and no only that, that it would be taken seriously enough to call us in there. That was the second part about it - that someone

38:30 took it as a serious offence. You got to be joking. So get a life. Yeah what? Anyway, like hello! So that was the crunch. So I went back to my trade for a little while. Couldn't settle in there because now you see I've had all these action activities. Everything how is going to be boring.

39:00 I went back to that for a while. I drove Pioneer Clipper buses for Ansett Pioneer for a while. I did a bit of truck driving for a while. When I say a while, all this that I've just told you, you could put in the space of two years and then that was it, I said, "Bugger this, I'm going to join the army". Because then I saw that as the next best thing to not having a normal, mundane, nine to five

39:30 job if you like.

When you joined up did you think you'd be going to Vietnam?

To be quite honest I never gave it any thought at all. I knew of course when I joined up that if war broke out that's what you were there for. It wasn't just a trundle around the headquarters building somewhere and masquerade as a soldier. I knew that I was going to be trained and if anything happened we had to go. It wasn't I suppose till I got to

40:00 Kapooka when they started training us for grenades and map reading, field craft and all that sort of stuff and they're saying that "Some of you people within six months are going to be in Vietnam". I guess that's when it hit me. "And if you don't listen to what we're telling you you're not going to be coming home. So pay attention to what we're telling you". Because we had a few boneheads there.

Tape 3

00:30 **Can you take us through your enlistment process and what happened to you through that?**

Well I enlisted in Victoria and went through my recruit training at Kapooka in New South Wales. I by that stage was twenty-five years of age because as you heard through my history I couldn't possibly be any

01:00 younger. So I was the second oldest in my platoon going through Kapooka because most of them were younger people, eighteen, nineteen. It was a mixture of national servicemen plus regular army that was in my platoon at Kapooka. We did I don't know how long but it seemed like six months at Kapooka.

01:30 Of course, it wasn't, it was more like six weeks or twelve - no, it couldn't have been twelve. I think it was six weeks. Whatever it was, it was a long time. And although I was pretty fit because of my background with the fire brigade I still found it pretty hard going keeping up with the seventeen, eighteen year olds. Although I realise now that if I was as

02:00 fit as I was then, now, I'd be real happy about it. But at the time I thought I had a bit of a hard time. So yes I went to Kapooka in New South Wales. It was a mixture of ARA people, Australian Regular Army, and national servicemen [compulsory military service] - or as we had to call them, selective servicemen. You weren't allowed to call them Nasho Bastards. They had to be called selective servicemen. So from there

02:30 because of my background with the fire brigade and ambulance I went straight to the medical corps which was probably one of the few smart things that the department of defence did in the twenty-four years that I saw it. Because it would have been ludicrous to waste that training I already had to make me an infanteer or a tank driver

03:00 or something like that. It would have been ridiculous. So off I went to the school of army health which in those days was at Healesville.

We'll just stop there for a second and I just want to go back to the first training - your recruit training you did? You said it was - you were older than most of the other guys, what was the

relationship between you and them about your age?

Nothing. Good. No because I was - the

03:30 guy that I - it's funny. I suppose water finds its own level in a way. That's why we have people live together and people make different mates and whether that's structured on your income or your culture or what, but everybody seems to find their own level and it was a guy - and he won't mind me mentioning his name - called Frank Zimmerman who I happened to be sitting next to. We saw each other and of course we looked about the same age.

04:00 So we came over and had a fag together and we finished up going on the bus together to Kapooka. We were the two oldest on the bus. He was about four or five years older than me so he really did it harder than I did. And four or five years doesn't sound like much, but up there doing what you've got to do four or five years is a lot of years. So Frank and I hit it off together. When we first got there they were referring to us as "Dad"

04:30 although we were only four or five or six or seven years older than they were, we were the dads of the platoon. But once we got into training and they could see that we were as good as they were, we could keep up with them, we were just as good a shot as they were, we could do all the things that they could do, we could come in more than halfway up the platoon in a run -we

05:00 wouldn't be last. There'd be twenty people or thirty people behind us that were a lot younger than we were. We were accepted very quickly into the platoon because we were more mature than they were as well. And they used to come to us for advice. Why they did that I'm buggered if I know because we didn't know bugger all about the army either. But they just thought that they'd come and ask us advice on things. "What do you think if we did that? What do you think it might be if we did that?" We could only give them - it was non-army

05:30 advice if you like. It was probably the best thing to do under certain circumstances and they were quite happy to talk to us about that. So yeah Frank's and my relationship with the rest of the platoon was very good. From day one till the end. We had a guy in the platoon who - I can't think of his name now - he was, he might have been German, I can't think of his name.

06:00 This guy couldn't march at all. Two left feet. He used to square gait everywhere. And it was so bad that come the final march out parade he had to stand off to one side because he buggered the whole thing up. And I always remember we used to have to march to the rifle range which was some five ks away. And you'd either double or you'd march. Anyway we'd be marching away and this guy used to be always on the end. They put him right at the back because if they didn't - he'd put everybody -

06:30 if he was in the middle he'd put everybody out of step. He was forever skipping trying to get into step the whole way. I always remember one day he actually got in the step and I said to someone, "Look at this". Fran, I think his name was. "Fran's got in step." Well the bloody platoon sergeant must have seen it and the mean bugger as soon as he saw this bloke get in step he yelled out, "Platoon change step" and everybody changed step and this poor bugger was buggered again. I thought, 'What a mean thing to do'.

07:00 But we were accepted good and I never saw - where did I see - I saw Frank again at a posting somewhere. I don't know where it was now. I might have been Sydney somewhere and I had to go. He went to engineers and I went into the medical corps and I ran into him again - I didn't run into him in Vietnam, but I ran into him a couple of times through my twenty odd years, twenty three odd years

07:30 in the army. I ran into him a couple of times through the system and then I never ever saw him again until one Anzac Day down at Sorrento. He was standing out the front of the RSL [Returned and Services Leagues club] and I turned up and there he was. It was like old home week. So I went off to Healesville.

Just on training again, what was the relationship between the conscripts and the regulars?

Not all that good. See, the problem was -

08:00 it wasn't all that good right throughout my career. And perhaps when we start to talk about South Vietnam I could tell you more about it at an appropriate time. See, the problem was that most of them didn't want to be there and most of them were, well they had a hard time with discipline.

08:30 And the fact that they didn't want to be there and the fact that they knew they had some rights even though they were in the system. One of them in fact had written to his mother because he had been made to have his hair shaved off and he wrote to his mother who went to the local ombudsman who got in touch with the department of defence and from then on national servicemen weren't allowed to have their head shaved. So it was that strong.

09:00 And it was their own doing. It wasn't that the regular soldier didn't like the guy. It was because of their attitude. Like, they played on that. And not all of them. We shouldn't shoot all dogs because some have got fleas I suppose. But most of them did have fleas. They didn't want to be there and as I explained later on I had all sorts of trouble overseas.

09:30 **Just on a technical issue, if a conscript comes in and a regular comes in, without him saying he's a conscript, would you know? Or how would you know?**

No. You wouldn't know. Not when they're all mixed in together anyway. When they all arrived on the bus together you would because they all got off the bus. There was five busloads that came and you all got off the bus. And there they are.

10:00 There's the Nasho Bastards. Selective servicemen as we were told. But once they mixed in and they wore the same baggy green skin as you did then there was no way of knowing and the service numbers weren't any different - they didn't have a special service number. So there was no way of knowing, but you quickly found out because they were very quick to tell you that they were conscripted.

10:30 **Did that seem strange to you? Because if you wanted to fit in with these other guys you'd probably want to keep it secret, don't you think?**

I don't know. I suppose I would. But sooner or later somebody's going to find out anyway. I mean, people talk. You go to the canteen at night and have a few beers and people say, "What did you do before you came into the army?" "The magistrate said four years or the army" or whatever it was. "I was …" What he's going to have to say is, "Oh well I'm a national serviceman.

11:00 I'm here because I was told I had to be here". And like I said, some of them - I had some very good friends that were national servicemen. They were quite all right. They accepted the fact that they had to go and they went and they did what they had to do and they did it very good and they came home and got on with their life and there were those who didn't. There were those who were obviously the conscientious objectors who stood on the box and didn't want - they didn't go at all. There were those who went and said, "I'm not going to fire a gun, but I'll go". So they were put into

11:30 dental corps, ordinance, medical, things like that. Then there were those who dead set didn't want to go and they didn't go either. They were left at home to serve their couple of years without going overseas. And I think that that's probably what made the difference between the ARA guys and the national servicemen. There was this extension about, "I'm not going. I don't have to go. You're here because

12:00 you want to be. I'm here because I have to be and I'm not going. And if I go I'm going to be a bastard the whole time I'm there. I'm going to cause as much trouble as I bloody can. And sack me and I'm gone". That was the thing, you see. And there was bugger all discipline with him because what are you going to do with him? If you give him a discharge, that's what he wants. He's bloody amazing, so where are you?

Did they walk around with a

12:30 **bit of an air of superiority if they were educated and so on?**

No. They walked around with a bit of an air of superiority not so much because if they were educated. There were - mind you there were a lot of ARA, regular army people who were very well educated who were ORs - Other Ranks - and didn't want to be anything else. I knew a lot of people who were well educated who were private soldiers, corporals,

13:00 sergeants, whatever, and I knew some other people in the other ranks that were bloody dills and should have been down there. However that's the way the system worked, but these guys I just think that they walked around like that because they were a select group. They knew that everybody had been told that they are selective servicemen, they are to be treated as such. And there'd be a lot of military people,

13:30 officers etcetera that would tell you that's bullshit, that they didn't get treated differently at all, but they bloody well did. At the end of the day, on the final analysis, when it came to the crunch, whatever term you want to put on it, they were selective servicemen and they had channels to places where the regular soldier didn't. And when things started to get a bit too tough then people had to back away and people like local councillors or local ombudsmen

14:00 were writing letters and saying, "You just be very careful what you do with this fellow, he is a selective serviceman and he is not to be shoved around like the grub regular guy".

Did you see many conscripts who just couldn't handle what was happening to them?

Unfortunately there was one fellow in particular and I sometimes wonder who it is that selects these people.

14:30 I think I said before that conscription is conscription and that's it. There's no marbles. If you're fit you go. But if you're not fit and you're not suited then you don't go. Whether you got flat feet or whether you are considered to be psychologically unstable or you won't fit the mould or whatever it might be then particularly if they got a chance of going to a war - and I often wondered who it was, who psyches the psyche.

15:00 I'd like to meet some of these trick cyclists that say a guy's all right to go. And there's one guy in particular - I went to after my initial training prior to going to Vietnam everybody went to Canungra and in my platoon at Canungra there's a guy there called Faraday. I can't remember his first name, but he was in my platoon. He was the most unsuited, unlike person that you'd ever be, like you wouldn't even enlist him in the boy scouts.

15:30 He was so unsuited to be a soldier yet he was a national serviceman. Now who the bloody hell selected

him and said he was all right to go, I'm buggered if I know. But it was a catastrophe in the end. He was the sort of guy who was overweight, hated any form of discipline and not only that he was a bloody dill as well. Things like there was a place there called Heartbreak Hill. I don't know whether anybody else has mentioned it

16:00 during other interviews, but it was a big hill there called Heartbreak Hill and it was really a heartbreak. You marched up that with bricks in your bloody pack and all sorts of things and it was a killer. And we had a great big GPMG 60 machine gun to carry with all the rounds. And you had to share that. You couldn't carry it all the way yourself. So as a company you'd walk with it for certain distance and you'd share it. You'd share it right down the whole platoon. Not this bloke. He wasn't carrying it for no-one.

16:30 He was always miles back. He was always last way back. He was the sort of guy that the sergeant was always going to be yelling at. "Faraday!" And then he was always through his national service going to have someone on his back this bloke, every day. And the worst thing happened of course. He went to Vietnam and he would have had - and I didn't serve with him in a platoon, but I was

17:00 there at the same time he was, of course. The same thing would have happened. The sergeant would have been on his back every day. Well Christmas Eve he walked into the sergeants' mess and shot five of them. I picked them up. The only reason he didn't shoot fifty-five of them - the gun jammed. And that was Christmas Eve and this was this bloody Faraday who way back you could see - and me as a bloody recruit in those

17:30 days - oh no, I was a sergeant then - could see, it was sticking out like you know what that this guy is so unsuited for service, never mind service overseas, and there he goes. And the inevitable happened. Because he saw the sergeant - he was sick to death of the sergeant because he was the guy who was yelling at him all the time. So he just - and of course you carried a loaded gun everywhere you went so it was easy, wasn't it? He just walked into the back of the mess. Everybody has their guns hanging

18:00 up on the hook inside of the mess because there's no guns at the bar and you carried them wherever you went, but you hooked them on the hook. So their guns are up here, they're down there. This bloke walks in and just opens fire.

I don't know if you recall Full Metal Jacket [an American movie set during the Vietnam War]. There was a character in the first half of the movie who had some very similar things happening to him with the drill sergeant shouting at him and so on. It sounds very similar to that. And he ended up in the film shooting his drill sergeant as well.

Yeah. I don't recall that. Yeah well this bloke

18:30 shot several of them. And he would have shot them all if it hadn't jammed.

Do you believe that's a result of what some call bastardisation [violence and harassment used as part of initiation procedure]?

No I don't. Not in this guy's case because I knew the guy. Whilst I didn't serve with him long enough to know him that well I saw him long enough at Canungra under pressure and let's face it, the sergeant, that's what his job is. And there was no

19:00 bastardisation involved in the weeks that we spent at Canungra, but the guy had to be yelled at all the time. Like, he was way back there. And we're all suffering for it. "Get up here. Get up here. Carry the armour. Carrying the bloody gun. You are carrying the gun." That's not bastardisation. That's training. That is trying to mould this guy from a civilian slob into some military shape to go overseas. And nothing bastardisation about it. And it would have been the

19:30 same over there. Like, this guy's going to get someone shot. So they have to be on his back all the time. And if he's that sort of guy, which he was, which he shouldn't have been in the system in the beginning, he's being picked on or looks like he's being picked on the whole - and he would see that as, "They pick on me all day every day". But there's a reason for that because somebody could die because of his lack of whatever.

20:00 So they've got to be on his back all the time. And the reason they're on his back all the time is because he's bloody unsuited for service, so let's go back to the trick cyclist who said he was okay to serve. Bullshit. He shouldn't have been in the army. So of course he shot these bloody people and then of course it's Christmas Eve. The poor buggers are going to get told Christmas Day aren't they that their dad's not coming home, that he's been shot by some bastard.

Just besides this guy and

20:30 **what happened to him, did you see bastardisation or was it a part of training?**

No. They picked on - the weakest guy got picked on. That happened in the platoon. It didn't have to be anybody of any rank to do that. It's like a yard full of chickens or WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, isn't it, the weakest one gets picked on. And

21:00 like other animals sorting out their pecking order, and they do it with everything, don't they? Lions, tigers, everybody sorts out their pecking order, who's going to be in charge and we get suddenly this

pyramid forms, doesn't it? Who's in charge, who's the 2IC [second in command] - that silently happens everywhere. Then that happens in military as well in a platoon of say twenty people living in a dormitory style building. Then that's going to happen.

21:30 It's going to be this go and see him, he knows all about that or go and see him, he's in charge of that. Or "That dickhead. Don't ask him" and it happens. I don't know if you call that bastardisation I suppose. But I never ever saw my military service I don't think I ever saw any real bastardisation. Not like they're talking about these days anyway. Like that

22:00 incident where they're talking about - what did they do to that poor bugger? They - I forget what they did now, but they had that big inquiry, didn't they? I just forget what they did to that guy. I don't know whether they tarred and feathered him. They did something to him. I can't remember - the big incident just a few years ago. But I never saw any of that. If you want to call being pushed into shape bastardisation I suppose it depends on what name you want to call it.

22:30 Some people need to really be pushed and shoved to get into shape. And the guy that's putting them into shape, he's only got a certain amount of time to do that. And once he's gone, he's gone. But I never saw the things they're talking about now in bastardisation. Not in my time in the service anyway. They were always pretty good. Yeah. People got yelled at, people got bloody disciplined,

23:00 but I never saw someone who was taken round the back and painted bloody red or had his bloody pants pulled down and made to stand there while somebody whacked. None of that. I never saw any of that. If it happened in the battalions then I never was ever aware of it and certainly all the postings I was on I never saw any of that. And even if we had other soldiers of different nationality

23:30 I never saw any racism either. Not in my time.

When they pick on the little guy or to train, there's two ways they can go. They either become very good soldiers and they're whipped into shape, or they become like this other guy you were mentioning and they just can't handle it and blow up essentially. What would be the percentage that would be

24:00 **whipped into shape and become very good soldiers?**

Ninety percent. And out of that other ten percent, nine percent of those would be discharged as unsuitable I reckon. What I saw anyway. They'd get an SO Psyche S8 tag [? discharged on psychological grounds] on them and they'd go. Or they would be shoved into a canteen somewhere where they - they used to have the ASCO [Australian Services Canteen Organisation] canteen and they'd be shoved

24:30 into there to sell watches or whatever it was for a period of time. But then there are those that escaped through and they're the ones and it was a very small minority, but it doesn't have to be many to do the damage that this bloke did. And yeah I don't know. Maybe there should be some reporting system so when the guy left Canungra that somebody should have then realised if they hadn't realised it before

25:00 when the guy got to Canungra, his bad performance at Canungra, then maybe somebody should have made a note of that and made recommendation that the guy be reassessed and maybe that's where it fell down. I suppose in defence of the trick cyclists I mean he can only interview you, can't he? He doesn't see you under stress or see you out in the fields so he's only got a certain time. I suppose if you can bash the square peg into the bloody round hole, you pass. Particularly with

25:30 conscription because there'd be a lot of people trying to get out of it like trying to put the square peg in the round hole so they didn't have to go.

How effective was the training at Canungra to prepare you for Vietnam?

Very good. Pretty good. Bear in mind that most of the ARA people had already had good training at their recruit battalion because everybody knew that

26:00 Vietnam was already on so the training of the recruit was now focused around the fact that ninety percent of the soldiers going through recruit battalion would find themselves at Vietnam so their training had to be the very basic, start the basic training for overseas service. And then of course when you did finally go then by the time you got to Canungra you should already know about map reading, you should know about field craft, you can fire a weapon fairly successfully, hit the thing

26:30 once out of eight. Whatever the pass mark was. Yeah. So you had all this basic knowledge already so they only had to pick up on that. And most of the training at Canungra was, oh, river crossing with rifles, and obstacle courses carrying lots of weight, demonstrations of

27:00 weapon pits and booby traps and things that were in Vietnam. They had a big area fenced off where they gave you a - someone was in the middle and they gave you a demonstration of how things happen. They'd touch something in the thing and swing down and blink into the tree or spikes'd come up out of the ground, or a trip wire. They had all the stuff set up that the Vietnamese would use. So we had to demonstrations on those. Then we had a bushwalk as close to the jungle as you could get. and you'd walk round and it would be

27:30 booby trapped and you had to take note of whatever - they had someone lying on the ground where you

had to just not go over and turn the guy over so you had all this. So it was pretty good.

On a scale of one to ten, ten being just like Vietnam and realistic, how much did Canungra, how much was it like Vietnam?

Well in all fairness to them it was impossible to

28:00 make it like it here in Australia. If you had have gone to Singapore or somewhere you could have. But I would say it was probably seven out of ten. Probably. Somewhere between six and seven out of ten. Only because you can't actually reproduce the environment. Absolutely impossible.

28:30 And you can't instil in someone's head that every one of them looks the same. What do you do? But that a small child is capable of blowing your legs off. Those are the sorts of things that they can't instil in you. You can only go and see that yourself. That's what a lot of people didn't understand back here when they found that

29:00 villages had been burned or bombed, they didn't understand that the small child that had been bombed with it was also a VC [Viet Cong] and carried a hand grenade and all the other little things that could blow your legs off or kill you. So it didn't matter whether they were this big or this big, if they carried something that was going to harm you then they were the bloody enemy. And it's hard for someone back home to come to terms with that and it's hard to differentiate between the small child smiling at you -

29:30 are they smiling at you because they're glad to see you? Are they smiling at you because in a moment you're not going to have any legs. So I found it hard to come to terms with that. And I was over there. Never mind about someone back here trying to come to terms with that. They just see that as, "Geez the bastards are killing women and kids". But those women and kids were the enemy. They were bloody VC. Yeah, so all those sort of things

30:00 in all fairness to Canungra they couldn't reproduce, but what they did they did fairly well, so I give them a probably a seven.

At Canungra too you said that most of these guys, ninety percent, would be going to Vietnam …

Everybody that was going to Canungra went to Vietnam. Ninety percent that went to recruit training were going to.

Okay. Did that start to forge bonds between the guys because they knew where they were headed?

30:30 **How close did you become at that time?**

Pretty close. But we weren't going over there together. It's different if you're an infantry battalion or a company going over because you do your training together and you go over and you fight together. But we all went to Canungra as individuals. I went over as one. I arrived at Canungra as one person. I flew with an MP [Military Police] sergeant who I became very good friends with which absolutely amazed me -

31:00 being friends with a bloody MP. But he's quite a nice bloke in fact. So everybody in my platoon were all single people. Arrived by themselves so it wasn't as if your whole unit had been sent so you all knew each other anyway. Nobody knew anybody on day one. We knew we maybe weren't going to see each other when we got over there because we'd be going to all different places. So I guess

31:30 because of that - everybody knew that - I guess you didn't get a friendship that you would normally get if you were going to stay together. But everybody got on pretty good. We lived in tents and four in a tent so you got to know the other three guys very well. You mightn't have got to know the others too well. You certainly didn't get to know everybody by name. The platoon was something like a hundred strong.

32:00 It's like everything. You very quickly establish your own little group and that's your little friendship group and everybody else does the same, don't they? And I was lucky enough to - Brian Shepherd, who was the military police that I went up to Canungra with - I flew to Vietnam with him as well.

Before you went to Canungra you went to Healesville, is that correct? Or after?

No. From recruit training I went to Healesville.

32:30 **Can you tell us a bit about that time at Healesville and what you were learning there?**

I was what they call corps enlisted because I was already - when I say corps enlisted, I was always going to the medical corps rather than when you went to recruit training they had a little conference based on - with all your photographs on the wall and they'd say, "Righto. Now, Wigg, let's have a look at his reports, at what he's done, what sort of a shot is he? What does he do?

33:00 Oh, he'll be suited for infantry". So you went to infantry. "What about this bloke? Oh yeah I think he'd be good." Because you could pick three places too. You could say I want to go to engineers or I want to go to armour or I want to go to artillery for example. In most cases you got one of those three choices. Depending on how many artillery said they wanted. If artillery only wanted five people off that intake

well only five people were going to get it and they would

33:30 pick the five best who scored the best or who they saw as the best. But if you were corps enlisted as they called it in those days then before you even went to Kapooka you were going to the medical corps and that's what happened to me simply because of my previous employment I suppose. So when I got to Healesville - you went to Healesville for twelve weeks to do what they called a medical assistance course.

34:00 Because guys that were getting in there, they wouldn't know the difference between a Bandaid and a thong. So they weren't from the medical background so they had to be trained to be medical assistants. So it was a twelve week thing. I got there and of course if you got there in the middle of a course you couldn't join the course. You had to wait. You just did general duties around the place until the next course started. So you might be there for four weeks waiting for

34:30 the next course to start. So you'd be there for four weeks plus the twelve for training. That, with my case, I arrived there and I think it was four weeks, three or four weeks, before the next course started and I was doing like everybody else - raking bloody leaves up off the golf course or sweeping up the tennis court or whatever everybody did. Until such time someone come and said, "What the bloody hell are you doing sweeping leaves and doing that? You need to come straight

35:00 up and do some of the exams. So I went up into the classroom to a quiet classroom and they started giving me exam papers to do because I already had what they considered might be sufficient training. So I only then had some small gaps to fill in so I didn't have to stay for the whole course. I only had small gaps to fill in from where I flunked the exam paper. I might have missed three questions on one exam paper

35:30 and one on another or something. They just put all that together. I had some lectures on that and then I was gone before even the course started.

Really? So basically they just tuned you up so to speak.

They checked my credentials I suppose. They checked my training to see what I already know and then filled in the skills gap. What's the bloody waste of time me being there for the whole twelve weeks if I know nine weeks of it?

36:00 **At this point in time were they painting a realistic picture of what you were going to expect?**

No. What happened then was that there was nowhere for me to go and there was four of us that were in the same boat that were all trained if you like. So they said, "Look, there's an administration course going on in Western Australia at the SAS [Special Air Service] regiment. We've got nowhere for you to go at the moment. Who wants to go

36:30 and do some of that trainings?" So three of us said, "Oh yeah buddy we'll go". So they piled us on a train and we went across to Swanbourne Barracks [Western Australia] where the SAS regiment is and sat there - it looks like an old fashioned typewriter now with the round keys trying to get up to what was it? I don't know whether it'd be a hundred and fifty words a minute. Whatever the words per minute were, by the end of the course we had to be doing that with

37:00 no more than x amount of mistakes. So we three of us decided to do that. So we went off and then qualified in admin. So from there when I came back - it's funny because while we were there the postings came out and one bloke got a posting and he said, "Oh look at this! Fantastic. I'm going to the Middle East". And we said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to Cairo".

37:30 And we said, "No. You're not going to Cairo. You're going to CARO - Central Army Records Office at Albert Park Barracks." He thought he was going to the Middle East. He said, "Oh fantastic. Fancy, I've only been in the system a few months and I'm going to Cairo. I'm going to Egypt. How lucky can you be?" And we said, "Give us a look! That's CARO, you idiot. Central Army Records Office." "Where's that?" "Bloody Albert Park Barracks." So that really squashed him down. I think he got drunk that night.

38:00 Yeah. He thought his luck had changed. Fantastic. Yeah. So we then went off to admin postings.

Just quickly on the SAS did you see any of their training at all while you were there?

No. We were in another little wing. They had a little wing set aside for administration training. An old dude who was I thought was an old dude then. An old grey-haired sergeant who was in admin [administration] and he was there every day

38:30 teaching us all this stuff about service writing and all the books and procedures and etcetera. And whilst we were in the SAS Swanbourne Barracks we weren't in the same section where the SAS regiment were. We were in their lines or inside their gates - just inside their gates I suppose - and we did have some contact. We were able to use their mess and we did. We were only private soldiers and we used the

39:00 same ORs mess as they did. But that's the only contact that we had with them. I didn't see any of their training.

The guys you did see, did they seem a special breed or anything special about them?

I didn’t reckon they were any better than me. They looked the same. I was certainly as fit as they were. But they obviously were. They were guys - I wouldn’t have been able to survive their training at that stage. Like I said, I’m twenty-five or twenty-six at that stage and that’s too bloody old to be going

39:30 through SAS training. While we were there I did go on later on on a SAS medical attachment which only lasted one week which we jumped out of aeroplanes into the desert and had to find our way back with no food and that sort of stuff and that was quite interesting. It wasn’t as taxing as it would have been like in SAS regiment training. But yeah I doubt very much whether I would have made the grade at twenty-five

40:00 or twenty-six years of age. But they’re certainly a special breed. You’ve got to be dedicated right to the nth degree.

And when did you get the posting to Vietnam?

By that time I got to the rank of sergeant within about a year. Or

40:30 eighteen months or something. As you can see I joined the army in 1968 and I went to Vietnam in 1969/70 so I’d gone from a raw recruit to a substantive sergeant in that short space of time. Only because I suppose because I was a bit more mature than my counterpart there were positions available on courses for me to go on. I was lucky enough to have officers that perhaps saw my

41:00 potential and nominated me for these courses. So I went up through the ranks very quickly and as it turned out far too quickly for normal. Plenty of maturity but no bloody experience. And that came to bear later on. So those that thought they were doing me a favour in the beginning didn’t really help me.

Tape 4

00:30 Okay. We were bussed from our staging point in Sydney up to the Sydney International Airport where we boarded a flight to Vietnam via Singapore. Everybody was instructed to take with them a civilian shirt or jumper so when we got off in Singapore we all had to change our top so it wasn’t readily seen that we were military. What a joke

01:00 that was. Here we all were in the same pants, the same shoes, same haircuts and we’ve got a civilian shirt on. It didn’t seem to make too much difference to me, but anyway, because of the Vietnam War and because of the publicity it had someone had decided it wouldn’t be good for a couple of hundred to disembark in Singapore and wander around the Singapore airport for an hour before we got back while the aircraft refuelled to go on its way to Saigon.

01:30 So on the aircraft about half an hour out of Singapore everybody had to change their shirt, get into civilian shirts etcetera. We got back on the plane from Singapore and got off at Ton San Nhut Airport in Saigon where we were in the hands of the Americans. There were American style military buses that picked us up and took us to obviously their staging point

02:00 at the airport or just off the skirts of the airport. We were actually in American territory there because the Americans were occupying all of the Tan Son Nhut Airport at Saigon and Long Binh was only like an hours drive away from there and they had their 24 Evac [evacuation] Hospital there. So we were staged there overnight. They fed us. If I remember rightly we got there in time for the evening meal. Our bags and everything were all dumped

02:30 in a pile on the tarmac. We found our own bags, loaded them on the bus and staged at the American staging point where they with my first introduction to how the American soldiers actually lived. They certainly lived better than we did. They had their own entertainment. They had a band. Unbelievable. So we stayed there that night. Ate a meal. It was like a restaurant style living. They had, like I said, bands and singers.

03:00 So we stayed there that night. And then flew on to our destinations wherever people were going. We then got on board a Caribou and that Caribou was like a milk run. It dropped people off wherever they were posted. Would fly, drop in at Nui Dat, drop in at Vung Tau and any of the other places where the soldiers on board the aircraft were posted to. And I can tell you it was a different flight getting out of the

03:30 Qantas 767 and getting into a Caribou. Flying above all the bomb craters. This is where we first realised, we’re actually here. We’re in the war. Looking down at the big bomb craters and we were told the aircraft flew, had to get up to its maximum altitude as quickly as it good because of ground fire. And then when they came in to

04:00 land they had to lose altitude really fast and get down on the deck as quick as they could. I remember landing at Nui Dat and Nui Dat had a really small runway if you like and as soon as - because they come down from a fairly steep descent - and as soon as they hit the deck they’re on the brakes straight away and like everybody’s sitting sideways in the Caribou and everybody’s leaning on about a forty-five

04:30 degree angle while they hit the skids. Then away they go again. They climb really high and really fast straight away. To get out of any fire from the ground. When we landed at Vung Tau because everybody's hanging on for grim death thinking that when the wheels hit the deck we're going to be on the brakes and it's all going to happen again and they just switched it off and it just idled to a stop because obviously the runway was gigantic compared to the little red earth runway at Nui Dat. So we were all hanging on for nothing.

05:00 Yeah so I got there, I arrived and a vehicle picked me up from the military airport there. I got to the field hospital about seven o'clock at night I suppose and went straight up to the sergeants' mess and met the people I needed to meet. Did all the march-in procedure, officially taking on a nominal

05:30 role etcetera and there I was. I was suddenly in country.

What did you think of Vietnam when you first arrived?

It was just a typical - flying over, of course we flew over the jungle coming over and we couldn't see too much because we were up at a very high altitude. We could see bomb craters down there. But it was -

06:00 my first initial response because I was at Vung Tau and it was a coastal resort. We were on the beach. It takes a while to realise that you're actually in a war zone because Vung Tau was the R&R [rest and recreation] base for people coming out of the field. They would have their week's R&R in country - rest and recuperation - at a place called the Peter Badcoe

06:30 Club. Of course that was a great big swimming pool. They had, you could hire speed boats along the water and go skiing. People were forever holidaying there. They weren't on holiday but they were having their R&R so we would be constantly seeing people wander round in bathers and a towel and taking their rest and recuperation at the Vung Tau R&R centre. So to me it looked like a some

07:00 holiday resort that someone had spent a lot of money to send people there. But behind all that of course it was very different. And until I'd been there for a while and actually got to fly to different places did I realise that this wasn't - there was no front. For want of a better word, this wasn't where it was all happening. This is why the field hospital was there of course. It was considered to be a safe zone. Although we did have fire

07:30 on half a dozen occasions while I was there and we were always having red alerts. But yeah it was considered to be a safe zone which is why the main logistics were there and why people came and had their R&R. But if you didn't ever get out of Vung Tau or you never got out of that little area it could almost be a holiday. You weren't faced with any of the bad stuff. There were people that spent the entire

08:00 life in Vung Tau as pay reps or supply people or ran the jail at the MPs or stood guard on the gate etcetera. Those sort of people had access into Vung Tau every night of the week if they wanted it. Yeah. So it was just a shopping spree. But there were definitely hardships and I don't care who it was or where they were or what they did, my personal opinion is that nobody ever came home from there

08:30 or ever comes home from any conflict the same as they left. Whether it be in body or mind, you don't come home exactly the same as when you went. From varying degrees of course, but even from the smallest degree I'm a firm believer that no-one came home exactly the same as they went. Whatever job they did. There I am. Stuck there for a year.

09:00 I suppose the thing that amazed me. I couldn't believe that people were actually counting the days. They'd get there and someone'd say, "I've only got twenty-seven and a wakie [last day of service in Vietnam]". "What do you mean?" "I've got twenty-seven days and then I wake up and I'm going home, see, so twenty-seven and a wakie. How many have you got?" And you used to say, "Three hundred and fifty-four and a wakie". And people made their own calendars. I remember having a Snoopy calendar.

09:30 What do they call those calendars with all the numbers on it? It's not in months. It's just from one to three hundred and fifty. It's called a something calendar. It's on a big square with just numbers on it. I'll think of it after. And people made up these calendars.

10:00 Mine had Snoopy at the top of a slide at day one and he would slide down to day twenty-six so I didn't have to mark off twenty-six days. I just marked off at the end number twenty-six when he got to the end of the slide. Then he'd be going down a ladder to somewhere else. And it was just our way of counting off the days if you like. Rather than carving a notch in a stick. Everybody had their own calendar on the wall or somewhere in their bunk or somewhere you marked off the days.

10:30 The whole time you were there you knew exactly how many days you had before you went home. You could ask anybody at any given time, day or night, and they would be able to tell you they had a hundred and fifty-six and a wakie or whatever they had. It was just amazing. Back here I'm flat out knowing what day it is sometimes, what the date is - I wouldn't have known today was the ninth unless somebody told me, but there you mightn't have known what the exact date was but you knew how many numbers, how many days you had

11:00 before you could get on the plane and go home.

So is that what you did straight away when you arrived?

Everybody did the same as soon as they got there. Marked their calendar at day one or three hundred and fifty. Whatever the day was. But when you finished you calendar. So you obviously didn't make the calendar up on day one but you knew - these calendars I'm talking about, somebody just had ordinary metal calendar and it had a little red arrow on a square that you could move from day to day.

11:30 However they did it, everybody had their own system of marking the days. From day one that was it.

What are the places that you visited outside Nui Dat and Vung Tau?

I made quite a few trips to the Binh Loi. And Binh Loi was a Korean Hospital where we took

12:00 Vietnamese and they'd been flown in. They hated the Vietnamese, the Koreans. And we would take them by road ambulance to this Korean hospital at Binh Loi and if you took four there today with drips in etcetera, if you went back tomorrow with another three, the four you took yesterday were gone. They'd pull the drips out in the middle of the night.

12:30 Whoever it was'd be dead the next morning and they'd just disappear. I never ever saw the same person that I took twice. And mind you I didn't go every day. Different people went. I wouldn't say we took turns either, but everybody - well not everybody either because those that worked in the lab or x-ray didn't go. But there were certain people in the system that took turns if that's the right word to go.

13:00 The ward master I might add always went, but somebody else would go with him. You'd have sometimes three on board or two on board or one on board.

13:30 **You were at the First Australian Field Hospital.**

I was.

Tell us about the tasks you were designated when you first arrived?

Okay. When I first got there I was in charge of the admissions and I had staff there to look after for running admissions and discharge centre - the A&D as it was called. And their role was to monitor people as it says being admitted and discharged and their conditions. So there were

14:00 big boards up in the shack that had everybody's name on it, whether they were in a medical ward, surgical ward, what their conditions was, what was wrong with them - gunshot wounds, diarrhoea - and mind you, we had people over there they just got normal sick. So we had people in there that had to have their appendix out. People that had to be circumcised, people that had the flu, people that got the measles. All of those things were the norm

14:30 for any normal hospital that would run where you had thousands of people.

People had to be circumcised?

Yeah. Because of the heat. There were people who had problems because of the climate. So at a late age, whatever age they were, in they went. They were circumcised. So from everything from that to coughs and colds. It wasn't just a hospital that received battle casualties. It was a normal - because we had a thousand people

15:00 in the One Aust Unit at the Australian Logistic Support Group and they were people who were susceptible to all the normal things like standing on a nail, getting caught in the barbed wire running at night time if they got a red alert. So all of those things we had patients for. It was a hundred bed hospital. It was divided up with a surgical ward, a medical ward, an intensive care unit,

15:30 theatre, x-ray, pathology, then they had another room there with a door on it with a tap dripping. And that was lovingly called the Jack Shack. That was where people who got the dreaded disease fronted in there and they'd stand in there with their pants down and a layout of the bars in Vung Tau. "Point to me and tell me which bar you were in last night or which bars have you been to?" So they could say,

16:00 "I've been in that one there. And this one over here". And then they could go and do something about finding out who it was that was spreading the disease you see. I'll always remember the major's name was Gavin Hart. He was a real dag. He was just really suitable for this job. They'd be standing there, the bloke'd stand there with his pants around his ankles, getting examined while one of his med assistants showing him, saying

16:30 "Where were you? Tell me where you were." I always remember that - and there'd be a long seat with people sitting on the seat waiting to go in there. I might add I never got to sit on the seat. But I do remember being just outside the admissions and discharges was the casualty and I remember people used to front there to get certificates stamped and what have you or get medicines. And I remember

17:00 this hard-as-nails old nursing sister there and this young guy fronts up to the counter and he's nervous as all anything, twitching etcetera and she said, "Yes. What can I do for you son?" and he said, "I've come to get an injection" and she said, "Through the swinging doors, turn left, sit on the seat where everybody else is". So he went through there and I think this poor little bugger worked in the ASCO Canteen. He was a timid little bloke. Anyway he sat on the end of the seat with everybody else and

17:30 when his turn came he went in and they whipped his pants down round his ankles and they're pointing, "Where were you in the bar?" And he said, "I've never been in one of these places all the time I've been here". And they said, "Well what the hell are you doing here?" and he said, "I've come to get an injection for my international health certificate to go home. They've sent me around here". So the poor little bugger, all he needed was an injection of tetanus or whatever he had to have - typhoid or something to go home. And yeah

18:00 he looked so guilty that she straight away suspected that's where he had to be so she shot him round there. But so our role at that stage was to monitor all the conditions on the board and every day they had to be changed. If somebody went from the VSI, very seriously ill, back to the SI [seriously ill] list or to the satisfactory list or back the other way, they all had to be marked in.

18:30 They had to be accurate as of the hour. They were done on a big chalkboard - not a chalkboard, but a plastic whiteboard type of thing. They were medical summaries to be typed. The night shift would type up all the medical summaries from the doctors' comments through that day and go on their medical file. They had a file for everybody that was in hospital. They typed up medical summaries and got people's possessions ready to go home medivac. They had a medivac [medical evacuation]

19:00 once a month. A RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Hercules plane used to fly in and take them all home, those that were going home. So all that work had to be done. We also looked after the dust off [medical evacuation helicopter] shack which meant that when a chopper [helicopter] was coming in with casualties, when they got in the vicinity of our location they would radio in "Call Sign Vampire" and tell us how far out they were, what they had on board. So they'd call in and say to you, "Vampire, this and Vampire

19:30 Vampire this is dust off 241. We are inbound your location approximately thirty minutes out. We have on board two gunshot wound, one above knee, traumatic amputation" etcetera so we'd get all that down and then it was our responsibility to notify all those people that needed to be notified. We needed to notify the theatre staff, the anaesthetist, the pack store, everybody because when these guys got off the chopper

20:00 you can imagine they just didn't mosey [wander] off. They had weapons, grenades, live ammunition, all sorts of stuff, all real live ordinance that they couldn't take into the hospital. So somebody has to be there to strip them of all this gear. Because when we go to the other side of it when you drag them on board out of the jungle or wherever you took them from they would still have all this stuff on them. All their ammunition, all their grenades on their belt, up here on their buckles.

20:30 All of that stuff would be there. And you're just too busy putting tourniquets on, putting drips up and stuff to be worried about taking grenades and things off. So that all happened at the other end. So the pack store'd be there, the ward master'd be there, and there'd be staff there too with stretchers etcetera, take the place and strip the stuff off him and we had an ammo dump off to one side of the helipad where all this stuff was dumped straight into there so that when the patients came down the ramp into

21:00 triage then they had nothing but their greens and their boots on what was left of whatever the problem was.

Were there any instances where ammunition posed you a serious threat?

No. We only had one incident where I'd actually come on the chopper, we'd picked the person up, and I was to get off and have a break. A couple of days

21:30 off. And I had on board a middle aged Vietnamese VC female. And she had gunshot wounds to the pelvis. So I got off with all of that and normally the chopper would lift off and go away, but I got off with all of that, went into triage and of course they had an x-ray machine there that the x-ray guys used to just wheel up and he could lay it down, do what he liked with it, and take x-rays.

22:00 So he's taking x-rays of all the pelvic area. And all of a sudden there's this big black shadow up inside her vagina. And everybody said, "Oh Christ! There's a bloody grenade in there". So she was wheeled straight out to the chopper pad again and left there. We got two warrant officer ordinance bomb disposal people over from the ordinance depot which wasn't far away from the hospital. And they put

22:30 rubber gloves on and of course went fossicking up there to get whatever it was and to everybody amazement it was a great wad of American money wrapped in the banana leaves or coconut leaves that she would use for buying rice or ammunition or whatever. As they were walking over through the jungle they would obviously have to buy food and stuff from the villages as they went and that's what this great big wad of American currency which looked like a grenade.

23:00 From memory that's about the only time that I can recall that there was any problem with that. Because I mean it was done fairly - like it was a procedure that always happened. There were people there that their whole sole job was to ensure that no weapons, ammunitions or explosive ordinance went any further than the helicopter. And that was their whole sole job. They had no other purpose in life but to do that.

Because it was so common to have

23:30 **that sort of equipment?**

Everybody that got off had that equipment. Yeah. ‘Cause it’s come straight out of the field. And everybody that got off would have that equipment.

Can you tell us - would this be classed as dust off?

It’s the other end of a dust off.

Dust off is bringing casualties back?

Yeah. They call it a dust off because when the helicopter lands, as you imagine, there’s dust everywhere from the blades and you, what you’re doing is dusting off someone, you’re taking them away.

24:00 So the dust off is - so that is classed as a dust off. That’s the delivery side of the dust off. So it’s a pick up and a delivery. So it’s a helicopter dust off that’s arriving. And we had this little Italian guy that worked in the A&D and we had all sorts of problems with him because when he was on shift and they radioed in they would tell him how far

24:30 away they were and then he had a PA [public address] system he could press the button or ring the CO [commanding officer] or whatever he had to do. And he would say something like, “The dust off she’s a coming in a forta five minutes” and everyone’d say, “Now Angelo, is that four or five minutes or is that forty-five minutes?” He says, “I tell you, forta five minutes”. “Angelo, you mustn’t say that. We don’t know whether

25:00 you’re talking about forty-five minutes or - say in five minutes time or three quarters of an hour or something like that, but don’t be saying forta five minutes” because he kept saying it all the time. And people’d say, “It’s coming in five minutes” and you’d get everybody there and it was better for them to stand around for three quarters or an hour than not be there at all. So old Angelo couldn’t, he couldn’t get out of this forta five minutes bit. Bit of a character. So that was the role.

25:30 Also, when the medivacs or the dust offs came in you might have one, four or five, whatever they might be. And it was the A&D staff’s role to stand at each of the triage counters or stretchers - they weren’t stretchers, they were examination benches - and there were six of those, three on each side of the room and that’s where they’d triage people. They’d come off a chopper and there’d be a medical

26:00 officer there saying, “We’ll take this one first, we’ll have that one over there, this one over here” etcetera. And there’d be medical teams that would be allocated to each of those triage areas where they’d start cutting off clothes and boots etcetera. My staff’s role was to stand at each one of those and list everything that happened. First of all, if they could they’d get the person’s particulars, who his next of kin

26:30 was, rip off his dog tags [identification tags], write down the service number and get as much information as they could from that casualty and then as things - intravenous and everything - was being administered it was their job to tick and flick and write how many mills of this, how much went in, all this, every single thing that happened to that person on that bench was his responsibility. So they had this role, not just only in the A&D and the paperwork, but they were there in the triage as well.

27:00 And in some cases they would be on standby for when the patient came back out of theatre in a recovery area. They also sometimes played a role as a watchdog over that person because everybody else is being used somewhere else, either in theatre or somewhere like that. If you’ve got four or five really serious casualties in it was just bedlam. It was as busy as anything. And that could go on. Staff would be working flat out

27:30 sometimes for well twenty-four hours. Nothing for theatre staff to change shifts and be in there for hours and hours. Twelve hours, fourteen hours, whatever. So that was the main role of the A&D staff. They didn’t have to worry about the pack store. The pack store took weapons and things belonging to the Q store. So those weapons had to be, you know, the serial numbers were taken and

28:00 they were put in an armoury and locked away. And then when the guy was discharged, then he would have a little tag and he would go if he was going back into the field he’d go over to the Q store, to the pack store section of the Q store and they would have all his stuff there for him. If he had boots that hadn’t been cut to pieces then he would get his boots. Then he would get his weapon, any ammunition that was there listed under his name, he’d get all of that stuff and off he’d go again.

28:30 **Can you tell us about your first operation?**

The A&D staff there were one, two, three, four, five - there were six people that worked in A&D. Myself and one other were allocated areas of responsibilities at Long Binh etcetera. We had - because the Americans weren’t. They did have their own

29:00 medics of course, but because the Australians weren’t doing any dust offs, the Americans were doing dust offs, then some Australians were permanently posted or permanently allocated to dust off the whole time they were there. Then of course they had to have time off. So while they were having time off some of us were placed in as a relief while they were having their time off. So none of my staff were

29:30 a permanent dust off group. We were replacements for those who didn’t make it and were waiting for a

replacement to come from Australia or whether were having their twenty-four off. Because we did forty-eight on and twenty-four off. So during that twenty-four off if they were short then one of us would go up and do that forty-eight hours or whatever it was in the interim. And my first - what was your question now? My first area that I went into was to this

30:00 female that we picked up. She was just outside a village, the name escapes me now but I suppose it was about thirty minutes flying time from Long Binh. She was on the outskirts of the village. It was probably about four a.m. in the morning when we actually picked her up. I wish I could think

30:30 of the names of things, but there's that many names of the places that you would fly in to visit it's just impossible. And some of them had no name anyway. Some of them were just out in the middle of the nowhere. So that was my first. There was nothing too traumatic about that. She just like I said had gunshot wounds to the pelvis and it was no big deal. There were various other times where we picked up people

31:00 with one leg gone, two legs gone, feet just hanging out of boots just hanging on a sinew. I could never get used to somebody being dead with just one small hole in their chest, you know, when you could pick up someone whose legs were blown apart like just nothing, just bone and mesh and they would survive, they were in no danger of dying. You were only

31:30 at the worst I suppose thirty minutes flying time from the nearest hospital with major facilities. So we were getting casualties back to a hospital with full surgical facilities quicker than they were getting road accidents here in Australia to the hospital. People were dying from road accidents here with less injuries than we had over there. And when they got

32:00 back to the hospital they had Collins Street or Wickham Terrace specialists who were over there three months at a turn - honorary surgeons or honorary physicians. Who gets an appendectomy done by a Collins Street surgeon? The bloody intern does that somewhere. This guy is a Collins Street surgeon. You'd pay hundreds and hundreds of dollars for him to look at you and here he is whipping someone's appendix out, you know. Yes, so they

32:30 were like thirty minutes to the nearest help, and I mean help. Like, if you go four a.m. into a public hospital you're likely to get a couple of interns there and it's going to take time for them to get someone there with any expertise in a specialist range. Like here, with all these guys on standby right there, as the chopper hit the deck, they were there. You had all these specialists there at your finger tips. Fantastic. And that was the same at the American hospital as well. They both were - I think the American hospital

33:00 from memory was a two-hundred bed hospital and ours was a hundred. But exactly the same. They stuck out all the same sort of people. And like I said I could never get used to having to do a post mortem with the major on a guy who just had one small hole in his chest which looked like a bruise. And he'd drowned in his own blood. That bullet had gone down and pierced his lung,

33:30 he'd drowned in his own blood and he would have been a paraplegic anyway because the bullet we pulled out was wedged in his spine. But to look at the guy, like he was perfectly all the there. And the worst case I suppose was a guy that I saw who had his whole face blown away and he had no nose at all, just two little holes between his eyes and his whole face was just skin hanging

34:00 down. There was no jawbone, nothing, just shreds of skin hanging down. How can a guy like this make it? When I left Vietnam he'd come back from Japan and he'd had his whole face rebuilt. He'd had a wire jaw built, they'd taken skin off his bum and rebuilt his face and whilst he looked like a bit of a patchwork quilt

34:30 and wasn't speaking too good - like I mean his face was being rebuilt. And in the end some two years later I saw photographs of the guy and whilst he mightn't have made the movies, he had a face back and he was alive. You've got to compare that with someone that's just got a small hole. It's amazing that you can do that. And when I first got there

35:00 and started to see these people pick up or look at people that were traumatised in such a way - I mean, they had no hope as far as I was concerned, they were buggered. Like by the time this guy gets back to the hospital he's gone. There's no hope. And then a week or two weeks later be walking through the ward and there he'd be sitting up as large as life. He mightn't have a leg or he mightn't have any legs, but he would be as large as life, fit as a trout.

35:30 And you'd think to yourself, 'God, bloody amazing'.

How much affect does trauma have on the casualty victim?

They're all right while they're there. The biggest part - I always used to think about that and I used to think, when they go home that's going to be the worst. Because, see, while you're there you're still in a military environment and you're still amongst friends who understand what's happened and you're still being cared for. Nurses who

36:00 really care. But when they got home it was all going to be different, wasn't it? They were going to be out of that environment and they're on their own and to make it bloody worse they're going to have

people chucking tomatoes at them or slinging shit because they shouldn't be in Vietnam. And there they are now they're going to be in a wheelchair the rest of their life. That's when it hit most of them. When they got out of the military environment and had to survive at home.

36:30 In the real world. They never had any protection. Their military protection was gone. And now the real life starts. They've got to fend for themselves for the rest of their life. They've got to find a job and if it was a marital situation they were already in, what's the, how's the family going to take it all? What's the wife going to do? Is she going to leave him like some of them did because he's not the same person who came home.

37:00 She's not going to be bothered with all of that. There were some lovely women who stayed with them. but I don't think that anybody had too much trouble facing it while they were still in country. It was when they came home that was the bugger.

The real war.

Yeah. That's right. That was the real hardship, when they got home. Luckily I didn't have to see any of that because that would have been the worst part of the lot. Because they were still jovial.

37:30 **I want to explore that a bit later on once we've concluded your Vietnam experience. However, on the nature of casualties, what about landmine casualties? I understand they were fairly common.**

Yeah. They were very common. There were more land mine casualties than anything else because that's the way these buggers operated. They set booby traps, set mines.

38:00 There was bugger all gunshot wounds if you like. There were gunshot wounds, but the amount of mine injuries were incredible. We had a whole battalion walk into mines at the bottom of the Long Hai Hills. That was my first experience at major pick up. From a large pick up from a whole bloody battalion walking in onto a minefield.

38:30 They were just massive casualties. Feet off, legs off, all sorts of things. And we had, there was one fellow I got to know very well was a sergeant, a platoon sergeant and they'd harboured up for the night and he was going back to check on his section and he walked from one hootchie [makeshift tent, shelter] to another and stood on a bloody mine and blew his legs off. And people had been walking through there. That's where they'd harboured.

39:00 People had been walking backwards and forwards through that little harbour area for hours and he walked back between one hootchie and the next and stood on the bloody mine and blew his legs off. So yeah the mines were a bit part of the injuries over there.

That battalion you speak of, do you remember the name of that?

Yeah. 7RAR [7th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment].

And in that particular dust off operation how many casualties do you recall, estimate?

Um

39:30 there was in excess of twenty I think. But they weren't - ranging from small pellet injuries to the legs or the body to loss of limbs. But I just - I hadn't been there very long and I just remember there was a bloody lot of them. The only other one of particular note was that

40:00 a dust off came in and I was up in triage and they dropped this bloke on the table next to me and he smiled at me and said, "How you going, Sarge?" I said, "Do you know me?" "Ah yes." "You couldn't possibly know me, mate, I only got here last week." And he said, "I was on the same plane as you". And it was what they used to call Reos, Reinforcement Battalion and they used to come over in blobs and

40:30 replace people that were due to go home. People that - not people that were due to go home because the battalion came over and went in bulk, but people who had been injured or medivaced [medical evacuation] home left holes so these people were Reos and they'd come over to reinforce, fill in the little holes of those that had been medivaced home.

Tape 5

00:30 **You were saying just before about the differences between medivac and wartime medivac procedures. You were saying there was a lot of thing you could do in the battle field that you can't do here. What do you mean by that?**

You can't - back here you wouldn't be allowed to med assist, a private med assist, wouldn't be allowed to administer morphine. It's against regulations.

01:00 Has to be nursing staff or nursing sisters etcetera, but over there it's different because it's a war zone and it had to be administered now. And so the rules change a bit to what you can do in a war zone and

what you can do back home in peace time. For obvious reasons I suppose. And so the training differs. So those that are going overseas to do that would of course

01:30 train to administer this sort of stuff and put the formidable red 'M' on the forehead or a tag on the boot. That wasn't any big deal. It's just that the guy gets some morphine right now instead of twenty-five minutes later after he's screaming out with agony and pain. Why wouldn't you want to zap him with some pain relief?

02:00 And why would you want to wait to get back to the hospital when you can train somebody to do it and it's extenuating circumstances, it's not the normal medical procedure for somebody of that rank. It's like saying a medical orderly in a civilian hospital back here can administer drugs. You can't do it. But we're saying now if it goes into a war zone or say there was a disaster here in Heathcote and there were that many bloody casualties that people were dying and they

02:30 needed the stuff administered, there's not enough hands to do it then they may very well grab a half a dozen orderlies and give them a quick soldiers' five or a quick demo how to do it because we need the hands to do it. Under normal circumstances that wouldn't happen. The orderly wouldn't be doing anything like that, but under certain circumstances he may.

Did you treat Americans as well as VC and ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]?

No. We didn't

03:00 have any of those. We only occasionally got VC to the Australian Hospital. I don't remember any Americans. We might have. But they have their own facilities of course. That's not to say that the two hospitals never ever did. I don't remember any Americans at our hospital. We may have had one or two. We certainly wouldn't have had any gunshot, American battle casualties. We might have had some American

03:30 sick from their base at Vung Tau. They had a like a small medical facility called Cotton Gauze over at the airport but they were just day treatment sort of things. Anything that was worse than that they would have either ferried back by chopper to their establishment at Long Binh or they may have put them in the field hospital over night. But no not as a rule we didn't.

Why VC?

Because sometimes they brought them

04:00 down for interrogation. They bring them down to - the Americans at their 24 Evac Hospital at Long Binh also had a POW [prisoner of war] section of the hospital where it was all fenced off and guarded. So they had POW battle casualties that they could treat in a separate area, like a fenced off area. But occasionally we would have the VC come

04:30 down to the field hospital and they would be interrogated. They may have been picked up in an Australian working zone so they wanted more information because that's where our battalion might have been in operations. So those specifically, they may have been already interrogated by the Americans and now they're being flown down to be interrogated by our own interrogation people and then they would be flown back again because the Australians had no holding capacity

05:00 for POWs. The least amount we had there the bloody better. We had a small baby. I'll never forget this little baby came in with napalm [jellied petrol]. You could see the acid coming off the little baby's body. The baby was going to, it had hours to live. They put the small baby, they took it in the theatre and washed it and bathed it and did all they could for the kid. I'm talking about a

05:30 like an eighteen months old baby that obviously had got caught up in the skirmish. They put the baby in the surgical ward and opposite the bed that they put the baby in was a VC. And the VC had - I can't remember whether he had both legs in plaster or one leg in plaster - and this bastard got out of bed in the middle of the night and pulled the tubes out of the baby. Unbelievable. How he survived, I don't know.

06:00 Like, how he made it out of that bloody ward, I don't know. But yeah so that's the sort of stuff they did. I can only remember two occasions when we had VC in wards while I was there anyway. And only that one occasion that this bloke who pulled the bloody tubes out. The child was dying anyway.

So when you say pulled the tubes out?

The child had drips. Intravenous going in.

06:30 Body fluids going in to it and this bugger crawled out of bed and pulled the bloody tubes out.

So you were lessening the suffering of the child?

No. He was killing it. He was VC. The child wasn't. He just pulled the tubes out. I suppose that's the other angle you look at. I mean, we looked at it from the point of view that he was VC and that was what he was doing. I never ever thought of it like that. You might be quite right.

07:00 He might have been lessening the suffering on the child. I doubt it. He was caught in the act of doing it.

So it wasn't as if that because he pulled the tubes out the child died because as I said he was caught doing it. It's just the bloody act, to think that he's in all this pain himself that he could drag himself out of bed to do that.

He must have felt pretty strongly about it?

Yeah. Well that's their ways I suppose.

07:30 **When did you start to see the grey areas? Generally I get the impression most veterans before they went to Vietnam they saw it as capitalism versus communism struggle, good versus bad, things like that. But when they arrived there they started to notice that things were a little bit different to what they may have expected it to be? What was yours? How did it change? How did your views change?**

I didn't think too much about it when I went.

08:00 I was a regular soldier and you go where you're told. I can't be worrying about the conflict and who's right and who's wrong. If I'm going to start worrying about that I might as well join the conscientious objectors and stand on a box. But I joined the system knowing that some day I might be sent away somewhere and you go like they're doing now. It wasn't until I got over there - it's like everything else, once you get involved in it you start to learn about what's

08:30 going on. And whilst I never ever thought from one perspective that we shouldn't be there - we had to be there because we had alliances with other countries that were involved. If they ask you for assistance you have to go. It's part of the treaties. That's why the New Zealanders were there. So from that point of view I had no problem about being there. Because I knew I wasn't silly enough to know

09:00 that we have to go as part of the treaties. So I didn't see any problem. When I got over there I saw how futile it was. I suppose within six months of being there. You could see that it was just never - we were never going to do anything. It was just going to be an endless thing that would go on for ever and ever. They were being supplied arms and ammunition from somewhere else.

09:30 How can you treat that? You can go there and blow the place off the face of the earth tomorrow. Americans could have blown the place to smithereens tomorrow but that wasn't going to fix it either. Look what they've done in Iraq - bombed the place to buggery and what's happened? It just goes on and on. I suppose after about six months I realised that this is absolutely hopeless and if you're going to do anything at all you need to get the small child from school

10:00 at kindergarten level and start educating the child and it's going to take hundreds of years if you're going to keep wanting to put that effort in it. And it's just not worth the effort. They do their own thing. And have a look, Ho Chi Minh [President of North Vietnam] marched back into Saigon and the whole thing wasn't worth it. All those lives lost and all the plunder and misery all for nothing. Because the area and the ground

10:30 they gained was just given up in the flick of an eye. So I suppose it was about six months before I saw. You've got to be there for a while to see what's happening and who's winning and how much ground you're getting. It wasn't a front anyway. There was no battle front as you're probably quite aware. It was just a sneaky stuff all the time. Sneaky stuff that could go on for a hundred years. Well it's been going on for a hundred years, hasn't it? Started off with the French.

11:00 So they're just left to their own resources now and life just goes on.

Were you actually ever in a situation where you saw skirmish action, fire fights or anything else?

Only from above. I tried to have my feet off the ground as much as I could. It always amazed me though if you flew at night

11:30 the doors of the chopper, both doors, would always be open and it always amazed me. You'd hear gunfire and you'd see this like fireflies in the air, inside the chopper. They actually were tracer rounds that were coming in one side, one door and going out the other. And suddenly you go "Ooh". I used to try and

12:00 become part of the bulkhead somehow. But you don't realise it do you? Because it's just 'Oh look at all the little red things that are there'. But no I tried to be up and of course the helicopters most vulnerable time is while it's on the deck and you're being screamed at the whole time to get off the deck, "What are you doing?" because the medic goes out on a long lead off the helmet 'cause you're in communication with the pilot all of the

12:30 time. So does the crew. Everybody's on a long lead so everybody's in communication with everybody all of the time. And the moment they put the skids on the deck they want to go. They're only there a second and they want to go again. And you're being screamed at to get on and get out and get on and get going. And when you get to the stage where you go into an area and you're trying to pick up casualties and the ARVN soldiers are all trying to get on,

13:00 and you got to be kicking them off. We had a big American half Cherokee as part of the crew. He was a

huge man. And he, as fast as they were coming in one door, he was throwing them out four at a time out the other door because they were only small. And they're coming in as fast as they're coming in one door they're going out the other door. Hanging off the skids as you lift off because they didn't want to be there.

13:30 Here's an opportunity to get out of here, it's our only opportunity to go and bugger the casualties. Let's get on here and if I can cling on and hang on maybe they'll take me. You just had to leave them behind. That's what they were there for. So they must have been doing it hard I reckon if they all wanted to get on. Other than that I wasn't involved in anybody

14:00 directly shooting at me or me having to directly shoot at anybody else. That was an issue I didn't have to face.

But from above could you see?

Oh you could see it quite clearly. But there was an issue I didn't have to face down on the ground.

What could you see from above?

You could see areas of fire from one side to the other because people weren't exposed.

14:30 If you look at that photograph there, see how thick the jungle is? People just weren't exposed. Like, it was firing into the jungle. Even the flash suppressors on the end of the rifles wouldn't hide every flash. But that's all you could see or you might see two or three people run from one place to another. And mind you we didn't hover up there looking. The idea was to piss off quick.

15:00 You didn't hover up there and give a bit of a running commentary. "Two hundred yards to your left, you do this. Change your fire". You had one job to do and that was it and you got in there and you got out as fast as you can. And you might see as the chopper lifted off and they're at an angle like that you might look down and see something, but don't forget we're not just sitting there with passengers looking. There's now casualties on board. There's things to do.

15:30 There's no looking time. It's people in here have to be dealt with and they're sliding all over the place. It's all very well if you can pick up one because they can go into the proper place, but if you've got five and they're anything from sitting to laying to traumatic amputees, there's a bloody lot of work to do. We've got the crew as well to assist.

16:00 The only people who are doing the looking are the pilot and the co-pilot. They're the ones doing the flying. They're the ones that would see more than anybody else let's say.

You had obviously something to do with the Americans. Can you tell us about your views of them?

Well I only had a small - my dealings with the Americans was very small.

16:30 Because we're talking about one crew. We're talking about when I actually went up there and stayed there. I stayed in a hut with four others and the only others I met would be if you go to the dining room. Wasn't called the dining room of course. You went to the mess hut or whatever they called it. And you sat down and spoke. Some of the crew would introduce you to somebody else. "This is Chuck from

17:00 Arizona" or whatever you say. "How you going, Chuck?" "Oh dem rart y'know". But you never ever, I never had social arrangement with any of them except a small crew, small bunch. I always thought that most of them were fairly loudmouthed, exaggerated. But I must say that the

17:30 people that I flew with in that helicopter were fantastic blokes. One of them so much so that we're still friends today after all this time. I didn't have a wide scope with any of them except a little bunch. And I did find

18:00 although some of them I thought were quite over the top at functions that I went to - when I say functions, like farewells and things for people going home - some of them were right over the top and I thought, 'I don't know how long I can survive with you, mate' but lucky for me, the guy that I flew with, this Bruce Nelson, is just a champion bloke. That's why to this day we're still very good

18:30 friends because he's just such a nice guy. And of course he comes over here, been over here twice now and although I've never stayed in touch with the rest of the crew I do talk to Bruce when I do see him about how they're getting on and what they're doing etcetera.

Generally speaking what were the views of the Americans amongst Australians? Just from casual conversations?

19:00 They used to do everything in bulk. The Australians used to have to sneak around in small numbers etcetera and the Americans would go up the guts with tons of smoke, radio, flinging their cans of drink out on the side of the road or throwing their lunchbox, whatever they had, it was just like there were so many of them it was an expendable thing. Like, if they lost fifty who cares? If we lost five we'd care. We just couldn't

19:30 afford to lose five where they could afford to lose fifty I suppose that's the way they looked at it. They

went everywhere in mass making as much bloody noise as they could. I suppose they thought they'd frighten the Christ out of them there was that many of them coming I suppose. But we didn't do any of that. It was all hit and run stuff. They just went scrub jumping and you could see the difference on our people were trained - you just didn't throw any of

20:00 your garbage around. It was burn, bash and bury. So there was no evidence of you being there because all enemies are very good at reading the signs of the ground, like how much rubbish has been left on the ground by how many numbers are in the group and all that sort of stuff. They're intelligent. So the more shit you leave lying around the more information you give to them. We had an ARVN interpreter called Than.

20:30 He unfortunately was on the top of an APC [armoured personnel carrier] in convoy and they were patiently waiting for the engineers to sweep the road for mines and he threw his tin of bully beef or something, whatever it was, off the side of the tank. And somebody screamed at him and said, "You been told not to do it" and he jumped off the bloody tank to get it and jumped straight on a mine. And it blew

21:00 him right up into the top of the trees and when he came back to the hospital they had him in a ground sheet and his whole body was only that long. That's all that was left. And all the specialists just couldn't believe it that he'd just been compacted. You opened the ground sheet and it was just a mass of leaves, twigs, bits of branches, whatever the tree was.

21:30 His head was absolutely in perfect shape. Like it happened so quick he didn't even have time for his eyes to glaze and from his head down was just twelve inches of - you could see a thumb poking out here, a toe out here and that's all that was left. Just a mass of goo.

That must have been a pretty powerful mine.

And a head shoved on it. Just blew him, well it would have been a minefield track, you see, to blow a track off a tank.

22:00 Just blew him to buggery. I mean, they gazed at him for ages. All the specialists came and looked and just couldn't believe it. What could be left and what could happen. So that's how important it was not to chuck stuff off but of course he jumped off to get it and it's got to be bad luck I suppose just to land both feet right in the wrong spot.

And he was with the Australians at the time?

Yeah. He was an ARVN interpreter. In fact

22:30 he was the ARVN interpreter for the field hospital. I think we raffled his motor scooter one night in the mess. They couldn't find who else was going to get it. Like, what do you do with it? So we raffled the thing for Red Cross or something.

What did you think about the ARVN or what was the view amongst Australians?

Look, I didn't, I don't know that I could comment too much on that because

23:00 I guess you'd have to ask the infantry people that actually worked with them because the only dealings that I ever had with ARVN were the ones that were attached to the hospitals as interpreters. And they were just - well they were just normal guys. All the ones that I spoke to at the hospital were all okay blokes. But from any other point of view I guess you'd have to talk to the soldier that worked

23:30 alongside of them. Because I couldn't comment other than having a beer with the guy in the mess or having dealings with him at the hospital. And our area didn't have much to do with them anyway because our area didn't need to have to talk to interpreters. All the people that we were dealing with spoke our own language. It was only if they had Vietnamese come in, like occasionally one of them'd

24:00 get bloody run over in Vung Tau or something and they'd come into the hospital for treatment. I can't remember the little boy's name that got run over, squashed his leg off, and he was at the field hospital for quite a while and the parents used to come and if I remember rightly they didn't allow the father to come anywhere near him because he was going to do away with the child. Because he saw the child as a

24:30 burden because the child couldn't now work, couldn't do anything, couldn't earn anything for the family, so he was going to be a burden so they would rather bonk the kid on the head rather than have to save - and besides that they get a lot of money from the Australian government anyway. And we were always told if we were ever involved in an accident with a Land Rover driving then we were not to go because if someone barrelled themselves down the hill they were known

25:00 to bash their limbs on the wall or do some more damage to their body because the more damage they had the more money they would get and they saw the Australian government as having heaps of money. So if their arm was hanging out of the socket they're likely to get a lot more money than if they've only got a cut on the elbow. So I remember we were all instructed if you accidentally knocked one of them over on the side of the road - 'cause they all used to walk down the side of the road which was only a gravel track anyway -

25:30 certainly not in Vung Tau but from Vung Tau back to the base that was just a gravel road and I think that yes we were told on several occasions that if you accidentally bowled somebody over you weren't to go. You're to stay there and get some assistance, but don't leave the person. And when I asked why, that was the reason. That they were likely to go and do more damage to themselves than what's already been done.

26:00 But I guess that's the only time and I guess that's the reason that the ARVN interpreters were there, so that they could liaise and speak to the local population should they have to use the hospital facility.

Were most of these ARVN interpreters generally Christian?

I couldn't tell you that. I would imagine they would have been Buddhists. I don't know what they would have been.

26:30 I don't think I ever entered a conversation with any of them about religion. It just wasn't - I don't remember having a too much of a conversation with anybody. Like, you just ask them how they were and how's your day been? It was just more like a polite thing to speak to them. And whilst a lot of them could speak English they didn't have a perfect command of the English language. They could speak enough language

27:00 to translate one to the other. No. I didn't talk too much about that.

Now you would have had - being in the medical establishment - you would have had probably quite a unique relationship with the infantry because of your liaison with them, dust off, that is. And obviously the infantry were the worst affected out of all the units.

27:30 The tankies [those who worked with tanks] copped a bit. In fact, if I remember rightly the guy with no face was a guy that was a result of a round piercing the tank or an armoured personnel carrier and going round and round inside the tank. That I think he was a result of that. Or you'd get them - they got a lot of burns, the tank people. They also got a lot of turret head, hatch cover injuries.

28:00 Where they belt the head on the hatch. There was a hell of a lot of hatch cover injuries that belt the skull on the hatch cover. No. We did, all the medical staff had a very good relationship with everybody that ever came anywhere near them whether it was infantry, armoured, whoever it might be, because we were the people that fixed them up.

28:30 This helicopter that came out of nowhere was a saviour, wasn't it? It was a bird from heaven. It didn't matter how they got to hospital, whether they came by vehicle, whether somebody carried them, or whether they were - they saw the medical procedure like you would today if you sliced your bloody leg off or sliced it open or whacked yourself in the elbow with a chain saw and it's all hanging there, well the only place you want to see is this hospital and when they've got you all sewn back together again, that's why people marry

29:00 nurses. They strike up a relationship while they're sick. I'd like to know how many people have married a nurse. There's lots of movies about it, isn't there? Like your war time movies where they fall in love with their nurse and actually get married. They're fantastic stories but I wouldn't mind finding out what the figures were of how many people - not just here in the miliary - but how many patients have actually married their nurse.

29:30 And I bet there's quite a few that have done it. And it starts off out of appreciation of course. But then of course they strike up obviously another sort of relationship. I married a nurse.

And alluding to what I said before about infantry and armour and things like that, were there incidents where you had

30:00 **to deal with people who attempted to commit suicide, self inflicted injuries?**

We only had one that I know of and that was a guy, field hospital personnel, who went to his locker - bearing in mind that everybody had loaded weapons, but the rule was, particularly with the F1 machine gun that you had two magazines strapped, taped together like

30:30 that. One was empty and one was full. And you always had the empty magazine in the gun so that people could see that the magazine that wasn't in the gun had the live rounds in it so you could tell straight away that the magazine that was in the gun was empty. And people carried the weapons around like that all the time. It was only a matter of reversing the thing and you were up and running. Well this guy had apparently - and unlike the Americans at Long Binh

31:00 where they had to stow their weapons in an armoury and if they had a red alert or the siren went off or they had incoming inbound missiles then they all had to charge to the bloody armoury and get a weapon out. The Americans, they couldn't believe that the Australians could carry around a weapon fully loaded and not have any incidents. They just was amazing. But this poor bugger, he'd shoved his F1 [weapon] in a locker - imagine a single steel

31:30 locker, shoved it in there, shut the door and gone down and he's obviously off work now and gone down to have a few drinks in his off time. And he's come back later that night, opened the door and the thing's fell out. And he's gone to grab it and of course he had the magazine with the rounds in there, not the empty magazine, and he's grabbed it and pulled the trigger and put half a dozen rounds into

himself. He survived.

32:00 They rushed him down to - and this is how well trained these young private med assists [medical assistants] were. They had him down on the table, they had him resuscitated, they had a drip up and all this up before the first doctor even arrived. I mean that's just how well trained they were. These people would be the equivalent to a medical orderly back here. Because they just saw so much of it. You get good at something when you've got to do it all the time. But that's

32:30 the only one that I had. We had a soldier from another unit and I may be corrected somewhere down the line in the future, from the transport - I think it was 5 transport squadron - who lived at the back of the field hospital their lines were. And this guy arrived at the hospital shooting up the hospital. He walked up from the A&D fired a few rounds into the wall,

33:00 came up past x-ray, fired the gun there. You can imagine what's happening. And he's on his way to the wards. And he came out of one section into the open where the Red Cross hut was and he's about maybe ten paces from the push swing doors into the actual wards and I can tell you now that if he had have gone like that he would have been shot straight away. And

33:30 at that stage where he was about three or four paces from the door he threw the gun. And of course by this time they've got a minister or a priest or whoever it was there at the time, because you don't have every denomination calling out to him to put the gun down etcetera. And we've got heaps of voices everywhere in the dark yelling out, "Put it down!" You can hear all these weapons go and I just knew that even if he had have gone like that he would have been shot full of

34:00 holes. Anyway he threw the gun down and sat on the ground crying and they took him away.

What happened to him? Why did he … ?

Who knows? He just lost it I suppose.

This was an ARVN?

No. This was an Australian soldier. This was one of our own soldiers from 5 Transport Squadron in the same area. Who knows what happened to him? He just lost it I suppose.

In the hospital?

Yeah. He came down

34:30 to the hospital with the gun. It's amazing. What do you do? But that's about the only …

What about fragging? That was a problem that occurred in Vietnam in alarming proportions. More in the American Army?

What's that?

Fragging. That was soldiers killing each other.

No. There was no problems of that at all.

35:00 I never saw any - well I can only talk to you about my tour and I saw no evidence of that whatsoever anywhere at all. None whatsoever. The same with drugs. I saw no evidence of drugs in Australian troops whatsoever. They might have had the odd puff of the marijuana, mind you, it would have been given to them by an American soldier in a bar somewhere. But I can honestly say that to my knowledge and I'd be fairly

35:30 a hundred percent positive about this that the Australian Army in Vietnam had no way had a drug problem. And I saw the drug problem with the Americans at 24 Evac Hospital at Long Binh. They called an amnesty on their soldiers to come in with their drugs and come in and be rehabilitated and get some treatment. Because they would be scratching themselves. I saw one guy who scratched himself with a

36:00 the valve that you would pump a football up with. And he just kept gouging till he got a hole till it got into his arm, heated it up with a candle the stuff and in she went. And he was in there. His whole arm was this big and the side of his head was this big. He was just a bloody vegetable. He was a vegetable. And they had a ward set aside at 24 Evac Hospital

36:30 with these people had a drug problem. So much so that while I was there I know they called an amnesty on everybody, please come in, give yourself up, give yourself some treatment, especially if you just been introduced to it. Get yourself in here now and oh yeah. And I always amazed, I always thought that was a credible thing with our forces that there was not one sign of any of that.

Why do you think that? I mean fragging was also a serious problem with American ranks.

37:00 **Why do you think there were so many problems with drugs and fragging?**

I don't know. Who knows? I suppose the Americans were introduced to drugs a long time before we were, like in the civilian world perhaps. Or they must have been because I can remember as a kid growing up and going right through to my days in the army - and I hung around with a mob round

Brunswick and all over the place and none of my friends took drugs. They weren't there.

37:30 We didn't have any drugs. I don't know what we did.

They were available.

If it was I never knew about it. None of my mates, there was eight of us, and we never smoked any marijuana. I'm going back to - what am I now, 62? - so I go back to my days of twenty, so that's forty years ago. I don't know there was marijuana round Australia forty years ago? I don't know. If it was it certainly wasn't around like it is now.

38:00 We've got all sorts of places, we've got people in high places smoking marijuana. Haven't we? They mightn't admit it, but some of them admit it that they find it a placid thing and they don't mind going home and having a - I remember a doctor being on TV saying he goes home and has a marijuana with his wife. I know somebody in this area here who passed away now and he was always up in front of the court for growing the stuff. And his wife said that

38:30 if he - when he drinks alcohol he's a real bastard, he is a nasty person, but when if he has a marijuana he's the most gentle person you could ever imagine. So she said, "I prefer him to smoke marijuana every night than drink alcohol". But I know we didn't have a problem. There was not a problem with the Australian Army in Vietnam with drugs. And in my tour I would have certainly known or seen some of it

39:00 because we would have them in for treatment.

You're certainly in the position to speak about it. Two things about the Australian troops. One was, did you notice the differences amongst them - the tensions that existed between say Nashos and regulars and also once you've answered that if you could talk about the conscientious objectors as well.

I'm probably not he right person to

39:30 speak to about the national servicemen. But since you've asked me - I mean, it's only my personal opinion. I'm only giving you what happened to me or what my thoughts are. Half of my staff were national servicemen and they were all bastards. They were hard to get on with. They were militant to the degree as militant as you could get. They and unfortunately the people that I should have had in support

40:00 weren't supportive because - I don't know, maybe because they were national servicemen. But it was always washed away. It was always dealt with, we'll deal with it. Like if I wanted to charge one of them, oh no you can't do that, we'll deal with it another way. Well some of them should have been charged and bloody locked up or sent home.

Were they that bad?

If it had have been an ARA [Australian Regular Army] soldier he would have been

40:30 And I'm not saying that the offence was that bad, but they were so militant that they should have been more severely dealt with than what they were. I guess looking back down the retrospectoscope now I would say that my twelve months in Vietnam was the worst time in my whole entire career. And largely due to a command and control problem with national servicemen and no support

41:00 too. And bear in mind that I was a very very young sergeant. Like I'd been in the army one year and there I was a sergeant. So I had - whilst I sometimes I thought I'd been born old because of all the things I'd done prior to being in the army. I was only twenty-five so all the things I'd seen more in my younger life to twenty-five than most people would see in a lifetime and I guess that's the only reason I survived at all.

Tape 6

00:30 **So you're talking about the troubles you had with the Nashos. You said it was the hardest year of your career?**

Yeah. It was. Not the hardest. It was the worst year of my whole entire career for lots of reasons. I mean, the national servicemen were certainly a big part of it because of their militant attitude which caused all sorts of other problems from myself

01:00 under the umbrella of command and control. You see, it's difficult enough when you're the new guy on the block. Like if you go to a new job everybody there already knows the job, they already do it. And if they're not prepared to let you in to tell you what's happening and to give you the inside information on how the place runs and what's happening then it's very difficult for you. And these buggers

01:30 saw me as a sergeant so why should they tell me anything. Like, what am I doing there? They're already doing the job and if I can't do it already, what the hell am I doing there? I mean, I'm one day in country,

how the hell would I know what's going on? Every postings different. And if you haven't got your junior ranks to tell you how things fit in and how it works you can't take over and control the thing. Even to the point where you - and I'm a firm believer, if you

02:00 can't do the person's job you're supervising then you can't supervising him. How do you know what you're supervising? But you have to be allowed to do the person's job. So if people won't allow you to fill in and do everybody's job that's there then you got no hope. And that's where I found myself. They wouldn't turn the job over. I couldn't get in. If I wanted to do a night shift, for argument's sake, say "I want you to do the

02:30 day shift today because I'm going to do the night shift. I'm on through the day, but tomorrow I want you to be on through the day and I can do the night shift so I can see what goes on". "Oh no way." "What do you mean, no way?" "I'm not doing it." "Well you will bloody well do it because I'm ordering you. That's an order. You will be on the nightshift." So he goes over and see some bloody officer over somewhere else and come back and they'd say, "Oh Kevin there's no need for you to be doing the night shift, these guys know what they're doing" - see?

03:00 It'd be all stalemate and that was the most difficult time for me. Because as I say, twelve months in the system I'm already a sergeant. But I haven't got the experience to be able to go and speak to that particular officer and say, "Look, for me to survive here, this is the way it's go to be. I need to be able to do this and besides that the staff belong to me and I've got to be able to run my own staff" but you see, being

03:30 very junior in my rank I accepted that as, okay there's no need for me to do the nightshift, I'll just plod along. So I plodded along and I had to learn that job out of hours and a bit here and a bit there. And it was most difficult. And I should say in this interview that I'm not for one moment putting all the national servicemen in the one bottle. It's just that

04:00 most of the ones that I had anything to do with including that national serviceman that shot those sergeants on Christmas Eve - he just happened to be a national serviceman. And I suppose then the cream on the cake was that when Bolte [Sir Henry Bolte, Premier of Victoria, 1955-72] got in he said, "If you elect me I will finish national service tomorrow" [actually as a State Premier Bolte would have no say in such a decision]. Now the system, the army's not geared up to discharge thousands of people tomorrow. So

04:30 bugger me dead, he gets in, what's he going to do now? Everyone's chanting now, "Yo ho ho let's get the national servicemen out". Well you can't get rid of them tomorrow. Like, they've all got to be phased out. There's a hundred things to do with getting someone out of the army. You just can't do it tomorrow. So I guess the final coup de grace was when he said, "Those national servicemen who stay and finish their time regardless of whether they've got eighteen months to go or three months to go

05:00 or six months to go will be given a war service loan. Now that really was the last straw with me. We had national servicemen who were conscientious objectors who did not go to Vietnam. They didn't go. Why should they get a bloody war service loan. And here, whether they were regular army soldiers or whether they were national servicemen, they had no bloody legs. And they'd gone over there and their reward if you could call it a reward was a

05:30 twenty-five thousand dollar war service loan which wouldn't buy a house anyway and now these other buggers if they to suit the government's - Bolte's policy - if they stayed in that little amount of time, however time they got, they would get a war service loan or a defence home loan he called it. But the defence home loan and the war service loan was worth exactly the same amount so there was no difference. So of course what did they do?

06:00 Yes. Why wouldn't you? You stay in for the six weeks, the three months, and that allowed them all that really did was give them that breathing time to slowly phase them out. So he got his way. He was true to his promise. These buggers that had caused problems the whole time that they were there, not all of them, but those that had were rewarded. So they didn't go anywhere. They weren't put to any hardship and they've got the same loan as their counterpart who was a

06:30 national serviceman who's now got no bloody legs. I mean, that really stuck in my craw. I thought, 'Well I've bloody seen the lot now'. Life's just not fair sometimes. And normally, most I've always found in you're in charge of people it doesn't matter what you do to somebody as long as you do it the same to everybody else. You can tell them they have to stand on their head over in the corner for ten

07:00 minutes but if one guy doesn't have to do it that's when there's uprise. But if they've all got to do it, they say, "Well I don't really understand why we're doing it, but we're all doing it so let's go and do it". Yeah. And so here were those that went overseas and came back and were entitled to this war service loan and here were those who made it as hard as they possibly could for everybody they came in contact with and they got the same treatment.

07:30 I just never ever thought that was fair and I've never ever forgotten that. And whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong in thinking that I'll go to my grave hating the system for making that decision for the benefit of all those poor buggers who earnt what they got. So I'm probably the wrong person to talk about national servicemen whilst I do want to reiterate that I don't want to put them all in a jar because I know some nice guys who were national servicemen and they went out of their way

08:00 to do the right thing and do their commitment and the rest of it. And then there were those others whom I'm talking about. Yeah so that''s the Nasho Bastard or if you like - what did we have to call them? The selective servicemen. So I always remember the day that they all - a bus pulled up at Kapooka

08:30 and the CO had come over and said, "Now there's three busloads of national servicemen coming here shortly. They are not to be referred to as Nasho Bastards, they are to be called Selective Servicemen". And I always remember this hard as nails old sergeant, he went up the steps of the bus and he said - he'd already said, "Right, sir, we will refer to them as Selective Servicemen" and the CO went and the electric bus doors opened.

09:00 He went two steps up and he looked down the bus and he yelled, "Right you Nasho Bastards, out!" Well there you go. That's what they're going to get. Funny, isn't it?

The best example - the most famous example of a field hospital is the TV show M*A*S*H [1970s American show set during the Korean War]. How realistic is that show in your opinion?

Well yes in lots of ways it's very realistic.

09:30 I mean, casualties came and went just like they did. They didn't come and go on a bubble - a sperm bubble as we used to call it or a meccano set on the sides. We'd advanced a bit more since then to the UE [unit-equipped] helicopter. But the casualties came and went very similar to that. Yeah. I mean, I've seen lots of those shows. There was probably more segregation with male

10:00 and female staff in the field hospital that I know than the one that's in the TV, the M*A*S*H [which stands for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital]. In fact, M*A*S*H came out while I was in Vietnam and I was at Long Binh at the time and I went with all the Americans and sat in an outdoor theatre type thing that they'd set up and saw M*A*S*H when it very first came out.

Was that a bit surreal doing that?

Sorry?

Bit surreal. Considering you were

10:30 **experiencing it?**

Oh well we looked at it as a comedy and I said to somebody, "They've made this specifically for Vietnam because this is what it's like". Mind you we didn't - oh well we did - we had football too. The field hospital had its own football team. Being an Essendon [Australian rules team] supporter I remember writing to the Essendon Football Club asking them for twenty of their old jumpers. Because we wanted to play under their

11:00 colours and I had been an Essendon supporter since I was old enough to eat and drink. And I thought that would be good for them to send some jumpers to a team that was playing in their colours. I thought it would have been a good marketing thing apart from anything. Oh no. We didn't get any jumpers. We got a nice letter back saying that the first jumpers get handed to the seconds and the second jumpers get handed to the thirds and by the time they get down to there there's nothing left and

11:30 virtually, "No. You're not getting any jumpers". So because the hospital didn't have a team jumper and we played in a competition with other units. Mind you, we played on a soccer field and if you were any good you could kick a goal from the middle of the ground. Yes, I found out that the opponent was on me one day. I can't think of who he was, but he played for Essendon anyway in those days. He was a national serviceman and by halftime I'm asking everybody who this bloke is. "Who's this bloke keeps kicking

12:00 goals from the middle of the ground all the time?" And they kept reminding me that he was my opponent.

The things in M*A*S*H like the surgeons wearing Hawaiian shirts, walking around …

No. That didn't happen. That side of it was just a no go. Medical staff have to be on call twenty-four hours

12:30 a day. Whatever they're dressed in apart from their pyjamas or underpants - I mean, the siren goes, they've got to go. But they always got a uniform or something there to put on. I never saw anybody that was - oh look, I'll tell you what I did see. I mustn't forget that if someone was on their day off they were still on call right, so you could be down the beach on your day off because we were right on the beach. You could be down the Peter Badcoe Club [recreational club for Australian service personnel] swimming in the pool. Sitting having

13:00 a drink, laying on the beach in your bathers. Now if something happened then a vehicle was sent. You had to tell somebody where you were twenty-four hours a day so you could be contacted or someone could drive down and get you. Now if the helicopter was only fifteen or twenty minutes out, by the time they got the people they needed and got them back to the hospital it was quite on the cards that person was still in a pair of bathers or still in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. So

13:30 that's the time that could happen. But they didn't purposely front for duty in an Hawaiian shirt. It would only be if they were called out. And then they'd put the gown on. Theatre staff would have gowns and caps and boots and they'd shove that on over whatever they were in. But yes they didn't purposely front for work like M*A*S*H do - purposely fronted for work in Hawaiian shirts and things, no. And walked around the unit like that. No, that certainly

14:00 didn't happen.

How different is the command structure of a field hospital compared to the command structure of a combat unit?

It's all the same. No, they don't have - a combat unit has platoons and sections etcetera and companies.

Is it less strict?

No. They all have the same command and control, they all have a CO, they'll all have an OC [officer commanding], they'll all have a

14:30 regimental sergeant major, they'll all have company sergeant majors. They'll all have the amount of sergeants they need. The structure is different from a combat unit because a combat unit has battalions, platoons, sections, companies and sections. Where the field hospital or a military hospital doesn't have all that make up. But it has the same reporting

15:00 structure up and down the ranks as the infantry battalion would have. They would have their company sergeant major in charge of a company, then they're got their platoon sergeants, then they got their captains and lieutenants. And where a hospital would have the COs at the head of the thing like the battalion commander. Then he's got, they got their majors which are OCs. Then we would come down to the hospital and you've got

15:30 all your section heads. And if you like, they're like the platoons. Section heads, you had an officer in charge of the wards, you have got matrons in charge of the overall ward, then you've got nursing staff that are in charge of each of the wards - a surgical ward - and if you want to liken that to a company or an infantry section, then you've got a lieutenant or a captain in charge of that. You've got a lieutenant or a captain nursing staff

16:00 in charge of that ward so you can almost shadow them over. The command control's identical I guess. And I don't think that probably strict, whether one's stricter than the other is probably not the right word. There's probably more socialising could occur at a

16:30 stagnant unit like a military hospital than it would with a battalion because with a battalion you've often got platoons and sections out on patrol. They're not always all home at the same time whereas the military hospital environment everybody's all home at the same time so everybody can work together and play together. If you have a unit barbecue everybody except for the on call or skeleton staff

17:00 are at the barbecue. Whereas with the battalion there isn't because there could be two platoons or companies or sections out in the field all the time and you're never ever going to have everybody there at the same time.

Were there equipment shortages or any trouble in that getting equipment and supplies?

Look I could tell you a couple of stories - my personal view was that

17:30 the officers that went to Vietnam - I won't say particularly officers, but those who could make a difference, let's say that, that went to Vietnam anyway in my tour couldn't seem to get used to the fact that we were in a bloody war zone and it didn't matter where you got the piece of equipment from. Who cares where you got it from? It was all had to be accounted for. "Jesus, where'd you get that from? How am I going to account for that?"

18:00 Who cares! Like, we're leaving it behind when we go. Who cares? An example of that is that the dust off radio that we had in the dust off shack was next to bloody useless. It was called a "PR77 set" and it was fine in the theatre. It was a fantastic radio in the field for the signalman to carry etcetera. But it was bloody useless trying to get distances that we needed to talk to helicopters. It meant that we could get earlier warning if we could

18:30 range out further with signals. We could talk to the field ambulance in Nui Dat for example if we had a better radio. But we couldn't get a better radio. To get a better radio it meant we had to have a great big generator, it had to start up every time you pressed the petrol switch and forget about it. But because of my liaison and my connection with the Americans I was able to strike up a good friendship

19:00 with the signal people in Long Binh. And they were willing to exchange this fantastic radio set for thirty cases of VB [Victoria Bitter - beer] and I thought that was a fantastic exchange. So we arranged the exchange and the helicopter flew down this particular day, no doors on the thing as usual, but it had all this equipment. It had three senior signal people,

19:30 specialists fives or spec fives as they called them, on board the chopper. And they flew down with all this bloody equipment and we got it down into the A&D radio shack and they're busy fitting it all up. We didn't rip out the little one. That was still there. They were fitting it up. Anyway the QM [Quartermaster]

arrived. And I said, “This is this radio I was telling you we might get. Well here it is”. “Oh

20:00 Jesus, how am I going to account for this? Fair dinkum. Geez you get me into some strife.” I said, ‘Jesus, what is wrong with you people? Here are these people, we haven’t got the enemy fitting and installing it, they’re giving it to us. Like, it’s ten thousand dollars worth of equipment that they are giving to us or on loan - I don’t care how you do it. But this is it”. Oh just the bloody saga that went on about this bloody radio. I said - “How am I going to account for it

20:30 when we have to go home?” I said, “You leave the bloody thing behind”. “Oh if I don’t account for it, what if someone steals it?” “Who the hell’s going to steal it? Look how hard it is to get it in here.” Like, it was a huge thing. Yeah. I just found it very difficult to deal with the fact that some of these people failed in their entire tour to still understand that we were in a war zone and you got things by however means you got them and if somebody wanted to give you something from another

21:00 unit or from somewhere else they wanted to give it to you, you didn’t need to know how the hell you got it. “How’d you get this?” And that’s the thing I used to notice with M*A*S*H. They got things from wherever they could get it. You know. “I’ll trade you this for that. We’ll do this.” And that’s the way it does happen. That’s the way they do it. We had the HMAS Jeparit came in with all stores and they’d run out of booze.

21:30 They were short supply on booze going back. The bosun happened to come to our sergeants’ mess that night and he said, “How you off for booze?” Somebody went to the store and said oh yeah. He said, “How about, how you off for steak?” And the cook said, “Gee we got no bloody steak. You got to be joking”. He said, “Well how about I give you eight cases of steak for ten cases of VB?” And what a good idea.

22:00 So we went down to the wharf to the Jeparit to make the trade. Well bugger me dead, there’s an MP lieutenant there wanting to know, kicking us off the boat all the time. And then we had to front the 1LSG commander because we were involved in this bloody trading deal. Like, I always had trouble understanding why people would worry about that. Like, the guy was in charge of stores at one place was swapping with the guy who was in charge of stores at another place because one

22:30 had a deficiency the other one had more than. What the hell’s wrong with that? It might be different back here where everything has to be accounted for and rations have to be done this way. But over there you got what you got how you got it. I mean, we were able to do it in the sergeants’ mess without any interference from anybody. We swapped - VB was always the barter. VB was like gold over there to the Americans.

23:00 And when you drank their Budweiser [American beer] you found out why VB was like gold. I think we swapped thirty cases of VB for this huge fridge freezer with big glass doors to go behind the bar. Christ knows how much that thing was worth. It must have been worth thousands and thousands of dollars, but they trucked it down. And in she went and the engineers came and installed the thing for us.

23:30 I think one of the other deals that was done, we got an American Jeep for fifty cases of booze or something. It was just amazing. They knew how to do it. If you didn’t have something you went somewhere and you got it. Who cares? Like I said to the QM, “Who cares? When we go it’s not part of your agenda. Like when you got here all the stores and equipment that are here, you can account for. They’re all there. And certainly

24:00 you have to account for them when you go. They all have to be accountable all the time. But anything that’s extra you just leave behind or you ring the Yanks [Americans] and say, look, do you want this radio back? And by then the people who gave it to you would have been posted home and no-one there knew a thing about it. So if they don’t want it back you can say, we’re going now, thank you for the thing on long-term loan, would you like to pick it up or can we deliver it back, and they’ll say, yes or not.”

24:30 What could be hard about that?

We’ve had stories of the Americans have so many supplies and they’re not really counted much, that if a gun ran out of bullets they’d throw it away, if a Jeep ran out of petrol they’d throw it on the side of the road and get another one.

I never saw that, but I mean I heard about it all the time but I never actually saw it. Like they said that graders and dozers and things if something happened to it they just slid it over the side of the road and left it there. There were all those stories but I

25:00 never ever saw where that actually happened. I mean, I can imagine it happening. I think I’m more inclined to believe that’s a slight exaggeration on what they Yanks were like. They were certainly like that to give away equipment and a lot of their equipment they could get away with not accounting for a whole lot of stuff. Whereas the Australian Army couldn’t. Everything was right down to the last bloody nail was accountable which in a war zone’s ridiculous.

25:30 We need people that are going to go to a war zone to understand that it doesn’t matter where you get it from. If a sergeant can get you something you need, don’t ask him where he got the bloody thing. Just be happy that he got it. Yeah well where did we get that from, are we going to get in the shit for this? No. Don’t ask. And I had a CO who was very good at that. I only found one CO and he’d say “Oh

fantastic, where'd you get that from? Oh I know, don't ask". And he'd go away. He'd trust you that you hadn't stolen

26:00 it. No-one's going to come round and put you in jail or he wasn't going to get into trouble for having something in his unit that had been actually stolen from somewhere you know. If you didn't actually steal it but someone had given it to you like we were doing over there there's absolutely nothing wrong with it and we need people to understand that, that we're not back in the civilian street. We're over there. Times are tough. I mean I got enough building material to build a whole annex on the back of the sergeants' mess for nothing.

26:30 Not from the Australian Army I didn't. But for nothing. "Where did you get this stuff from? How are we going to account for that?" "Don't worry about it. When it's all hammered up in one big piece it'll be all part of the mess and no-one know it even wasn't there". But no to answer our question I hope that's answered your question. The command and control almost identical. It's just that it changes shape a bit.

What was your relationship with the commanders

27:00 **and the surgeons and the people around the base?**

Good. Look, the surgeons they were only there for three months at a time. They were civilians. They were civilian specialists and they put on a uniform for three months and did a rotation three months and they were bloody nice guys. They were down to earth guys. They didn't have one military bone in their body. They were just wanted to come and have a drink and didn't understand that they weren't allowed

27:30 in the sergeants' mess unless they were invited and all that sort of stuff. They'd appear and say, "Knock knock can I come in for a drink?" We had as you would have to a very good rapport with them. Those particular people you did. I had a lousy rapport with some of my senior people because of the national service problem. But apart from that - that's a personal thing that occurred with me.

28:00 Which I will never forgive them for. And that's one of the main reason, plus some of the other stuff the war zone produces, made it the very worst year of my entire career. If I could chop that piece out I would be most happy with the service that I did, with all my years of service. And the army certainly prepared me for what I do now.

28:30 For the company that Penny and I run. We run it very successfully. We're very professional and we have very high standards of what we do and most of that came from my service. Yes, if I could just chop that bit out. Mind you, I got a lot of experience. I was already twenty-five years old when I went there, but I was fifty-five when I came home after one year.

29:00 With the things that I'd learnt and how to deal with problems. The people who rocketed me to the rank of sergeant in one year who obviously thought they were doing me a favour because they obviously thought that I was mature enough and sensible enough to do that in hindsight did me a bad turn.

You earlier said, compared to M*A*S*H again, that the nurses were more separated than that. What was

29:30 **the relationship of the guys and the nurses on the base?**

We often had social - like all the social events everybody came together. We very rarely got to the officers' mess, they very often came to our mess. That's because the sergeants' mess was down as the best mess out of all of them. It's the medium mess to go to. The one that's got the right amount of culture. You go down to the snakepit, there's no bloody couth and culture down there at all.

30:00 You come up to our messes where you're getting it's just a nice atmosphere. You go the other way it's opposite. It's over the top. And if you ask any officer, if you're interviewing one, if you ask them what's the best mess in the army is and I'll be you any money they'll tell you it's the sergeants' mess. I've forgotten the question. Ah yes, look everybody came together.

30:30 When there was something happened or it was Christmas or there was some special thing or it was Easter, it only happened about two or three times a year, everybody came to the sergeants' mess because we couldn't go to the officers' mess. We were only invited there once a year. And they'd have dances. These nurses were on great demand I can tell you because they were the only females on Vung Tau that had round eyes anyway. And so the signals officers' mess

31:00 or the sergeants' mess or the engineers' mess, they were always ringing up and sending a letter to the matron inviting the nurses to a special event at the mess. So that I didn't have to dance with you. So you could have a real girl to dance with. So they were always in high demand. But they were segregated. Everybody had their own lines to live in. The officers had their lines over there.

31:30 Females in Vietnam were all officers. There weren't no ORs. So the female officers' lines were there, the male officers' lines were there, the sergeants' lines were here. The ORs lines were there and that was it. You didn't go to the female lines unless you were invited and you were never invited anyway. You might have gone to the female lines if you walked one of them home after a dance. And three or four of you might walk home with three or four of the nurses just to

32:00 see them to the gate. It was usually the matron that was amongst them anyway so she was there to see

that you didn't get any further than the gate. She was the last one in so she made sure. But when I say they were more segregated, that's all I mean. When you look at M*A*S*H it looks as if they just come and go out of everybody's room as they please. And that wasn't the case.

We've heard that commanders and officers

32:30 **from outside the hospital would come in and were pretty popular with the nurses.**

The only thing I can say - I wasn't an officer so I can't quote what went on up in the officers' lines, but I suppose it's like any life. If you're a male, you're a female, you become attached to someone and you strike up a relationship and you might be from another unit. Let's say

33:00 for argument's sake the nurses all went to the engineers' mess. And one of the nurses struck up a relationship with one of the engineer people. Then it's quite likely that they might communicate together. He might visit their officers' mess so that he can spend some time with her. Now I'm only crystal balling now and saying what I suppose might happen.

33:30 Because I wasn't part of the officers' mess I wouldn't have seen any of that anyway. We weren't privy to that sort of stuff. And I'm not suggesting that anything went on. I'm just saying that a normal human being relationships if you met somebody that you hit it off with then it may be that person might visit the nurses' mess or the nurse might get approval to visit his mess. I can see that. Whether they

34:00 allowed that to happen or not I don't know because I wouldn't be privy to those sort of decisions.

What did you hear about Vietnamese families? Guys having Vietnamese families around that they would spend weekends with.

There were people who in the 1LSG [Logistic Support Unit] had a certain job that was a nine to five believe it or not. They had no on-call

34:30 responsibility. I mean, at the hospital you couldn't go anywhere unless you told the people exactly where you were going or you had someone stand in for you while you were gone. Because we were all on call. But there were people in I suppose like military police, ordinance people, supply, pay reps, those sort of people, administrative staff, who at the end of their day's work come five o'clock knock off. Then their time was their own until eight o'clock they fronted for work the next day.

35:00 And they would have every Saturday and every Sunday off because their unit would close. Those are the people that would have access into town all of the time and I know that some of those people struck up relationships with Vietnamese families, with girls, and families in town. That's why at the front gate at Vung Tau

35:30 when the bus went out for people going home there would be a great herd of females with babies jumping up and down to try and see in the bus to try and see who was going. Because obviously these people weren't telling them that they were leaving country. Let's face it, you're there long enough to give someone a baby. If you struck a relationship up with a Vietnamese woman on your first two weeks of being in country

36:00 like the child's going to be born and three months old when you're leaving. And I've no doubt there were quite a few of that from the women that were bouncing up and down trying to look in the buses that went out the gate. Because soldiers would just leave them and go. Once again of all the people I knew I didn't know anybody that fitted that category. But I do know that it did occur.

36:30 **Do you think that on some occasions the Vietnamese girls and so on would get with Australians in order to …**

Get a fare over here?

Yeah. That's it.

Some of them did, didn't they? It's not do we think it happened, some of them bloody did. They got over here under that umbrella. Mind you, obviously the person who they came with wanted them to come otherwise they would have got on the bus and gone without telling

37:00 them, wouldn't they? I once again don't know the legal ramifications of this but I think it's a question would have been asked of the male, "Are you prepared to support this person and take her?" I mean, you have to get permission for all of this, don't you? With the immigration branches and COs and all sorts of things get involved in it. It's not just something that she decides and he decides. There's all sorts of - and then of course there's checks got to be made and checks and balances and

37:30 yeah but some certainly did get over here under that umbrella. But I wouldn't have thought it would have been a case of her being allowed to come over here just because of that. It would have been it would have been a mutual agreement or some funds paid for to support the child over there. And there are people I'm sure who are still supporting monetary wise children that they left in Vietnam.

38:00 And then there'd be those don't give a shit. But I'll bet you any money you like. Once again I don't know anybody. But I'll bet you any money you like that there are people who didn't wish to have them come over to Australia but are nice enough people to be sending money and still sending money for the

support of that child. I'll bet you any money you like there'd be some of them.

How did the

38:30 **locals greet the Australians? Were they friendly to them?**

Oh yeah. Money. They were very friendly. Especially on paydays. They knew when it was the American payday and when it was the Australians payday. Oh yeah. You'd go down the street and they'd say, if it was let's say the Americans payday, their pay week. They'd been paid on Thursday. And it's only one or two days gone

39:00 by and you'd go down the street and they'd know who was who because the Australians weren't allowed to wear their uniforms in town or anywhere off the base. But the Americans could wear their uniforms anywhere they went so it was very easy to pick before anyone spoke who was an American and who was an Australian. Because the Americans always wore their uniforms around. So if it was an American payday and you'd be going down the street then they'd be singing out,

39:30 "Uc da loi, number ten. GI number one" [uc da loi is Vietnamese name for "Australian"; GI is an American soldier] because the GI had the money. Because the uc da loi, it wasn't his pay week till next week and the odds were he didn't have any money left or very little, but the GI had just been paid, so he's number one. Now the following week you went you'd go down the street and they'd be saying, "Uc da loi number one. GI number ten". Because they knew that

40:00 situation had reversed. Oh yes they were very good at learning things. And you know they were very clever because you'd come up with an emblem, you'd design some sort of an emblem and you'd go down the street some other time and there'd it'd be engraved on a cigarette lighter or engraved on some sort of a plaque. They'd got their hands on it and done it all. A unit plaque or a cigarette lighter. You could buy Zippo cigarette

40:30 lighters there with all sorts of things. I've got one, I had one I don't know what happened, I think I might have given it to my son - it had a tank on it. For armoured corps. Not armoured corps. For the tankies and the tank regiment. That was done by them. They were just very good at extracting money from ingenuity. Like, silk paintings. You could give them a photograph of your wife and kids and they would give it to you back

41:00 on a big silk painting like that of all blown up in a silk painting. Fantastic. They were just excellent at that sort of stuff.

Tape 7

00:30 **From your experience dealing with casualties and such like how resilient is the human body?**

What, in terms of what full recovery?

Yeah. When the human body is injured are you surprised sometimes by the way it recovers?

01:00 Sometimes I am. Sometimes people don't recover at all. But there are those, I think the majority of people recover quite extraordinary. The human body's a wonderful thing. In most cases can repair itself. Like parts of your body repair itself as it goes along. It's like cutting yourself, exposing yourself to germs, the human bodies got its own system built in

01:30 that fights all that. But some people recover better than others I'm sure depending on what's wrong with them. Depending on how old you are. Now at the age we were talking about before people live to a hundred soon because there's so many things they can do. But I don't know. How will they replace people's bones. You can put another heart in, you can put plastic parts in,

02:00 you can do bypasses and do plastic kneecaps and all that. But bones get old and brittle and how do you replace those? You replace them with a wire. A lot of motorbike riders have got a lot of wire in their body. But I'll bet they're also suffering later on with all sorts of pain from arthritis etcetera. But some people sometimes I'm amazed. Like the guy who had no face.

02:30 He's alive and well and he's survived. And people are built differently and a lot of times it's in the mind. You'll recover as best as your mind's going to allow you to won't you? Some people are told they're dying and they just soldier on like nothing's happened and others'll drop their bundle and they're dead within a week I suppose. The mind's got a lot to do with it. You got to

03:00 trick the mind. Unless it's something that's missing. If you can't regrow a leg, can you? It's not like a drop-tail lizard. You can't drop the thing off and grow another one. That sort of stuff's not going to repair itself. Scars and things are there forever, but I guess it's the internal scars that do the most damage. The physical side bugger all really. Providing you've got all your arms and legs and even those that don't seem to go on and live

03:30 a fairly substantial life. But I guess it's the internal injury that doesn't repair, or doesn't repair as good as we think it does. You can say to people, "Look he's got on marvellously" but you don't know what's going on inside the bloke. A lot of times it's when he's by himself or when she's by herself, when the person's by themselves you don't know what'd going on then and that's probably I suspect the part that heals the least,

04:00 the internal bit I guess. But yep we are capable of - you break an arm, it gets in a splint and repairs itself. How quickly depends on how old you are and what your bones are like. But yeah it's the internal stuff, I don't reckon that ever repairs itself. Like I said, I'm quite convinced that it doesn't matter who it is, but when you come

04:30 home from there whether it's a body thing or whether it's a mind - body or mind nobody came home exactly the same. And some people spend a lot of time by themselves going back in time and have a o lot of difficulty handling that. But on the outside they're fine when they're in a group of people, but they're no good by themselves. They can't get it away. I know people who still live

05:00 and eat their service overseas. To me it's not like that with me. That's another life and I'm in a different life now and I'm able to just wipe that aside although I have my moments. But I'm able to for the most case able to wash it - it'll be there for a short time - I'm able to wash it away or wash it to the back of my mind and get on with the life that.

05:30 I'm in now. Which is why I don't spend any time at RSLs. I'm an RSL member but only just recently. And I didn't join the RSL for comradeship. I joined the RSL because it's one of the local haunts you can go to have a meal at the restaurant. But I didn't join for up at the bar to talk about, to relive all the things that happened. I don't want to

06:00 relive any of it.

During the war how did you cope with the situation? Was alcohol a part of it?

Oh yeah alcohol's a part of army, a part of the defence. Yeah. It went hand in hand, didn't it? There's a lot of people's lives been destroyed through drinking problems and there was a bloody lot of alcohol consumed in Vietnam I can tell you.

06:30 For various reasons I might add. For reasons to drink away the memories or problems or while they zap themselves out at night - I'm not suggesting everybody that went to Vietnam was an alcoholic, I'm just saying that alcohol was a part of it, it was like a drug. Instead of somebody having tablets to go to sleep they had a few drinks to put themselves to sleep

07:00 so they could sleep at night. Not lay there all night thinking about what they saw today. I suppose if that helped well then it helped. But peacetime military are very aware of that problem now. They mightn't have been some years ago but they are very aware of alcohol in the defences now. In my day if you belonged to the mess you had to go,

07:30 it was compulsory to go to the mess a certain amount of times a week. It wasn't compulsory to drink though. But it was compulsory to go to the mess and most people that went to the mess drank. There were those who didn't drink and they drank soft drink. But they had to go to the mess so the fact that going to the mess was compulsory for a lot of people it was to them seen as compulsory drinking although nobody said you had to drink compulsory.

Why was it compulsory?

Because you had to - there were mess meetings -

08:00 I'm talking about the sergeants' mess - you had to go to. You had to be seen to frequent your mess and talk to your fellow peers which at the time seemed to be able to relax in a comfortable environment, it was a privilege to be in that mess. You could discuss things about the days training or if it was somebody else in another department you couldn't get to through the day it was a time to over a drink

08:30 of whatever you were drinking whether it was lemonade or beer it was a time to reflect and talk to them about what problems you might have interdepartmental maybe. But it was made compulsory to visit your mess at least once a week and they had happy hours. They put on party pies and stuff to try and attract everybody in and drinks at half price.

09:00 I think that's what the military's cottoned onto now. That you can't be seen to be forcing people into a drinking environment whether the guy drinks or not.

In Vietnam do you think the higher ups saw drinking as a way to help soldiers cope and thus made it more freely available?

No. I think from my experience and I had to have an interview

09:30 with one of them myself, they had a trick cyclist as I call them, a psychologist, they had one on the base who was there not only for people at field hospital but for people in the area and I was amazed how they could keep an eye on - they kept an eye on people. If they thought you might be having a hard time then suddenly you'd get a phone call from him and he'd say, "Come down. I'd like to have a talk to you".

10:00 And suddenly you thought, 'Hello? What does a trick cyclist want to talk to me for?' And somebody might have noticed that you had changed. Somebody might have seen you sitting somewhere quietly by yourself thinking about things that maybe you shouldn't be thinking about and someone astute enough to report that so that it gave you an opportunity whether you want to or not, you went an saw him and he would just sit beside - I had one visit.

10:30 And he simply asked me how I was going. I'd have a pretty rugged time at one stage and he simply said to me, "How's it all going? You're looking a bit down in the mouth over the last week or so, is everything all right? Can I do anything for you? What can we do? If you have any problems for Christ's sake come and talk to me". And I found that was very good. I hardly knew he was there. Until such time

11:00 as I got a phone call. So somebody obviously had seen that my mood had changed sufficiently to take notice of it I suppose. So how many other people he saw I don't know. Like he didn't have a consulting room with everyone sitting out the front. How many people he saw I think he might have seen in private like he did with me so that people didn't say, "Oh that bloke's lost his marbles. If you ever see anyone sitting on that seat mate, they've lost their marbles".

11:30 It wasn't like that. But no I saw that they did that very well, in my unit they did that very well anyway. Drinking was an after-hours thing. The mess was never open through the day. It was only open at night. And it opened at maybe five o'clock in the afternoon or something for those that had finished early and went through to maybe midnight. And then she

12:00 was closed again, she was a dry camp [no alcohol]. So it wasn't open slather. You couldn't just go and get a drink and you didn't have alcohol anywhere in your line. It was out of bounds to have it any lines, it had to stay in the mess. If you drank alcohol it was in a controlled environment. So I can only speak for the unit I served with and I didn't see that it was a big problem. Because people could go to town and do what they liked.

12:30 They didn't have any control over that I suppose. And occasionally you'd see someone who drank himself into a bit of a stupor and you'd look back and say, oh yeah what happened two days ago or something had happened and then someone'd just keep an eye on the bloke and he'd after a couple of days he'd be back to square one [OK] again. And I think if they found someone that was boozing and drunk the whole continual time then someone would certainly do something about it. Don't forget we're a medical unit.

13:00 People were very aware of problems like that. So I can't speak about any other unit but from my point of view, from my tour, and I suppose someone who was a total abstainer might say, "Geez there was a hell of a lot of booze drank. The bloke's in there every night of the week". But if you can't go into your own mess and have a couple of beers at the end of the day

13:30 before a meal and maybe a couple of beers after tea with a game of darts particularly where you are and what you're doing then it's pretty poor. There will always be those who abuse the system I suppose. But I never saw a real problem with it. But I'm aware that in the Department Of Defence over the years as a whole it was being studied that maybe we shouldn't have compulsory this

14:00 or compulsory that. Maybe we are contributing to somebody's downfall. And I know that prior to me getting out of the system that was all just coming in. People were starting to be very aware of that.

At the field hospital in Vietnam did alcohol - say a surgeon's drinking at night and a dust off comes in, would it affect the surgeon in any way?

No. They had more than one surgeon

14:30 so there'd always be a surgeon, an anaesthist and a physician on call the whole time. And then I mean you can't be on call and not relax or socialise for twenty-four hours a day for three bloody months in a row. They'd only be there for three months, these specialists. So they had enough. They had two of everybody so that it didn't matter what day or the time of the night it was, you didn't have to

15:00 stagger away from the bar at half past ten or eleven o'clock at night trying to sew somebody up or do some intricate operation when you maybe had too much to drink. And Bob - you should have asked Bob that question because he's a theatre tech.

We did. With the

15:30 **recreational activities what type of things would you do to relax besides alcohol?**

Well I said we were lucky enough to be in the 1RSG area and they had the Peter Badcoe club there, they had a lovely big swimming pool. They had three or four speed boats that you could ring up and book and go skiing. They had dart clubs.

16:00 Every unit had a football team which you could go to training on Tuesday and Thursday nights and you play the game on Saturday. They had a couple of cricket teams. Volleyball was a big, volleyball's always been a big thing in the army. They had always had volleyball championships within the unit and within departments. One department versus the other.

16:30 Or they join a couple of departments together and call them Team A, Team B whatever. Always had a

ladder, a volleyball ladder and a cup at the end of the thing. Then they had inter unit activities of volleyball, cricket, all that sort of stuff, so there was plenty of sport if you wanted to get involved in that side of it as a recreation. There was - well in the 1RSG area anyway there was - and that's probably an easier area to run that

17:00 sort of thing because there was a hell of a lot of units there and it's a big area and you've got lots of engineers and carpenters and all those people who can build that sort of stuff. Out in the weeds I guess it's a bit harder. A guy would come back in from a section tour and he'd be back into the weeks where his tent was and what they did, I guess a lot - I've seen it. They had volleyball sessions there as well.

17:30 When I was at Long Binh the Yanks were forever having volleyball competitions. They played volleyball in their sleep. So from what I saw anyway there was always other activities and then you could go into town with your camera. Thirty-five millimetre cameras were the big deal in those days. Thirty-five mill cameras had just come out and they were the big deal, they were the ant's pants. Everybody had a thirty-five mill camera and they were all taking slides. And you could

18:00 go away for the day touring the Buddhist monk places and taking photographs around town, down at the market. Another big thing that people did for recreation was make their own - because AKAI reel-to-reel tapes were a big deal then as well. And myself included all we came home with twenty of those great big tapes full of music. Music that you wouldn't get

18:30 that you'd listen to. There was a place in town you could go and plug into Australian Radio Vietnam and you could plug in, take your tapes along and plug straight into the system so that you got the stereo stuff straight onto the tape and your earphones and you'd listen and, "Yeah I want that one" so you'd plug in, "Oh no I don't want that one". And every second person had an AKAI reel to reel [type of] tape recorder. So everybody

19:00 chose the recreation they wanted. I played football when I could. When I was there I played football, half a dozen games. I was always a member of somebody's volleyball team. I built a lot of stuff while I was there. I built all the annexe onto the sergeants' mess for them with this timber that we acquired. Yeah. There were other things to do and I guess you make them

19:30 available and it was up to the individual. And some of the recreations were made compulsory as well. Like, you played in the unit volleyball team or else. And unless you had one leg you were part of the group. There were a couple of them had took up photography and they were given a dark room and they could go and develop their own photos and do all sorts of things with photos. I've got a photograph here somewhere

20:00 of a spider on my head that a budding photographer took a photograph of me and a spider and interposed the thing on top of my head. I've got that here somewhere. So a lot of people would have had a lot of other activities.

Was Vietnam very tiring for you while you were there?

Very tiring yeah. You were on call the whole time.

20:30 It didn't matter, like you could be asleep at two o'clock in the morning and the alarm'd go off at two o'clock and you were up and you wouldn't necessarily get back to bed at all until the next night. So you'd be - the alarm or siren'd go off at two o'clock. I'd race in, pick up a K phone, one of those wind up phones back to my A&D to find out exactly what was coming in

21:00 and then if that was two o'clock in the morning you could bet that you weren't going back to bed. So you'd be there through till breakfast. You'd go and have breakfast and then you'd go back and your normal day'd start. And hopefully you wouldn't get another one the next night. Mind you, they didn't happen every night. But when they did they really taxed you. If a battalion got in the shit anywhere like they did at the Long Hai Hills

21:30 then they're ferrying casualties in one after the other and they are twenty-four hours awake.

Does that lack of proper rest and sleep start playing tricks with your mind?

No. I don't think so. Might have made me think of home more. But I don't think it affected what I was doing.

22:00 Didn't affect my performance at all. We did get the opportunity to - like, we'd say to the staff, "You three go. Come back in three hours". And they'd go and have three hours sleep and come back. You just can't work forever without any sleep. But no I don't think, I didn't notice anything like that except for maybe I might have sulked a bit more and thought of home a bit more and thought of the kids a bit more and

22:30 "What the bloody hell am I doing here?" and then that bad time'd pass and things'd right themselves again and all you'd have is the coughs and colds and sore holes and those that were smiling now whether they had a leg or not. That was a fairly satisfying thing to actually see them in bed still as good as gold and yeah.

What about others around you coping with the lack of sleep? Did you see any problems?

23:00 I always amazed at how people could just keep going. The human body's amazing how you can keep

going if you have to. It's a bit more important to keep going because of the job you're doing with casualties and than it is to try keep going to get from here to Seymour even though you're buggered. You say, "Gee I wish I could keep driving more". That's a something nothing. If you've got casualties coming in it's

23:30 amazing how you can just rise to the occasion and at the end you fall in a heap. And you sleep. But while it's all going you don't realise what the body's capable of doing if it has to. The old adrenalin kicks in and takes over and away you go. Apart from running into the barbed wire I remember one night charging down the bloody sand dunes and some idiot had stretched barbed wire right across the my route.

24:00 It wasn't a path. It was the route I used to take, down the sand dune and I knew every bit of it, it didn't matter whether it was dark or day and I knew every piece of this and that's where I used to tear down. Anyway the outside work party had strung this barbed wire up through the day and I run flat out straight into it. Oh yes. So when I arrived in triage I was covered in blood. Don't know whether to put me on the table or who to put on it. "Christ, what's happening?" And you know barbed wire's a bugger.

24:30 It gouges you everywhere. Little chunks of stuff out of you. Tore all of my clothes. And I'm wondering what the hell had happened. I'm laying there like a bloody fly caught in a web. And I'm trying to tear it of me to get out of the barbed wire to get where I had to be. No. Most of the people I saw, nurses included, were all able to just rise to the occasion.

25:00 **The job you were doing, you could get a bit lost and focus on the negative and the bad things you saw and all the dismemberments and all that, but there must be a lot of positives too when people are saved and people recuperate. What are the emotions when you see the good work, the positive work that's done?**

Yeah. Oh it's just so pleasing that you can see the after thing and you see this bloke's up walking around now and he's as good as gold and he's going home and that's fantastic.

25:30 Yeah all the good work that people do. The laboratory finds something wrong with someone- they got a blood problem or something and they find it and they guy's out and going whereas he would have been dead or violently ill. It's very pleasing to work in a hospital. I mean, there is a real down side. But if you don't let that get to you and you balance that with all the good stuff

26:00 it's a very pleasing place to work. There's a lot of rewards, both personal and collectively as a group And I think that's what kept a lot of people going and there was more stress in the field hospital than a lot of soldiers give credit too. A lot of soldiers, particularly those who were never wounded, would see it as a boffin base job.

26:30 "Bloody all right for them. They sit at home all the time in hospital working in an air conditioned ward. What the bloody hell would they know?" But that couldn't be further from the truth. It's a very stressful place to work. It can have some really bad memories and some bad things occur. But I said if you balance all the good stuff - like someone said, "It can't be all that bad". Well it isn't all that bad. Like, my tour in Vietnam

27:00 can't be all that bad. There were some really good times. I've got a lot of good memories as well. I've got a hell of a lot of good memories that are in there as well. Laughable things that occurred. Things that I can reflect back on as quickly as the other ones. And I suppose that's what saves it. If it's all bad you never survive.

27:30 If there's every day of the week is bad. I mean, you talk to the World War I and now the World War II veterans and talk to them about being in the trenches and the mud and the shit and the rain. I mean, that must have been bloody devastating. However they'll all have a story somewhere where they've had a laugh over something and there's always been the good times that keeps them going through the bad times.

What was the biggest laugh you had over there?

28:00 Let me see, what could I - there were not quite a few, but there were a few and I'm just trying to reflect on some that might have occurred. We built a dust off chopper out of a

28:30 the old dunny seat. I don't mean the toilet seat that you'd see out there. One of the old tin jerry cans that the night man would carry away on his shoulders. We bolted that on to an old stretcher and put a piece of timber up with a couple of pieces of wood as a blade and we went up and dusted off the CO down to our mess. So we went up and collected him.

29:00 And he had to sit on this dunny seat and four of us trundled him down the sand dunes. Of course, he didn't make it, did he? He got halfway down the sand dunes and off he went and the whole thing, five of us, all rolling down the sand dunes with this dunny seat helicopter coming after us. There's pictures of that somewhere. That was the CO who we dusted off there. I mean it was quite a laugh, but I'm sure there were

29:30 dozens of other things that sometimes I reflect on. I'm having trouble recalling some of them now. I'll think about it while you're talking to me and I might come back to it.

Did you feel appreciated by the fighting military side of things and did they show you their appreciation?

Absolutely. Everybody had

30:00 a lot of time for the medical staff. Why wouldn't they? No, they were all very good. They - whether they had visited the hospital or not they knew the work that was going on and they knew what was happening behind the doors and they were pretty good about it.

Having that psychologist on site as it were, do you think it would have been

30:30 **very beneficial for say World War II guys to have that same opportunity?**

Yeah. You need someone to talk to, don't you? You're going to sit and mope about something and let it get right to you, that's where the real problem starts. A lot of guys can do it, can find solitude in talking to a mate. Most people can do that by if they got a really good mate they can sit with him and say or the mate will sense something

31:00 that's wrong. And they'll grab him and force it out of him and a lot of people can do that. But there are those that can't. There are those who are loners if you like and they'll sit and stew over it until something bad happens. I think it's an excellent idea to have somebody. I don't know - these trick cyclists, sometimes I have my doubt about them. Sometimes I think some of them ought to go and psyche the psyche.

31:30 But being sensible about it I guess they are trained to get things out of you that you need to release if you like. I've always said if I was ever going to be a doctor I'd want to come back as something else in this world I'd be a skin specialist or a psyche because you're never ever going to worry about killing anyone. You just go and tell them, "If that cream doesn't work, go and try some other" and they psyche blokes normally -

32:00 I guess he can have a failure and somebody could commit suicide, but for the bigger part it basically reassuring people and trying to get stuff out in the open. It's not usually that get down on the bed and tell me what happened since you were a child, you know, like you're doing with me.

Many many tapes ago you told us a bit about I think his name was Faraday when he went

32:30 **a bit troppo [mentally upset by war experience] on Christmas Eve and he shot those soldiers. Can you describe what it was like when the soldiers came in to be fixed up as it were and the emotions that went through that day?**

Shocking. For everybody concerned. They were all sergeants and - which doesn't make it

33:00 any worse or better, but for us that had our own sergeants' mess I mean it could have been us. So I'm not making it any less or worse because of the rank. But I had to go through their pockets and I don't know if you can ever imagine reading a letter from a wife saying that the children would

33:30 be - presents were put on the tree with the dad's name on it and they'd all be looking forward to having Christmas with him even though he wasn't there. This is the sort of stuff you're reading and they're putting the body in a body bag. That's bloody heavy stuff, I'll tell you, for everyone concerned. And it fairly knocked me around. And I consider myself to be fairly tough when it comes to that sort of stuff, having seen all the

34:00 things I'd seen through my life prior to that. But having to read a letter like that to try and find out to get information to put down to who this person was, it's fairly bloody tough stuff I can tell you. And everybody felt the same way. I mean, it just buggered Christmas for everybody concerned, not only their family back in Australia but everybody in country. Christmas was buggered.

34:30 And I suspect buggered for every Christmas for their family from hereon in to year dot. Yes. It wasn't a good thing. And it was particularly devastating for me because I knew the bugger. I'd been through Canungra with him and he was in my platoon and I can see that he wasn't going to make the grade. That there was going to be a problem. And then when that happened. And then to add insult to bloody injury they brought him

35:00 back to the hospital because they had a psych team come from Australia to interview him and document the whole thing etcetera and they did that at the field hospital. They had him locked away at the MP establishment jail at 1RSG but they brought him down to the hospital for his interview with the push from Australian - legal people, solicitors that would be defending, solicitors that would be prosecuting,

35:30 trick cyclists that were going to interview him and get what they could get from him. A whole entourage arrived from Australia. And I passed the guy as close as I am to you and yeah it wasn't good.

What was his demeanour when you passed him? What did he look like?

He didn't seem to me to be all that fussed about it. And then he went back to

36:00 the military prison at Holsworthy and of course they couldn't do anything to him, he just was allowed to wander around because he hadn't been charged. And I just forget now whether he was actually charged

under the military legislation or the civilian legislation. I just can't remember which one it was. And I can't remember what the sentence was either. I tried to follow it. I think from memory he might have got two years that was down to one and he finally got out in six months. Something along those lines.

36:30 It was pretty poor anyway. Because he had the conscription thing to hang on to. He was unsuited, he shouldn't have been there, somebody should have seen that he was unsuited and of course that was all a large bearing on what had happened. Yeah. So whether it was premeditated or not because of the actions of - it was a bullying tactics that people were applying when really in fact

37:00 they had to be on his back night and day because he would be endangering other people. Yeah. So it wasn't good. And I've managed to put that aside over many years.

How many years did it take to get over it?

A long time. Ten years I reckon.

What was the most upsetting thing about it to you?

37:30 Just the fact that he could get into the system in the first place and that these people were so vulnerable to that sort of thing happening. It was because people were wandering around with live ammunition. We're in a war zone and you can't not give them - I mean, I thought it was ludicrous that the Americans wouldn't be carrying it in their base. They weren't allowed to carry it in their base.

38:00 They went out on the field of course on manoeuvres or whatever they called it. Then they would obviously have their weapons and ammunition. But wandering around the base, no, no weapons. Where we had them all the time so that made everybody vulnerable to someone who perhaps lost their marbles like the guy who shot up the hospital and this guy who obviously lost the plot and just had enough. And because it was a senior NCO [non commissioned officer] who would be on his back all the time just by nature of their role

38:30 that's who he saw fit to take it out on. And it just upset me that those people could be so vulnerable. Christmas Eve, time off, standing at the bar, relaxing and all of a sudden we're let ourselves into a position where somebody could just walk in and do that. I don't know what the answer would be. You'd have to have the door locked and everybody issued with a key so that those that couldn't get in -

39:00 you weren't vulnerable any more. I don't know. But it just seemed a waste of a bloody lot of good lives to me.

So if these guys had been shot in battle by VC or whatever it wouldn't have had such an impact?

No. Not at all. You pays your money, you takes your chances, I suppose, don't you? They're there. They're regular soldiers anyway and it's what they're paid to do. But to have that happen by someone from your own. And I would think that would be even more

39:30 devastating to your family. I mean imagine there's a knock on the door and the military people say, "Look, I'm sorry, your husband's been shot at the war". That's devastating enough. But when you find out he's been shot by bloody friendly fire and not accidental either, like it's a purposeful thing that's been done. Yeah. Bit of a bugger I suppose.

Did you think for some time that you could have done something more

40:00 **before it all happened?**

No. I didn't blame myself. I just at the time at Canungra it was just a passing thought, 'Jesus, how did he get in here?' But I didn't think any more about it. It wasn't my role and I couldn't foresee what was going to happen.

Tape 8

00:30 **Looking back on the war do you think that national service was appropriate?**

I think it would have been appropriate had they had true conscription and not the marble out of the barrel. I really think that there was more problems caused by the ballot

01:00 and calling it conscription when it really wasn't conscription - conscription's everybody goes. And the big damage was done by that. I think even the soldiers, the national servicemen that went were resentful that their mates, there were others who weren't going. Everybody wasn't going. Like I said before if you do - usually it doesn't matter what you do to someone as long as you do the same thing to everybody.

01:30 But if you're going to do that sort of thing and run a ballot and then call it conscription it's really let something fester. And I think that probably if they'd done it the other way - they had to have it - we didn't have a force big enough to keep people over there that long. We ran out of bodies. I don't mean

bodies as in bodies, but we ran out of people to send.

02:00 That's why with what's going on now they've got back to the Army Reserve and people to go because they don't have enough people to keep changing them over. But I'm sure that if they had true conscription and you went and had a medical and you were fit and you went and I think half the trouble would have gone away.

But what if the people didn't want to go and you were conscripted.

Yeah well there was always going to be those. Then I suppose

02:30 that was up to the law to decide what they were going to do. But there was a lot of national servicemen who had a bitch that wouldn't have had a bitch if everybody had gone. There were a lot of mums who had a bitch who wouldn't have if the kid next door had gone. So why should he be there drinking booze and having a barbecue in the backyard while my son is maybe even dead.

03:00 Or over there risking his life and these buggers are drinking booze in the backyard. They're his age. Why aren't they there as well? Like I said, if everyone's in then everyone's in. Like it or not, it's the same with everybody. I just think that it wasn't all the problem, but it was a big deal. Those that didn't want to go I suppose they were still going to stand on a box and not go. They were always going to be conscientious

03:30 objectors. There's always people who through their religion they won't take up arms. And that's no bloody excuse because they could have gone dental, they could have been in the dental corps, they could have been in the medical corps. They could have gone and served in the ASCO Canteen. They could have done something. They didn't have to pick up a rifle I suppose.

How were they viewed generally, conscientious objectors?

Not good at all. Even by their own national service people that went.

04:00 Particularly in the end when they were given the war service leave or as it was called a defence service leave. That was the last straw, where people who stood on a box and didn't go were given the same reward as those who went. That was a cop out by bloody Bolte because they couldn't get everyone out of the system tomorrow.

04:30 And he said, "I will discharge all the national servicemen out of the army the day after I get into power". And what a ridiculous statement. You can't do that. Can't just feed them all out the same day. So as I mentioned before that was the last straw. But I do think that had it been for everybody the same a lot of the problem would have gone away.

With the conscription system, is it true that

05:00 **that Nashos that went to Vietnam were volunteers? Because not everyone was conscripted left Australian soil.**

No. They asked for volunteers first. They were given the option and then there were those who didn't volunteer. There were those who went. But for the most part they asked for volunteers and that was going to save a lot of problems, wasn't it? I mean the carrot there was if you go overseas,

05:30 when you come back you'll have a war service loan. To a lot of young kids that was fantastic. Then there were those who were part of a battalion who, the battalion went, you go. For singles that went over, reinforcements or people that went over one at a time they were for the best part volunteers.

Of course there's a difference between the CMF [Citizens Military Force] and the ARA, isn't there?

06:00 **Australian Regular Army is ARA. So they also sent reservists to Vietnam?**

No. There was no army reserve people went to Vietnam.

It's got on a list there that one CMF guy was killed in Vietnam.

Well he might have gone onto fulltime service. But there wasn't any Army Reserve or CMF people to my knowledge that went to Vietnam fulltime.

06:30 CMF or Army Reserve, now as it's called CMF, all those specialists were brought on the CMF list. So they became CMF soldiers but like surgeons and to get them into a uniform and into the system they had to do something and they weren't going to be regular army so they couldn't sign them up. The minimum time you could sign up for regular army was for three years. So they weren't going to do that. So they signed them up as

07:00 CMF. So those specialist people would have been signed up as CMF, but there certainly wasn't a great herd of CMF people all bundled up and sent to Vietnam. If one of them was killed then he would have been a specialist brought in for a particular task like all the surgeons. There wasn't hundreds of them went.

What did you think of the anti-war movement

07:30 **at the time?**

I just thought they were misinformed people. I mean, they had their own views, but most of them were, well eighty percent of them were university students to start with. There were those that had a placard at home that said, “Down With Everything”. You know, you’ve got your rent-a-crowd that always goes to these things. There’s always the same. You can see the same heads and they’re all the same category of people. Stirred up by a

08:00 group. They half of them when I came home and spoke to a lot of them, I mean they just didn’t understand why we had to be there. We mightn’t have liked it but we needed to be there. As I said earlier today we’re only a little piddly pot and if we don’t abide by conventions and by treaties then we’re not going to survive. I tell you what, if they come across that little border through Papua New Guinea we’re going to need all the bloody

08:30 help we can get ‘cause they’re like ants and we’ll never do anything about it. And if we’d said, “No. Go to buggery” to our friendly brothers then they’re going to say no to us and we won’t survive. So it was all, whether we liked it or not - and there’s always a bad decision. Look, it’s happened again with Iraq, hasn’t it? It’s always a big political scene. There are those that are saying we shouldn’t be going, there are those who say we should be going. It’s exactly the same thing.

09:00 But hopefully when they come home they won’t be treated like we were when we came home. And when those people grew up then they had another welcoming home, didn’t they, for the Vietnam Vets. And those same buggers who were throwing tomatoes all those years ago were back there as a mature adult in the crowd saying welcome home. Because they understood that we mightn’t have wanted to be there either.

09:30 But why take it out on a soldier? He’s been told where he’s going to go. Not his fault. So why take it out on him. You go and throw tomatoes at Parliament House if you want to. They’re the ones that made the decision. But don’t take it out on the soldier. I mean, there was all sorts of stories that were going around Vietnam when I was there about this group back here that were sending food to the enemy. Collecting money and sending

10:00 rations and food to the bloody Vietnamese. Imagine what sort of a devastating effect that has on the soldiers over there. Like, this is your own people, in your own age group, that are doing these sort of things. So I don’t think you’d find a soldier that would have joined the ranks of the urgers or the agitators. Hopefully they’ve all seen the light of day. And most of them have

10:30 because I’m sure most of them on that parade when they gave the official welcome home. It was certainly a better welcome home than the first one I can tell you that.

The public image of Vietnam Veterans is that they’re quite angry. That

11:00 **anything related to PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] is generally related to the Vietnam era. That’s the public image, generally perceived by people, or so I gather. Obviously that’s inaccurate, but relating to say the World War II generation of soldiers I’ve heard some say that they see the Vietnam veterans as whingers.**

Yeah. Well I haven’t heard that comment, but

11:30 maybe that’s because we’re trying to get what we deserve now in pensions and some support and I feel for them as well because there wasn’t the same forum that there is now for those soldiers when they came home. And mind you, they missed out on a lot of stuff as well. The government’s not very good at looking after its own when they come home from the war. I can tell you that. I mean, history will show you that.

12:00 That it’s all very well when all the promises when you go but when you come home it’s not as good, the apples aren’t as rosy as they tell you they’re going to be. You can only have this much money. You can only have that much money. You can’t have that. Somebody’s sitting up there saying no unless you can produce this or produce that you’re not having any support. I mean, look at the poor buggers that were on that ship. They still haven’t been paid their money - that HMAS Melbourne that ploughed into …

12:30 **Oh yeah I know the one you mean.**

You know some of those people still have not been paid any money. I mean, that’s disgusting. And I know there’s a lot of World War II people and World War I people that didn’t get what they should have got. They weren’t looked after like they should have been. And it’s a bigger forum now. The public are more aware and we’ve got, Vietnam Vets - see, World War II had the RSL.

13:00 They came home to the RSL. And the RSL could do what they could do for them. But Vietnam Veterans now, there’s so much support for them, isn’t there? There’s the Vietnam Veterans’ Association, there’s the RSL, there’s a whole lot of counselling people you can go to. There’s a whole lot of help to fight the system to try and get you just desserts [what they deserve]. And for most cases that’s all the people are trying to do. Get their just desserts.

13:30 Get what they should get. There are a lot of guys that suffering. They're all about my age now of course those that are still alive. And like I said every one of them would have some problem. About this big or that big. Every single one of them, a problem of some description whether you can see that from the outside or not. And bugger it, they need the support. If it's a monetary support that's what they should get.

14:00 Good God, they're going to give us a gold card when you turn seventy. How lenient is that? I mean, how many of us are going to get to seventy or how many have already got to seventy? And when you do get to seventy how long are you going to have the gold card? Like, how long are we going to live after seventy? And if they've already got something wrong with them because that's why they need the support they're certainly not going to live long are they? So they're not really giving much away by saying, "When you get to seventy you can have a Gold Card" [Repatriation health care card].

14:30 I've got a Vietnamese doctor I go to. You know what he says? He thinks that every one of us should have a Gold Card now. Right now. He said that pussyfoot around every and he's a Vietnamese and he said, "The government should give all of you people a Gold Card right now and let you get your prescriptions and your medicine free of charge" and that's all they'd have to do and that'd go a long way to pleasing people. And I suppose if that comments been made

15:00 by a World War II veteran that we're whingers then that's what we're whinging about.

They've also said that - it's a minority though, but some of them have said that they've been through battles far worse than Vietnam and they never had any of this counselling or benefits.

No. They didn't. But that's not our fault.

15:30 They didn't. And that's bad. And that's really sad. I'm sorry that they didn't have that in those days and they damn well should have. But because we've got that now they shouldn't shoot us down because we've got access to that. Yes. I agree they should have had access to that as well, but they haven't. And there's nothing that I can do to go back and fix that for them. And yes I'm certain it was a different war all together. And you'd have to realise that. Anybody that's studied it

16:00 or knows anything about it would realise it's an entirely different war. Like I said, fancy being ordered to get up out of a trench and two paces later you're dead. I mean, you go to Vietnam, it's a different thing. Hide and seek. Fire and run. Hide and run. There wasn't a front like there was. There wasn't tanks or marching on El Alamein. Yes. It wasn't like that. We weren't blowing up bridges as we went. There was none of that. It's an entirely different war all together.

16:30 And every war that happens - big or small - will all be different. This thing in Iraq is different again. I mean, there's people coming home from war service there and there's people like us saying, "What a lot of rubbish, it's not war service. They're going over there, it's a peacekeeping force. How can you get overseas service for that?" And these people will be up for all their pensions and entitlements for being part of a peacekeeping force. Like they wouldn't know what it was to be

17:00 subjected to under fire. Now that's exactly what I'm saying now to these people, what the World War II people were saying of us. Because we see that our hardship was greater than theirs. It's the same, you say to your kids, "In my day, son, this wouldn't have happened". And they go, "Oh yeah, here we go again. It's always different in his day". And that's the sort of thinking that's going on now. I'm saying to

17:30 Penny, my wife, these people - it's a peacekeeping force for god's sake. It's not a war. They're over there peacekeeping. And they're only gone for - how long have they been gone? Three months? God, they don't know they're bloody alive. We were gone for a year. Now you got the World War II people saying, "A year! Jesus, I was gone for three years, like what's going on?" So you're always going to have that. And I don't think you should try and put them together and try and weigh one against the other. If somebody went

18:00 on active service and they've come home with some complaint or there's something wrong with them then they should be looked after. Regardless of which campaign they went to. And I feel for those veterans of World War II or families of World War I who didn't or aren't getting what they should get. But calling the Vietnam Vets whingers isn't going to fix it either. Yeah. So that's the way that I would answer that question.

18:30 **Can you tell us why it is that Vietnam Vets have such a high incidence of PTSD?**

No. I don't know. I can't answer that. They've got the support that they get. I don't think I know anybody personally that has that.

19:00 I know they're out there. But I don't know anybody personally that has that problem and I've got half a dozen close friends who are vets who retired the same rank as I did, saw the same services I did and none of those have it. I can't answer that. I've got no idea why that would be.

When you came back from Vietnam how would you say the war changed you?

19:30 I came home a different person. I took a long time to fit back into the system that was back here. Not only from the point of fact that people were opposed to what we did, it was just - it's hard to

20:00 pinpoint. But I just was a different person .I saw things differently. I had some complaints that I brought back with me that I wasn't managing very well. Or I wasn't coming to terms with them very well. I saw those as being a lifetime thing although I still had all my arms and legs and was no way anywhere near as other people and I knew that. But I saw this as

20:30 me having to suffer with whatever I had through the rest of my life. And I hoped that someone was going to look after me so it if got worse the system was going to be there for me. I just suppose dealing with coming back - it's entirely different. You spend a year over there and then come home. You've got no idea what it's like to come - you come back to something that's normal after all of that time being in a

21:00 place where things aren't normal. Having to carry a loaded gun around with you twenty-four hours a day, having to sleep with the bloody thing and then you come home and you've got to try and fit back into a system where everybody's supposed to be, everyone's a friend. You're not looking at someone thinking, 'Oh I wonder if he's a ...' because they all look the same. Then you think, 'I'm home now. I'm right. Everybody's a friend. No-one's going to do anything to me. I'm happy'. And you hear

21:30 people say every time they hear a car backfire they'd be petrified, I didn't ever get to that stage, but things were different for me. And I had a hard time settling back into the reality of the real world I suppose. Yeah. It's just something that I can't explain. I don't know whether anyone else has been able to explain it, but it's just a different thing. It's just different.

22:00 I don't mean seeing things different either. I just mean that internally things aren't right. Things aren't the same. And I think that's probably what a lot to do with these people that have got this complaint. Maybe they, it gets worse and worse. And I know somebody that came home, was quite all right for twenty years and suddenly they weren't. On medication and Christ knows what.

22:30 And you wonder how somebody could be, to cope with it for twenty years as good as gold. And you'd think if you could cope with it for twenty years you'd be home and hosed, wouldn't you? Why does that happen? For some reason something triggers something and they're gone.

Do you think it's a case that they've actually hidden that?

They might have I suppose. I don't know that I'd get it. I mean, I silently suffer with lots of things. I silently I

23:00 wouldn't call it suffer, but I silently deal with a lot of issues without Penny even knowing. I just keep them to myself and then deal with them. And then the next day I brush them aside and luckily for me to date those things have been able to go away. And maybe that's the case with some of these people. They've been able to silently deal with it. And I also do think that we're bloody proud people and you

23:30 don't want to go rushing off to someone saying, "I've lost my marbles and I can't deal with it". You don't want anybody to know. Outwardly you want people to think that you are dealing with this magnificently and there's absolutely nothing wrong with you at all and you're not telling anybody that you're a bloody wimp and you couldn't handle it, "I'm a bloody sook". So a lot of guys go through that and they manage to keep it under wraps and deal with life quite effectively

24:00 until one day they just can't do it any more and they think. "Bugger it. I can't deal with this by myself any more. I've got to bring it out in the open and admit, or submit, that I need some help". And I think that's what happens.

Do you know of people, personally or who you've heard of, people who - apart from the discussion you've had with Myles [interviewer] on this - who've

24:30 **actually been admitted to psychiatric institutions or committed suicide after the war?**

No. I don't know anybody personally or remotely that have committed suicide. I don't know any Vietnam Veteran, put it that way, either close or remotely, that have committed suicide. I know of a few that have a lot of serious problems. But I don't know anybody

25:00 that's gone that far. And I can't think of anybody telling me of anybody that we know that's actually done that. There are, like I said, some people who are in big trouble. And they've got to be cared for and properly. They've got to be watched. They are down and out. But I don't know anybody who's actually done it.

Do you know -

25:30 **I suppose the fact that you got married after you came back ....**

No. I was married before I went. I had two children when I went.

Sorry. Yes.

Penny's my second marriage.

How much of a support was that for you mentally? How much of a stabilising fact was that?

Very good. I knew I had a family back home. Talking about suicides and things, I didn't know anybody that came home and suicided, but I certainly knew a couple that did it over there.

26:00 Because they got the letter from home saying "Don't bother coming home. I've gone off with somebody else". And that must have been devastating to count the days down three hundred and fifty-five and a wakie and you get down to five and a wakie and you get the letter from home saying, "Don't come home". How devastating's that? And then the pistol goes to the head and bang. There are two of those that I know of

26:30 while I was there. One was a warrant officer and one was a corporal. And they just couldn't face. Imagine, for a whole year they're looking forward to going back home. And then five days before they're due to go home they're told "Don't come home". That's bloody shocking. On that side, if you're talking about people doing away with themselves, that's the only ones I know of, but that happened in country.

27:00 **If I may ask you a private question, do you think that your war experiences or you being in the war and coming back home, do you think that potentially eroded your first marriage, your relationship with your first wife? A causal factor whether it be major or minor.**

No. The year that I was away had absolutely nothing to do with it.

27:30 We were married for twenty-four years and had four children. There was absolutely nothing in that year that I was away which would have lent or been part of my marriage break up. She was very supportive of me while I was over there. I had a family and children to cling to back there.

28:00 We wrote every single day. So, no, there was nothing there at all. In those years the marriage was sailing along fairly well I suppose. As well as it was going to anyway I can tell you. But separation does have a lot to do with - I mean divorce separation, I mean

28:30 family separation, husband separated from wives can play a big role in divorces. The army in itself is full of divorce cases. Because that's the sort of role it is that the soldiers away from home so often that they decide it's not worthwhile any more and he finds someone or she finds someone. And the military if somebody did a study

29:00 I think you'd be absolutely appalled at the amount of divorces in military life.

Even at that time in Vietnam?

Yep. I mean there were those that I've spoken about - the don't come home stuff. But even without Vietnam, just a soldier's normal service - field trips that he's got to go away, training trips he's got to go away. The guy's not home all the time. It's not a nine to five thing. And for lots of reasons all due to

29:30 not being home as often as he should be or could be is all a factor that leads into separation and divorce with military personnel. And I wouldn't mind seeing the figures on divorce with military personnel. I think people'd be bloody astounded at the divorce rates with military personnel.

Your experiences -

30:00 **would you say that your memories of Vietnam are perhaps your strongest?**

What, through my whole career?

Through your whole life? Whether it be personal or professional?

Yeah well it's certainly a part of my life that I won't ever forget. It's a slice of life that you could have done without but certainly

30:30 I'll never forget that service. And some of it's like yesterday. Some of the things that I can think about are like they happened last week. You can't believe that much time has gone past. But are we talking about memories that last the longest or are we talking about ….

Strongest. How vivid is it in your mind?

31:00 Like yesterday or at least last week anyway. And I would think it will always be like that. It will always be like it only happened last week. I can still see people's faces. I can still see buildings. I can still see locations. I can see all of that still, all of that stuff. If you showed me a map of the places I've been I could pinpoint all sorts

31:30 of things for you. I could talk to you about people who were there. I can see them standing there right now. That's how - and I think it'll always be like that.

What triggers these memories?

Nothing in particular. Most of the time while I'm by myself if you've got nothing to do. If I'm busy and your mind's doing other things of course your mind's full of that. But there are times when I spend a fair big amount of time by myself. So does my wife, of course, if I'm not here she's

32:00 by herself. But it's those times when you're by yourself. It might be night time when you go to bed. It

might be me reading a book in a restaurant somewhere in Western Australia and I'll read something that'll trigger something else off. It's never if I'm with somebody - it's never when I'm with somebody. It's always when you're by yourself

32:30 and the mind's not active.

What about sound and smell? Does that ever? I'm not talking about war sounds like machine gun fire, artillery - but are there any particular sounds - someone's voice or a certain smell that might trigger a memory.

No. Not that I know of.

What about rice?

Oh. Yeah well okay.

You're lying aren't you?

33:00 Yeah well. Rice. When I came home - I can't eat rice. I've had rice every which way you could have it. I've had it fried, boiled, steamed, in my ice cubes. And I tell you rice is not my favourite food. I can eat a little bit of special fried rice if I went to a Chinese restaurant.

33:30 But that's the extent of it. Rice to me is just Vietnam. Like I said, there's no fridges, there's no freezing system there. They put bloody ice cubes in the beer. And they transport their blocks of ice in rice because rice is their stable, there's an abundance of rice over there. So they pack this stuff in rice. Well the rice melts into the ice, doesn't it?

34:00 You might be having a drink with a couple of ice cubes in it and there's the rice again. So it's not good. Rice is not my favourite food. But that would be all. I don't have any other - there's nothing else that brings things to memory like a smell or a particular notice. Not that I know of.

On a bit of a lighter note, the terms used by Vietnam Vets

34:30 **of different units, contingents, whatever, different years, to describe some of the activities like PCOD - have you heard of that time before? Can you explain what PCOD is? As far as I'm aware it means, "pussy cut off dead".**

Oh no see I've never heard of that. No it's true. It must have just been in different cycles and different units. Obviously units would have maybe a battalion had - where did you get all this from, you got it from some of the battalion?

The other vets, yeah.

But they would have been battalion people, wouldn't they?

Apart from - no some of the infantry guys didn't know

35:30 **about this. But engineers knew.**

It would have been something that was invented in a particular unit I'd say and it was very strong in that unit. And it never ever escaped. Like, it wasn't a term or name that was used by every single person. As you've just found out again. Like, other terms like the term goffa [goffa is Royal Navy slang for any non-alcoholic drink, with the rejoinder "Why bother?"]. You could talk to any military person, even those that hadn't been in Vietnam, and my

36:00 wife could tell you what a goffa is. And that's a definite military term for a soft drink. And where it comes from I wouldn't have a clue. But there are those sort of terms that everybody would know as opposed to the one that you've just said. Not everybody that went to Vietnam would know that. They all know the uc da loi, and Cheap Charlies [both of these terms feature in a song called "Saigon Tea", sung in the character of a Vietnamese bargirl, about the Australians being "cheap charlies" in comparison to the wealthy American soldiers] and barmy bar, and all those sort of things everybody that went to Vietnam would know

What about "steam and cream" [massage parlour]?

I have heard of that but

36:30 again it wasn't something that was used around places that I went to or guys that I knew. It might have been used prior to my tour or after my tour. Although after my tour there was only another eighteen months or so, so it didn't have long it if did rise its ugly head.

What's the gist of its definition?

No idea. Steam and Cream, I mean, you know all these things, you must have got it from somebody. You must have asked them before. Like I said it wasn't a term that was used by people I know. I've heard of it only once before before you mentioned it today. But I hadn't heard it. Honestly it's not something that was used really

37:30 prevalent around Vietnam. Not in the year I was there. What about Bob? Was he able to tell you what it

was? You must have asked him the same question. What did he say?

I don't think he knew some of these terms.

No. See, so he's the same unit as me so that'll tell you something. I'm the second person in that unit that doesn't know.

Vung Tau was generally the area where any sort of sexual activity was conducted.

Yeah. You'd be breaking your neck to get to Vung Tau.

38:00 But that's right. No. Saigon was the biggest of the lot.

Now what were places - to your knowledge - I've heard terms used like "Suck Fuck Clubs", what were the other sort of terms used for these sort of places?

That was the only terms. That one term that is quite true and everybody that went to Vietnam would know that term.

38:30 The only place - like there's a special place you could go and that's all you would get from them. You couldn't have intercourse, they just didn't do it. And there were places you could go to they'd have intercourse but they wouldn't suck fuck. So there were specific places you went to. But they're the only terms that come to mind. Mind you, you're talking to someone who wasn't able to get into town

39:00 every day of the week like others. I'm not just saying that because my wife happens to be within hearing distance, but there are those who were fortunate enough if you like to get in there every single night and every single day of the week. Then there were those of us who were either not at Vung Tau or when we were, we were on call twenty-four hours a day.

How important do you think these avenues were for

39:30 **soldiers? Particularly ones that had seen combat?**

While I think that it was important I think that wives - and they may can me for this somewhere down the line - but I think wives have to understand or need to understand that the husband - it was nothing to do with being unfaithful. It was relief. It was pressure. Getting rid of the pressure. It was simply a relief thing.

40:00 It wasn't the fact that they loved somebody else or they were I suppose if you talk to the church about it they would tell you that it was, it was sinful and it shouldn't have been done. It was sex out of wedlock and all of the terms that they want to use. However I'd like to see those people in that position. And we're only human beings and everybody needs some form of relief I suppose. And I suppose me having said that now the wife at home could say the same thing, "Look I'm here by myself

40:30 and because Joe Snooden or whatever came round last week, don't be too concerned about it, Kevin, because it's only my relief". How would I feel about that maybe? Well I'd say, "Well nobody's shooting at you, dear. You're not whipping yourself out through the rice paddies". But I suppose in their defence that's what they might say. In my defence that's what I'm saying.

That's a good excuse. But we've got about roughly thirty seconds or one minute, to round it off is there anything you'd like to say for the historical record that you haven't told anyone or us today about your experiences in Vietnam? Or anything to do with Vietnam per se.

No. I've been quite open with the interview.

41:30 And what I can remember I've openly spoken about. After you've gone I'll probably remember something that maybe I should have said, but that's, you pay your money, you takes your chances and your money's just about run out.

Alright, thanks a lot. Good on you.

INTERVIEW ENDS