Australians at War Film Archive

Michael Malone (Mick) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Mick whereabouts did you grow up?**

I was born in a small country town in New South Wales called Binnaway. Twenty two miles from Coonabarabran, thirty four miles from Coolah and spent my first eleven years there before my folks packed me off to

01:00 boarding school in Bathurst. St Stanislaw's college. The best thing that ever happened to me of course. My mother and father every moment of their life they worked to send me and my sister off to boarding school and I hope we've repaid them over the years.

So the first eleven years of growing up in the country what sort of things was there to do on the weekends?

Oh, we were just normal kids. We were in all sort of strife.

01:30 Racing around the place. We had a river that ran through the town called the Castlereagh. Used to always get into trouble swimming in a flooded river. And the Castlereagh used to be the fastest flowing river in New South Wales back in those days and it's full of, it's too full of weeds and everything now. We had cows. I used to get the cows every day. Most of the time I couldn't find the damn things. They'd be up the river or down the river or, had a lot of mates, went to the local Catholic school, St

02:00 Peter and Paul's, local Catholic school and we played rugby league. We didn't have much to do with the kids that went to the public school. A lot of them used to call out, "Catholic dogs stink like frogs." So we, there was a bit of rock throwing going on but generally it was just a good childhood and I loved every moment of it. You knew everyone in town and they knew you and my

02:30 Dad was a shearer and he was away a lot. Mum used to milk the cows. We used to eat a lot of rice and milk and my grandmother lived next door which was fantastic, Polly. Polly was a famous shearer's cook and her and my mother ran the refreshment room on the railway station for years.

That sounds kind of unusual.

Yeah, and they made pies and there was trains that came in and they'd pack the place out and sell everything and Polly had

03:00 a handcart. She used to cart all the stuff from her house up to the railway station. It was a good life but you know, then we sold up. They had an auction and sold everything and we moved to Mudgee where Mum had a great opportunity running the refreshment room on the railway station at Mudgee. And at the same time packed me off to boarding school.

Did you have any jobs as part of the refreshment room?

No, not really. I was only a kid and I came home on holidays. I didn't know anybody in

03:30 town. I must admit coming home from school in school holidays in Mudgee wasn't much fun. It was a bit of fun but I didn't know anybody and it was a bit of a chore. You know I wished my school mates had invited me home to their farms or whatever but it never happened but then we, at the end of that time Mum and Dad moved to Sydney and consequently I left St. Stanislaw's and moved down there too.

04:00 **What actually did your father do in the Second World War, Mick?**

Dad was a member of the 2/13th Battalion, 20th Brigade. They were a unit that was based up in, or sorry recruited up around the Maitland district and inland from there and he joined about 1940, '41

04:30 and by the time he got to the Middle East he'd missed the battle of Tobruk but he was there for the battle of El Alamein and then served through Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and then they were shipped home and retrained up in Atherton in Queensland. They basically dyed their khakis green, getting ready

for the push in to New Guinea and his battalion was one of the

05:00 ones that landed at Scarlet Beach in Finschhafen. And the battle of Kakakog?]] and then the battle of Lae which was the big stoush that put the Japs to flight basically. The 20th Brigade suffered a lot of casualties there and he was there right until early '46 where a lot of them couldn't get home because, needless to say there were hundreds of thousands of soldiers, Americans,

05:30 Australians trying to get home, relying on the ships to get them home was the big drama and he came home and he'd been wounded. Shot through the shoulder. He'd been bitten by a snake. His section commander Bertie Chowne, Sergeant Bert Chowne who won an MM [Military Medal] in the desert had been sent back to Australia to become an officer

06:00 and try as he may, tried to get back to his battalion but they wouldn't send him back. They sent him back to another battalion, the 2/2nd Battalion and he was killed in action in Wewak up on the north coast of New Guinea. Bert Chowne, he was a great VC winner. He won the Victoria Cross. So he was a VC, MM and the diggers canteen at Ingleburn in New South Wales is named after him. That

06:30 was Dad's mate. So Dad was a lance corporal, then a digger, then a lance corporal then a digger. I think he'd been up and down a few times. But in those days they had a claiming system where you can claim a younger brother, you can claim a relative to serve in the same unit as you. So he claimed his younger brother Jim. Jim's still alive. Jim's the only son still alive and Jim joined him in New Guinea as an eighteen year old and served

07:00 through the islands and then went off to Japan with the Britain Commonwealth Occupational Forces for a year or eighteen months. And Dad when he got home de-mobilised of course and I was born probably within a day of nine months of him getting home. Not really but I'm a baby boomer fairly close. They got married reasonably soon after he got back. He met Mum on leave and he was from the local, from

07:30 the town of Coolah and Mum was a Binnaway girl. And he basically said, "My name's Ned Malone, what do you think of me so far?" Which is the biggest pick up line of all. And then they got married and I was born about nine months later, my sister was born about well nine, ten months after that so we're pretty close my sister and I and she lives in New South Wales and has her own family and I live over here basically.

08:00 **What did you father tell you about this war?**

All the good things. Never heard any mayhem, any drama. Never a thing about how bad it was. It was always the fun things and it was one of the main reasons I joined up because I thought this military life's a bit of a doddle. But Dad had a lot of good mates and I used to go to all his Anzac marches as a kid and the reunions afterwards and met all his close mates and it was so much fun and the comradeship

08:30 was so strong and that 2/13th Battalion even today 2004 is still a fairly strong organisation but their numbers are way down now. I remember going there when there were the old 13th Battalion from World War I at the reunions. Old guys in wheel chairs you know. They must have been in their eighties or nineties then but they were the Old 13th, or the Fighting 13th they called themselves. And they were a fantastic battalion in World War I. And the World War II boys used to

09:00 revere these guys. They really made a big fuss of them. But with Dad gone, the link to the battalion's sort of broken a bit but Jim, his younger brother, Jim who was in the battalion is still a life member of the battalion and goes to all their dos and all that sort of stuff, yeah.

Just rewinding you a little bit back to your childhood. What sort of subjects did you enjoy at school?

09:30 I was pretty sharp in English. I took the prize in fifth class in English. My maths was always bad. It was not that they were bad. My father used to really hammer me about my maths and my mother was a brilliant person with maths and always has been and my sister was pretty sharp. But English, social studies, history, that was my bag. But we were taught by nuns you see. The

10:00 nuns they were pretty tough cookies. They didn't jam it down your throat in the classroom, they'd be doing it on the rugby field. They tucked their skirts up their knickers and grabbed the ball and run and we'd be hanging off them and trying to tackle them. No we had some lovely nuns there. A little tiny Catholic school. The Sisters of Mercy which was an Irish order and had been out in Australia for many, many years since the

10:30 early nineteenth century, Sisters of Mercy. And they were tough. They were tough hard. They used to wear in the heat of the summer and the summer in the bush in New South Wales was pretty bad. Here they were dressed up in their black, full black with all their gear, it was pretty tough. And they lived there, they had a little house there. And we loved them.

It sounds kind of ideal?

It was idealic.

What sort of religious element

11:00 **in that school?**

Oh well they're Catholics. There was a little church next door, they had a priest. The priest lives in his little house and there's about seven nuns at the school and we did religious knowledge, RK I think they called it. With religious knowledge we did the catechism, we said prayers every day but it wasn't too bad, it was just what we were used to. Dad was a Catholic from Coolah and Mum wasn't.

11:30 Mum was a protestant. And she always accepted that we go to Catholic schools, there was never a drama about that. No I'm pleased that I went to a Catholic school.

It sounds like a pretty small school?

Yes St. Peters and Paul's at Binnaway is no longer there of course. There's no Catholic school in Binnaway any more. People actually live in the local church. The church has been converted into a house. I don't know.

12:00 Fifty kids, eighty kids, hundred kid, I'm not quite sure. It seemed like it was full of kids when you were in the assembly hall. But when you go back as an adult and you look at the place and you think, "Holy mackerel look how small this is." No it was just one of those little schools, every town had one. The whole of the educational system of New South Wales was basically public schools and Catholic schools. And without the Catholics they would have been in big strife actually.

It sounds like

12:30 **you didn't like getting sent away to boarding school?**

Well that was a big deal. I was in a bit of strife when I was a kid and my mother and father thought, "Well bugger this we'll get you out of here."

What do you mean strife? How much strife can you get up to in a small country town?

Well how's this for starters. We hijacked a rail carriage full of lollies and chocolates.

13:00 **Well done.**

Not really. My mother and father had to pay the fine of course. We were fined five pounds each. We were led astray by older kids but the older kids were only twelve and eleven. But we were nine. But we basically knocked off half a dozen tea boxes of lollies and chocolates. And thought we were invisible and nobody was ever going to find out until they came home one day

13:30 and Herbert Gilbert the local police sergeant's sitting up in Dad's kitchen drinking tea and I thought, "Oh oh the jig's up," so I bolted and they said, "Get back here boy." And I think I hold the record for giving up everyone else's names the quickest. When I joined the army many years later I did a resistance to interrogation training and I used to think back to that and I'd think, "Anything I do now is going to be easier than what I did then,"

14:00 because it was so horrifying getting caught and being hauled up in front of a beak, they actually brought a magistrate from Dubbo over and convened a court house in the local town hall. And very embarrassing. So to get me out of there Mum and Dad decided boarding school was it. So I went, went to one of the hardest, toughest boarding school around. In those days it was anyway. And I tell people we were hungry and cold

14:30 for five years. But that's just me. My mother's always horrified to hear that, because she did her best. We were allowed five pounds pocket money a term which you never saw and I was always in deficit of course, but Mum and Dad couldn't afford any more than that. And some of the kids at school were sons of cockies and graziers who had everything. And it was pretty bad. But it was a great upbringing, it really got me ready for the army.

Well what was so tough about it exactly?

15:00 Well we lived in dormitories, there was hardly any heating. It was freezing cold in Bathurst in the winter. And it's a peer group school, like a prison camp where the tough kids bubble to the top and you get a lot of bullying and a lot of carry on. But I used to play rugby and that was my saviour, that I was heavily into sports and stuff. So I was one of the in kids as it were. And I was so in

15:30 that I had to repeat third year high school because I failed, I was on the paddock too much and not in the classroom. But my time there was valuable. I learnt how to survive, learnt how to get on with…

16:00 Anyway the school itself was run by Vincentian priests and the poor old Catholics had some bad press over the year, but I can honestly say in the four years that I was there that there was no paedophilia in that school. There was a bit of sadism I'll give it to the old Catholic priest, the Irish they knew how to rule by the cane.

16:30 But that was – it was a big nothing really. We used to smoke every day. We'd get caught, we'd suffer the consequences but it toughened us up. And I'm so thankful because many years later when I did the SAS [Special Air Service] Selection Course I turned to my mate Bart Maverick and said, "Is that all there is?" Because I was used to harder stuff than that at school.

Is it that they whacked you really hard?

Oh six across the back side, six across the

17:00 hand. Didn't matter. You never got hit anywhere else. But I tell you what when you got six, once a week, once a fortnight you were in pain a fair bit of the time. And they used to lay into you too. No holding back. No strap. Because the Christian Brothers used to use a strap but the Vincentians used to use a big cane called the bruiser. And it was a torturous thing. They don't do that stuff anymore of course, more's the pity I think. But

17:30 I spent my time there and Mum and Dad moved to Sydney and basically couldn't afford for me to stay there so I moved out and went to school in Katoomba in New South Wales for a year.

Well it sounds like you didn't get on very well in the boarding school?

Oh I did, I did. But my academics I didn't. I didn't do very well academically because like I said I was too busy concentrating on playing every sport there was. It was a boarding school where you had hardly

18:00 any day kids so you had all these social structures in the school. The refectory, and we had a German family who were the cooks. Old Helmut. We had all sorts of devious things like going on. It was like I said a POW [prisoner of war] camp where you knew exactly where you had to walk at night to keep away from light shining from the window, or a view from a window to

18:30 a certain spot means the difference between getting caught and not getting caught. And oh it was fun, a lot of it was fun. Severe fun. And I must admit I've never gone back for a reunion but I will one day. It was a good school and I think it still is. Today it's a vastly different school because I took my kids back there about ten years ago and showed them the supposed terrible place I lived in. And here it was all in, all

19:00 little separate rooms and carpeted and heated. Nice bathrooms. And the food's probably ten times better. So be it, we move on. But it was a great place to go and we were a famous rugby school. We never got beaten for years in any grade. Fantastic. So Stannie's, I always look at myself as Stannie's, as if I went there yesterday too.

So when you moved to Sydney which school did you go to?

Well Mum and Dad looked around for another catholic school.

19:30 We lived in St. Mary's and the local St. Mary's high school was a bit of a wild place. So they sent me to St. Bernard's College in Katoomba which meant an hour and a half in the train there and an hour and a half back every day. And I was always late for first class because I couldn't get up there. And always had to leave early, me and another guy from Kingswood. So I was missing an hour of school

20:00 a day just to get up there and back. And they were different kettle of fish, they were De La Salle Brothers. And they were different, they were kind, full on rugby players like I was used to but it became a chore going up and down. So I pulled the pin.

Wasn't there a school closer that you could go to that was Catholic?

No, there is now. St Dominic's, I don't know why I didn't go to St Dominic's actually.

20:30 I just don't know why I couldn't go there. Maybe Mum and Dad couldn't get me in. But my brother-in-law Mick and his family all went to St Dominic's which is in Penrith just up the road. But for some reason I didn't go there. But if I hadn't have gone to St. Bernard's maybe I would have served on and then gone to uni and Sydney and never ever joined the army.

How did you fit into the school in Katoomba?

Well it was great. The best thing about it in my view, was that it had a cadet corps.

21:00 And the cadet corps introduced me basically to army life, all be it World War II sort of standard with the old uniforms and stuff. But it was so much fun carrying your rifle home on a train, it was just a big deal. So getting stuck into that side of things was a real departure for me.

What sort of things would you do as part of cadets?

Well you'd

21:30 drill of course. You'd have to blanko, which the old guys from Korea know all about the blanko. You'd have to blanko your gear which you used the stuff to create a khaki belt and khaki gaiters. And your slouch hat had to be bashed correctly and you learnt all that stuff. But going to camps, annual camps at Liverpool Army Base that was a pretty big deal.

22:00 The beds were straw palliasses. You had to actually get straw and fill a sugar bag and that was what your bed was. And that was – I hadn't come across that before. And I thought, "Oh this army's life a bit of a doddle, I quite like this." But it wasn't the main reason I joined the army but it was one of them, I'd had a bit of experience in cadets so I thought, "Oh easy."

What sort of skills did you learn as part of cadets?

Well you learnt to fire a rifle. You learnt

22:30 to carry packs, you learnt to get on with other people. You learnt to eat in mess hall, you learnt to eat rations. But none of that was hard at all compared with what I was used to at boarding school. None of it was hard at all. Many years later when I was at Duntroon as a warrant officer and instructor in the field wing many of the cadets that used to come through, had absolutely no experience with anything.

23:00 They came from cities, they'd never been to the bush. They'd never done anything. They'd never had a rifle in their hand and those guys struggled they really did. Whereas a lot of the kids from the bush who knocked around and went shooting with their father, they found it easy. A lot of the ringers, a lot of cowboys, found it a lot easier. Not that the ringers and cowboys eventually graduated better than the city kids. The city kids generally had the academic goods on them.

23:30 **Balances out in the end?**

Yeah I think so. Yeah.

Was cadets compulsory?

No. Never compulsory. At that school. That school's gone by the way, it got burnt down. The only thing I've got from that school is a puggaree off my hat. The green, red and yellow puggaree. It was one of the things you did, one of the activities you signed up to do. We had handball courts there which I played at St. Stanislaw's. It's the only two schools I've ever seen with

24:00 handball courts. So I took the pennant in handball which is not played over here actually. It seems to be a very Catholic New South Wales game.

I used to play it in school.

With handball. With a black rubber ball.

Four squares.

No. Long court. Front wall, two side walls but no back wall. Like a squash court with no back wall. You played singles or doubles.

Oh okay, no we had small

24:30 **black balls with four squares. No walls.**

Yeah. But it was a great game. And at St. Stanislaw's the bell'd ring and the whole school'd just pour up to the handball courts, which were built in the twenties. They were concrete things. And each class had their own courts. You had seniors, mugs, juniors and juvenile. They were the four courts. The juvenile court only half size of course so little kids could learn.

That could hurt though if you're whacking

25:00 **a ball at a…**

Fist. All my fingers have got the evidence of how you used to smash the ball and you did it as hard as a squash ball. And we had some champions there. And they went off and played in championships around the country. I don't think I ever saw any mention of it ever since. I think it was just one of those sports that have just, not died, but there's no evidence of it being played

25:30 at any sort of senior level.

I'm not really surprised 'cause it hurts so much.

Oh yeah you hit the wall, yeah you take the skin off your hands, no problem with that. But it was a great game. We were all very fit. There was about one fat person in the entire school and I think he was just an academic who never got out, and everyone else just ran around like maniacs. You just collapsed into bed at night exhausted. And you'd just rely on a parcel from home to supplement the

26:00 meagre rations basically.

So how many years did you end up doing in high school?

Four. I did three in Bathurst and I repeated one. Did first year, second year, third year then repeated third year much to my folk's chagrin. But it was my own fault, I never knuckled down. I always had the potential. As my father and my teachers used to say. And I've proven later, I went to university and did

26:30 things. But I was too interested in ging-going around the countryside as my mother'd say. But I don't regret any of that. It was just how the coin fell you know.

So did you get a job after school?

Yeah I worked at some jobs in Sydney. Wholesale drug company then I got a job at Dalgety's. My main

aim was to get a job in the wool industry. My father was a shearer.

27:00 And I did wool classing at school. And I went to tech[nical college], did wool classing. But I found that I didn't want – I just didn't want to be in that trade. I don't know when it occurred to me that I didn't want to do that but, I didn't want to basically upset Dad or Mum, but the wool game wasn't what I wanted to do. But I struck with it and I went to Dalgety's earning thirty six pound a week there.

What was Dalgety's?

Dalgety's was

27:30 a big player, is a big player in the wool industry. They were at Miller's Point in Sydney. I used to travel in from St. Mary's on the train every day. It was alright. That was 1966 and then the Battle of Long Tan happened and I signed up. Went down and joined up.

I'll just rewind you a little bit. Sorry how long were you working at Dalgety's?

Oh two years I suppose I was there.

28:00 I left school at the end of '63. I was working at a wholesale drug company in '64. I was working at Dalgety's at '65. I was working at another place, I can't remember some of these places. Only short term jobs. But by August 1966 I was at Dalgety, I decided that

28:30 the Battle of Long Tan happened and that's it boys, let's go and join the army.

How did you find out about the Battle of Long Tan?

Well it was in the papers. It was the news headlines in the papers was '18 dead'. D Company, 6 Battalion were caught in this huge stoush in the Long Tan rubber plantation. Just outside Nui Dat itself. Nui Dat was the Australian base, they'd only just recently established. Had no wire or anything around it yet.

29:00 And the papers screamed, "18 dead, Diggers in biggest battle since Korea," and all this sort of stuff. And three or four of us decided to go down to the recruiting office and sign up.

Three or four from Dalgety's?

Yeah and two of them weren't suitable. They were louts and vagabonds and I think they were put on their bike.

How did that conversation actually erupt for the four of you to go – ?

Oh just one of those things. We were

29:30 standing in the pub. We were only nineteen years old. One of our mates had just killed himself actually. Just shot himself. He had a job teed up on the Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme. And we were all pretty pleased for him. We'd had a few beers in the pub. We were only eighteen, in those days you couldn't drink until you were twenty one, unless you were in the army. And I don't know, maybe the

30:00 realisation that I wanted to be a soldier happened there and then. But maybe the Long Tan thing was the catalyst that pushed me over the edge. I had no regrets. I went home and said to Dad, "I want to join the army," and he wasn't that pleased with it but he signed me up. He signed the papers.

Did you actually encourage your other mates to join up with you?

Yeah I did but they sort of – I don't think any of them ended up in the army.

They weren't as keen?

No it was all just pub talk.

So your father was not too

30:30 **happy?**

Oh I think Dad saw me as aspiring to something bigger and brighter than being a bum soldier. Like him and his mates were. But to me they had the best life of all even though they were getting shot at. Their mateship and stuff endured for their entire life. So that was for me.

How much were you seeing in the media about the Vietnam war before you signed up?

It was

31:00 all pretty positive in the early days. The domino theory was well held by many academics where if Vietnam fell then all the other nations of South East Asia would fall to Communism. So the domino theory was one that held sway. We signed up with LBJ [US President Lyndon Johnson], of course. 'All the way with LBJ', which Harold Holt famously said.

31:30 You know the most famous thing Harold Holt – the thing that Harold Holt is most famous for now is, it's a rhyming slang for salt, that the army boys say, "Pass the Harold," and you know exactly what they're

talking about. Isn't that awful? He's not known for anything else.

And he's also known for disappearing without a trace.

Chinese submarine.

You reckon?

Yeah.

Chinese submarine?

Conspiracy theorists. No no that was one of the theories, they reckon he was ambushed and

32:00 kidnapped by a Chinese submarine.

What were the Chinese have been doing there?

Well who knows who knows? So yeah the political situation. We had the left and the right of politics even then but I think Vietnam was one of those things that both sides of politics attended to agree with. I think the left side were a bit

32:30 worried that their fellow travellers, the Communists were being attacked by non Communists. And there were a lot of people in the Labor Party in the early days. We all remember the DLP and the big split in Labor in the fifties was caused by – well [Melbourne Archbishop] Mannix basically called on Catholic people to pull out of the Labor Party because of the Communists and they formed the DLP [Democratic Labor Party]. My father was a DLP man. I never ever spoke to Dad

33:00 much about it. But BA Santamaria was very prominent. The Civic Council and that sort of stuff. Which the Labor Party over the many years since have portrayed as a fascist organisation which I don't agree with. BA Santamaria spoke a lot of sense. Him and Gough Whitlam never ever spoke personally even though they – I think they admired each other or respected each other, not admired. But Gough Whitlam was a weird kettle

33:30 of fish. After World War II – old Gough was in the air force in World War II and he walked down Phillip Street where Labor Party headquarters is and Liberal Party headquarters in those days. And he went into the Liberal Party headquarters and said, "I want to be pre selected for a seat." And they said, "Oh no, we've got all our candidates squared away." And he said, "Oh okay." So he went down the road and signed up with the Labor Party. So old Gough just wanted a seat in parliament, he didn't care which

34:00 outfit he was. The reason I'm mentioning Gough is that Gough came to play a huge part later on in the way the military was viewed and he's probably still the most despised man in the entire country from a soldier's point of view. Very very capable. But he had a lot of people in his organisation who, I don't think they had their hand up the back of his shirt but I think there were people like Jim Cairns who are card carrying Communists who actually was deputy

34:30 Prime Minister for God's sake. And here we are, stuck in the army fighting against Communists. It made us feel like – especially when Monash University students sent supplies of pharmaceuticals and all sorts of stuff to the enemy, the Viet Cong in Vietnam.

What happened with that?

We had a lot of fellow travellers in university. You know the old saying, if you're not a Trotsky at eighteen you're not right in the heart and if you're still a Trotskyite at

35:00 thirty eight you're not right in the head, maybe that was true. But they had a very strong Trotskyite organisation in Monash and they sent supplies to our enemy, the Viet Cong. They gave succour to the enemy. And that's one of the examples of or one of the definitions of sedition and treason is that, but they did it because we live in a democracy and – didn't make our soldiers feel very good.

Do you think

35:30 **that the Australian Government should have actually stopped that from happening?**

Well I think they had their fingers burnt with trying to burn the Communist Party. Bob Menzies tried to have the Communist Party banned in the fifties. And they went to a referendum and basically it was kicked out. Which is fair enough. In a democracy you should be able to have all these different parties. Banning it would've driven it underground and made it twice as bad. So I think they had their fingers burnt and I don't think they were going to setup in

36:00 and do anything about university students doing stuff like that. Even though I'll never forgive them for that, ever ever till I die, ever. They never sent me a parcel but they sent Ho Chi Minh's people parcels. And that was very very hard to cop especially when you thought you had an enemy within.

Well when did you actually find out about that?

There were a few different aspects happening while we were in Vietnam. The wharf labourers, we

36:30 were very very dirty on the wharfies for not loading the HMAS Jeparit. The HMAS Jeparit was a supply

ship and in 1969 they refused to load it, they refused to load our Christmas grog. And other supplies of course.

Do you think that they're Communists?

Oh absolutely. The Communists in the wharf labouring movement in those days were very strong, very strong. And they refused to load the Jeparit and

37:00 ironically I don't know how the postal workers got involved but they refused to deliver our mail. So we never got mail on the Jeparit. And we never got mail delivered home. So there was a campaign in Vietnam and they did up flyers and they sent them to every soldier, this was within the ranks. "When you get home, whack a wharfie and punch a postie." You've probably heard this before have you?

No actually.

The whack a wharfie and punch a postie campaign was on. And every soldier that

37:30 came home was going to whack a wharfie and punch a postie. For letting them down while they were away on active service. Which was an absolute disgrace from a soldier's point of view. Absolute disgrace to be on active service and have segments of society working against you. It's okay not to agree with you but to actively work against you by sending sucker to the enemy. And my father had the same thing in World War II. When they were in the islands the wharf labourers in Townsville and Brisbane

38:00 refused to load the ships with ammunition. Which is just unbelievable when you think that they were fighting the Japanese who were enemies of Russian anyway so the Communist agitators in the Waterside Workers Federation were basically working against our allies by doing that. I said to Dad many years later, I said, "Didn't you ever ask yourself why you weren't getting ammunition at the front line?"

38:30 "Oh there were shortages, there were shortages." I said, "Well the shortages were, they weren't being sent from Australia, they refused to load the ships." The Government had to step in and put soldiers on the wharves and load the ships themselves. Never forgive them for that either. It happened here in Fremantle. Happened in Sydney, happened all over the place.

Do you feel that you were betrayed by your country or by Communists?

We weren't betrayed by the country, we were betrayed by elements in the country. The Communism

39:00 was fairly strong still. People put it down as democratic rights and the right to – the American imperialism thing hadn't stuck its head up as strongly as it has now of course. But America made an adventure into Vietnam based on the domino theory and we agreed with them.

Did you personally believe the domino theory?

I think so but I was fairly apolitical in those days. I was a member of the trade union

39:30 when I joined the army. I was a member of the Miscellaneous Worker's Union. I had been a member of the AWU [Australian Workers Union] when I worked at Dalgety's. I was sick and tired of them going out on strike all the time. They used to go out on strike down at Dalgety's every second day and it was just dreadful. You'd come all the way in the train and you'd get to go all the way home again.

What were they striking about?

Anything. They'd be drunk from the night before and they'd go on strike. Wouldn't want to work, they were lazy. Oh no

40:00 the trade union movement in this country have done some wonderful things over the years to get better conditions for all and sundry. But they're way past their use by date. See the military, people tried to suggest a trade union in the military many years ago. Which wouldn't have worked. You can't run a military like that.

It's sort of almost politically opposing…

Well they've

40:30 got a trade union in the Dutch Army and I think the Swedish Army and all that sort of stuff. But I mean those people haven't been to war since forever. You can imagine saying, "No we don't want to go." How's the government supposed to run anything doing that?

I'm not going to go on parade today, we're on strike.

Exactly. So service in Vietnam politically getting back to your point about what we thought of the political scene, we were fairly apolitical.

41:00 We were there to do a job, we were there to do a job given to us by the government of the day and that was that.

Oh we'll have to rewind you a little bit. We've gone on a bit of a tangent but it was a very

interesting tangent. Whereabouts did you actually sign up for?

In the recruiting office in George Street in Sydney I think it was. No it wasn't George Street, it was another street, can't think. Used to a big recruiting office there and it was doing fairly good trade in those days.

41:30 Don't forget a lot of people didn't have work. A lot of people joined up because they didn't have work.

What year was this?

'66. The year I joined I walked into the recruiting station and there was a bloke sitting there. A little Greek bloke, a little black guy. He wasn't black, he was just, he was dark you know. Jackie Doulis. And he had a big dint in his head about there. He was a speedway motor cycle champion of

42:00 WA. End of tape.

Tape 2

00:33 I walked in to the recruiting office in Sydney the week after Long Tan happened. Long Tan, the battle of Long Tan where D Company 6 Battalion were caught in the rubber plantation and gave an amazing count of themselves. They lost eighteen killed but they accounted for, or so the story goes, and possibly between six hundred

01:00 and two thousand enemy, over a night. And it absolutely poured rain, it was just horrendous. The diggers in those days were issued only three magazines of ammunition, sixty rounds. A lot of guys were out of ammunition. And it was just one of those boys own stories where you thought, "Bugger this I've got and do my bit." Anyway the day I walked into the recruiting station this little Greek guy, this dark Greek guy.

01:30 Who would've been celebrating profusely yesterday when the Greeks won that thing. Jackie Doulis, black Jack Doulis was his nickname in the army. And he was one of these real swarthy little tough as teak. And I was nineteen, he was twenty nine. No he was about twenty seven I suppose so he was a lot older than me. I introduced myself and he had a huge dint in his forehead where he'd hit the wall at Claremont Speedway. And he had a broken finger

02:00 that stuck out at an angle. He looked like a pretty hard bitten sort of a character. And he was a bit of a knockabout blokes. And I was only a nineteen year old kid who knew nothing. And the other bloke in the room was Rob Wallis and the three of us basically all signed up together on the same day. And I said to Jack, "What are you signing up for?" He said, "Oh I can't feed my kids, I've got five kids." So Jack basically signed up for a job.

02:30 I'm not sure whether he knew about the battle of Long Tan but he probably did. Jack went on to serve two tours in Vietnam. When I was 7th Battalion and also did a tour with 5 Battalion. I think he did about twelve years in the army. But old Jack was a scoundrel, he was always in strife. I've got a feeling he might have come home from his first tour in the brig on the HMAS Sydney. But that's Jack and he's still a very close friend of mine today. He lives

03:00 over in New South Wales. He's retired of course. 'Cause Jack'd be sixty seven now. Or sixty five.

Just on that subject, did many of the fellows come home in the brig?

Oh we never did. See I was SAS and we flew there and back by 707, or C130. But I suspect there'd be a few boys letting off a bit of steam and probably locked up on the way home. But I think Jack punched one of his sergeants in country and got charged with assaulting

03:30 a superior officer which is a pretty heinous crime. But old Jack was the sort of bloke, he was never going to take no for an answer, he was never going to look at authority as anything more than something to buck. But when we got to Kapooka Jack and I teamed up. Down there we were in the same platoon and we knocked around together. And we covered each other's back pretty well.

How long was it after you went into the recruiting office that you arrived at Kapooka?

A month later.

So what happened in that month?

04:00 Oh they run the pencil over you. You've got to do psychology testing, you've got to do medical testing. They run the pencil over your background and all sorts of stuff. And then you get the paper to say you've been successful. So you jump up and down and race in there. And you've got to report to Eastern Command Personnel Depot at Watson's Bay on the such and such a date. You get there and there's a thing called the draft and the draft of

04:30 twenty, thirty, forty soldiers, or civvies still with long hair and all sorts. Get on the train in Sydney and

head to Kapooka which is down in Southern New South Wales. And the amazing thing of that train trip is there's this big old fat sergeant there and his name was Gillespie. Written on his shirt. And I looked at him and I thought, "It can't be." And I said, "Is your name Wallard Gillespie?" He said, "Yeah

05:00 who's asking?" And I said, "My name's Mick Malone, I'm Ned Malone's son." Wallard was actually in the army with my father. And old Wallard he was still in the army taking army drafts to Kapooka, every week in 1966. And Wallard means boy in Arabic. So

05:30 when Wallard was with Dad and the boys in the desert, he must've only been about sixteen years old, he must've put his age up. And here he was still in the army taking drafts to Kapooka and I was one of his drafts. So I was pretty pleased about that. And we had a good yarn on the way down on the train and he told me all sorts of things about my father but never anything bad, like I said it was always the funny things, the scoundrelling things. Stealing beer and hiding, you know, all that scoundrelly stiff.

06:00 But that was great. We got to Kapooka and we thought our throats were cut of course because Kapooka was full on. You were in huge new barrack blocks.

How were you greeted when you arrived?

Trucks. "Get on this truck!" That was it, so you did what you were told. While you were at Kapooka you got your hair cut, you learnt how to absolutely scrub the barracks into a new pin sort of – the place was new anyway so it was pretty easy to keep clean.

06:30 **What was the reaction from the other recruits to getting their hair cut?**

Oh no-one liked it. It wasn't like you see in the movies when the marines get shorn, you get a fairly close hair cut. You get about a two I suppose. And they don't care too much about how they cut it, they just get it off. But most guys turned up with fairly short hair anyway. The national servicemen who were in the barracks next door were a different kettle of fish.

07:00 There were a lot of long haired blokes turning up and getting shorn. But the nashos [national servicemen] were in – we were in 18 Platoon C Company and D Company in the block next door, three storey block was three platoons of national servicemen. And I saw a bloke I knew. I thought, "There's Tony Subalesky." I said, "Tony what are you doing?" He said, "I'm a nasho I got called up." Tony went onto serve in Vietnam but got killed in a car accident many years later and the

07:30 irony thing about him is his daughter Megan is one of our Legacy kids here in Perth and we still look after her today. And every year at the Legacy camp she used to come and say, "Tell me about Dad, tell me about Dad." So I used to tell Megan all the stories about the father, when I used to play football with him in Sydney. Yeah small world, very small world, Australia. But Kapooka's basically a three month hack it situation

08:00 where you're out on the square everyday. You have to learn drill from scratch. Basically all the drill is designed to culminate in a big march out parade at the end. So you worked towards the drill. Your drill sergeants are all bloody ranting raving screaming people.

They're like the characters in the movies are they?

Oh they are a bit like that. Not like Full Metal Jacket, nothing as bad as that, a little bit like that. And they have to be.

08:30 The whole army thing about discipline and doing things instinctively, it starts there. You have to do things instinctively. In battle instincts are the only things that get you through it. If you have to think about it then you'll die. In Vietnam when the bullets start flying, instinct and teamwork it was the two main things, especially is SAS.

How did you find the discipline during

09:00 **that basic training?**

Easy. Piece of cake. Nothing compared to what I was used to at school. But it was different. It was something I had to do and I did pretty well at Kapooka.

Do you reckon school was tougher?

Oh yeah yeah school was always tougher. My mother wasn't there. You had to basically live on your wits at school. It was fairly a similar thing, living in barrack blocks, living in dormitories. Eating in mess hall, eating in refectories.

09:30 It was all very similar. It was a life that I was quite used to. But you met a lot of good mates there. You met a lot of turkeys, you met a lot of blokes who'd never – you'd look at a bloke and say, "He shouldn't even be in the army this guy." And those guys normally got found out. They got shown the door after a couple of weeks. But everyone got jabs and you were sick as a dog for days with sixteen jabs, all these damn smallpox injections. Ohh everything.

10:00 Some people handled it pretty well, other people were crook as dogs. You played football, you went on long route marches. You got a day off towards the end to go into town and everyone got drunk and created a bit of mayhem. Jack Doulis got locked up because he jumped in the swimming pool in the local

hotel in his full army uniform. They locked him up, poor old Jack. And I thought, “Oh good one Jack.” So that was the start of

10:30 Jack’s life at Kapooka and he went on to make a bit of a name for himself in the 7th Battalion. He’s a very strong 7th Battalion man today. The Pig Battalion, they called them.

Why?

Well when they were down at Puckapunyal I think it might have been, I’m not quite sure. Anyway the battalion was assembled and they just made pigs of themselves on the grog and their CO [commanding officer] went right off his head next day and called them, “You’re nothing but a bunch of pigs.”

11:00 So they adopted the pig as their motto. And the 7th Battalions ‘piggies’ as they call them now, their newsletter is called The Oink or something. They love being called pigs. And when they took over from the 5th Battalion, the 5th Battalions, 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] – their motto’s the tiger battalion. And they made a huge sign when 7th Battalion got off the plane, here’s this big pig

11:30 being nailed by this tiger. Fornication I’m talking about here. You can imagine it. This big cartoon type thing, this tiger giving it to this pig. Anyway that – the army – the sense of humour in the army is quite diabolical.

I hope we’ll hear a bit more about it during the day.

Yeah. The 7th Battalion which would’ve been the battalion I would’ve gone to with Jack Doulis and all the other blokes. Trevor Bates and those guys.

12:00 If I hadn’t have been selected to go to the SAS.

Well before we talk about that selection Mick can you tell us a bit more about the daily routine at Kapooka?

Yeah the daily routine was fairly easy to get into. You know you’re up at sparrows they used to call it. Sparrow’s fart. Which is the morning or 0 dark hundred. 0 dark hundred is first light but you were never up at first light. You were up fairly soon after that. Reveille would be about six o’clock. But

12:30 you had to have your barracks absolutely squared away before breakfast, and breakfast’d be seven. So you’d be up at half past five scrubbing your gear and getting your gear ready if you hadn’t done it the night before. Then you’d all troop down to the mess hall and line up. You were issued dixies which are mess tins but you never took them to the mess hall. We were eating on plates down there I think. No I can’t remember that now.

13:00 But they’d put huge meals in front of you and you’d just eat it all because you were so hungry and every day was full on. And then there’d just be a day of room inspection, everything had to be absolutely tickety boo. Your socks had to be actually folded in a certain way and laid out in your lockers. Everything had to be absolutely – otherwise you’d be on confined to barracks, or you’d be on guard duty. Or would be reporting to the boss

13:30 all that sort of stuff. Some guys were in trouble all the time. Those guys normally were weeded out and thrown out of the army. And you – after breakfast, after inspections you then changed into whatever outfit you needed for that day whether it be draw rifles from the armoury to do drill. To do medical lessons, to do other lessons on army routine. They had

14:00 religious stuff. The funny thing about the old religious thing, they used to say, “Righto all the Catholics fall out on the left, all the OPDs – other protestant denominations – fall out on the right. And all the Callithumpians, stand where you are.” And Callithumpians were the non believers. So the Catholics would go off to the little Catholic church and the OPD’d go off to their little church. And the

14:30 Callithumpians had to pick up cigarette butts. The first day there were twenty Catholics and twenty thingoes and about a hundred Callithumpians. The second time we went, there were no Callithumpians, everyone went to church, everyone. It didn’t take you long to learn in the army that if you wanted to get out of picking up other people’s cigarette butts, that’s what I always hated and I smoked in those days, you didn’t want to

15:00 get done. The old story as my father used to tell me about, never volunteer for anything, that sort of thing was pretty true. And they’d say things like, “Who can drive?” and everyone’d stick their hands up and they’d say, “Righto we want sixteen star pickers driven into the ground over here,” stuff like that. So you learnt very quickly that to volunteer for anything you’re even going to get caught doing something absolute diabolical mess duties or cleaning up the pig swill. Or you know

15:30 whatever. So you never did. You just kept your mouth shut till you were picked. No that was a good time but it was a learning curve. It was forced feeding basically. You had to be ready, to prove you’re ready for training in your corps skill. And you were chosen to go to whatever corps at Kapooka. You were given options. “Righto where do you want to go?” Infantry, first option. Some people say infantry first option

16:00 second option armour, third option ordnance which is blanket stacking. You know or whatever, working

in warehouses and stuff. I put down for infantry, infantry, and infantry of course and got my backside kicked because they weren't options. But I only wanted to go to infantry. But lucky for me the Vietnam War was on and they needed just about as many infantry guys as they could get to man the battalions. We had nine battalions in those days. We're down to about two these days.

16:30 And the army had about forty thousand, thirty five to forty thousand members so it was a pretty big army. It would be relatively probably about the biggest army we've had since World War II. But my uncle, Uncle Terry, my Dad's younger brother, not the one he served with in the islands, was armoured corps. He was a warrant officer class one. He'd stayed in the army after World War II and served on and I think he got out a couple of times and got back in. But his son Peter was my age

17:00 only a few months older than me. He joined armour at seventeen years old. So he'd already had two years in the army by the time I arrived at Kapooka. And Peter had come down to Kapooka with his armoured troop from 2 Cav [Cavalry] or 3 Cav, doing an exercise in the area and they stayed in Kapooka. And I caught up with him and he and his father were both trying to get me to join armour and there was no way in the world I was going to be a tankie

17:30 or a tread head or whatever you want to call them. And I knew there and then that I wanted to be in infantry. And Peter went off to Vietnam and got killed and Terry was in country at the time. It was a pretty traumatic time for my family but I'll cover that later if you like. But Kapooka, three months, we marched out, you were allocated your corps. I was allocated to infantry so I went up to

18:00 Ingleburn in New South Wales to do infantry corps training and you learnt to be an infantryman up there. Other people who did armour went down to Puckapunyal. People who went to signals went down to Watsonia and people who went to Bandiana to study, do all their blanketing stacking. The cooks went to Bandiana or Puckapunyal and so on. So you were allocated different corps based on the army's need. And the bulk of us went to infantry. And we all got to

18:30 Ingleburn which was an old World War II barracks, dreadful place.

What was the journey like there?

Oh it was on the train and we were full of piss and bad manners at that stage basically. Because we'd graduated from Kapooka. Just nineteen year old kids and Jack Doulis. And Jack was our sort of mad father figure in the group and he was a great bloke, he really is a great bloke. And to him

19:00 mateship was all. And he met some great mates in the army old Jack. And he's like me, his mates date from the time he joined the army. All my mates prior to that, I wouldn't have a clue who – can't remember their names even. The day I joined the army's when my life started basically. So we went to Sydney, a day up the Cross and all that sort of thing, a bit of mayhem.

What kind of mayhem?

Oh you know

19:30 normal tarts and grog that's all it was.

Were you in uniform?

Yeah in uniform. Everyone went on leave in uniform in those days. There was nothing, we weren't in any strife or anything it was just basically letting off a bit of steam. There were no drugs or any of that sort of stuff.

What was the atmosphere like in the Cross then?

Fairly full on. American servicemen at that stage were coming to the Cross on R&R [rest and recreation] and the girls up there were making an absolute

20:00 fortune they really were. I remember being up there one day and there was a demonstration which was after I came home. And there were people screaming out, "One two three four, we don't want your fucking war," at the top of their voices. And a lot of them were prostitutes that were – had made a fortune out of the place, when the Americans were coming there. So I don't know what happened between

20:30 the end of the Australian pull out in '72 to the time the Americans finally said, "Enough's enough," in '75. The Americans used to love coming to Australia though mainly because they were Caucasian, they spoke English. Australian people were very friendly to the Americans, Americans were still our well remembered allies from World War II who saved our bacon in the Battle of Coral. And the Battle of Midway which stopped the Japanese.

21:00 And the Americans were still remembered for their time here. And the Americans were always known as having bags of money. With a free spending attitude so Australia benefited from it. I'll never forget that. These pests screaming this thing out.

It's a bit ironic when you consider they'd made such an income out of it?

Oh they did. They did and it was – but then you started to realise, hang on there's a bit of a political undertone happening here in Australia.

21:30 You really didn't understand it prior to that, there really didn't seem to be much. But I think the political scene in Australia changed dramatically. The Communists had infiltrated the 'Save our Sons' organisation. That was well known and ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] actually proved that. The 'Save our Sons' organisation was a bunch of dedicated mothers who for all the right intentions tried to stop their sons being sent

22:00 to Vietnam. Which is fantastic and in a democracy that's fine. But the Communists decided that the best way to undermine everything is to infiltrate certain organisations and they did. And they infiltrated "Save our Sons' organisation. Absolute tragedy it was. And all of a sudden you had this group who took it up to the Government fairly well but once they realised there was another agenda

22:30 flowing underneath it all then it became very very nasty. But there were Trotskyites all over the place. And we saw them as the enemy because we were fighting them in Vietnam and here they are at home, basically cutting our throats. The soldier boys were very very upset about all that sort of stuff.

Understandably. During the time though that you were approaching your infantry training, was it that unsettled?

No not really.

23:00 There were the odd demonstrations and things happening but we were unaware of that. We were so taken up with this new game of soldiering. Which proved to – was proving to be one of adventure, one of mateship, one of teamwork. All those things that you hope come along in your life, were all happening for us before we were even twenty one. You couldn't drink in a civvy pub but if you were in uniform and you were seventeen you could drink.

23:30 That was the weird thing. And army canteens, obviously the Chowne Club, named after Dad's mate the VC winner from World War II, was directly across the road from our training base at Ingleburn. And you could drink in there, in the bar under twenty one. And we thought that was a pretty big deal. They'd send you away to war at nineteen but you couldn't drink in a pub until you were twenty one. I really felt for the poor old Abos [Aboriginal people] when they

24:00 got back from World War II where they were banned from drinking in pubs you know. They fought so well and there were lots of them in battalions. There was a mate of Dad's, well not a mate, a member of Dad's battalion. His surname was Lyons I remember. His grandson or great-grandson went on to become a famous rugby league player of New South Wales called Cliffy Lyons. Anyway old Lyons had apparently punched an officer in the dessert. He punched

24:30 him somewhere in Alamein or something. Anyway he was locked up and at the end of the war they refused to give him his medals, the old bloke. And he went back to his country town, he wasn't allowed to drink in pubs or anything. None of them were. It was a terrible thing. The Australian way we treated the Aboriginals in those days. Especially servicemen was just diabolical, it didn't make any sense at all. Nowadays it's a vastly different because there's Aboriginals in the army and they're treated –

25:00 in the army it's the only place in the world where no segregation, no racism no nothing. We had Dutchmen, we had Scots, we had Aboriginals, we had all sorts in the army. Didn't matter what colour, black white or brindle, just depended on how they did their job.

Came down to the individual?

Oh absolutely. Anyway old Cliffy Lyon's grandfather was given no medals and Dad's organisation, the 2/13th Battalion fought for years with DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs]

25:30 and the Government to get him issued his medals. And finally they agreed. And old Cliff was – the old bloke was about eighty when finally they had a big parade down at Kapooka in Wagga, and the 2/13th Battalion Association were all there on parade and they presented the old black his medals, pinned them on his chest. And there were tears everywhere. A bit of injustice overturned. But

26:00 one of the worse things you can ever do in the army is basically assault a superior officer because if you carry it through to it's final conclusion, you could say, well the officer tells you to do X and you say, no and punch him, then the whole morale and discipline fabric of the entire unit could fall down. The Americans – it happened to the Americans. In Ashau Valley these officers kept saying, "Up the hill men," and in the end the blokes said, "No we're not going." And turned around and killed their officers.

26:30 They blew officers up in their tents with grenades. They fragged, what you call fragged them and became a complete disaster. And that's what happens when a military loses its sense of discipline and sense of position. You know that the officer's an officer and you're a digger. You obey that's it. You can't not otherwise the whole thing falls down. Even though the officer might be a turkey and he'll get his eventually, you've still got to do what you're told.

27:00 Oh no Ingleburn was a different place because out of the couple of months there I spent a week bashing dixies. Have you heard of the term 'bashing dixies?'

No.

Scrubbing pots and pans in the mess. And when you've got about twenty platoons in there at a time. A

platoon of about thirty men, that's a lot of big pots to scrub. And these cooks – in the navy if you burn your pot in the kitchen or the galley you have to clean it yourself. Not in the army. You get

27:30 diggers to do it. So you'd be in there days after days scrubbing pots. You'd be there till eight o'clock at night trying to get the burnt crap out of the bottom of these pots.

How come you were lumped with it?

Well everyone did. Everyone did a week in the mess. You had a team of about five or six of youse that worked in the mess for a week. Over a couple of months everyone got to work in the mess for a week. A lot of times – it was seen basically as a rest period where you didn't have to go out in the bush, you didn't have to do all that stuff.

28:00 And some people enjoyed it but it was really drudgery, it was pure drudgery. But it wasn't hard, it was something you did. The other thing was guard duty. Each platoon was given a week on guard duty and you'd have to mount the guard every afternoon at six o'clock. Formal mount which meant you had to be absolutely scrubbed. I won the best dressed soldier on one of the guards. And best dressed soldier gets stood down, that's the best bit about it, stood down means you can go back to your barracks.

28:30 You haven't got to sit there in the guard room all night. And the guard mount on a barracks like that you've got say ten, fifteen on the guard and you've got a couple of roving pickets who walk around with a pick handle, walking around the lines – I don't know what you were supposed to do – I think the rules of engagement were you weren't allowed to belt anybody with a pick handle. But you still had to do it. And you had to stand on the front gate with a rifle.

29:00 Like the guards in Buckingham Palace sort of thing. Freezing cold, hot. Didn't matter what weather it was and that's just what you did. And it was just part of the training.

So you scrubbed up and stood down?

Oh yeah absolutely. And oh I was so rapt. I got off it. Back to the lines, get all your gear off and go back to bed. While all the other poor buggers are in the guard room getting tortured.

What kind of exercises did you do there?

We

29:30 all of a sudden went away from the drill. The drill we learnt, in other words short arm or short order drill or rifle drill, marching on our parade grounds, stuff we did at Kapooka, we just didn't do it anymore. We went out the bush. They pack you onto the back of the trucks and take you out the bush and you'd have a couple of corporal instructors who – their role was to teach you how to be an infantryman. The two guys that we had

30:00 had just come back from Vietnam anyway so we had first hand experience from these guys talking about Vietnam. And you went out and you did ambushing and you did track crossing. How to cross a track, it's not an easy thing. You have to have men positioned up and down the track. You had to clear all the sign off the track. 'Cause tracks are where the enemy are, especially in Vietnam. They moved on tracks all the time.

Well can you describe how you approached an exercise to cross a track?

Well they'd sit you down

30:30 in the bush on logs with a track and they'd have a demonstration platoon. And with a click of a finger or a whistle or some sound the demonstration platoon blokes, a section of five or six would come out of the bush moving slowly covering their arcs in front of the assembled students sitting on the deck. And they would go through the drill of crossing a track. The commander would come to the track, look at it and determine if it's

31:00 being used. Turn around and place his blokes down. Move his scout through and move his signaller through and so on and so on. And the 2IC [second in command] at the back end, or the tail end Charlie, he would grab a branch and make sure all the footprints were wiped off the track and then they'd fade straight back into the bush again. And then we'd spend the days basically doing track crossings and things like that. And next day you'd do ambushing, the same sort of thing. You'd sit down and they'd come along, and they'd lay an ambush

31:30 out in front of you. That was good training.

Can you describe an ambush.

Yeah an ambush in infantry terms is fairly different kettle of fish to what I was used to later on at SAS. You ambushed tracks that were being used heavily by the enemy. Don't forget the Vietnam War was a totally different war to other wars we'd fought. You determined how many people were using the track by – you'd get trackers in who'd

32:00 say, "Yes based on the amount of footprints and the heavy weight use of this track, this track's being used by a hundred people a day," or something. So the commander would say, "Righto we need to ambush this track to gain intelligence on who the enemy is." What weapons he's carrying and

documents and maybe it's a paymaster or whatever. So you find a track that – or a part of the track that's suitable for an ambush. You pull all these men back. The recce patrol would have gone forward, recce [reconnaissance] – two men.

32:30 Have a look, pick a track, where you've got enfalade fire down the track so you pick a bend. So the machine gun would be set up in position where he could fire straight down the track in enfalade. You know on for laid and defalade? Enfalade means theoretically one bullet fired could go, pass through ten men. Whereas defilade is men advancing in a front where you've got to move your weapon right across to cover them. So you try and put a weapon

33:00 in enfalade to cover down the track. Maybe both directions, it depends on how many machine guns you've got. And it might be a linear ambush of a hundred and fifty metres. It might be a rifle ambush. They might have dug mines into the track or it might be Claymore mine ambush which are – were mines developed by the Americans in the Korean War to repel missed assaults. The

33:30 massed assaults from the Chinese, you just couldn't handle them with small arms, so they developed this thing called a Claymore. M18 A1 Claymore mine which has got four legs and it's a shaped charge. And it's basically a C4 explosive with seven hundred ball bearings embedded in it. And it's aimed – you've got a little aiming sight on the top and you lay down behind it and you aim it. And you overlap them. And you might have ten, fifteen Claymores on a

34:00 ring main running back to a firing point. A ring main is a circuit. And you've got a thing called a killing ground and you mark a tree from there to there, it might be a hundred metres long. And when the enemy are in the killing ground you fire them. And you basically blow everyone to bits.

That'd be over seven thousand ball bearings?

It's just mayhem, it's just terrible. We had a lot of success later on in Vietnam with them in the SAS.

34:30 The Claymore mines was one of the most effective weapons used in Vietnam. By us, by Australia anyway. So you'd learn all that stuff and you'd learn about putting your flank protection out, you had to put flank protection out because in Vietnam we found out very early in the piece that Charlie, or Sir Charles or the Viet Cong we used to call them. Sir Charles he'd had a couple of guides or scouts on a track depending how fast he was moving. But if he was in an

35:00 aggressive stance he would put scouts on the track but he'd also put clearing groups in the book. Paralleling the track. Which means he's going to swoop up your flanks. So you put a flank out there who watches for people in the bush. Sometimes the flank has a Claymore which would stop any assault through the bush from

35:30 that direction. And you have a rear protection group where you put your signaller and whatever else. And they cover the rear arc basically. So the ambush of say, platoon sized ambush of thirty men could cover a hundred metres depending on the thickness of the bush, depending on the intelligence of who you're looking for or the evidence on the track. Or wether the track hasn't been used for quite a long time. and ambushing became a very big part of our raison

36:00 d'être in Vietnam.

So you spent a lot of time doing ambush exercises at Ingleburn?

Yeah a bit of time, not much. You had to cover a lot of stuff. You'd go to the range every second day and you'd fire your rifle, you'd fire machine guns, you'd fire submachine guns, everything.

What kind of weapons were you being introduced to?

SLRs. The seven point six two self loading rifle was the main weapon issued to soldiers. Officers and some others, signallers and a few people

36:30 had M16's, the old AR15, the Armalite. They were five point five six millimetre. Yeah seven point six two millimetre weapon was a big hitter. It was only slightly different to the size that my father would use in World War II, the .303. Seven point six two is actually .308 so it's fairly similar. We actually had Bren guns in the

37:00 early days in Vietnam that were brought out in the bigger size, the 308. The old 303 Bren guns were changed into 308's. But then we got the American M16 machine gun which was a seven point six two belt fed machine gun, vastly improved the amount of fire you could put down in the bush. By having a hundred round belt as opposed to a thirty round magazine. A metal magazine, five, six of those and you're really carrying a lot of weight. Whereas each man could carry –

37:30 infantry battalions sometimes used to – especially the Kiwis [New Zealanders], you could see them on the chopper pad. Each man's got five hundred rounds draped over his body like Pancho [Mexican Civil War character]. Cross belts. But they needed them and when they got into the big stoushes those machine gunners needed all that ammunition. Some of the assaults that Charlie put in would just overwhelm you without it. But Ingleburn you learn all this stuff.

38:00 You went to the range, you fired all these new weapons. M60 the first time I ever fired it. You'd fired the M79, the forty millimetre grenade launcher which is still in service today but the main use of it is it's

mounted under the barrel of an issued weapon these days. Which gives the firer of both the rifle barrel and the grenade barrel to use at the same time. It increases the weight you have to carry

38:30 that's the worst about it. All this is to do with weight. Dry season, gees I'll talk about dry season when we get to Vietnam. But the weapons we fired were all the common weapons issued in the army at the that time. 1966. The SLR had come in in the late fifties, about 1958, '59. It was based on the FN, the Fabrique Nationale, just seven point six two millimetre rifle that the Belgians had produced.

39:00 And the British Army, us, the Kiwis we all had the SLR. I think the Brits might have had the FN but our SLR was the Australian variant made in Lithgow. Lithgow Small Arms Factory, which I think they make golf clubs up there now. But Lithgow was full on, she was making a lot of weapons up there. After the war I think they made washing machines.

Were the Lithgow variants as good as…

Oh yeah, very much so. They were

39:30 just made under license. It might have been a – well the artic trigger that the FN had on it I don't think ours, after a while had the artic trigger. The artic trigger means the trigger guard can be taken off or folded down. So when you're wearing big fat gloves in the artic you can still fire the thing. You don't have to worry about putting your finger – we didn't need that. It wasn't very artic in Vietnam. And the stock. The wood on the stock was different. I think we might have had

40:00 just a couple of variants like that and the flash height might have been a bit different. I don't think I ever saw an FN so I don't really – I can't really equate the two. But it was a fantastic rifle. It was a semi automatic rifle, in other words you could fire twenty rounds just by pulling the trigger twenty times. You didn't have to cock it or anything. Once you'd – and then you just changed magazines and kept going. The sub machine gun was the Australian FF1 which

40:30 was a diabolical little, useless submachine gun. We never used it in Vietnam. The Owen gun, we still had the Owen from World War II. We trained with that. We trained with that at Kapooka and Ingleburn. And that was used in Vietnam by some of the earlier battalions. I think the SAS was the first squadron in Vietnam, 3 Squadron, in 1966 used Owens. And so did the 1st Battalion, use Owens.

41:00 So the Owen gun was World War II technology. It was nine millimetre. It was quite a rudimentary weapon compared to today's Heckler Cox and other submachine guns. Very very rudimentary, and dangerous. Bloody thing'd go off on you without – if you let the working parts go forward with a magazine on she'd fire a round and lucky it wasn't being pointed to anybody at the time. Weapon training was a big part of

41:30 Ingleburn. By the time you went to your unit you really had to be across these weapons. And they were basically the stock in trade of the infantry soldier. There were other weapons that once they went to the battalions. You see this is the third step in their training prior to deploying to Vietnam. The battalions had other weapons like heavy machine guns which is the same machine gun but mounted on

42:00 a tripod and made into a – with a C2 sight…

Tape 3

00:31 Weapon training at Ingleburn was very important in that when the soldier left Ingleburn to join his battalion he basically had to have all those basic skills squared away. The battalion didn't have time to retrain anybody in basic skills. But there were some parts of battalions, like the support company in a battalion has mortars, recoilless rifles. Which is a big anti tank

01:00 weapon. They use mines, all of stuff they haven't covered in the early days. So there's the specialist training. You became a specialist trainer. And there were other parts of that battalion corps called assault pioneers. Assault pioneers were responsible for – and the assault pioneer sergeant on parade always wore a big beard with a chrome axe over his shoulder. This goes back to ancient times of the British. I don't think they do that

01:30 anymore but the pioneers were basically engineers, infantry engineers. And they dug holes, they built bunkers, they dug the command post into the ground. They did all that stuff. They lifted mines, they laid mines, they did all sorts of stuff. And assault pioneers were very hard working men in the battalions. And I did a lot of assault pioneer work later in SAS. We didn't call – we did the assault pioneer course at SAS but it was

02:00 just part of our training.

What's with the tradition with the beard and the axe?

Well the assault pioneer sergeant, that was just a tradition left over from ancient times. We had a lot of British traditions in our system. I think the 4th Battalion were the last ones to have an assault pioneer sergeant with a beard and a chrome axe. The 4th Battalion now is a commando battalion so it's out the

door. But I still remember when I was a young soldier

02:30 seeing them on parade. They had a big – a leather vest or some sort of big apron thing. And a big axe over his shoulder. Looked very impressive. But it was just one of those myriad of things that was passed down by the Poms. The Poms are heavily into that sort of stuff. They were pretty good fighters too the Brits I'll give them that. They did all of it well. We learnt at their knee

03:00 not the Americans. I'm not knocking the Americans but there was very little the Americans could teach us. We had a totally different attitude. Our soldiers were far better, we were better educated the lot.

Do you think it stems from better education?

Oh yes I think so. I think the diggers that joined the American Army a lot of them were just, no education at all. And they took them anyway. The Americans are pretty desperate for numbers.

03:30 No I don't knock the Americans at all. The Americans just have got a different kettle of fish on their hands you know. Whereas our blokes are far more laid back, far more laconic. Far more anti establishment. Bloody terrible. Some of the digger in the way they used to react to authority was just unbelievable. You'd think, "You can't get away with that." But it was just sort of expected, the Australian larrikin digger.

04:00 **Well how does that sort of sense of humour translate into a better soldier?**

One of the big things in the SAS selection process is you have to have a sense of humour. When things have gone completely pear shaped and things are bad, you need to be able to laugh at something. The Americans never ever got things. They never – their sense of irony was missing and their sense of humour – in their special

04:30 forces team it was different. They're far more like our blokes. But the poor old jarheads, the American marines.

Jarheads?

They're jars, that's what they used to call them. Well it was just their haircuts was just a ring of hair around the top like a lid. I don't say that disparaging, the American Marines have done a fantastic job over the years and done the job well. And lost thousands of soldiers in battle. And their traditions are very high.

05:00 And they – but they're a bit tub thumping about their traditions you know. They'd rather fly the flag a bit instead of seeing results in the bush. Anyway. But our blokes, we always had a reverence about ourselves and authority. It all dates back to the way our soldiers used to carry themselves in Egypt in World War I. Where the British officers were constantly horrified with the way the Australian soldiers refused to salute

05:30 them. And our blokes are similar today. Blokes will – in SAS you'll get a salute once a week if you're lucky but nobody sees it as a slight against your rank or anything. But it's just a waste of time and everyone's effort in worry about it. You can give respect to people in different ways. You don't have to stand there saluting. And in SAS of course you don't salute anybody in the bush because the snipers might be looking for the commander.

06:00 But you never going to be under the view of a sniper in the SAS anyway.

Just getting back to Ingleburn, what sort of living conditions did you have there?

Old World War II barrack blocks. Platoon per block. So you'd have twenty six, thirty blokes in a block, fifteen each side of the room, single alleyway down the middle. A locker and a – used to call them tables personnel. Little steel table with a

06:30 drawer in it. And you could sit there and write a letter. And a chair. That was it a bed and a chair. We never had foot lockers or any of that sort of stuff. We just had a cupboard. Generally an old wooden cupboard that you put all your stuff in and you had a trunk. You were issued a trunk, a steel trunk at Kapooka and you took that with you. And that's where all your gear was stowed, under your bed. And your boots and it was fairly frugal, fairly Spartan living conditions. The amount

07:00 of food was adequate. And your mates were there and you got up to a bit of larrikin stuff avoiding duties. But everyone was just counting the days to get out of there of course. Because that's when the next big adventure would start, you'd go to a battalion. That was the big deal, we were all going to 7th Battalion together.

What would you do in your time off at Ingleburn?

You'd go into the Cross [Kings Cross], into town. Some of the pubs in town were navy pubs

07:30 and soldiers'd go in there and get into blues with the navy boys. And some of the pubs were army pubs and the navy boys used to turn up and get in blues.

Is that sort of more of a...

The Civic Hotel. Yes it was just, a mentality left over from World War II. There was never any drama. The civvies never battled an eyelid. They always knew that the soldiers and the sailors had a bit of money to spend. So they tolerated it you know. But we never ever got into any strife like there was never any

08:00 rape or never any assaulting women, it was all fairly calm.

Just has a big of a biffo?

Yeah bit of biffo. A bit of biffo didn't hurt anybody. They used to call us pongoes.

Why was that?

I don't know. It comes from World War II somewhere. It's an old British term that relates to soldiers. They still call soldiers today, pongoes the navy do.

It doesn't sound very flattering.

And we call them FNCs.

08:30 I won't tell you what that stands for.

I can pretty much guess.

Yes. But there's always been a great comradeship between the navy and the army. The air force, there are different units in the air force that we revere. The two being, in my service was 9th Squadron in Vietnam, the helicopter boys that worked very closely with us and saved us worthless hides a few times. And 36th Squadron which was the C130

09:00 outfit that the boys work with now. They are pretty sharp outfits. But the army's got all the helicopters these days and we work with them. The air force basically haven't got any helicopters any more.

How long did you train at Ingleburn?

A couple of months. Three months maybe.

Did you enjoy it while you were there?

Yeah, but like I said it was something you endured. You were there with your mates you'd met a couple of months ago and you were going to go and serve together and you were looking forward to the next stage.

09:30 It's a bit like Big Brother. You're in this environment that you're making the most of but you can't wait to finish. You really think there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Once we get to the battalion we'll be up there and be able to do this. You get issued better gear and you get issued your new beret with your slouch hat with your Royal Australian Regiment, duty first badge.

10:00 Which was a big deal for young blokes wearing cross rifles badges, which is the infantry badge. To then step up to the RAR badge. That was a big deal. And we were all looking forward to it.

And what uniform were you in at Ingleburn?

Same as Kapooka, just your issued clothes. Greens, khakis had been long gone of course. All greens. Black belt, slouch hat. AB boots.

10:30 We were still being issued AB boots. Ammunition boots. They were – some of them were dated World War I. Later they upgraded and once you got to Ingleburn, you got issued GPs. The old general purpose boot which was a fantastic boot. And there's never as good a boot since. And once you went to the battalion you were issued a better GP again which had a steel plate in it made by Dunlop. And

11:00 those steel plates were to defeat pansy stakes in Vietnam where you tread on a booby trap, a hole in the ground and your foot'd go in and pansy stakes, a sharpened stakes'd go through your foot. Well these boots defeated that.

So they actually had the steel plates in the sole?

Steel plate, whole bottomless steel plate. Thin mesh plate. And it was a fantastic boot, it really was.

Was it heavy though to wear?

No. No it wasn't heavy. It was just a wonderful boot. And unbelievably they've never been able

11:30 to emulate it since. They're had about a thousand different boots since then and none of them have been as good as that. But maybe other people have a different view of it. So you get issued all this stuff and you count the days. And you say righto we've got three weeks to go boys. You've stayed off the grog and you wouldn't make a clown of yourself because to get back squadded meant that you weren't with your mates any more. A bit like repeating a year at high school.

12:00 All your mates'd go ahead and you were back there. That was the worse thing that could happen. So you

never did anything to get back squadded so you graduated together basically.

Had you made some mates by this point?

Oh yeah. But all the mates I had from Kapooka were there with us. They're the same blokes. And then my world changed dramatically from that moment when I saw a bloke walking down the road with a sandy beret on. Two guys, two fairly big, very fit looking blokes in polyester

12:30 uniform. Wearing these sandy berets. I said, "Who the hell are those blokes?" And they said, "Oh they're SAS, they're here for their selection board." "Oh. What the hell's SAS?" I thought it must've been – he said, "Oh special air service." And I thought it must've been some air force unit, I'd never heard of it, unbelievably I'd never heard of it even though I'd lived and breathed army stuff for years. The SAS were under the radar. They'd

13:00 been formed in 1967 and they were a commando unit basically. So the boss of our platoon, this sergeant, I can't think of his name, came around and said, "Righto they're calling for names for interview. Who wants to go and be interviewed by the SAS selection board?" And we all put our hands up. "Yeah we'll be in this." Get out of whatever we were doing today or tomorrow whatever it was. And it always had a lag aspect about it. If you volunteered to do that

13:30 meant you wouldn't have to go out the bush or wouldn't have to do something else onerous. So we all fronted up and walked into this room and there was three – a pretty senior NCO [non commissioned officer], a warrant officer, a major and a psychiatrist or a psychologist, sitting there at the table. And you'd sit there in front of them and they'd then grill you.

What sort of things…

"What do you want to know about the SAS?" "What

14:00 do you know about the SAS?" Or, "Why do you want to do this?" "What is your reason?" Some blokes said, "Oh just to get out of here," and they'd have all their information on you prior to you coming in the door. Your education standard, your IQ [intelligence quotient] standard, all that sort of stuff. And they knew exactly who you were and your age and your fitness and out you went.

14:30 And I never heard anymore about it for a day or so.

Did you think you did well?

Well no. I thought, "Dreadful interview." I'd never been really for any interviews before at that stage, I was only nineteen. And the next guy went in and the next guy and so on and so on. And we all went through and we all, up the boozer that night talking about it. And saying, "Oh see that bloke, see the gongs he had." And one bloke had Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam.

15:00 Infantry combat, all that sort of stuff. And we were pretty impressed by the SAS blokes. Old Tommy Marshall was the major I found out years later. He came through the ranks of the SAS and he was a major. Can't think of who the other two were. But a day or so later word came down that the following people will be going to Perth to do the SAS selection course. And my name was on the list.

How many were selected?

Four from our platoon. Four from another platoon, five from another platoon.

15:30 Twenty one. It was basically twenty four on the draft. And when we got there – no there weren't' there were twenty because when we got there there were six others from other corps and things. Ordnance corps, artillery, there was one guy from artillery. And we all just – we were in two mind initially because we all of a sudden weren't going to the 7th Battalion with the rest

16:00 of our mates. But we had this other adventure we thought, Perth, I'd never been to Perth in my life. Never been out of New South Wales actually. In those days it was all train travel too so you hopped on the train and away you went. And it was fantastic. You know pulling up in Melbourne and Melbourne was closed. And pulling up in Adelaide. We get to Adelaide and it was Sunday and Adelaide was always closed on a Sunday. And finally we got to Perth across the Nullarbor. We just couldn't believe looking out

16:30 the window for days on end at the Nullarbor. God, gee. But we got to Perth and were met at the station by Blue Corston, Sergeant Blue Corston. Who was dressed in absolutely spit polish gear you know. Green, very fit looking guy with an SAS beret. He threw us on a truck and took us out to Swanbourne. And we'd been chiacking each other all the way across and saying, "Oh I'll give myself a day, I'll give myself two day before they kick me out

17:00 of here, I don't think I'll do very well."

Had some of your good mates been drafted with you?

Yeah. No the guy I met on the first day, Rob Wallis, him and I were both on the draft. Guys from other platoons. Alan Ingram. G.D. Smith, old G.D. There were a lot of guys there that were mates. It was good. But Rob was my main mate at that stage. He was really good. He topped Kapooka and he topped

17:30 Ingleburn, he was going places old Rob.

Did they actually give you a chance to graduate at all in Ingleburn?

Yeah we marched out. We marched out with the rest of the platoon. They turned right, we turned left. We marched out. We got on the grog that night over in the Chownie Club. Or the Chowne Club. Had a few beers. You know slapped each other on the back basically and they all went off and drew their new gear to go to 7th Battalion. Jackie Doulis and company. It was a bit sad leaving old Jack. Jack had put in for SAS

18:00 too but they hadn't taken him because he might've been a bit old. I don't know. Jack would've made a good SAS guy but he would've been in a fair bit of trouble over there I suggest.

With the blokes who didn't make it into the draft were they really up and positive about you being selected?

Oh yeah yeah. One was killed in Vietnam. Jimmy Cutliffe. The rest all went to 7th Battalion and performed very well on their tour of Vietnam.

18:30 A lot of them, most of them got out. The guys that went on draft – it's quite an interesting draft actually. Out of the twenty six people that started on that course, something like sixteen ended up warrant officers in the SAS. Sergeants or warrant officers in the SAS. Amazing.

They must've done something right when they were selecting you?

Well it was called a paper board, they select – you

19:00 fill in all the boxes, put education away, IQ away, fitness, attitude and all that stuff. Put all that away without having to worry about retesting it or putting people through diametric, diabolical torture for six weeks. Then you've got it shot to bits. Out of that course only one bloke didn't get through. And he's the artillery bloke who, they let off a bomb out in the bush one night, one morning about five thirty to get us up. They always threw whiz bangs

19:30 in the bush. "Get up!" That was reveille. So you got up and put your running gear on, a pair of boots and trousers and a singlet. And you'd go for a run down the bottom of a hill. This is down at Collie. You'd run all the way down to the bottom of the hill and run back. That was the morning run. Anyway this bloke yelled out, "Get stuffed!" or something. We went off on our run and when we got back this guy had been packed up on a vehicle and been sent back to Perth and thrown out of the unit, just like that.

20:00 Never saw him again to this day. He's an artillery bloke. But I don't think he would've gone very well. He had no intention of doing anything he was told I don't think. But it was good, we trained…

But what immediately happened after you arrived in Perth?

Well we drove out to Swanbourne Barracks. Campbell Barracks. And in those days the Campbell Barracks that we'd heard about, were basically bulldozed. And they built these –

20:30 well actually there was a big sand hill there and they bulldozed it and built brand new accommodation blocks for the three squadrons. SAS had three combat squadrons in those days. They'd already served in Borneo with two squadrons 1 and 2. But Vietnam had come along in 1965 and they raised a third squadron called 3SAS Squadron. And they went to Vietnam first. And so those guys

21:00 from that first squadron were just coming back off leave as we arrived. So they were given the job of running our selection course. It wasn't called a selection course in those days. It was called a cadre course. C.A.D.R.E. or 'cadre' as the Americans say. The cadre course was basically designed to teach young soldiers how to be SAS soldiers in about six weeks. My mentor

21:30 who is still a very close friend of mine today, Chris Jennison, he'd already served in the British Army. He served in Borneo and Vietnam. And this guy was the guru. He taught us more about how to be an SAS soldier than any man alive. And all the Bart Mavericks and Ken Bowens and Mick Malones – all had this guy as our teacher. And it was fantastic. He chain smoked. He was a little pommie bloke with a baldy head and he had absolutely

22:00 no pretensions about anything to do with dress, bearing, drill, parade grounds, any of that stuff, he didn't give a stuff about any of that stuff. His main role in life was to teach us to survive in the bush basically. So we were met – went through the front gates of barracks and taken up to the – there was two barrack blocks on top of the hill which we used to house the regiments. Don't forget

22:30 at this stage a squadron's already away in Vietnam. 3 Squadron's just come home. They've just been replaced by 1 Squadron. So there was a combat squadron just back so only half of them were there. There was a squadron away and there was a squadron getting ready to go, so they'd be out in the bush or in New Guinea or wherever. So there was plenty of room in the two barrack blocks. So we were put in east and west block

23:00 were the two blocks. And we basically started life in there for a few days until we moved down to the back of the rifle range to the old huts down there.

Was it comfortable?

No it was World War II stuff again. And we weren't allowed to go anywhere near the place except we ate our meals in the digger's mess, the brand new digger's mess.

Apart from that you were in really bad conditions?

We were basically ignored. We were. But all we could see were these SAS

23:30 berets walking around in the distance, we had nothing to do with them. We'd go out on the range, and we'd fire on the range. We went down to Collie on trucks and we basically broke up into small four to five man patrols and learnt how to be SAS soldiers.

How was that actually taught?

Each senior NCO or corporal that was allocated to your patrol would take you out in the bush from the main base camp and you'd just do stuff. You'd do fire movement.

24:00 You'd move quietly through the bush. You'd do navigation. You'd do track crossings again. We all knew how to do track crossings from our earlier experiences. Nothing really was much different. And you bonded. You bonded in patrols. Those patrols didn't mean much though because you weren't going to be in those patrols back in the regiment. You basically went where they told you back in the unit and you filled holes.

24:30 Guys had been wounded or sick or left the army and this went on for about six weeks. And we plugged away and plugged away and then all of a sudden they said, that's it. And I turned around to my mate Bart Maverick who is still my mate today and said, "Is that all there is?" Because high school was harder than that. But we then went back to the barracks. We had a bit of leave. A couple of days off.

25:00 They then packed us up on a train and sent us back to the eastern states to do a parachute course at Williamtown.

Did they give you some sort of progress about how well you were doing?

Yeah they rolled you in and said, "Righto you're okay, your navigation's a bit crap. You know you need to sort this out but you should be okay."

Is that what they said to you?

Yes and there's a book in the regiment called a red book and many years later when I was second in command of the squadron I was able to get the red book out of the safe.

25:30 And I looked up the comments against my name. It was positive. A keen young soldier. That's all it said. Each man in the book and there were hundreds and hundreds of names in this book has a single sentence or a single line comment or a word. Some of them are not very good. Some are very good. Yeah it was good to know that. But I was – the bloke who was signing our course reports

26:00 was one of the great heroes of course. Wally Marshall. Wally Marshall was running the training squadron at the time and he was a Military Medal winner from Timor with a 2/4th Commando. He was an old man at that stage needless to say. Wally was a major and he'd won an MM. He was one of our heroes sort of thing. And here was Wally, "Not very good at navigating, young fellow." And I said, "Yeah well, I'll get better."

26:30 So I was only nineteen. I wasn't a very good soldier really. I was just making up the numbers sometimes, other times I did okay. So we went off on our parachute course on the train. A rattler to Kalgoorlie.

The rattler?

They used to call it the rattler. That was the rattle and bang all the way to Kalgoorlie. Then you'd get on the trans at Kalgoorlie. But the rattler – you'd take grog on the train with you and drink grog.

27:00 But you had a good sleep. The thing used to rattle so much, used to send you straight to sleep. Bunks. Four bunks in a compartment. Was it four or two I can't remember but they were really old. It was like twenties technology, the bunk things. But it was good.

Doesn't sound too bad.

No it was good. But you're with your mates and you're off on a parachute course and you're really shit scared really. You think, "Oh parachuting, I don't think I'll be able to do this.''

What did you think about your

27:30 **ability to do parachuting?**

Well at this stage I'm still young enough to have a go at anything. So we get there.

Where is the parachute course?

Williamtown in New South Wales up near Newcastle. Used to be the air base up there. It still is an air base actually. And the parachute course is run by the air force. Parachute training flight. And you had all these air force

28:00 people and Australian Army parachute jump instructors. And everyone was very overawed by all this stuff. But you walk into the classroom on the first day. They put you into barracks and next day eight o'clock in the classroom there's a big sign on the notice board. 'Knowledge Dispels Fear'. So that was basically the way it was. You learnt how to be a parachutist before you became a parachutist. They put you up in the swing trainers and then they put you up in the polish

28:30 tower and swung you off. And you did landing after landing after landing.

Can you describe these towers for me?

Well the polish tower was a huge tower. It was a big thing where you climbed up a set of ladders. They hooked you up into a harness. And it was basically a tower that simulated going out the side door of a Hercules. So you go out into the slip stream and then along. Along a big wire.

29:00 And you had to do all your drills and land. You're still on the wire but you did that. They had another thing called a fan tower. Which just uses the motion of a fan rushing through the air to slow you down. And it was the landings, basically teaching you how to land. Landing was all important, feet and knees together. If you didn't land properly you'd break something. That's what happened to a lot of guys. And then

29:30 you'd be introduced to the Caribou. The Caribou was a two engined American transport plane which would carry about twenty five men. They called it the cattle truck, just a noisy cattle truck. And still, they used them in Vietnam. They still use them now for sea air rescue. And basically away you go and you do four parachute jumps, day jumps without gear. When I say without gear, without equipment.

30:00 Out of the Caribou and then you graduate to the Hercules. Oh no you might do one jump with equipment out of a Caribou – it's off a ramp. Jumping off a ramp. Then you graduate to the Hercules. That was the old A model Hercules in those days, the first lot we ever had. And it was a side door exit. Many many years later in the SAS we were jumping off the ramp of the Hercules, the big ramp. But in these days

30:30 when you're putting out massed troops out two side exits, theoretically sixty four troops at a time, go go go go. So you're one behind the other. You see those massed jumps on television. Those mass jumps take about fifty to a hundred aircraft to get that many men in the air at once, just flying at different heights and levels. So you graduate to the Hercules. And it's very noisy and you're actually cacking yourself you know.

31:00 And you go through all your drills and helmet, and you're checking all your gear but it's all instinctive because your training has been so intense.

How long's it been to get to that point?

A couple of weeks. A couple of weeks. Oh they do they really pump it into you . But the instructors were sensational. They knew exactly what they were doing and we all basically got through it when you do eight jumps.

What was your first jump like?

Shit fall. That blue green blue green. No my first free fall jump was blue green

31:30 blue green. In other words sky ground, sky ground. Tumbling. But the first jump I can't remember a single thing about it. It was – I remember the tranquillity of being under canopy. It's a static line jump in other words the big strap that you hook on in the aeroplane is pulling your canopy out of the bag. So you don't have to do much but I had twists down to my neck. You go out incorrectly and you twist in the slipstream.

32:00 You twist and you've got to get out of these twists and avoid other parachutists in the air and steer. These old parachutes you had to climb up the riser to steer the damn thing. And they weren't very sophisticated at all and they were pre – oh they were still ex parachutes, old ones. And they were very hard to fit in buckles that had to slide and they were just awful damn things. They've got far

32:30 better parachutes these days. And the jump instructor was the bloke on the ground with the loud hailer and blokes watching with binoculars. And they debrief every man on what he did. "And you sir are nothing but a complete clown." And some blokes were just dreadful. I was one of those, I was pretty dreadful. But you get better on your second or third jump. And you get to the Herc and you think, "Oh I can't do this." But you do it.

33:00 It's quite overwhelming. The Hercules is such a big noisy aeroplane and you've never been in one in your life and you hear it, and you're about to jump out of the bloody thing. So you get through all that and then you get basically debriefed, course report, passed. And you get issued your parachute wings which is a pretty big deal. Huge deal.

Anybody fail in the parachute?

Oh yeah a few of them. There were people from other units on our course too. And some of those guys never made

33:30 it through. Some of our guys never made it through. But one of my mates off my selection course, did the eight parachute jumps on his course but when we got back to the regiment, a couple of months of later – no it wasn't a couple of months later, a couple of weeks later we did a parachute jump with the regiment and he refused to parachute. He refused to jump. So he was kicked out of the unit straight away.

Gee. Any ideas why that would've happened?

Just bottle.

34:00 I've always worked on the principal that everyone's issued a bottle of courage. Some people's bottle empties quicker than others. But he went off to Vietnam after that with an infantry battalion and he did really well. So I don't know. I don't know what the problem was. Some people were just not cut out for it. I'm not cut out for it even though I did a couple of hundred jumps. I always tell people I did two hundred unsuccessful landings.

Didn't like it?

No I bounced and bounced and crashed every time.

34:30 I hit trees, rocks. I hit a fence once and let two hundred sheep out of a paddock. Nearly got run over by a road train on the highway. Landed in the water, I've landed everywhere. I wasn't cut out for it.

That sounds terrible. A terrible history of parachute jumping.

Just one of the things you've got to do when you're in SAS. Just one of the things. You don't do it you can't draw the pay.

So how did you celebrate graduating from the parachute course?

35:00 Grog. Got into the grog. But don't forget we're still only nineteen. No wrong I was twenty at this stage because I'd turned twenty in April when this selection course was July. So towards the end of the year on the parachute course I was still, I was twenty. But we were still under the age to drink. But everyone drank. Especially in uniform. And in those days you went everywhere in uniform. But those new parachute wings, you felt like walking down the

35:30 road like this. It was a pretty big deal. And we went to the football on the way home. One of our mates Kenny Bowen from Melbourne, there was a big demonstration game at the Sydney Cricket Ground between Geelong and St Kilda. Cowboy Neil was one of the big boys in there. I think he was a St. Kilda man. But we went to the cricket ground and we were sitting directly behind the goals in our uniforms drinking beer. And it was the first game of Aussie Rules I ever saw.

36:00 And we were mightily impressed. Some of those guys in those days were sensational. Big, huge with these tiny shorts. We were rugby players see and I'd never even seen a game of Aussie Rules until I was twenty. Not that I missed much. Rugby's still my main game of course. But we drank a bit of grog, I caught up with my father in Sydney on the way back.

36:30 Went home and said g'day to Mum and Dad then caught the train back to WA.

What did they think about this SAS deal?

Yeah they were pretty proud of me. I think my mother and father's main reason to live was for their kids to just do the best they can with what's given to them. And I'd already let them down at school in terms of my academic performance but I was doing the best I could here. I was

37:00 in Australia's top combat unit. And the myths and everything that banded around SAS were quite strong and you felt very proud to be there.

What sort of rumours were being banded about when you were…

Oh nothing much. There's just this aura, this je ne sais quoi, this certain something. The SAS boys would – and they've proven it in Iraq recently.

37:30 And in Afghanistan and East Timor and Vietnam. We only lost seven men in the whole seven years and only one to enemy action which is a record that no-one else can … Why we despatched over five hundred Viet Cong. But it was just that certain something. And I think the people that aspire to serve there, and I've often said to people over the years, "That if you serve for twenty five years

38:00 in the army, and never aspire to serve in SAS team you're wasting your time, you really have. And many years later I did a regimental sergeant major's course, the RSM's course and I served with some very good soldiers. But they were so limited in their thinking about soldiering. And digging holes at high range up in Townsville was as good as it got and that was a tragedy really. Some of those guys would have made very good SAS soldiers. But you know you can't have everyone in the unit.

38:30 Someone's got to do the donkey work too.

So how did other SAS blokes welcome you new blokes when you arrived in Perth?

Well we came off our parachute course. The truck picked us up at the railway station again and back to

the line, but now we were parachute qualified. The blokes didn't care much about it. You were in the mess and, "How're you going?" But laconically they didn't – no-one broke out the

39:00 massed bands or the champagne, it was just another bunch of blokes. And they'd run the pencil over you fairly closely. They had a look at you. "Oh don't like the look of that bloke." The only thing you could ever wish for, the highest accolade you could ever wish for in the military was to have a good soldier, a proven good soldier say to someone else, "He's not a bad hand." That was the highest accolade. But you kept it low profile, you stayed

39:30 under the radar. But we had more to do. So we were allocated to 3 Squadron and they were the down time squadron. They were the squadron that had just got back from Vietnam and all the guys away on course and leave and getting married. So there weren't many of them around and the ones that were allocated to run our selection course, they basically still had us under toe. And they said, "Righto the next set of courses are the signals

40:00 course." And signals course was a hard course. It was all Morse based. Morse Code. 'Cause that was the main high frequency communication even up until ten years ago. Still using Morse. 'Cause Morse will cut through, right though all atmospherics and distance and god knows what. And so the signals course started and it was towards the end of the signals course

40:30 we went for about two months and it was just torture. And I know a lot of us had a lot of trouble with it. I mean there was this wonderful teacher called Barry Smith. 152 Signals Squadron bloke. He has passed away. He really stuck with us. We were just dreadful and he stuck with us and he said, "Righto you blokes, you're going to be sigs by the time this ends otherwise…" And he was right. He made us sigs. All of a sudden it started to happen. And you started to remember and you could start taking down Morse.

41:00 You only had to take eight words a minute. And the best I ever got in the army was taking about twelve words a minutes. But the core system people, the people who actually do Morse Code stuff for a job, some of those guys are taking twenty five words a minute. Real fast stuff and they're working a full hour behind. God. So I wasn't, didn't aspire to be one of them. I was just a grunt sig as the irreverent bloody

41:30 152 blokes we used to call WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. 152 Screaming Chook Squadron, that was their name they were given somewhere along the line. But they were outstanding. They taught us, they backed us up in the bush. We worked back to them in communications centre. And in Vietnam they saved our bacon so many times. Ridiculous. But towards the end of the signals course we were all just starting to get it and morale was starting to rise.

Tape 4

00:34 Somebody said, "I wonder how we get one of these berets." We expected to be issued the thing. You see the blokes putting their berets on at a jaunty angle. You think, "When am I getting these?' Anyhow, someone said, "You get them up the Q store [quartermaster's store]." So we all trooped up the Q store and stood there at the counter basically trying on berets till we found the one that fit. Put a badge on it.

01:00 Signed our name on the bit of paper and walked out and walked back down to the squadron with all these berets on. It was like winning the lottery. But the fact is they made no song and dance about issuing it. No song and dance about presenting it or anything we were just automatically entitled to it. Which is a bit of a shame. Nowadays they make a huge fuss. They have the family and they have a big parade.

So it wasn't almost an anti climax?

01:30 Oh it was very anti climatic very much so. But it didn't worry us too much we were just glad to have it. It was sort of like a – up till that stage we kept thinking, "Hang on we're still on the selection course here." Nowadays they actually do all that stuff before they issue the beret. The bloke'll do his selection course and then do all the other courses. Parachuting, signals everything for twelve months and then they issue the

02:00 beret at the end. So we were basically the forerunners for what happens now actually. But at the end of the selection cycle now they have a big parade, they have all the families and they make speeches, the Governor General if he's in town and it's a pretty big deal. So it's a bit of a shame but it was just good to get it on the head. And we were basically in the unit. And we were posted to, after the signals

02:30 training finished we were posted to a troop. I was posted to L Troop 3 Squadron.

Just before your posting is there any more detail you could go into about the sigs training?

Signals training. It was just torturous hard. It was like trying to learn another language. It was like language training. Where you just cannot pick up the vowels, you cannot pick up the nouns and the verbs. You just don't understand how it all fits and then all of a sudden one day you do. And that's what Morse training was like, you had to just know the

03:00 alphabet and you just have to hear it. Di-di-di-de-da-da-di. I.M.I. I.M.I. It means say again. Many years later, well not many years later, months later I still couldn't pick that. I could pick the basic stuff but once you were posted to a patrol in a troop in a squadron. And I was posted as a sig because I was trained in Morse. And I went to Vietnam as a signaller.

03:30 But that's another story.

What sort of equipment did you do your sig training on?

We had – well as we arrived in the unit we used to use the old 510 set which is a double pouch HF set. High frequency. High frequency is sky wave where you're actually bouncing the signal off the (UNCLEAR). VHF, very high frequency is line of sight. And UHF which we used later on also

04:00 is extreme [ultra] line of sight, in other words me to you or me to a chopper. It's a little hand held. But if you wanted to guarantee coms, communications – coms, you used HF. And you put up a suitable – if you were in New Guinea and you wanted to talk to Perth you had to use a quarter wave length dye pole. And the dye pole was basically cut. When I say cut, measured with a feeder in the centre

04:30 and angled at the right angle so that the signal was being thrown out like that with the feeder coming down to your radio and away you went. Half wave length dye pole, quarter length dye pole, or full wave length dye pole, just depending on distance and you could use those in the mountains because the signal was thrown straight up into the atmosphere and back down again. Whereas VHF you couldn't do any of that. Ironically in Vietnam

05:00 later on we carried all three radios in a four man patrol. VHF, HF and UHF. Unbelievable.

Could a man carry one of those each?

Yeah. So we had those radios. We had ten sets which were a dreadful VHF radio. They were pretty awful damn things. They were little skinny long tall skinny radio. They were no good. And then we got

05:30 the 77 set in. The 77 set was a VHF radio. Still line of sight but it had a big whip aerial which meant that the line of sight could go a lot further. And that was basically it, those two radios. And that was basically it. Those two radios. And we never worried about the big radios, the communicators, the signals used back in the communication centre. The big Collins receivers and those sorts of things, that was their bag. We had too much to worry about just learning

06:00 Morse let alone trying to work out the other intricacies of being a signaller.

Were you taught the maintenance and repair of these…

Not really no. No maintenance. Maintenance, yeah you'd clean it up and batteries and how to check batteries stuff like that, but no maintenance. When I say no repairs. We had radio techs who repaired all that. They were posted to the squadron.

Would they be on patrols with you?

No. No.

06:30 A few lost your coms in the bush. It was a fairly simple process. If you didn't get coms – you missed a sked, well basically the balloon would go up. If you missed two they'd be out looking for you no problem. That's when your other radios come into play, talking straight to the chopper.

Is a sked a scheduled com?

Yeah yeah sked. You had normally one or two skeds a day depnednign on what patrols you were on.

07:00 So the signals course was basically that. You learnt about communication networks and who was working to who. You learnt the language, voice language. One two this is one three, radio check over. And all of this.

Can you share a bit more of that radio language?

Not really. I'm not – I'm a reggie sig. You're better off getting our corps signaller, Possum Brambley to talk about that. He was one of the best too, old Possum.

07:30 But it's just a language, voice language was easy enough. Wait out, wait. You had to understand what each aspect was. Wait means just wait, wait but wait out means you were off the radio and you were going to get back to him. Out means you're out. It was gone. The communication was finished. And pack up and move sort of thing. But I don't think I ever, later

08:00 on in combat I don't think I ever got a voice message through. It was always Morse.

Why would that have been?

Well just the way it happened. We'd throw out – we used to use a vastly different radio in Vietnam, a little 64 set, a four channel, point five of a watt in the ampage. A four channel HF radio, little tiny thing

about this big with a lid on it.

08:30 It had a little ear plug and it was a miniature compared to the other things we used to use. They had a voice facility on it but I never ever got it to work but the Morse facility worked pretty well. We used the 510 Morse key with the 64 set. Our sigs adapted the plugs. The 510 key had a rounded top on it and you could roll your fingers on and off and some guys got really good at their Morse by using the 510 key. And we all had our own keys.

09:00 And one of the big no no's in signals of course is idiosyncrasy. You never let idiosyncratic stuff crop into your work because the enemy can pick you up. Ah there he is again. And that's the same bloke that uses a double wait out or a double out, or so you learned all that stuff. And you learnt codes. You learnt how to use codes. The main code was the OTLP – one time letter pad. Which is the

09:30 safest code in the world today because you're working book to book. I've got a book in my pocket of code pages. The signal centre's got my duplicate book back there, so when they're decoding my message they're using the duplicate book back there. And I'm using my book here. So as long as we're on the same page then it's laughing. So if I lose my book or my book gets captured they just destroy the other way. There's no two books in the world the same. So it's just about impossible

10:00 - well it is impossible to break. It's just an embassy code used by everybody.

So they wouldn't be codes that you'd be able to memorise then.

No no. You memorise other bits of your code, your indicator groups and stuff. You memorise that stuff. You're issued those by your signal centre on a little card or something. Well you try to memorise them so basically what page to go to on what day. Where to start, what line to start on.

10:30 Codes are fascinating things. They really are fascinating. And if you get them wrong, if you're out by one letter in a line nothing makes sense, nothing. So you've got to get it right. Encryption and decryption.

Did that cause much anxiety for you as a signaller?

Oh very much. Very much. Unless you understand exactly what you're doing and you double check it. See in Vietnam later on the patrol commander would say, "Righto we'll get coms at the next stop.

11:00 The afternoon sked we'll do it early." Or, "We'll do it at the right time." I'll work out where we are, he'll hand the message to the signaller which is me. "Encrypt this." So you encrypt it onto the pad, you turn it into the code you want to send in Morse and away you go. You come up on the radio and say basically – our call sign in Vietnam was Bravo 9 Sierra

11:30 and each patrol, Bravo 9 Sierra, 1, 1 – 1, 2 – 1, 3 or that I Troop and 2, 2 – 2, 3 – 2, 4 would be J Troop and the 4's were L Troop which was our troop. So Bravo 9 Sierra 4, 1 or Bravo 9 Sierra 4, 4. And you come up clear on those and you're offered your message in clear. Or you're offered, the offering of the message over.

12:00 And then you'd send the message in code and then they would decrypt it out of the book that you left back there. And basically the intelligence you wanted to tell them would be then moved down to the headquarters at Nui Dat and passed onto the intelligence people and the brigadier and whatever else they wanted to make of it. So that's – but if it was just a loc stat, or location statement then, that'd be coded too of course.

12:30 You didn't want the enemy to know where you were. You would never send a six figure grid reference in plain. I think we basically overestimated what the Viet Cong had. I don't think they had the ability to intercept any of our messages frankly. But we never knew. There were reports around the place that Russians had been seen in the bush or big Caucasian men with Viet Cong groups. Maybe it was true. The Cold War was on see. The Cold War was

13:00 flat strap. So maybe the Russians were in there, maybe it was a danger. But I always got the feeling that we only ever captured one or two radios ever in seven years. Charlie never carried radios so did he have direction finding equipment, did he have anything to intercept our signals or not. We never knew. But we always had to assume he did. Oh no the signals job was a good job in that, in a good patrol the signals

13:30 people around you, or the people around you would make brews for you or make you lunch or a feed. A bad patrol commander would basically get his communicator to get coms in the rain, whatever, put out aerials, pull in aerials, get packed up and then say, "Righto move in five." And you haven't had a brew. That's a bad patrol commander would do that. I didn't know many of those. Most of them generally had their act together. And the signaller had to be looked after

14:00 because he was carrying a heavy weight and also while you were sitting there with mind in neutral he was getting coms.

You were his contact with task force headquarters?

No, contact with the squadron. Squadron communication centre. We never worked to task force

headquarters. We just worked to the squadron. And there's a good photo in my book there of the SAS communications centre

14:30 or room, which I never saw the inside of while I was there because we weren't allowed in there. It was a need to know. You never needed to be in there so you never went in there. And we used to send sit reps [situation reports], loc stats, ambush reports, contact reports, all sorts of stuff. If you were sitting on a track or an OP, observation post and you were watching three hundred VC [Viet Cong] walk by with everyone armed to the teeth with big packs

15:00 then, the patrol commander's madly scribbling stuff down. He's scribbling stuff – direction they're going, how many, weapons, tactics. If he saw anything like, if they were on the ball, whether they were just moving quickly. Estimated speed of move because if they're going like mad down a foot pad, and by the time you get coms – pull back and get coms and tell the task force or tell the squadron it might be an

15:30 hour. He can walk two or three k's in an hour. You know they got to react fairly quickly. So the SAS were the eyes and the ears of the task force basically. And you had to get coms quickly. But signalling it was interesting. We got to New Guinea later on. I'll tell you in a second. We got to New Guinea after being in the squadron for a while and went off on a medical course and did a few other courses like assault pioneer which is demolitions and things.

16:00 And by the time we got to New Guinea – each squadron went to New Guinea for a couple of months as a work up for Vietnam. I was the coms – I was the signaller. And the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s used to call me No Coms Malone. But I got better. By the time it came to the sharp end I got coms when the shit hit the fan.

Why were they jiving you like that?

Oh it's just the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Chiaking each other all the time. That's just the way it was.

16:30 **So when you joined the squadron they called you No Coms Malone.**

No no the bloody sigs, a lot of times they never got coms in New Guinea. Whether it was to do with aerials or you know, you do aerial theory, you understand how aerials work. But you can't judge it. Your ferox[?] might be down on that day or low or

17:00 **high. You know, you just can't pick it. And you might be bouncing your signal straight over the top. So if they didn't get your coms on a quarter wave length dot hole, they'd give you a mouth full of cheek when you got back. No Coms Malone. But I proved them wrong later. I got coms in Vietnam when it mattered.**

So what was the trip to New Guinea for?

Every squadron went to New Guinea to train in the mountains for Vietnam in the jungle.

17:30 We trained. We did a long stomp, we did a hundred and ten mile walk. Some patrols went from the Asiki to Salamaua, others went from Menyamya to Bulolo. Others went from Salamaua to Asiki, all that stuff. And you basically crossed the Owen Stanley Ranges. Well not really not as bad as the Kokoda track. But the, bloody yarmahs [slang for mountains], I've never seen yarmahs like it. You'd go up and up and you'd just see daylight and you'd think, "Oh,"

18:00 and get to the top and it's a false crest and up she goes again. And you're in the clouds for God's sake. Anyway we all did those, we all did those – it was a bonding exercise thing for each patrol.

How did you manage that excursion?

Alright. We flew into Asiki up in the mountains and there was a big piece of white paint on the wall of the cliff. Apparently the pilot has to aim for the bit of paint

18:30 and where he bears at another paint mark on a cliff on the left he turns left, that's how they get into Asiki airstrip. But we got off the plane and went straight up over the mountains but I got cramps, very bad cramps and I couldn't go, I couldn't continue. For some reason or other I was just an absolute mess. Anyway they flew me out. And I got bollocked by the squadron commander back at Egam Barracks back in Lae.

19:00 There was nothing I could do about it, I was as fit as the next man. But the cramps set in and it nearly killed me.

Were they muscle cramps or stomach cramps?

No muscle cramps, legs. They were just absolutely torturous. Then I went back and then I flew back in and did the last half of the stomp from Wau Airfield where the Australian troops fought the Japs on the air strip. They were landing off the planes and getting off and firing at the Japs at the other end of the strip.

19:30 So I saw all that country and stomped all the way down the Jap track to Salamaua.

Did you have that knowledge at the time?

Oh yeah we knew what it was and the Jap track, which was down through the kunai grass plains. You see photographs of huge plains of mountainous plains and not a tree for miles.

20:00 Well the kunai grass plains have got a track and the Japs actually cut the track from Wau to Salamaua over the Komyatum Gap, down to the Francisco River. Francisco River where they were withdrawing under the onslaught basically. And the current day track – we're talking abut 1968 here, was a foot pad down the middle of this track. And the track was only as wide as

20:30 ten, twelve feet wide. But they dragged all their guns, tanks and everything down this thing. And today it's just a foot pad that goes all the way from Wau to Salamaua. So I went and rejoined the patrol and stomped down to the coast with them. It was sixty miles. My legs were okay by that stage. I don't know why I got these terrible cramps but I did. But anyway Reg Beasley

21:00 I think he was planning to throw me out of the squadron but I think they persevered with me. I wasn't a very good soldier like I said, and at this stage I think they were starting to cut adrift a few of the guys. One guy got cut out mainly for drink problems.

You were borderline were you?

Oh I think I might have been yeah. But my coms weren't bad. Then they called me No Coms Malone. But I was fairly personable sort of a young bloke and I think my troop

21:30 commander was only a young bloke himself. He didn't have much of an idea about much. Bit more educated than me that's about all, a Duntroon graduate. But apart from that he knew as much about the bush as I did.

How did you reassure Reg Beasley?

Oh he just said, "Lift your game," and I said, "Well how do I lift my game?" But I went okay.

22:00 We went home and we flew back to Australia and we went on pre-embarkation leave, that's a couple of weeks leave before we went to Vietnam. And back again.

How did you spend that?

I went home to Mum and Dad's place. That was around Christmas time I think. 1968. And we got back to the squadron and we painted our trucks, we pulled the code

22:30 things – a triangle, a yellow trunk with a triangle on it, with three bars indicating our squadron or whatever. Your name and all that stuff had to go. Had to get all your gear ready, had to be issued tropical issue stuff and millbank filters and all this sort of stuff. And we were in the process of working our way up to getting going, we were doing some pretty heavy range shoots and stuff like that. I was in the boozer one night up at the Gatwick Club

23:00 and the phone rang and I answered it, "Kelly's Wood Yard." That's my father on the phone and he said, "I want to speak to Mick Malone," and I said, "Speaking." And it was pretty noisy in the boozer, the boys were really getting stuck into it. And he said, "Peter's been killed in Vietnam." Peter my cousin. And I was horrified of course, because it was just unbelievable. Unbelievable firstly that my father would ring me, about anything. Poor old Dad wasn't heavily into writing or ringing people up.

23:30 But Peter being killed and I'm about to leave in three weeks. So it was a bit of a touch and go situation. I think my grandmother wasn't that happy to have his father, Terry Malone, Peter's father, Peter was killed, Terry was in Vietnam at the same time. He was up there as a warrant officer in the training team in Hoi An which is up near the

24:00 border. He was a warrant officer training Vietnamese tank crews. And Peter was in the armour corps down in Phuoc Tuy Province and got killed on Operation Goodwood. And I'm about to leave. So needless to say I got wheeled in and asked a question. "Do you want to go or not?" I said, "What are you talking about? Of course I want to go." So that was put to bed and three weeks later we left. We flew into Singapore. We had to wear white shirts

24:30 and take our polyester shirts off and wear a white shit with a tie, with our army trousers in the Singapore terminal. We looked like a half trained Latter Day Saints missionaries. You know we had our white shirts on but not the black trousers. I don't know why but the Singapore Government weren't that happy with us transiting through. It was something like that. So we went by 707 of course. Flew straight

25:00 from Perth to Vietnam. Most of the other guys went by C130 or the HMAS Sydney which was a troop carrier. But we didn't have to endure that thank God.

What was the flight like?

It was just a good flight, six or seven hours. All of a sudden you're in Vietnam, eyes like a mad cat. And we flew in to Tan Son Nhut Airbase, in Saigon. Huge airbase.

25:30 We were lined up behind F105's, Phantoms, C130's all lining up to land, one behind the other. It was a very busy airport. The busiest airfield in the world at that stage. So we landed in a Qantas 707 on the 18th February 1969. And were met at the airport

26:00 by bus and as we were getting off the plane there was another squadron getting on it. So we had our jaws down here just with apprehension and excitement and the squadron we were replacing had big grins on their faces going home. Twelve months later I understood all about that.

Were there any exchanges between you?

Oh yeah yeah yeah. A lot of the Borneo blokes who knew each other. Our senior NCO's in 3 Squadron knew each other. I didn't know any of the young guys that were going home.

26:30 **Was there any shi-aking?**

Oh yeah big time.

What kind of things were they saying?

Oh you know, "Look at your lot." "There's no VC left, we've killed them all." All that sort of stuff. But generally they were just desperate to get on the plane and get home. And we just arrived so they bussed us across to the Australian airfield. Oh no we actually flew to – no we didn't – we flew from Saigon by

27:00 Australian Caribou aircraft, Wallaby Airlines, to Nui Dat and landed at Luscombe Field. Luscombe Field was a big airstrip right there in the middle of Nui Dat. And it was like the Pilbarra, it was red dust and dirt everywhere. It was dry season and it was just horrible. It was dry as a tick. Dry as a bone. And Vietnam is a terrible place for that. It dries out extremely. Just completely and utterly dries out.

27:30 There's not an ounce of water anywhere in dry season. And in the west season it just pours. So if we had've landed at Wittenoom you wouldn't have known the difference. You know it was just so dusty and so red.

Were you surprised?

Oh yeah very surprised. I didn't think that it'd be that dry but it was so hot and so tortuous. I thought, "Oh no." The trucks were there waiting to pick us up. And drove us basically around the hill and back up to the hill,

28:00 top of the hill, where SAS base was. And we were shown our lines, our tent lines.

Can you describe it?

Well they were pretty horrible actually. The squadron prior to us had lived there, they'd lived pretty rough actually. All the sandbags were all rotting. They'd taken over someone else's line when they moved up there, the squadron before them had moved. No work had really been done on the place at all.

28:30 And there were weapons. And the day before we arrived the ammunition dump at Nui Dat blew up and killed two ammunition blokes and the whole of the base was showered with grenades and shells and god's knows what. And they were everywhere, and there were sandbags sitting on top of them all over the place. There must've been fifty of them around the lines. And you weren't allowed to touch them because they were UXB – unexploded [bombs] – UXO – unexploded ordnance. So that was

29:00 day one. Then on the first night we were rocketed or mortared and we had to stand to. Stand to, you yell out, "Stand to," and everyone gets to their stand to positions in the bunkers or helmets on. Guys running around with no clothes on with just a pair of boots, rifle and a helmet. So that was the introduction. Introduction dusty as hell, bombs every where and mortared the first night

29:30 so welcome to Nui Dat. I thought, "This is going to be fun."

Were you expecting more of the same?

Oh yeah it's the sort of thing where you think, "How often's this happen? Every night?" But it calmed down and we settled into our lines and were briefed by the control commanders who'd all flown up earlier on the advance party. And we did some shake down patrols around the place in the barracks, in the lines themselves.

30:00 **What were they?**

The shake downs? Just shaking yourself out in your patrols and we issued new cams and American boots and all the different bits and pieces. The American rations weren't much good in the dry season. Oh they only thing good in the American sea rations was the – they had a tin of pound cake in there. It was the fluffiest cake you'd – your grandmother couldn't make cake as fluffy. It was in a tin.

30:30 Americans had some weird rations and their meat was so salty you couldn't eat it. But the wet season we had these LRRCP packs. Long range reconnaissance control packs which came in a big satchel like this and there were two dehydrated meals in each pack and they were huge. Chilli con carne, never heard of chilli con carne before. And there was chilli con carne. I'll have some of that. And away we

went. So the dry season, the first patrols were shake down patrols

31:00 a couple of days in benign areas. They wouldn't send you into some area where you get your arse shot off day one. Down to the range, basically a tour of the Nui Dat area, don't forget there was eight thousand troops in this one area. The hill was where we lived in top and the area was surrounded by rubber trees and the battalions were placed in the rubber. Three battalions there at that time. Plus the reinforcing unit which was –

31:30 saw thousands of men come through that replacing wounded and killed. Plus the tanks had a specific area and the armoured personnel carrier mob had another area and then the headquarters was itself down in another bit of rubber. Down near the Wombat water point. The first SAS squadron to go to Vietnam actually lived in one man tents just next to the headquarters until

32:00 the hill became available and they moved up there. But we had the best bit of real estate. But the worst bit about it, we had a huge bloody aerial sticking up over the top. With lights on it so the aeroplanes wouldn't run into it. And the Charlie thought we were the headquarters didn't they? So that's why we kept getting mortared and rocketed.

What was on the perimeter of the taskforce?

Well when the battle of Long Tan happened in '66, three years before they hadn't set any wire or anything.

32:30 And what Long Tan was is D445 Battalion were massing for an assault on the Australian task force headquarters. And they were bumped by D Company 6 Battalion. And luckily as it turned out. Harry Smith's mob basically walked straight into them. And they didn't blunder into them, they followed up a couple of contacts, they followed up a couple of guys and bang straight into this lot and she was on for young and old. But there was no wire

33:00 at this stage. When we got there in '69 the wire was fairly thick and heavy. Not as bad as the Somme but heading that way, layer upon layer of wire. I'm talking about triple concertina and bastard wire and all sorts of stuff. Everything covered by machine guns and Claymore mines. So Charlie, yeah by the time we got there Charlie would be well advised not to attack the Dat. It was fairly heavily fortified place. But he used to sit out in the bush

33:30 and just throw the odd rocket in, the odd mortar in. And just bolt.

What risk was there of being hit by one of those mortars?

No very little risk. We were pretty safe in the Dat. We had a boozer there and we used to get absolutely smashed in the boozer. But later on they brought in the old two can per day perhaps policy. Which was a bit of a disaster. We used to get into it. We had VB [Victoria Bitter]. VB was the beer of choice. And at one stage the Americans

34:00 would offer us three cartons for one carton of VB. Three cartons of Pabst Blue Ribbon, or Bud or Coolers or whatever they had. Because their beer was as weak as water. But VB was the beer of choice. It was a ripper. Some of the other beers. Like Charlie Waddell. Remember Charlie – was it Tom Waddell or Charlie the cheap grocer. We used to have a grocer in Perth here called Tom the Cheap.

Yes I remember him.

34:30 Well it was like an action, Tom the Cheap Grocer. Well he sent a pallet of Swan Beer up for us. A pallet. Fantastic. It was undrinkable. It was not drinkable. It was just rubbish. Either something happened in transit or the preservatives were wrong but you could not give it away. You could give it away, the blokes wouldn't drink it. But VB was just sensational.

35:00 And you'd go up – in the afternoon you'd finish work, cutting grass or digging bunkers, or building – they decided to revet our line. You know what revetment is? Pull down all the sandbags and build concrete revetments with corrugated iron and star pickets and wire and every tent would be basically full revetted. So if a

35:30 mortar bomb landed just outside, you could be asleep in your bed and not get killed. The only way you could get killed would be a direct hit sort of thing. Bit like revetments around armourment points and aircraft – revetments on air fields.

So mortars were starting to pose a bit of a threat?

Oh no they didn't land around the place. But yeah I suppose, but you had to occupy soldiers' minds. When you weren't out in the bush don't forget – the basic

36:00 daily routine would be reveille at six o'clock. Everybody would be up anyway because it was so bloody hot. Squared away your room. There were usually three guys in each tent and an officer on his own in his tent and sergeants two per tent. Squared away your room, have a shave. Everyone just wore boots and shorts, no shirts. Only had to wear a shirt to breakfast. So you go down to the mess for

36:30 breakfast and this was a building. A kitchen and a mess hall on the other side of the road basically.

All under canvas was it?

No. It was actually buildings at this stage, wooden buildings with tin corrugated rooves. And you'd have your breakfast and go back to the lines and whatever job was on that day. Whether you were going on a sandbag trip down to the local sandbag thing. Or whether you were preparing for patrol, you might get a warning or the patrol

37:00 commander'll come down the path with a bit of paper and say, "Warning order boys." The warning order basically tells the patrol, warning the patrol we were getting ready for patrol in three days. So we used to get three day warning of it. Which allowed you then to do all the briefings, draw the rations and special equipment you might need whether it's cameras, binoculars, pistols. Whatever, whatever you needed. All the different weapons whether you're doing

37:30 Claymore ambushing and down to the range to test all your weapons. Down and talk to the air force about where you're going in and all that sort of stuff. And then you get dressed and cam'd up. The 2IC of the patrol would go down and draw the rations out of the Q store based on five men, six men for the length of time you were out. So you could work it out by meals. And you'd draw ration packs because like I said, wet season you'd draw

38:00 dehydrated stuff. Dry season you use Australian canned stuff. And some American. And the American stuff was good because it had cigarettes in the ration pack. Little packs of five Winston's and stuff like that. And we all smoked in those days, well most of us did anyway. And the 2IC'd [second in command] bring it all down the lines and lay it all out and blokes'd draw their rations. If there was any special gear you'd sign for it. And the sig, as the signaller I'd go up to the com cen. Draw the radio

38:30 which would be fully serviced and ready to go. Get my codes, get my net sheet with whatever other instructions they'd give me. Take it down the lines, do a radio check with the communications centre just by throwing a wire on the ground. Do all that stuff. Draw all the other radios, whether you needed a VHF radio to talk to the chopper or a UHF radio to talk to the chopper. At one stage earlier in our tour we had a balloon, a huge balloon like a barrage balloon.

39:00 Up on a cable, seven hundred feet cable. They used to wind it up every day with a radio on top of it. And trying to get VHF com. Don't forget the province is only forty k's from coast to mountains. And from delta to the other border of Binh Tuy. So forty square k's that's how big the province was. It wasn't much at all. So

39:30 you could get communications anywhere in the province by using HF, using a ground wire or a small wire. Not a – a quarter wave length dye pole would fire the signals right over the top but with a small aerial you could get a fairly weak signal through. And that's all we ever concentrated on. And the 2IC issued all the stuff. We'd have briefings, we'd talk about ambushing, the patrol commander'd work his way through

40:00 his plan. What are you going to do? And our maps were picto maps. A picto map is a photograph, an air photo that's been gridded so you've actually got a map on a photo. So when you're flying along in the chopper, you can actually see the landing zone, there it is there or the river. Actually had bomb damage holes all the way across one of the maps. You know where the B52's had flown all the way from Guam and just dropped their bombs and flew back again.

40:30 I don't know what the hell they dropped them there for but anyway. Bombing in Vietnam was just out of order. They dropped more bombs on Vietnam than they did in the whole of World War II, just ridiculous. One of those B52's could carry the equivalent of about twenty super phoruses. Just enormous. Anyway the patrol'd be ready, you'd get briefed by the intelligence people, they'd come down and brief you about the area. They'd

41:00 give you an area brief about the units that had been seen in the area and previous patrol reports and we'd study all that. So everyone'd be full bottle on the area when you went in. And I was the sig in the patrol. So a six man patrol. Clem Dwyer, one of my favourite patrol commanders, always had a six man patrol because he liked to be able to move people around in units. Or twos, or two pairs of threes or three twos.

41:30 Whereas five man you just couldn't carry enough gear and it got a bit unwieldy. Four man which was the SAS stable from Borneo was just too unwieldy. I went on a couple of four man patrols and that was a hairy little thing. You didn't have enough fire power there or enough gear to do the job. Not bad in the wet season, four man patrol in the wet season sure, 'cause you haven't got to carry any water. Just catch it every day in your poncho. Five o'clock every day. And that's the difference between the dry and the wet.

42:00 You could stay for fourteen days. You had to come in after fourteen days because your body…

Tape 5

00:31 **Just before we left for lunch you mentioned creeping something?**

The creeping mank. It's just a skin rash we used to get in the bush from being wet all the time. It was just one of those tortuous things, like prickly heat and you used to get prickly heat too. But not taking your boots off for twelve to fourteen days your feet

01:00 totally wet all the time, that they get all shrivelled up and then you get manky and you get all sorts of reinfestations of tinea and God's knows what else. So a patrol really couldn't go any longer than that. On the grounds of body maintenance and your crutch was the same, you can imagine. If you didn't take your clothes off for fourteen days and you used to stink like a pole cat.

But you wouldn't be able to smell each other though?

No not really.

01:30 And the VC couldn't smell you either. They smelt worse than us. 'Cause they never took their clothes off sort of thing. But you know that was the way it was.

So did you have fairly reasonable treatment available at the campsite say for things like your feet?

Yes we had a medic with us on the squadron. Kevin Logan, I still see Kev. Kevin was our squadron medic, he was a corporal. And we had a unit called the 8th Field Ambulance at Nui Dat

02:00 and that was a sort of six bed ambulance type hospital. Like an RAP – Regimental Aid Post. And then we had one field hospital down at Vung Tau. Which was a big MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] type hospital. Choppers full of wounded blokes. They reckon you could be shot in the battle field and be on the operating table within three quarters of an hour. Not that I ever got shot but it was good to know it was there.

02:30 **So would it take very long for things like creeping mank to clear up?**

Yeah. Yeah it did. Patrols'd normally get about a week, a week in between patrols, two weeks maybe. Depending on the need for information by the task force. A bit like a rugby team you know, you can only run as many blokes on the field as you've got up to it. And some blokes had prickly heat rashes, other guys would go on R&R, other guys'd be sick from other stuff, other guys'd be away on

03:00 secondment or attachment to other units. So picking your patrol and blokes always tried to stay in the same patrols. You didn't want to chop and change all the time. Because you then had to relearn everybody else's tactics. Every patrol was different, totally. For instance our patrol used to face in in the LUPs. LUPs are lining up places. Where ninety percent of control commanders face out in LUP's, so we faced in.

03:30 **Why did you do that?**

Well on long patrols it was always easier to keep concentration by looking at each other. At watching over each other's back. You know the arc – your arc of responsibility was directly behind the guy in front of you. And you're basically sitting in a circle with your feet nearly touching in the middle in the thick bush so it was a lot easier to stay on the ball. If you were facing the other way and had about three or four metres guys used to go to sleep and you used to throw rocks at them to wake them up

04:00 or tell them anything. This way you could spread a map out in the middle and have all sorts of briefing. Oh to each his own. I always faced in in my patrols later on when I was a patrol commander. Clem Dwyer was a great advocate of facing in. The blokes in Borneo used to face in in patrols. And I always thought it was a better way to do it.

How about the general signals that you could use out there?

Hand signals? Oh there was all sorts of signals.

04:30 Recce. Enemy was the big one. Smell, sound. Patrol commander or point to a – where the rank is normally – when you're wearing rank. Coms. LUP or that. Depending on – but everyone knew signals. There was no real dramas. Stop. Listen.

05:00 Direction of move. Foot track being used. Running water. One of our guys went up on an American recondo course in the north of South Vietnam. And he was the scout and he indicated to the Americans one of these. And everyone thought he was indicating running water, so they all drank their remaining water. And about three hundred metres later they're

05:30 all saying, "Where's the water?" and he said, "No no I was indicating a snake."

Well that's what I would think.

We never used that in our patrol. We had other signals. Every patrol had different signals. But they were generally – the same but a slight difference. Some blokes went like that LUP, other blokes went like that for LUP. Other guys went like that for a five minute smoke. Other guys

06:00 went like that for a stop. It just depended on who you were with. Most of us only ever worked with about max three different patrol commanders in twelve months. So you got pretty used to them. You tried to stay in the same patrol especially if it was a good patrol. A bad patrol you couldn't wait to get

out of them.

Could you actually excuse yourself from a particularly group of people that you didn't get along with?

No. You went and saw your boss and said,

06:30 "Look I'd like to go on another patrol if there's a vacancy." They'd try and accommodate you sometimes but – It happened to me, I spent five months in one patrol and went to my boss and said, "I can't handle any more of this," so I went to another patrol.

What was the problem with that particular patrol?

Oh he was the officer who never really knew much more than I did. And he was wheeling us around the bush. We got into more strife than ten people.

07:00 We had a lot of contacts with the enemy. And some of them were just – they weren't contacts we should have had.

So unnecessary?

I think a lot of – we blundered around the bush a fair bit with this bloke. He really didn't know what he was doing any more than I did. I was only twenty one, he was probably a year older. But I couldn't stand it any longer.

07:30 My nerves were on edge. I never enjoyed going out in the bush with this bloke. And when I left his patrol and went to another patrol it was fantastic. It was like a new lease of life. Felt safe, the whole bush experience was far better.

Did the other blokes in the patrol with the officer that you didn't like, did they feel the same way as yourself?

Yeah they did. There was a couple of blokes a bit more loyal than me. But

08:00 I stuck it out as long as I could. I was going to hell in the hand basket in this patrol and I just couldn't stand it any longer. But I went to another patrol and I spent the next seven months enjoying it. Enjoying it.

Well maybe if we could just rewind a little bit. I don't think we've asked you about the first patrol that you went out on?

The first patrol? The first patrol was a shake down patrol. By shake down I mean just getting

08:30 acclimatised and used to the bush and different scenarios and things. It was a four day patrol and we went in on last light by helicopter into a landing zone. Raced off into the bush and propped for the night. Heard nothing. Moved off next day and basically wandered around a six to eight grid square

09:00 AO – area of operations. Just wandered around it like that. Listening for shots, coming across tracks and foot pads, checking them out, finding nothing. It was designed for that. They didn't want to send people into areas of known enemy action on their first patrol. The patrol commanders had already been out on one patrol with the previous squadron as a handover. And it was just a matter of getting your feet under the desk basically. One of the patrols got into a big fight.

09:30 A big fight.

That was like their first time?

Very first patrol.

Gee, what happened?

Well it wasn't – it was pretty untidy. They lost no-one killed or wounded but, it wasn't very much fun for some of those guys. The previous squadron, 2 Squadron their very first patrol in once instance was the big tractor job where they blew a tractor up. I don't know whether you heard about that. But Frank Cashmore led a patrol in

10:00 and blew up a tractor and trailer full of enemy and killed about eighteen or twenty. That story attracted a big trailer of rice. That was their first patrol so they did very well. That galvanised that squadron together. They really hit their straps after that. That squadron saw a lot of action. Probably a lot more action than us. We saw a lot of action but I think 2 Squadron, they were there when the Tet Offensive was

10:30 happening in September, October 1968. The Tet Offensive was where the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese made the big push on Saigon. And came within that much of succeeding. So the place was awash with enemy during their tour. There was quite a lot of enemy during our tour but the tour after us, 1 Squadron, they'd faded away again. There was hardly anybody there. It was just the luck of the draw.

11:00 **So what was the first situation you came across where you had some contact?**

Crossing a track. Getting a signal saying enemy. Everyone props. Just crouching in the bush watching six or eight enemy walk past from here to there. Quite heart – we used to call it five cent ten cent. And that's what your little bum was doing. But you're really crapping yourself and you

11:30 generally are until the shooting starts. And then everything's calm. It's funny. The adrenaline would hurt so much you could feel it in the ends of your fingers and toes. And your brain is in shock. But once the shooting starts it's generally pretty good.

Do you think that's because it was some sort of a release?

Yeah I think so. And the training kicks in and you don't do too badly.

12:00 But yeah seeing the enemy the first time in black pyjamas was a bit scary. And we saw him a lot after that. We saw him a lot on tracks, off tracks, in camps, in creek lines, all over the place. And we sometimes had contacts and sometimes we didn't. Depending on whether it was a reccie patrol or a fighting patrol. Reccie patrol was when you tried to stay undiscovered.

12:30 But we did a couple of reccie patrols where we had to get ripped out through the trees on a hot extraction. I got the aerial out – it's documented in the book.

Perhaps you could tell us?

Phantoms of the Jungle, by David Horner. We were on a reccie patrol and the forward scout basically bumped into two Viet Cong carrying a pig on a stick

13:00 and shot them. And – quite stupidly. And that was it, we were off, we were racing – we always pulled back through each other and go because you've got to run, otherwise you die. And before we knew it we had thirty, fifty VC chasing us. But they were on tracks and we weren't, we were going down this hill into this creek line full of (UNCLEAR) and

13:30 rose type bushes, very prickly.

So you were getting ripped?

Yeah. Yeah. Got in the creek line and they're firing grenades and throwing RPG's [rocket propelled grenade] and we're trying to get up the other side and I got caught in all these vines and I couldn't get through. And the patrol commander came back and pulled me through. He saved my life basically. He ripped me through and we ran to the top of this hill – around this hill and it was one of those exhausting things where you know – nothing left.

14:00 And anyway we basically evaded them – we thought. And we finally got to a spot where we could lay out an aerial and I put the aerial out. And called in the choppers to pull us out. They sent in the light fire team. The light fire team was a two helicopter gun ships. And they come in and brass the place up. So we threw smoke indicating where we were – red smoke. And the smoke's drifting up through the trees.

14:30 And we're sitting in the smoke. And the gunships are brassing up each side of us – quite scary and all the expended shells are falling on our heads and god's knows what. And the next minute the slick ship, the pick up chopper was there and he's dropped ropes down through the trees. And we've hooked on. We wear – we carry a rope called a Linen Star swiss seat and you put it on – wrap it around you – with a karabina [spring hook] at the front.

15:00 They drop the ropes through the trees and – with a lead weight on it and you hook onto the loop and they just drag you out through the trees and away. And carry you a couple of thousand feet above the ground. It's called a hot extraction. But without that you wouldn't have got out. We lost one bloke missing in action doing the same thing. In that tour. He fell off the rope. Dave Fisher. He's still missing in action presumed

15:30 killed of course.

Doesn't it like when you're throwing smoke and you've got the gunships coming along, doesn't that make you a sitting duck?

Well it does but it also empowers you a bit. Charlie's there firing all sorts of stuff but he's got to keep his head down because they fire rockets and mini guns into the bush and one pass can cover a lot of ground. You're sitting ducks when you're dragged up through the trees too. You're expecting to get one up the arse any moment. And it

16:00 doesn't happen and you suddenly realise you're still alive. And you're getting dragged through – and you've put your seat on wrong and one of your testicles is on one side of the rope and you're just in agony. And you're trying to say to the door gunner, let us down let us down. So they drop you down on the fire stone trail and land beside you, pick up all the ropes, chuck them in and fly back to the Dat.

16:30 They dragged a Kiwi patrol back one day all the way back to Nui Dat and they miscalculated the approach into the pad. There's a band of barbed wire around the hill about twenty feet below the crest of the hill. And he dragged them in and the whole patrol got dragged through the barbed wire. It wasn't very good. So yeah it's either that or you die and we used hot extractions quite a lot.

And you're all hanging off the bottom of the helicopter?

All hanging off individual ropes, each man.

17:00 If it's a six man patrol they bring out six ropes. And they've got an RAD [rope activation device] inside the aeroplane. It's a device where all the ropes are hooked into a bar that goes along there. Controlled by the crewies and that sort of stuff. And they just throw the ropes down with a lead weight. And they hook onto it and away you go. And it's quite scary especially when Charlie's running everywhere shooting. But we never lost anybody shot like that, we lost one by fell off the rope.

17:30 In between two hundred and eight hundred feet. Supposedly or he could have been anywhere. Whether he fell into a bomb crater or whether he fell into jungle, they never found him. They sent a lot of people in looking for him.

You mentioned before the aerial that you laid it out, what do you mean lay it out, is it on the ground or is it up in the air?

On the ground wire. Yeah you just thread it through the bush. If your camp was that way the aerial had to be

18:00 ninety degrees to the camp. So the radiation from the aerial will go towards the camp. If you point the aerial at the camp the only radiation that's going to go is coming out the end, do you know what I mean.

Not really.

Ask one of those sigs. Ask Craig Brambley or somebody, they'll explain it.

Does it take a reasonable amount of time to do this?

No you take your aerial out, you get your compass

18:30 out, work out where camp is. If the camp's there the aerial's got to go out there. So someone covers you and you take it out in your teeth sort of thing, and thread it through the bush in a straight line and that's it, one wire about twenty five metres long and it's called a ground wire. And that was enough because it's HF. Anything bigger would bounce the signal straight over the top of the receiving station which was only fifteen to twenty k's away. So the smaller the wire

19:00 the less chance the signal bouncing over the top. So you're still getting sky wave but it was a weak sky wave and sometimes you were only getting – there are five levels of communication signal strength. One two three four and five. One you can barely hear it needless to say. Five is loud and clear. So you can imagine. Your signal strength with a ground wire put out very quickly like that would be about two's and three's. And that was the beauty of the signals back in the com cen. 'Cause they

19:30 could read it, they could hear it. And they'd activate the choppers to get out there and get you fairly quick smart. Based on your signal would be a code word saying contact, require hot extraction. Like cat, rat, mat just in clear. And they would have that in front of them and they would activate the choppers. The choppers are sitting on the pad down there with the crews in the waiting room. A bit like the Battle of Britain crews. You see them rush out to their

20:00 Spitfires, well it'd be like that. Or if they know you're in contact they have already activated them and they're waiting to be called in. And they'll be standing off to the side with a light fire team of two gunships. Heavy fire team which I never had the pleasure of using which was three or more gunships and that's a lot of fire power. Ironically they've just retired the gunships.

20:30 This month from the Defence Force. They were great, called bush rangers, that was their call sign. Bush ranger.

How often would the four be used?

Oh I never saw it used in an SAS patrol. But I suppose the battalions in big shoot ups would have needed heavy fire team. They just didn't have enough to go around. I think they had five or six, gunships

21:00 altogether. If there were three or four patrols deployed theoretically there could be three or four different patrols in contact with the enemy at any one time. So the resources get spread fairly thinly on the deck. One of our big shoot up patrols, there was another patrol across the border in Binh Tuy Province and he had a lot further to go to rearm and

21:30 refuel than us. So we're in contact, they're in contact, so they went to them first. But they used all their ammo on that patrol and had to fly all the way back to Nui Dat to rearm and refuel before they could come to us, it was quite scary. Calling for extraction and they said, just wait.

How long would it usually take before you called and it would come?

Well it depends on where you were in the province but sometimes you could actually

22:00 hear the choppers take off from Nui Dat. But generally if they've got the choppers on the ground and the communication centre is in direct contact with the operations centre down in the headquarters they could activate the choppers within five minutes of getting your signal. And be out with you within

fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. That's pretty good.

It's got to be a pretty tense time

22:30 **then sitting there waiting?**

Oh it's always very tense. The battalions had the fire power to stand and fight. We didn't have the fire power. Four to six man patrol can't carry enough fire power to convince anybody that, it's anything more than a four to six man patrol. That's why some of the guys cut the big flash hider off the barrels of their rifles and made them into a weapon called the bitch. The bitch was an automatic SLR which was built by one of the armourers and it used to fire, used to sound

23:00 like a fifty calibre machine gun. Used to fire very slowly. It was automatic and used to go boom boom boom. But it used to shoot flames out this – and it was great because the enemy used to think they'd hit a heavy weapon's company or something not a small patrol which would give you a bit of breathing space. Without that they'd be right up your clacker. We did a fair bit of time running through the bush only to live to fight another day, all that sort of stuff. So that

23:30 was the nature of our work in Vietnam.

Did you ever have any close calls where you thought that you weren't going to survive?

Oh yeah. Numerous times. That one caught up in the vines I thought we were all gone there. Another one was with Clem Dwyer towards the end of the trip we had a couple of reinforcements in the patrol. We had a six man patrol. Two very good soldiers. Vadeslau Kasmanick and Barry Lansdown had just joined the patrol. And

24:00 we'd swanned around for a couple of days and we'd seen nothing and we thought, "This is great this is the last patrol," and we were going home – this was on a Wednesday night, Wednesday afternoon. We were leaving the country on Friday. We were still out in the bush on Wednesday. We were sitting in the bush eating spaghetti and meatballs, rations and you can imagine what they smelt like over a little cooker. Beautiful. And we hear this

24:30 digging and banging on the ground and we got into position where we could use some binoculars and out on the landing zone, a fairly big landing zone there were Viet Cong and women digging yams and things. So they were doing it pretty hard. But they must've smelt our food. Anyway they faded off into the J and we never heard anymore about them for about half an hour, an hour. And then

25:00 we were all facing in, we were only about fifty metres into the jungle from the edge of the landing zone. And the bloke sitting on this side looked and he saw a line of about ten Viet Cong coming through the bush rifles up like this. They knew where we were and they were coming to knock us over. So Clem Dwyer in his inimitable style quickly briefed everybody. "Righto this is what's going to happen. You lead out, out in the middle of the landing zone.

25:30 I'll stop them." Clem had a big automatic SLR with thirty round magazines. And a couple of grenades. And he stood behind a tree and we went and he got stuck into it with the SLR and fired twenty round burst and threw a couple of grenades and in the meantime we bolted out into the middle of this huge landing zone, as big as about four football fields I suppose. And there was a clump of bushes on a sort of hill.

26:00 We basically went to ground there. And then Clem came running out of the bush and there was an RPD – Russian light machine gun called an RPD – opened up on one of the flanks and there's dirt flying up all over the place around him as he's running. And he fell down and I thought, "Oh no he's gone. We're finished here." Anyway he got up and started running again, he was right. I got a coms there too. I put out an aerial and got coms

26:30 and we thought no more about it. We were fighting. There was a lot of fire coming from where we'd been and a lot of fire coming from the left flank. And we were worried about the other side, we didn't have enough guys to cover everything. Anyway we got a word, we're on the UHF radio at that stage and we got the word, "Throw smoke now." So we had these little tiny smoke poppers, you screw the top off and you strike it like a match and throw it.

27:00 And it burns very fiercely and just red smoke, green smoke whatever. And we were still shooting away just to suppress the bush. And a bush fire started, a grass fire. But the wind was blowing the other way thank God. But before we knew it there was a helicopter landing in the middle of the smoke right behind us. Unbelievable, twenty metres away. He just brought it straight in and landed. And

27:30 we couldn't believe it, our luck and we were away, he pulled us out – a brilliant bit of work. I think Squadron Leader Grimmons I think he was flying it, he won a Distinguished Flying Cross. I'm not sure whether it was for that one but it was for one of them. But they'd run out of gunships and we were up about three thousand feet and all of a sudden there's these dive bombers, American dive bombers dropping bombs smack where we were eating our food

28:00 about half an hour before. OV10 Broncos they were. They called them up from Saigon. They had no gunships left at Nui Dat so they called the air force in from Saigon and there they were on the job. Very scary.

Why did they run out of gunships?

Oh other patrols. Other patrols, other tasks. Rearming. Refuelling. Just not enough. We were very strapped with gear. The Americans had unlimited resources, we just didn't.

28:30 That's just the way it was.

Would the pilots and gunships be Australian?

Yeah they're Australians yeah. The initial gunships, sorry the gunships that were used by our first two squadrons up there, 3 Squadron and 1 Squadron, the first three squadrons, 3, 1 and 2, were American gunships and they were there when we first arrived too but our own gunships had just been built. They were UH1D's

29:00 with mini guns and door guns and God know what. And they became the bush rangers. Zero 1, Zero 2, Zero 3 and Zero 4. I think we only had four of them. But whenever they were short of gunships and they needed heavy fire teams they'd call on the Americans. The Americans come in with the snake eyes or the rattle snakies or whatever call signs they had at the time. They'd come in and be armed to the teeth and give you fire support and fly away again. But it was

29:30 always good to have our gunships around. We trusted them. The Americans'd come and do a pass over the top but way off target. They'd be quite ineffective. But our blokes used to come in very close, as close as possible.

So do you think they were better pilots the Australians?

I think so. Not better pilots just a bit more – a little bit more into what their job was. The Yanks, oh supporting Australians? No, no war going on down here.

30:00 But I never got to – I saw one American gunship in the whole time, the rest of them were Australians I think. Yeah so we got pulled out back to the Dat and contact patrols, you were met on the pad at Nui Dat. The pad was called Nadzab after the big parachute drop zone during World War II up in New Guinea, where the American and Australian artillery jumped into

30:30 was called Nadzab. So we named our helicopter pad up at Nui Dat Nadzab. And they meet you on Nadzab with a carton of beer or bottle of champagne depending on how bad it was. People clapping each other on the back and you'd clear the weapons into the test fire pit and go down and rip all your manky clothes off. And then you'd be – you'd have to have a scrub up.

31:00 Have a feed, have a debrief and then you could get on the grog. Each patrol had a carton of beer or a couple of cartons of beer. But you were then entitled to thirty six hours down in Vung Tau, rest and convalescence, R&C [rest in country]. So you'd jump on a truck or a chopper the next day and head off down to Vungers for a couple of days of mayhem. Which was always good and we did quite a few of those, quite a few. On the

31:30 grounds that you'd had quite a few contacts. If you didn't have a contact you just came back and unloaded your gear and got ready for being issued a warning order again in a couple of days.

So do you actually want to have a contact or not?

Well no. Well yeah.

'Cause you get a holiday.

You do, you do but I suppose we were – boys used to say they were full of piss and bad manners. But it's not aggrogance it's just confidence.

32:00 A lot of patrols were very confident and very gung-ho and wanted to take the fight up to the enemy all the time. And those guys sure, yeah, bugger going out in the bush and not seeing anything. We'd rather see something. And they'd get a big shoot up or they'd capture a lot of documents or weapons or a prisoner or whatever the job was. And they'd be pretty cockahoop you know. So going down to Vung Tau with your mates is always a fun thing. Vung Tau was just a local –

32:30 Cape St Jacques, the French resort down on the coast. Didn't look much like a resort when we were there. She was a bit of a cesspit but you could see it used to be nice once upon a time.

How many people were living there at the time?

In Vung Tau, oh it was a medium sized city. It was a Bunbury sized city. There'd be hundreds of thousands of them. No it was very well populated.

33:00 Saigon was a pretty big city. That wasn't very far away actually, it was only about forty miles away. From Vung Tau.

Did you have any favourite places in Vung Tau?

No well they're all knock shops and God knows what else. The thirty six bar or thirty seven bar was a barber shop but you couldn't get a hair cut there. The Grand Hotel, the battalions used to go to the Grand Hotel. We never went there very much.

33:30 The Tokyo Bar. There were quite a lot of bars that blokes used to wander around in. But the place was just full of Americans and full of Americans and Australians with money. And the MP's [military police] used to wander around in a jeep. An American, a Kiwi and an Aussie MP's there to knock anyone over the heads that they needed to quieten down sort of thing. But in the main you just drank and you bought Saigon tea for the girls. Saigon tea was

34:00 five dollars a glass and it was crème de menthe cordial but it meant they sat with you and talked to you. And a bit of the other if they were into that. But it was just a bit of fun and then the Badcoe Club was on the base, the Australian air force base or 1ALSG – Australian Logistic Support Group. They built a club called the Badcoe Club after Peter Badcoe, the Victoria

34:30 Cross winner. He was killed in action up there. And the Badcoe Club had a big swimming pool. It had accommodation. It had a good boozer, big sized canteen thing with balconies and everything. That's all gone now of course but it was a good spot to be. The scariest thing that ever happened to me in Vietnam was laying in one of the accommodation rooms at the Badcoe Club right on the beach in Vung Tau.

35:00 And being woken about three o'clock in the morning by the ground moving. Rumbling. And everyone fell out of bed and outside and we worked out it was an arc light mission. A V52 strike on the Long Hai Mountains about ten mile away. It was shaking the ground. And planes were dropping from about thirty thousand feet. But the noise and the rumbling was just unbelievable.

35:30 Those huge bombs slamming into this mountain. There would have been a lot of VC killed there. Yeah. No that was Vung Tau. But you kept away from the place fairly well. They had a sign on one of the – outside the pay office there. All weapons are to be cleared into this drum. They had a forty four gallon drum buried in the ground full of sand. And to clear a weapon you're supposed to take the magazine off, cock it and remove the round.

36:00 Let it go forward. Safety catch off, fire the action, safety catch on and put your mag back on, so it's rendered safe. One of the guys in one of the other squadrons saw this sign and thought, "Oh," so he fired the twenty round burst into the drum outside the pay office. Needless to say the poor old pogoes [person not involved in combat], they called them pogoes down in Vung Tau were running a mile. They weren't used to that sort of stuff. I think he was donged pretty heavily over that.

36:30 **Scaring the pogoes.**

Poor old Pogoes.

How did the Americans view the SAS?

The only people we had anything to do with were the American Special Forces and one of the other squadrons, the Seal [Sea Air Land] teams down in the delta. We weren't very pleased with the Americans Special Forces. They came to Nui Dat or Phuoc Tuy Province once. To do some training with us and then conduct a patrol in our province.

37:00 And they were there for a week Didn't have much to do with them. In the build up they camped separately to us. They ate separately. They were briefed separately and they had a specific job to do. They went out in the bush for about five days and at the end of the patrol the Viet Cong caught them on their last EDP [emergency defence plan] and killed two of them and wounded three. Sitting there with their thumbs up their bums

37:30 not paying attention and they got caught. So we weren't very happy, we'd never lost anybody at that stage. Certainly not in the dangerous place of an extraction landing zone. Now that's a seriously dangerous place to be switched off. That's where you've really got to be on the pill. So we weren't very happy with the US Special forces, but some of our blokes went up to Cuang Tri and a few other places. Danang and Nha Trang

38:00 wherever the special forces troops were working and did recondo [reconnaissance commando] courses with them and topped the courses. Which showed the Americans how to do the job basically. But West Maulin, General West Maulin started off his LRRP's – long range reconnaissance patrols after having seen the SAS at work. He wanted patrols that worked like SAS. And we just didn't have much else to do with them. We know the Americans were quite

38:30 impressed with the way we conducted ourselves. Basically our body count. We didn't lose anybody. One bloke shot accidentally and one bloke missing in action from a chopper, it's not a bad record for the whole time in Vietnam. Yet other guys – we shot two guys ourselves. Accidentally. Not our squadron, another squadron. And one bloke blew himself up with a grenade

39:00 accidentally. But all in all we lost nobody. We had control. And that was the big difference. We had control of our province. Charlie just decided to go elsewhere after – after they had their noses bloodied by the Australians every time they went to the bush. VC's decided bugger this, leave them out. The Australians have control of that province and we knew it and they knew it. And Long Tan was a very bloody nose, then '68 with the Tet Offensive.

39:30 There was a lot going on there. They got a very bloody nose again. And every time our patrols hit them

they hit them big time. And I think the body count was over five hundred and fifty Viet Cong to only one of ours. So no bad, not bad ratio. From a soldier's point of view we felt good being in command. Because we did what they did, we melted into the bush. We never used shaving cream. We smoked only because they did.

40:00 They smoked Kool cigarettes. You remember Kool? They were heavily into menthol cigarettes. We never listened to radios in the bush, we never switched of, we never took our gear off. You didn't, you wanted to go to the toilet, number two or something – you still have your webbing on and you just have it hanging from your shoulders. And your rifle in your hand. And there's a couple of incidents where guys have actually fired while they've been out having a crap. And dropped a couple of enemy.

40:30 Needless to say, they're ribbed for the rest of their life about, I never finished up sort of thing. But it was a classic case of knowing your enemy and knowing how to operate in the field. We really knew how to operate in that province. If we had've been in big mountains or down in delta it would've been different kettle of fish of course. And there are many commentators over the years and some ex

41:00 commanding officers of SAS who were on the record as saying, "We were used incorrectly in Vietnam." Well I don't think we were. I think we were used correctly for the time. The time that we were given. There was no point in sending SAS up to the demilitarised zone in northern part of South Vietnam, just to prove we can get killed as easy as the Americans. What's the point of that? The Americans Special Forces used to build A camps. A big camp on top of the hill. Denude the hill and

41:30 build this fortification. Exactly like the French used to do in 1953. And we all know what happened to the French. The French got their arse kicked big time. Americans didn't learn anything from the French experience. And I'd like to think we did.

Tape 6

00:33 **How popular were the girls on R&C in Vung Tau?**

Oh pretty popular no two ways about that. They were pretty cute little chicks. They were all hookers of course. And no two ways about that. But they didn't shy away from the fact that servicemen were their meal ticket and most of them had kids anyway. Except the real young ones. And the young ones looked about twelve.

01:00 They were probably about fifteen. But the boys used to get dragged back to their houses or whatever, but it was mainly Saigon tea stuff. I never bought any Saigon tea for any of the sheilas because it was hugely expensive and a waste of money. And I didn't need to speak to them that much. The Americans used to fork out money. But the most stupid thing I ever did in Vietnam was go to a sauna, sitting in a room where the

01:30 door was closed and then they started to fill it full of steam. And I'm sitting there absolutely cacking myself, thinking, "Have we done the wrong thing here? We're going to get murdered here." And it was just on R&C. The other stupid thing I did was bought a ring off an Indian jeweller in Vung Tau. He wanted a hundred dollars US for it and I beat him down, beat him down to ten dollars US. And I thought, "You beauty I got this ring." And I got back to Australia and took it to a

02:00 - I thought it was a nice emerald. I took it to a jeweller and the jeweller said it was worth about twenty cents. Cut pro nickel crap bloody setting and a piece of plastic and stuff you know. So the Americans wouldn't have beaten him down though, the Americans would have paid a hundred. So I thought I was pretty smart beating him down to ten. Still feel pretty bad about that actually. Not as bad as the bloke, a couple of years ago in Hong Kong who bought

02:30 a video player off a reputable dealer. And got home to Australia and he couldn't get it to work. Anyway he took it into a dealer and they opened up the back and there was two house bricks taped into the back of this thing, there was no working parts whatsoever. So you wouldn't – I didn't feel as silly as that.

No I don't think you'd had the wool pulled that seriously over your eyes?

Yeah. Oh no we were just babes from the woods.

What was the general attitude towards fraternising with the girls in Vung Tau?

Oh

03:00 no problem. They were just thieves and vagabonds. You had to watch your wallet no two ways about that. The blokes were there for one thing and that was it, well two things, drinking was one of them. There was a fair bit of that going on. And you just had to be careful. The girls – you kept away from the girls at the Grand Hotel because they were known to be unclean. But they were the most beautiful. They were the French – the Eurasian French Vietnamese

03:30 and they were just stunners. But you couldn't go near them with a barge pole.

It's an interesting combination that Eurasian combination.

Oh it's just extraordinary.

While we're on the subject of these unclean women was venereal disease a major concern?

Yeah fairly was. None of our blokes ended up with it. I know a lot of the battalion blokes – there was a fair bit of VD [venereal disease] running around. But they used to

04:00 dope them up with penicillin fairly heavily and fix it but there was none of the nasties. The black jack and all those things, syphilitic ones, none of that stuff. I never heard or saw any of that stuff. But apparently there was some of that about. But no the blokes kept to themselves. I think most of our blokes stayed away from it. You were in Vung Tau to be on the grog with your mates you know. Your mates you'd just had a shoot up with you know. Who just saved your arse and you

04:30 weren't really that concerned about the women. And that was it. And a couple of days, thirty six hours and that was it. And we used to hot bed the bunks of the 9th Squadron crew. They'd be out working and you'd be in their bed or they'd be back and you'd have hot meals at the air force base and it was fantastic. Most of the SAS patrols went down to Vung Tau and stayed with the 9th Squadron at the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base. We didn't stay at the

05:00 R&C centre. There were too many rules. Bloody rules.

Like what?

You couldn't bat an eyelid. They had these pouncy PTIs [physical training instructors], these artillery PTI sergeants pouncing around the swimming pool in their starched shorts and their bronzed tans. And the boys had just come out of the bush and the last thing you wanted was to have some jumped up pounce who wouldn't know the arse end of a Viet Cong if you put it in front of him.

05:30 Having him basically be a Nazi, can't do this, can't do that, forty seven other things. But the Kiwis they were our PRVs, our press release valves. The old Kiwis, the big Maori boys. They'd go off their heads in the boozer and smash the place up. And they'd sit back and just make notes, sit back and make notes about what they'd broken and basically

06:00 wouldn't let them out of the boozer until they'd pay the bill. Big Sam Petty, a huge New Zealand SAS guy. Sam and I were good friends actually. I picked up some lingerie for him, for his girlfriend in Hong Kong when I went there on R&R and I was his mate for life after that. But old Sam died a couple of years ago. He was a big prison guard after the Vietnam War. But Sam was a black belt in karate. He was a fiend. And he proceeded one Sunday there to smash all the furniture

06:30 up in the Badcoe Club. Smash it all. All the wooden furniture. So they just stood up on the balcony writing it all down. Two tables, five chairs. And basically hit him with the bill before they'd let him leave.

How would you blokes react when you'd see him smashing up the furniture?

Oh just let him go for it. The pressure's off us not that we were going to smash any furniture up. Oh no we get on pretty well with the Kiwis. We just blued a bit that's all. That goes back to our ancestors

07:00 in the Boer War. The Australians and the Kiwis anywhere together is a volatile mix. On a rugby field, a netball court, a battle field, they'll always fight each other first, bugger the enemy.

Why do you think that is?

Don't know what it is. The Kiwis have got a huge chip on their shoulder. We've always said that. We always called them South Sea Poms because the way they operated in Borneo. The way they –

07:30 their raison d'être their whole reason for being was a little bit skewed, they weren't the laconic knockabout Aussies that we knew and loved here. They took a bit seriously and we didn't like the taking the serious bit. When they got to Vietnam, there were a lot of seasoned veterans from Borneo, the old Kiwi SAS. There was only twenty five them and we were a squadron full of twenty year old louts. Absolutely tearaway louts who couldn't give a stuff about anything.

08:00 And that's just what our squadrons were. They were good soldiers in the bush no problem but out of the bush, drinking and carrying on. And every night in the boozer the Kiwis'd be trying to play guitars and the boys'd be yelling and carrying on. And they'd smash guitars over your heads and it just, they wanted everyone to listen to them sing. And we didn't give a shit about hearing them sing.

They couldn't sing for shit eh?

Oh no they were good but you heard Band of Men.

08:30 I have a Band of Men. It's called 'Ten Guitars'. You heard it five hundred times, you get a little bit sick and tired of it. I'd loved to have heard some more traditional Kiwi stuff, in Maori, the Maori language itself. But no you had all these half jumped up bloody cowboy songs they used to sing. And they couldn't understand it when the lout SAS boys didn't give a stuff and kept on drinking and yelling and carrying on. Anyway it was just our squadron.

What did

09:00 **you drink when you were in...**

Beer, that's it. VB.

Didn't get on the hard liquor?

Oh well yeah, not much though. You could buy a forty ounce bottle of Bundy [Bundaberg Rum] – not Bundy, Bacardi, forty ounce Bacardi of Smirnoff Vodka and a forty ounce bottle of Scotch for a dollar sixty at the bar in Nui Dat. A dollar sixty and that was it.

09:30 And a beer would cost – a beer only cost fifteen cents. No I can't remember how much a beer cost but you could go to the boozer with a couple of dollars and get fairly full actually. And you'd have a five cent night of course. Where everything was five cents. And we had military payment certificates, you couldn't use money. You had to buy MPC and you'd get paid in MPC, military payment certificates.

10:00 It was an American system, they instituted it after World War II in occupied countries. Where the local money is no good so they introduce a system of paying for everything through these MPC's. So you'd pay labourers, workers all in this – called a script. You know notes but notes right down to one cent notes. Everything. No coinage at all. But the beauty of it was that they

10:30 could change the colour of it at a drop of a hat so the people who used to hoard it all, some people used to hoard it and the black market and all that stuff – overnight, bang it'd be worthless. Couldn't trade it in. And that's what we used. You got paid in MPC and we weren't being paid much in those days. You were only getting about three thousand bucks a year, that's tax free. So beer was fifteen cents a can and a five cents night you were absolutely blotto for about eighty cents of course.

11:00 And you went to the movies, we had a movie theatre there which we built ourselves. Not me, us but a previous squadron, called Locker's Opera House. There's a good photograph in my book of that. And you'd – well a typical day, you'd knock off work, go have a shower. This is back in Nui Dat on the hill. You'd go to tea. You'd go off to the boozer, you have two cans of beer just to wash the dust out of your throat.

11:30 And you're in a flying suit at this stage. Everyone used to wear flying suits after hours. And your guns are in the rack back in the lines so you didn't have to carry weapons or anything around the place. If you left the hill you would, you always carried a weapon. So you'd go down to tea, have a meal and back up to the boozer. Have two or three more beers. Go down to the lines and get your ammo tin. Everyone had a big fifty cal [calibre] ammo tin which you'd fit eight cans of beer in perfectly

12:00 with a handful of ice. We used to get ice delivered every day by the ice man. The ice man cometh. And he always came to the hill first because we used to treat him like a king. We gave him grog and you know we treated him like a king because he had the ice. Came from the ice works down in Vung Tau down in Baria. And he'd have a eight tonne dump truck full of ice. And he'd go up the hill and drop a couple of big blocks on the doorstep

12:30 and we'd throw it into the big freezer things we had there and we had cold beer every day. But without him we'd be a little bit stuffed. So you'd have two before tea, three after tea and then get eight for the movies. Stick them in your can with a handful of ice nice and cold. And your plastic chair, Vietnamese chair and you'd wander down to the movies and put your chair there and, they – the sigs were always responsible to run the movies. The signal

13:00 troop blokes. The movie theatre was on one side of the road and the screen was on the other side of the road so you'd get vehicles driving past. It was quite weird actually especially in the dust. But it was also funny when it was absolutely pissing down with rain. It was only a big shed, roof with tiered, the tiering was made out of PSP, perforated steel plate, they used to make airfields out of during World War II. And you'd

13:30 fit about fifty blokes in there, a hundred blokes maybe. If the whole squadron went to the movies then it'd be pretty packed. And the sigs'd run the movies and they'd start off with a reel but irrevably they've been drinking too so they'd put reel two on instead of reel three or – and it was just a chaos situation. But we all saw the first run movies and we saw American NFL [National Football League] football every week. Which used to come up from something by reel. It was fantastic. We'd learn a lot

14:00 about the American football.

So you got into that did you?

Yeah yeah. And the Greenbay Packers and the Minnesota Vikings and the Jets, everyone had their teams and stuff. But it was good, very good coverage. But when the sigs'd put the movies on incorrectly they'd be pelted with beer cans. But that was their job, they had to run the movies.

Do you remember any of the movies that you would've seen?

I remember Robert Helpmann's Red Shoes. To this day I cannot believe

14:30 that they sent that movie up there. About a ballet dancer. But yeah, 2001 Space Odyssey. I'd seen it

before, I'd seen it about six times up till that stage. It came out about 1967 I think, 2001. '68. My favourite movie to this day. And we saw that in its entirety. It was fantastic. I think there were four reels or something. A four reeler meant

15:00 you had to take at least eight cans to the movies. But the movies were great and that's the only entertainment we had.

And you guys sure you weren't smoking dope?

No. Oh there was dope there up on the hill. There was a bloody signal squadron troop up there, 110 Signal Squadron who a couple of idiots amongst them had dope. And a couple of blokes, well one bloke in our squadron and a couple of blokes in a subsequent squadron used to get dope off them but it

15:30 was only ever marijuana. I never ever saw anyone smoking dope. Certainly no hard stuff. But the Americans and their heroin, that was all a concerted plan by the Viet Cong. Inserted tonnes of heroin into Vietnam to be given away to American servicemen. And it's the perfect way to undermine a war effort is to make the soldiers incapable of fighting. And all the black American troops went for it like hell.

16:00 And all of a sudden you had all this bloody, this heroin, this high grade heroin floating around for very little. A lot of people made a lot of money out of it. And a lot of people became drug addicts and worse. It was a terrible shame. But that was the Viet Cong ploy, that was part of their game.

Did you see Americans under the influence of those drugs?

No, no. We didn't see the Americans. We lived in a sort of an enclave.

You didn't see them in Vung Tau?

Yeah

16:30 you did but they were just drunk. You could tell who was drunk or who's on a bit of, you know, who's been smoking weed. You could smell it sometimes in bars and things. But it wasn't that big a problem. Not around our people. When I went on R&R to Hong Kong and I know that there were six huge American black guys get pulled up by the Hong Kong police and given a real once over. They stripped them right down, the whole bit. Cavity searches

17:00 the lot. Because they were convinced they were bringing drugs into the country. I saw all those guys later so they obviously never got done. I saw them later because they all brought iridescent suits off the tailors. Green and orange iridescent suits. And they're trucking around Hong Kong, you know these big guys, six foot ten, huge they were. These orange suits, I couldn't believe it. But no we didn't have much to do with the Yanks at all. I must've spoken to

17:30 three Americans in twelve months in Vietnam. Just the way it was. Don't forget I was a fairly lowly digger. I was only a baggy arse who didn't know much about much. And we kept our head down fairly well and just concentrated on what we were doing. You know a lot of our officers and a lot of the guys that went on secondments to the American units would've had a lot more to do with the Americans than I did. I know the boys were pretty impressed with the Seals down in the delta. Phnom Penh and

18:00 those places. They went out on operations with the Seals and saw quite a lot of action. And they were pretty impressed with them. But apart from that no I hadn't much experience at all.

What were your exploits in Hong Kong?

Oh Hong Kong's an interesting one actually. I put myself down as an E6. An E6 is a fairly high ranking sergeant. But they couldn't tell from our uniforms. I had parachute wings here and

18:30 that was it. And they couldn't really tell whether I was an E6 or not. Anyway there was a couple of guys from battalion – you'd be sitting in this huge hall. You fly by Pan Am 707 to Hong Kong. As a plane load and you got off the plane and into another big hall where you were briefed on hotels. The first hotel to be offered is the Grand Chancellor or whatever the name of the thing was.

19:00 Which was a seriously moneyed hotel. But it was only open to one star generals and above. There was a couple of those on the plane so they went off to that hotel. The next three hotels were open to people of lieutenant colonel up to brigadier rank. And all those people'd stand up and go out. The next hotels were officers from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel. And all the rest of the officers in the room'd leave, and go

19:30 to their hotels. And then there'd be called E8. E8 is the top kick, three up three down sergeant major American. And a couple of them'd get up and leave. And I'm thinking, "I'm leaving as a baggy arse E1 or something." So E7's they got going. And they called out for E6's and I stood up. And walked out with the rest of these Americans. And these Australian blokes in the battalion are going, "He's not an E6! He's a baggy arse like us," and all this

20:00 sort of stuff. But it was too late. I got on the bus and I got the Park Hotel which was a nice place. But I wasn't going to leave it to chance, I didn't want – plus I didn't want to hook up with those guys. No it was pretty good. I picked up – well I had a chick who had an MGB [car]. I was there for five days and

she was my girl for five days. And it cost me four hundred US for her for four days. A lot of money in 1969.

20:30 I took six hundred and fifty dollars to Hong Kong and I came home with nothing. I hid twenty dollars in my hotel room and I couldn't find it. To this day. I got back to Camp Alfa in Saigon where everyone transits through. I had enough for a cup of coffee, that was it. And I flew back to the Dat [Nui Dat]. And I don't regret a moment of it. I bought a lot of tapes. We were all heavily into reel to reel in those days. I had an M9 and all that sort of stuff.

21:00 Akai M9. Which was absolutely the crème de la crème of reel to reels. I wish I still had it actually but I haven't. And it was a ripper. And there's the speakers from them. Still sitting them. I bought those in Vung Tau. They're thirty four years old, they're older than you.

Yeah just. So what sort of arrangement did you

21:30 **strike up with this girl that you met?**

Oh I just said, "Look I don't want to spend my time rushing around here looking for girls. You look after me for the whole time and I'll pay you." So she did. It was great.

Did you get a guided tour?

Right up the new territories. The new territories in those days was just a big cyclone fence. Nowadays there's a city there. On the other side of the border in China.

22:00 Oh yeah we did everything. She took me – the most – I went to the pictures in Hong Kong and saw the movie Death in the Pacific – no – Hell in the Pacific. Lee Marvin and Tosero Mafuni. That's a two handed done by – these two guys are shot down on this island. One's an American and one's a Jap and it's an absolutely sensational movie. If you ever get a chance to see it it's just amazing. I saw that in a Hong Kong movie theatre. Everyone in the theatre was smoking except

22:30 me. And there were people cooking food in there. But Hong Kong was an amazing place in those days. It was just full of servicemen and there were ships everywhere in the harbour and there were Brits and there were – and the economy of the place was just booming because of it. Everyone came there with an armload of money with no intention of taking anything home. And that's what it was, you had an R&R.

What was the atmosphere like?

Yeah good. You felt very

23:00 safe. You felt very welcome mainly because you had money, your pockets were bulging with money. The tailors drove everyone mad up and down the thing, trying to make suits. A friend of mine in our squadron bought half a dozen suits off a Hong Kong tailor – beautiful, you know the shiny cotton – you wouldn't wear them today but in those days they were pretty sharp. And he came back

23:30 and he had them in his locker in the tent up on the hill. Anyway we got mortared, we got rocketed one Saturday afternoon. A 107 millimetre rocket hit, hit the bamboo directly above their tent. And Jock Lorimar was sitting, writing a letter and bang – he wore a big piece of shrapnel through the chest, another piece through the seat, just between his legs. Lucky just missed him by that much. But he was badly wounded. It tore

24:00 a big hole in him. He ended up getting casavaced [emergency evacuation from combat area for medical treatment] home. But a piece of shrapnel about that big went through the top end of one of the lockers and out the other end of the locker. And straight through every suit, all six suits got shredded.

Makes you wonder whether or not the tailor has something to do with that mortar attack.

But it was an amazing place. It was just set up for taking money off tourists. I went

24:30 over to Hong Kong Island, I ate a lot of local food. Just wandered around. Marvelled at skyscrapers being built with bamboo scaffolding. All the scaffolding was bamboo for God's sake. And all these people shinning up and down like monkeys. It was amazing. And I went to Hong Kong back in the late '90's and the new airport's a bit different to the old Kai Tak where they used to aim between the buildings. And as you fly in you look out a window.

25:00 And there are people in buildings right there at the end of the wing span just about. Oh they just built the place out so much that that airport had to go. Now they've got this enormous thing out at – way to blazes out on the Peninsula. And a beautiful bullock train to service the city.

So did you feel much more at ease when you left country?

When I left Hong Kong?

When you left Vietnam?

When I left Vietnam? No I never

25:30 felt – I never ever felt uneasy about being there. The only time I ever felt uneasy was in Vung Tau in the

day time. You just never – if people used to look sideway at you you'd think, "Is it Charlie? And he's got a bomb in that bicycle." There were no suicide bombers in those days so any neglected bicycle leaning against a wall was moved on. And they found a lot of bombs in bikes. The whole tubing was full of plastic explosives.

26:00 But they weren't going to kill themselves to do it. So I felt pretty safe. We basically commanded the place. You know we never felt like the blokes in Iraq right now. It's a vastly different kettle of fish there. They're in danger every moment of the day. You can never contemplate how the hell you'd combat someone with a car bomb who's willing to kill himself. We never ever trained for that. Ever ever

26:30 trained for that.

How would you I wonder?

You can't. All our counter terrorist training later on in the SAS, the whole lot out the window because you never ever trained for someone that's willing to die. You always presume you're going to capture him or he'll surrender.

Well sort of removes the air of suspicion if the person's willing to commit suicide in the attack doesn't it? 'Cause the circumstances are going to look less suspicious if they're there.

27:00 **Just getting back to the boozer back at the Dat, you guys were what drinking half a carton a day. How out of control did you get?**

Oh everyone was a bit pissy at the end of the night, no two ways about that.

Any sort of antics you recall?

Oh drinking in the movie theatre and having, just drinking on. Somebody had more grog or something so we were up there at midnight drinking.

27:30 And the duty officer's coming down the road with a big torch. So we've run off in the bush like schoolgirls and I've dived into this big pile of bush I thought was a beautiful comfortable piece of bush. And all it was a triple concertina of barbed wire covered in vines. So I was hung up in these damn things, cut to ribbons. Absolutely chewed up. But anyway the duty officer came and couldn't find us. And the boys extracted me after about half an

28:00 hour and took me up to the RAP where Kev Logan was woken up with, "Hey Kev! Get the Mercurochrome out." And I was – my back was cut to ribbons. I haven't got a scar to this day. But oh God. But no way in the world I would have done that if I hadn't been drunk. But you were benign drunk. There were a couple of blokes who were a bit out of order who tried to do stupid things on the grog. Going and getting their guns and stuff. If you remember we were in armed

28:30 camp, everyone was armed to the teeth.

Were there many of those incidents?

No not really, not in our squadron. The lid was kept on it a bit. Though I must admit someone said one day, "This squadron is going to explode." And there was a real problem between ranks. The diggers seeming themselves as being treated less than they should've been treated by some people. Some people would get

29:00 guns and nothing like, down at the one of the battalions, 9 Battalion, where a digger dropped a grenade onto a bloke's bed when he was sleeping and blew him to bits. And another guy down at the Service Corps mob walked into the sergeant's mess and just opened up at a guy standing against the bar. And shot about six of them. Killed one and shot five. And ran back to his hutchie and blew the cordite out of the

29:30 barrel and put his rifle back in the rack and jumped into bed and pulled the sheets over his head. There was none of that went on in our squadron. I think our blokes were a little bit more disciplined than that but there were a couple of times where things could've gone right off the rails. Just that close. And some of our leaders need to look back and think, "Hang on if I'd have done that a bit differently it mightn't have been as dramatic as it was." But there were close calls, there were a couple of close incidents.

30:00 I won't mention really what they were but there were a couple of times where people were actually going to blow people up. People were actually going to shoot people, were talked out of it. That sort of stuff.

Is that while you were in the bush or while you were at the Dat?

In the bush and at the Dat. Those sort of things happen. They shouldn't have happened but they only happen because of incompetence of people. Yeah there are are couple of incidents

30:30 that I don't want to really talk about.

So eventually the booze was restricted to two cans a day.

Yeah, two cans a day, perhaps. It didn't make much sense. The order came from the brigadier down the bottom. Everything was under control up in our lines. There

31:00 didn't need to be this heavy handed crap. This Nazi sort of imposition of rules. You know we were doing the job. We were stacking them up like cord wood, what else did they want us to do. We needed some release, we needed to come back to the Dat and have a good drink. But some of the other squadrons had a worse time with that sort of stuff than we did. We smuggled grog in. The chopper'd land on Nadzab and the boys'd scurry off into the bush with half a dozen

31:30 cartons of Courage, which was another awful drink that was sent up from Australia. By the time the 2IC got to the chopper pad the chopper was taking off and there was no sign of anybody. "What's going on? Why were they here?" "Oh it just happened," you know you get around it. We – there was one thing I will admit and it doesn't have to be off the record is that, we relieved the beer supply company down in – at the Dat down at headquarters

32:00 of a whole pallet of VB one day. Went down with a truck, we paid for a pallet and the bloke said, "Oh quick, I'm very busy, you blokes. Can you blokes drive that fork?" And one bloke said, "Yeah we'll drive the fork." So we put two pallets on the truck and drove off. We drank free grog for about two weeks.

As you would.

As you would. And there was no questions asked, no nothing. And we had a pallet of grog for

32:30 nothing. This dozy pest down there shouldn't have allowed us to drive his fork lift. Anyway that what's it was – you tried anything you could to get tin, corrugated iron, timber. You basically pinched it off the engineers. Or you got it off someone else. Or you traded it for a carton of beer. Or you traded – we had one of our Q store blokes used to trade

33:00 menthol cigarettes for poncho liners. The Vietnamese used to make these camouflaged poncho liners which are a nice soft blanket to wrap yourself in. Everyone had poncho liners. They're the liner that you pin inside one of those big American century ponchos, when it's cold. Anyway the Vietnamese used to swap these things for cartons of cigarettes. So it was all black market. But one day the black market

33:30 got caught. They were waiting for him at the gate and he used to carry all the stuff on a truck underneath the laundry. And the laundry would go to the laundry down in Baria and the whole bottom underneath the laundry was covered in cartons of cigarettes like bricks. And there were hundreds of cartons going to Baria to trade for poncho liners. And he got done, he got caught.

Red handed.

So we lost all our

34:00 cartons of cigarettes. Everyone in the squadron I think would have been involved in that. I don't know what happened to him after that. Whether he got kicked up the arse or whether he got away with it. But that was the only way he could get these poncho liners see, trade them with the locals and it was absolutely against the law of course.

Why?

Well it was black market. The MPs hated that sort of thing.

But these poncho liners sound almost like a necessity?

Well yeah but you never needed them in the Dat. It was never – well I

34:30 suppose in the winter, in the wet season. Yeah I think the winter was the wet season. It got cold at night. But you had a sheet. I used to get sheets from the Q store. I never ever used anything more than a sheet, it was so hot up there. Bloody middle of the tropics. But poncho liners were a pretty tradable commodity. They were pretty cool bit of kit and everybody had them.

35:00 You know the only way you could get them was to trade cigarettes.

Just getting back to relationships at the Dat, what was the relationship like between combatants and none combatants?

Well we always worked on the principle that our whole squadron was there to fight the battle. And we couldn't do our job without their job being done. But I must admit I was very very angry with

35:30 our Q store once when I got dragged through the bush and all my clothes ripped off me. I took my cams down to the Q store to trade them in for new ones, swap them one for one. And the quarter master sergeant reached around behind and grabbed a house wife – do you know what a house wife is?

Is it a knife?

It's a little roll of sewing gear. The soldiers have always been issued since

36:00 day one. They're actually pronounced 'hussiff'. But it's house wife. Grabbed the house wife off the shelf and threw it at me and said, "Go and sew them up." Well we planned to burn that Q store down for

about three weeks after that. We were going to burn everything down, everyone was a bit crazy towards the end of the tour. We were going to kill the cooks, we were going to do all sorts of things. But you know, young lunatics. But the worse thing about that is that the

36:30 people at the leadership level in our squadron were unaware that was going on. And they should have been aware, they should have been across it far more. They segregated the diggers out by having a sergeants/officers' mess and none of us were allowed anywhere near that place. And we had our own boozer. And if you weren't out the bush you were treated like dogs you know and it was – the lid was going to blow off it one day.

37:00 But that's just the way it was. At the end of the tour we got through it.

Well it's just appalling that you'd come back from the bush and you'd get no co-operation from the …

Yeah not as bad as one of the squadrons later on, they went to Malaya. After spending three weeks in the Malaysian jungle and coming back and they passed a truck coming in or going out the gate as they were going in the gate. And on the truck was the 2IC of the squadron, the pay rep, the head

37:30 cook and the Q store man. All leaving to go on leave and there was no food, no money, no hot water, no nothing. That squadron nearly went off the deep end. It happens and it's a very simple thing to go right off your face over things like this. It's all you need and later on in my career having been in SAS for so long you get to see how important other squadrons are – especially the base squadrons to the

38:00 successful operation of a combat squadron.

Well they're basic needs aren't they, they need to be met?

Of course they are. The needs of man. What are the needs of man? Shelter, warmth, food, water. And a bit of the other.

You can throw a few wants in there as well.

Oh wants. Wants and needs yeah. Yeah you're right.

38:30 **So what was happening towards the end of our tour? How well had you been performing in your role in the bush?**

Oh we were very confident. I changed patrols don't forget. And I went to another patrol and I really enjoyed my time in that second patrol. And we felt strong, we felt in command, every patrol we were out on we dominated. We dictated the actions. We initiated the actions. Ambushes were

39:00 successful, we captured a fair bit of stuff. We lost nobody. Lost nobody wounded even.

What was some of the most valuable stuff you captured?

Oh money. Not me particularly but the squadron. Money. An earlier squadron captured a radio. We captured a lot of weapons, a lot of documents. You're not dealing with an enemy that carries chandeliers around in their back packs you know. So valuables you passed all the

39:30 intelligence stuff to the int people, the 'int pests' as we used to call them. You passed all that back to them to contemplate their navel over and see whether there was any Intel in it. And you only handed half the money in. You divvied the other half up amongst the blokes.

Why did you regard them as pests?

Well that's just a nickname they got in SAS many years ago and they've always had the nickname int pests. It's like the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s are the signallers and the int people are the int pests.

40:00 **Would they pester you for …**

Yeah they'd pester you for information all the time you know. It's not meant as a derogatory thing. It's just a – you get introduced to blokes, "Oh I'm the new int pest." That's just the way it is. But capturing stuff, yeah you'd capture packs and rifles and bring them back and they'd have a look at them and say, "Oh yeah this is an Mosin-Nagant," or "This is an old Chicom AK47,

40:30 it's very heavily pitted," or "This is a new AK." We were the first squadron to spot the new AK, the AKM which was a heavily barrelled version of the AK47. And we spotted one in an OP one day and we came back and described it and allowed the int people, the int pest to build up a picture that the supplies of these things had got this far down. Vietnam was a weird place, they used to have people

41:00 who were carrying two mortar bombs all the way from Hanoi down to wherever. Dump them off and go all the back and get two more. Two thousand miles. And you'd often see women carrying huge packs on their backs, no weapons or anything just down the track, going like crazy down these tracks. Kids. Anyone that was armed was dead meat though. We had no fire zones or free fire zones. They declare an area out of bounds to civilians.

41:30 They do it by leaflet drop. They do it by posting, they do it by radio, by posting posters all over the joint. They do it by word of mouth. Anyone caught in this area, between this date and that date is dead sort of thing. So if a patrol was in there and you ran into somebody, he's a Charlie, he's VC. We only ever opened up on those that had weapons anyway. Never ever fired on unarmed people. But we've had

42:00 kids as old as twelve years old…

Tape 7

00:36 **You mentioned before that you wanted to kill the cook, take out your anger on people. Was that because you'd been there for such a long time?**

Twelve months is too long. Too long to deploy a squadron, a battalion, a unit on a combat operation like that. They've known, that's why the deployment to Timor, Afghanistan

01:00 and Iraq, max six months. So no you suffer burn out, you are not capable of doing your job properly after that. And you start getting loopy, you start thinking, "Well hang on, what are they going to do, send me to Vietnam if I kill somebody? No I'm already here." The guy that murdered the bloke in 9 Battalion got life. He's been out for twenty years. Been out for twenty years. He was about thirty five when he got out.

01:30 I don't know, I don't think blokes think of that. I think they just think, they get the red veil, the old red veil of madness comes over you and we all suffered it. You all think that they only wait out, the only way to do something about this is to actually kill this person. Luckily nobody in our squadrons ever did. A couple of our squadrons accidentally shot each other,

02:00 shot and killed their own men, but they weren't done on purpose. It was absolutely an accident.

Is that why fragging starts happening do you think?

Yes it does. The Ashau Valley they kept trying to force these blokes to go up this hill and they kept getting killed and the survivors said, "We're not doing this any more." And started to kill their officers. The Americans lost a lot of officers killed in Vietnam through fragging. Hundreds, I'm talking hundreds.

02:30 **Do you think that was also because they had a lesser education than yourself and bad training?**

No I think the possum was being stirred at home. I think their political situation was completely out of control by the time they got to about the 1972 mark. By the time we came home the American civilian thing had gone completely haywire. The rallies

03:00 in the street were doing the Communist job for them. Ho Chi Minh and these people just sat back and laughed their heads off because all the work they'd done was now being done by their own people. Sort of having an Iraq now. All the people rallying against the defence force and the government for being there, they're just doing the job of the enemy. Al Qaeda could not have picked it any better. Psychological warfare. Pschy-ops it's called. Americans have invented the term and have done

03:30 it for decades. They did it against the Soviets, that's how they beat them in the Cold War. Has been sort of reversed on them and it's not a pretty thing. And I think our squadrons – there was a discipline of the blokes that basically kept the lid on it. But there were a couple of incidents where things could have gone completely haywire, people could have been killed. They weren't so we'll move on.

Was that a direct decision after Vietnam with the twelve month tour to

04:00 **reduce it after Vietnam?**

I think so. I think they realised that there were too many mad people out there after twelve months. I said to my father – my father spent four years away in the war and I said to him after a study had been done in Adelaide that the soldiers in Vietnam saw more action than our military guys did in World War II. And he was appalled, he was horrified. He was with the 2/13th Battalion, the battle

04:30 of Lae and the battle of El Alamein and Syria and Lebanon and the whole bit and then Borneo. I said, "Mate the score's on the board. I did a hundred and eighty days in the bush and out of that probably about ten contact patrols, shoot ups. Over a twelve month period." I said, "That didn't happen as often for you and it's been proven. "Oh no it hasn't." But anyway we did, we were involved

05:00 in a war that was pretty nasty and we were getting a lot of flak from home and it was one of – where punch a postie and whack a wharfie came from. And to come home and have a bucket of red paint thrown all over the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, marching through the streets of Sydney was an absolute disgrace. The most disgraceful thing I've ever seen. But then the opposition to the other side would say, "What's more disgraceful than a bucket of red paint, what about

05:30 dropping a ten thousand bomb from thirty thousand feet not knowing where it's landing." But when you

put things in military terms, to me throwing a bucket of red paint on one of our hero battalions was an absolute treasonous act. And a lot of our blokes waded into protestors when they got home. Blokes got locked up. Waded into them, smashed them. In Adelaide three or four blokes got stuck into a great heap of people in a parade one day.

06:00 And it took about ten cops to drag them off. They were going to kill all these people. They were just back from Vietnam. So the red surge of anger and madness. So it stays with you after a while and you think, "How am I going to get over this?" And there's a lot of triggers along the way. A lot of these guys are in their fifties, I've been lucky I've stayed in the army for thirty four years. A lot of the guys came home and didn't have that backstop. They got out, went back to their

06:30 job as a bank teller in the local town in the bush. No-one else in the bank can relate to his time away. He bottles it up and bottles it up and all of a sudden by the time he's forty odd he's a nut case. Whereas I was still in the army with guys I'd served with in Vietnam. And I'm doing okay. I'm not a TPI [totally & permanently incapacitated pensioner]. A lot of my mates are. I'm a gold card holder because I've got more damage to my body from parachuting than anything else.

07:00 But that just covers any medical and dental stuff I need done. But I'm not a TPI, I receive an element of a pension but not the TPI. I still work, I run a business.

Do you think the TPI is directly related to the kind of response that Australia had for Vietnam vets when they came back?

Yeah absolutely. Directly related. It's not related to their combat time. It's not related – well a bit of it is. If you get shot at it's the worse

07:30 thing that'll ever happen to you. You really know – it's the only time in your life where you know that someone's trying to kill you. And when that realisation sinks into your brain it's a terrible thing. That someone's trying to kill me out there and the rounds have just missed your head or something. Or you hear crump crump crump, and you know he's there and he's trying to get you and you've got to get him. And that's a terrible thing. And the realisation of that takes a long time to sink in and they push it away. They bury it and it'll bubble up.

08:00 They'll see somebody they know, that they used to know who knew a bloke who got killed or something and bang, out it'll come. Gee I've seen blokes just dissolve. Just dissolve on the side of the road. Out of the blue.

Did you get more nervous towards the end of your tour that something bad might happen to you when you were out on patrol?

No no. I was more nervous in the early part of the tour because I didn't know as much as I should've. And towards the end of the tour I wasn't bad.

08:30 I wasn't a bad digger. I could do the job. I was well considered by my patrol commander. My communications was good. I had mates. We came back, we had a lot of shoot ups and it was good.

Can you tell me about your last day in Vietnam, what that was like?

Well I was talking about this before. On the Wednesday night we were in this heavy action, heavy contact way out near the border of Binh Tuy

09:00 Province and we called on gunships and we couldn't get any so they sent these dive bombers from Saigon. And we got back on a Wednesday night and we were just absolutely destroyed. We were just so thankful to get out of there because I felt sure we weren't going to make it that time. We got absolutely destroyed on the grog that night. And we couldn't go to Vung Tau for R&C because we

09:30 were going home in two days. The next day was scrubbing our gear and we were trying to do debriefs at the same time. The next day was scrubbing our gear and handing gear in and all that sort of stuff. And the Friday we prepared basically to leave. We flew to Saigon that afternoon.

How many of you was there?

The squadron, hundred. Little bit less

10:00 than a hundred. Some had gone home, an advance party had gone home. Maybe ninety. A 707 load anyway. And all the ones from the Sydney side were placed – no less because some of the guys went on a C130, the West Australian guys. But we were all from Sydney so we all flew by 70. We boarded about eight o'clock at night. I thought, "This is a bit weird, eight o'clock on a Friday night." And we flew into Sydney at three o'clock on Saturday morning.

10:30 Three a.m. And there wasn't a sound. I think they brought airline curfews in later when some of the big jets started to make too much noise. So three o'clock in the morning and we're going through customs and they put us through the hoops I tell you, they went through our bags and everything. And I'm wheeling my trolley out into the area where all the people are waiting. And it was absolutely packed to the rafters

11:00 with all our families. There they were. You couldn't hear a thing. There was silence. And then this huge

roar you know. And on the Saturday morning I was home eating breakfast in my father's kitchen. I'd been in action thirty six hours before. Very dislocating thing. It wasn't debilitating it was just fantasy. It was one of those things that didn't smack as being real.

11:30 It had – there was a lack of realism in it. You think, "Hang on." Whereas the guys that went home by ship had a couple of weeks to contemplate their navel you know, as it were.

Is what you're saying is that Vietnam seemed much more real to you than the life that you actually left behind and came back to?

Well yeah and I was only home about four or five days and I couldn't wait to get out of the place. I wanted to hook up with my mates again. And we all went to a wedding in Victoria.

12:00 And basically I never went home for a couple of years. I just didn't see them as my family any more. It was funny. They were my family and I loved my mother and my sister and my father but it was different. Vietnam had changed everything. I had a long term girlfriend when I left, when I came home I said, "Bye." That was the end of that relationship.

Did you have a lot of mail when you were over there?

Yeah didn't do too bad. I had a girlfriend who used to write quite regularly.

12:30 She used to send up salamis and all that sort of stuff which was fantastic.

Salami?

Salami. You couldn't get any deli type things at all. We were stick to death of living out of our ration packs and eating American manufactured foods and things, even though salami's a manufactured food. But you couldn't get any of that stuff, you could only get four gallon drums of frozen milk and it was just weird.

13:00 And canned of scrambled eggs. Powdered eggs. Powdered tea. It was just awful. I don't know how they eat or drink any of that stuff.

So essentially receiving a salami is a huge morale booster?

So hang it in the thing and the blokes'd walk in and cut a piece off and eat it. It got very mouldy though in the tropics. You'd have to scrape about four inches of mould every time you wanted to eat some of it.

13:30 But coming home was a big deal. I was still only twenty two at that stage. And getting home was one thing but I just wanted to be with my mates. That's a terrible thing. I think being away for so long your families change. And you don't mean it to be like that, it just happens. You swap one family for the other. And those guys, we ran amok down in Victoria at the wedding and

14:00 a couple of other things. I basically never went home for a couple of years. I went home the odd time but it wasn't the same. I had my own life to live.

Did your parents notice the change?

Oh I suppose they would've. I've never spoken to my mother or father about it. But I was a twenty two year old that had been immersed in the shoot ups of a war. You just can't say you're ever going to be the same again. And some guys never handle it.

14:30 I must admit though I was never ever able to go off and go to Rhodesia and fight in the bush war like a lot of blokes did.

Did they?

Oh God there. We lost two killed in Rhodesia and only one killed in Vietnam. Two killed in Rhodesia. Clive Mason and Kenny Smith both got killed, shot. The bush war in Rhodesia. I mean we killed five hundred in seven years.

15:00 The Rhodesian light infantry, a unit quite similar to ours, killed five thousand in half that time. Oh it was on for young and old over there I tell you what, it was just a terrible war. But, there was big money on offer. The blokes went to London and they were recruited at the Rhodesia House. And quite a lot of them took up the challenge. Went over to Rhodesia for a year, a couple of years and ran off with big money.

So they were getting paid a hell of a lot more than whatever...

Oh yeah, yeah.

15:30 They weren't mercenaries, they were actually in the SAS regiment and the salute scouts and Rhodesian Light Infantry. They were actually in those regiments, they actually wore the regalia of those regiments. But I always worked on the principal that everyone's issued a bottle of courage and some people empty their bottle quicker than others. I think my bottle was fairly empty by the end of the tour. Where other guys it was only a sip out of the top. It's just different makeups, everyone's different.

16:00 **And these guys ended up in Rhodesia, is that what you're saying?**

Yeah yeah. You can't put a template over it, you can't say this is how people are going to be. I think that's what psychiatrists and psychologists have missed the point on, you know you can't have a set set of rules that will cover everybody. Every person is totally different. A bit like an area study. Area studies we do in the army, every area study is different. Because it's of a different area. So every person

16:30 study is different because he's a different person. Some of my mates are so mad, so nuts now I don't recognise them as the guys I knew before. They're crazies but they were great soldiers. They suffered big time. Some guys did two tours of Vietnam. One guy did three tours of Vietnam. And he was completely out of his tree by the time he got back. On his first tour of Vietnam he was of that company that went into Long Tan the next day. To

17:00 bury the bodies and he has some absolutely terrible stories to tell. Like the fly story. He dug a shell scrap with an entrenching tool. A shell scrap's about that deep. And he put a toggle rope around the leg of the dead body which was a Viet Cong officer, a North Vietnamese officer, and dragged him into the shell scrap but he wasn't game to look at him.

17:30 Because the next day, the temperate was so great and the humidity was so hot they all blew up and the ones that were blown apart, blew up like crazy. And he couldn't – he pulled the body into this shell scrap and started to fill it in. And he filled it in as much as he could and thought, "I wonder," and as he looked up, just as he did the head of the body's sticking out of the ground. And a fly as big as your thumbnail flew out of the mouth of the dead

18:00 guy and into his mouth. And he kept telling the story. And I kept saying, "Do not tell the fly story." And every time he told he used to go into paroxysms but he had to keep telling it. It was like a broken record, he couldn't get it out of his head. A lot of people have got a different…

That just kind of flipped him over the edge.

He's flipped and he's still today. But anyway, and he went back two more times after that. Maybe trying to

18:30 expunge it, I don't know.

How do you think Vietnam affected you?

It didn't affect me overly for many years.

So you felt pretty alright when you came back?

Yes I stayed in the army.

But obviously a bit toey?

Yeah not bad. We were drunk for five years after we got home. And Jo rescued me. She said, "Come here," and married me and

19:00 rescued me from all that.

Where did she find you considering you were probably drunk somewhere?

I was drunk at a party one night. And the bloke who introduced us got killed in a plane crash in the Philippines a few years later. One of our closest friends. But it was a party in a house opposite her and her mother's place. And we were all down the OBH – you know the OBH [Ocean Beach Hotel]? The OBH was our pub, that's where we drank and that's where – Murray Quinliven hated us being there

19:30 but he liked our money. Anyway I had a Cottesloe Surf Club t-shirt on. Ripped right down the back. No shoes. A pair of rugby shorts. About two weeks growth. Was still on leave. And we were at this party, this house in Lyons Street, Cottesloe.

Well good to see you were looking your best this evening?

Yes. Yes. And I saw this chick sitting there. And she had long dark hair.

20:00 She was pretty sharp. Introduced myself of course. "My name's Mick Malone, what do you think of me so far?" And we've been together ever since. Thirty years coming up.

Well that's a lovely story.

Yeah. But all the rest of them, basically living in the barracks for years later. Hardly any of them got married. And the ones that did have been divorced a couple of times.

Why do you think it's so difficult for…

Well I found the right one first go

20:30 that's all. That's all it is. All this business of divorce stuff is finding the right one. Someone will invent a meter one day where you can plug it into your forehead or something and see whether the person's going to be compatible.

Wouldn't that be a money saving device?

It will. It will be. But until that day you'll have divorces happening – some of the guys in the army have been married three or four times. Just mad. And one bloke took his best mate on his honeymoon with him to Rottnest Island. He was married six weeks.

21:00 What's the point of all that?

Why was it important do you think to coagulate together with your mates pretty much as soon as you came back?

Because you could – they could identify with what you'd been through and you them. And they were your backstops, they were your mates, they were the people who meant more than anybody.

Would you talk about stuff with them as far as your experiences?

Yes you do but you reinforce in each other's mind how things were and

21:30 you basically – you don't blow smoke up each other's bums. "Oh you're a good mate," and all that stuff. You just like to reinforce the fact that I'm still standing here because of you without saying that you know. Yeah.

How much of the protests and the media attitude from Australia was filtering through to you in Vietnam?

We were hearing a fair bit.

22:00 We were hearing a lot in letters and a lot of guys got clippings from newspapers sent up. And by that time we had a television set, a black and white TV which we watched the landing on the moon on this black and white TV. Standing there, I couldn't believe what I was watching. Armstrong landing on the moon.

That would've been quite a bizarre thing being caught up in the middle of the war and watching…

July 1969. We were right there. Here the Yanks landing on the bloody moon. Unbelievable. Our lap top out there is

22:30 three times more powerful than the computers they had on the lander. How the hell they did has got me. But it was just a moment, just a wonderful moment. But that black and white TV sat in the rec room, they set up a rec room with table tennis tables and that sort of stuff. I think the Red Cross set that up but nobody went in there. We'd rather stand in the boozer and talk to your mates, just the way it was.

Sorry did you say the Red Cross set up something?

23:00 Yes the Red Cross I think set this rec room up or provided the tables or something in there. I know we had a Scaletric track at one stage there. Because two or three guys wanted to play Scaletric cars. I never went in there either. But you know.

Whatever turns you on.

Yeah. So drinking was the main game. We were twenty one and we didn't give a shit you know.

Did you have an interaction with the Red Cross?

No. Not really they were American. And they used to come there and

23:30 you'd be forced to sit in the mess and listen to their carries on and maybe try to play games and I Spy With My Little Eye and all this sort of rubbish. And the blokes'd say, "Look leave us out. We don't want to hear this." No they had their job to do but it wasn't with us. There's got to be more people around more deserving than us. All we wanted to do was stand in a bar and drink with our mates, nothing else mattered. Just knowing you know.

24:00 I still remember every single one of those guys. A few of them are dead now. Still remember them too. Jimmy Rate drank himself to death. But you know everyone has groups of mates like that that they relate to from school, wherever, the wheat bins at Quindaning.

24:30 Our mates we were just getting shot at together you know. It's a big deal to get shot at. You get shot at and the old five cent, ten cent, I tell you what you really know that you're in – one thing about it, you really know you're alive. You panic and the panic is so overwhelming you want to run but you don't. You stop, you go through the actions, you watch your mate's back.

25:00 You do all that stuff. That's what training is. You train and you learn how to cope. And the coping mechanisms of soldiers are a little bit different to the coping mechanisms of other people. But they would be the same if you were shooting at those other people, you know what I mean. There's nothing like Sarajevo or any of those dreadful places where the civilian population are continuously under bombardment. Vietnam was nothing like that. We had a pretty good war. If you

25:30 could ever say that. We dominated the field. The Australian Army did an amazing job in Vietnam. The never suffered one single reversal on the battlefield. Never one single defeat in the whole time they were there. Long Tan was considered the biggest battle. The Battle of Coral, but not a defeat. The enemy was always defeated.

26:00 And it's a proud record.

So what did you decide to do as far as work was concerned when you came home?

Well I was scared to get out. Because I didn't want to go back to the wool classing nonsense or get out of the army. I was in for six years anyway. And I'd only done four at that stage. So I had two more years to go. I wasn't going to cut and run. The nashos in the group did. Every single

26:30 national serviceman that served with us got out. Left. Only one ever came back. He was a shearer and it was too hard. He said, "Bugger that," and he went on to the RSM, regimental sergeant major to the parachute training school. So he did twenty odd years. But I stayed in and five years in I was promoted to lance corporal and by the time by sixth year came around and it was time to get out, I'd been promoted to corporal, two stripes in SAS. And I thought,

27:00 'Oh I'll give this a run." I had my own patrol. I was a lance corporal in New Guinea in 1971 and we were getting ready to go back to Vietnam so we'd just done all the build up training and then back to New Guinea with the new squadron. Full of nashos.

You were ready to go?

Yeah ready to go in November. Oh September, October something like that. Then they called the war off and that squadron actually came home. About that time. 2 Squadron.

Did you look forward to going back or not?

Sort of.

27:30 I was going back as a patrol commander this next time. I was looking forward to that in a lot of ways. But I think we'd been there too long at that stage. I think it was time to come home. We were starting to get a bit stale and you can't keep going to wars like that if the people at home are throwing rocks at you. It's just the way it is. There is a time to be there and time not to be there. And I think it was time, we did the right thing by coming home. And the myth that Gough Whitlam pulled us out of Vietnam is always and has been

28:00 a myth. Billy Hughes, Billy McMahon pulled us out of Vietnam. We came out before the election. We were home on the ground here. They'd had the election, the same year and everyone says, "Oh Gough Whitlam pulled us out of Vietnam." No he didn't.

As far as looking forward to going back to Vietnam, what was it that you were looking forward to?

To be the leader of a patrol. That was the crème de la crème. That's still the crème de la crème job at SAS. A patrol commander,

28:30 that is the P job. And only the best guys are patrol commanders. So to do that was basically fulfilling what I was meant to do.

Is that the training that you had in New Guinea, was that all as a build up to get to that level?

Yes like it was when I went to Vietnam the first time. Training in New Guinea was a build up and an introduction to the young blokes to the jungle, mountains, all sorts of stuff. We'd trained in Collie,

29:00 we did most of our training for Vietnam in Collie so to get to a tropical country prior to going was vitally important. The rest of the army went to Canungra in Queensland and trained. We never did, we went to New Guinea for two months. They went to Kanangra for three weeks. So we had a lot more time in the jungle. And the mountains. And we get to Vietnam and it's as flat as a billiard table except for a mountain there and a mountain over there.

How confident were you of your skills as a leader?

29:30 Good. I was a patrol commander in New Guinea as a lance corporal. I would've been a corporal patrol commander probably promoted to sergeant when we arrived. Just depending on the demographics at the time. But yeah it would've been good. But it's not something I've ever contemplated. I must admit I said, "Yeah it was time to go," I think we'd had our time up there.

30:00 Each squadron had done two tours. And it was not time to start the cycle again do you know what I mean. And a lot of national servicemen in that squadron, that if it hadn't been called off then and Gough Whitlam had've got in the following year, he would've called it off anyway and we'd have been up there for no time and come home. So yeah it all happened reasonably…

What did you think about it being called off so to speak?

Well we thought it was a job not

30:30 finished. And we thought – once we realised the Americans weren't going to win and they couldn't win because they were fighting the war wrongly. They allowed themselves to be bamboozled at the Paris peace talks. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese offered all sorts of things and went back on it, a bit like Stalin with Hitler. Hitler and Stalin making pacts and then attacking each other, you know it was ridiculous.

31:00 So the peace talks were just a joke. Just allowed the Vietnamese time to build up their forces.

So what you're saying is, you weren't really surprised that that happened?

No. Once the got the breathing space they were gone. For all money. If the Americans had've shown resolve and kept going and the people of America had've been behind them, they'd have kicked the Vietnamese half way across the world just about. You wouldn't see Vietnam as you see it today. But they achieved the aim. They

31:30 depleted the Communist forces to such a huge extent that the domino theory just fell and it didn't happen. Thailand is now a democracy, we just added a free trade agreement yesterday. Malaysia is a prosperous democracy. A sort of guided monocratic democracy. I think they have a king that comes in every two years or something. They swap it around. Singapore.

32:00 Safe. Laos and Cambodia look like they're being safe now. Even though one of them has still got a Communist leadership. The great bear of China and Russia who hated each other as much as America hated them, they're imperialistic tendencies have just been blown out the water. The Americans stopped the rot basically. And I'm thankful for the American's efforts but they just went about it the wrong way. They thought they

32:30 could over technologicalise the whole thing. Bomb them into the stone age and she'll be right. If they used their brains a bit more like the Australians did in Phuoc Tuy Province, I think the Americans would've been far more successful.

Were you this politically conscious when you were actually in Vietnam?

No, no.

So what did you think you were fighting for at the time?

I was fighting for what my government told me I was doing. I was in the army. I was a soldier and soldiers go where they're told to fight. I must admit I joined up because of the patriotic furore that Long Tan

33:00 instilled in me. The fact that the boys were fighting with their backs to the wall. And needed help basically. But we didn't question the army, we didn't question the government. The government said, "Go to Vietnam and fight," and away we went and that's what soldiers do. You cannot have a defence force which questions the government on particular actions, you can't do it. It just doesn't work.

So after you'd returned from New Guinea

33:30 **what was next for you?**

Well about the same time the war was called off from our point of view and then it was back to the regiment and for the first time we had all three squadrons in the barracks. The first time and the place was like Pitt Street, it was packed. And I was meeting guys that had been in the regiment for two years I'd never met before. 'Cause we'd fly to Vietnam and they'd fly home. And we'd be there for a year and so, two years many guys you'd never seen

34:00 before. And it was fantastic. So we're all down there down the Cottesloe, down the Albion, down the hotel just getting on you know. The war was over, who cared about soldiering. And we never went outside the gate for three years anyway.

Outside the gate?

Outside the barracks. Gough Whitlam was absolutely convinced I'm sure, that we, the SAS were going to overthrow his government and we never went anywhere.

34:30 When Malcolm Fraser got back in we started to go back to New Guinea, we started to go to Malaya again, we started to do all the things we used to do training wise.

So there was absolutely nothing for you to do?

No nothing. We lost so many good soldiers in that period. Whole squadrons of soldiers left. We disbanded one of our squadron. 2 Squadron was dropped off the oil bat. And it only came back on in 1983. When the counter terrorist thing started to happen. Now we've still got three full

35:00 combat squadrons and they would never dare, any government would never dare drop one of those squadrons again. It takes so long to train, so long to arm and so long to equip. And costly. To train an SAS soldier nowadays is a lot of money. And they're all bolting now to go to Iraq to earn big money. Well they're getting paid big money too. They're getting paid well. But I think the blokes that haven't been shot at are the ones that want to get shot at. It's a funny thing.

35:30 To soldier for fifteen to twenty years and never be in action is seen by a lot of guys as a waste of a career. I can't relate to that because I was in the army two years and we were being shot at. So my time in action happened early in my career but there are other guys that came along from 1972 to 1980, those eight years, that period, those eight years there. I met a lot of guys who did six, eight years in the unit who never saw an angry man. Never went

36:00 outside the gate, never went on an exercise. And you speak to them today, they don't have any memories of life in SAS because they did nothing. And then the counter terrorist thing started to happen and Malcolm Fraser started to panic over the Sheraton bombing in Sydney and we were given the nod to get together a fairly, well a strong counter terrorist effort. And I was involved in the early training of that.

And what sorts of things would you train?

Oh we had –

36:30 they brought a British SAS training team out and charged the Australian Government one hundred thousand pounds. Five or six man team, trained us in everything from sniping to demolition to close quarter battle to hostage rescue, to fast driving. To whatever. All these quasi military skills. Paramilitary a lot of it. A lot of the police skills that we needed for the

37:00 counter terrorist game.

That sounds reasonably exciting?

Oh it was, it was, very exciting. Very much so. And on the ground floor I was the team leader of team 2. I was the sergeant Alpha 1, we had an officer and him and I were the team leaders of team 2. We were able to sit back and watch team 1 make all the mistakes basically. Oh not make mistakes, we saw what they did and were able to mould our own ways to – in our view do a better job.

37:30 It wasn't their fault, it was just what was handed down by these Poms. But all the skills were different. There was urban warfare, there was the use of submachine guns and pistols and both at the same time. And demolitions that we'd never seen before. Industrial demolitions. Sheet charges. And all sorts of stuff. Rapelling down the walls of buildings. And jumping out of helicopters and just, all this different stuff. We'd

38:00 come out of the jungle. We never did any of that in the jungle.

What's the difference between the anti-terrorism branch of the SAS and the TRG [Tactical Response Group]?

Well the TRG, we train the TRG. The TRG exist because SAS train them. There's really – the big difference is they're police and SAS is not. And they can be used in any situation that the police deem. SAS can't be called out unless the Governor General signs the bit of paper.

38:30 Which is good. We don't want the soldiers on the streets anyway. Our democracy's quite fragile, well not fragile but ours is quite robust actually. But the way it's protected is that soldiers just do not take up arms on the street. Nowadays with the terrorism thing happening you see, you do see soldiers and police together in some incidences. The difference is SAS is a counter terrorist, not anti terrorist. Anti terrorists are ASIO and the

39:00 Federal Police and all those people. They're anti, they stop it before it happens. Counter terrorist is basically reactive. Once it's happened you then react. Anti terrorist is pro active. We're reactive.

With that branch is protecting civilian actually important or is that more of a TRG thing?

39:30 The CT [counter terrorism] thing when it first started, the main thing was to save the lives of the hostages. That was all. Invariably the hostages are VIP [very important person] or civilians or kids or whatever they were, a busload of kids. Save the lives of the hostages. That was the raison d'être the whole thing was based on that. Not kill as many terrorists as you can or retrieve the bulding. It was always save the lives of the hostages and it still is.

40:00 Except that the terrorists have moved the – they've moved the ball game. They've moved the ball games to suicide bombs and I don't think you can protect anybody from suicide bombs. Unless the anti-terrorist people have to. They have to know that firstly they're building the bomb, who's building them, where they're building them and so on and hit them before they get out of there. Like the Israelis do, the Israelis bomb all those work shops all the time. That's where they make their belt bombs.

40:30 They can't just wait for them to come and blow kids up on buses.

Did you actually go on any counter terrorist missions?

No exercises.

Where would those exercise mostly be?

All over Australia. We used to have state exercises which we ran ourselves, the squadron and the

regiment. And then nat ex's – national exercises which were run by the Sac Pav – Sac Pav was a huge name –

41:00 something to do with the prevention of ..

Tape 8

00:34 **So we were talking about your continued involvement with the SAS and the counter terrorism.**

I tell people I had the perfect career. In twenty seven years in the regiment and a couple of other units, five years for one stripe. Six years for two stripes. Ten years for three stripes. I was a sergeant

01:00 at ten years. Fifteen years for warrant officer class two. Twenty years for warrant officer class one regimental sergeant major. Not in the SAS, in the Commandos. And then twenty two years for captain and I was a captain for four. So twenty three – I had the perfect career. And I covered most of the jobs. Never once did I do a job that wasn't combated related except the last

01:30 one which – and the training job in Duntroon. But after we finished the counter terrorist thing in 1981 on Gauntlet 2. The call sign was Gauntlet. Gauntlet 1, 2, 3 and 4. I was the on the team of Gauntlet 2. The commanding officer, Rod Curtis who rose to the rank of brigadier, lovely man,

02:00 he called me into his office and promoted me to warrant officer and shook my hand warmly and said, "Well done, you've done a great job." And I said, "What job am I getting?" And he said, "I want you to go to base squadron at SSM, squadron sergeant major and learn some humility." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You've been a total arsehole. You run your squadron here as if no-one else existed. And you've shown no sympathy or

02:30 anything for trucks, medics, signallers, anybody." And I said, "Well sorry I was just too focussed." And we were. We were so focussed on the job because we expected the badies to strike any moment of the day and we were ready to go. And that's what we were doing and therefore everyone else would have to do what we did. I failed to realise a lot of things. They weren't getting the special pay that we were getting but they still had to be there. So he sent

03:00 me to base squadron and I spent twelve months as a squadron sergeant major at base squadron. And it was the hardest job I ever had but a very rewarding job. I had medics, and cooks and stewards and truck drivers and mechanics. All those guys. And I learnt that the regiment can't operate without the tail and a squadron's only as good as the support group it has.

What were the difficulties that you had?

The difficulties? Well there weren't difficulties,

03:30 just the way I treated these poor buggers. I just didn't take into account that they were different to my squadron. They had different needs and they weren't getting special pay. They weren't parachute qualified therefore they weren't getting SAS pay. They weren't getting allowances. We were getting all sorts of allowances and they weren't getting anything and they still had to be there to pick us up in their bus or their truck or their car.

These are the same poor buggers you'd had a lack of consideration for before?

Yeah yeah. So I went up there

04:00 and basically told the counter terrorist squadron that there'll be no more treating my men like this. So sure I turned it around fairly quick smart.

And what was your reputation like with these ...

I was a good – as Alpha 1 of Team 2, I'd lost one of my men killed in the killing house down the back at Swanbourne. He got shot in front of me. Little Peewee Williamson.

Is that during an exercise?

Yes just training. Bang

04:30 he was dead, shot in the head by another one of my men. So my team was wiped out. My four man assault team and I had to get new guys in.

Were incidents like that rare during these exercises?

Oh yeah. It's only ever happened once in all that time.

What sort of enquiry was there into the incident?

Huge inquiry. The beauty of it was, the inquiry pulled our SOPs [standard operating procedures] apart. Just dismantled them. And basically

05:00 made us rebuild the SOPs. And the ironic thing about it, I was in England in 1985 on exercise longbook from Duntroon. I went to the School of Infantry at Warminster. And while I was over there I was able to get up to Hereford where the British SAS live. And the RSM up there, old Taff Richards, I knew him from years before. We were sitting in his office with our feet up on the desk drinking huge mugs of tea sort of thing and he said, "What do you want to do while you're here?" And I said, "Oh I want to catch up with

05:30 a few guys." He said, "Who?" And I said, "Well Jock Owens and Taff Sayer and Ray Abbotts." He said, "Oh you won't be catching Ray Abbotts, Ray got killed last year." I said, "What do you mean he got killed?" And he said, "He was shot in the killing house down the back." I said, "I never heard about that." He said, "Oh no we got on with it." And I found out what happened, he got shot by the second man into the house

06:00 in the – through the gluteal, through the sciatic nerve and down into his femoral artery. And he died – you know working in the dark with NVG's – night vision goggles. And the second guy had a silenced submachine gun – hadn't realised – these things have got no recoil, these German submachine guns. And shot him in the arse and didn't know he'd done it. Ray went down, they ran over the top of him and continued on

06:30 shooting all the targets and stuff, and by the time they got to Ray and got him down to the RAP he was dead, he'd died. The terrible thing about it was they had an inquiry and then it was found to be death by misadventure, soldier on. When I was there in '85 I saw some of the most slack and dangerous practices still being practised by soldiers. With loaded weapons that we would never accountance

07:00 anything like that after Peewee got killed. After Peewee got killed we changed everything. We built things – it'll never happen again like Peewee got killed. It'll happen some other way because you can never predict everything.

What were the circumstances that perhaps contributed to that accident with Peewee?

07:30 All I can say without revealing any stuff that shouldn't be revealed is basically that, each man carries two weapons, a submachine gun and a pistol. And the pistol is the immediately action weapon on the submachine gun. In other words if the submachine gun fails to fire, you don't stop and clear it like you do with a normal submachine gun or a rifle in the bush or whatever.

08:00 You draw your pistol and carry on with a pistol. These guys were just sorting out their torches. Everyone carries torches and stuff. Adjusting slings and things and one guy just pulled his pistol and shot him in the head just like that. Just doing a drill. A drill that had been drilled into him time and time again. We used to do DPs – dry practices. And

08:30 you'd load both weapons and go to action at the start of the day and you'd walk all through the day with your pistol still in its holster with its thumb brake done up. But a round up the spout because you'd gone to action with both weapons okay. Fire a submachine gun, clear it and coming out, new magazine, do it again and again. You might do ten run throughs and the pistol never gets touched. Until you have a stoppage. And if you don't have a stoppage all day then the pistol never gets touched.

09:00 So at the end of the day you clear both weapons and go home. This guy just pulled his pistol out and did a DP, dry practise but forgot that he was in ready to go mode and shot him in the head. It was from me to that – there away from me. I had my headphones up on my head, top of my head. It was the loudest shot I'd ever heard. Terrible thing.

Why did he actually draw his gun?

He was doing a dry practise immediate action. He was

09:30 checking the length of his sling, shoulder, dropped the weapon and just did it dry practise. A terrible thing. But we pulled those SOP's apart and that can never happen again. But the Brits didn't do any of that, they didn't change a single thing. And I saw some of the most dreadful bloody blasé crap. And at the time Peewee was killed CT was the

10:00 thing. It was the top thing happening in the SAS. When Ray Abbot was killed it wasn't the top thing happening in British SAS, it was about the third top behind a few other operations they had overseas against the baddie. Different sorts of baddies, they were working against all sorts of people. Which we're only now getting back into now ourselves. But at that stage they were very blasé and very slack.

10:30 I was absolutely appalled that they didn't basically change their SOP's and Ray died for nothing. And Peewee didn't, Peewee didn't die for nothing. He died in the cause, everything was changed because of Peewee and we probably saved a lot of lives doing that. And the CT game. So I spent twelve months in base squadron basically kicking the CT squadron up the arse with their misuse of their fuel, up

11:00 at the fuel point and all that sort of stuff. Which I used to do myself the year before.

What kind of misuse are you referring?

Oh blokes not signing for fuel that's all. We'd never know from one day to the next how much fuel was used because guys weren't putting it on the bit of paper. The tank'd be empty but there was no

signatures on the paper. You're supposed to write all this on a running sheet. So we stopped all that and got it all fixed. And then they sent me back to the CT squadron as a sergeant major for the

11:30 following two years. And we kicked some serious arse, we were a top squadron.

What were some of the achievements?

Oh we just had a very revved up outfit. We had all the Yanks beating a path to our door to learn our closed quarter battle methods. I had Jim Wallis as my squadron commander. He's went to brigadier, he heads up now one of those think tank in Canberra. International something or other.

12:00 He was as sharp as a tack, probably the smartest officer I ever worked with. He was a great man to work with because it was full on, every day it was full on with old Jim. Thought processes – you just couldn't keep up with him. He was amazing.

You were just making reference to that chap that does the think tanks?

Yeah Jim Wallis. Worked with him and Graham Ferguson

12:30 the following year. And then I was posted. Posted out of the regiment for the first time for eighteen years. I went to Duntroon. Duntroon in Canberra is probably the most important posting that an SAS warrant officer can do. Because you're there at the coal face of the new officers, the brand new guys. All the good guys that I picked out over the two years that I was there, they've all served in SAS as troop commanders. Some of them

13:00 have been squadron commanders and the current commanding officer was one of my cadets. So really, it's a great fulfilment thing. And I really enjoyed Duntroon. The kids loved it, loved Canberra. Jo had a great time in Canberra, she had her own business there. And Duntroon was just the best. For two years and away you go.

Sounds like a fairly influential role Mick if you're got to hand select those people for their future?

Oh well you weren't really hand selecting them. You were just identifying them

13:30 and planting a seed in their brain. Don't forget about SAS. And the good guys, the infantry blokes because all the good ones went to infantry in the main. You're not soldiering unless you're soldiering in some sort of infantry capacity. And a lot of people dispute that but that's the way it is. It's the man on the ground at the end of the day that takes the piece of ground. You can take ground with artillery or tanks but it's the infantry boy that holds it sort of thing.

14:00 And SAS is just a different kettle of fish altogether. You're thinking outside the square completely with SAS. SAS is the flavour of the month, flavour of the year with the Government. Since Timor it's been sensational. The blokes that have served in Timor and Afghanistan and Iraq have had the best careers they really have. They've got rows of medals. Some of them have got some serious decorations. One of my sergeants from

14:30 - sorry one of my diggers from commandos – oh getting back to the point – after two years at Duntroon. And I was in the field wing looking after the field aspects of training. And my senior class was the old Duntroon. In 1985 the old Duntroon ceased. They ceased operating and then in 1986 became

15:00 the defence academy next door. They built this huge university type campus. And the four year degree you used to get at Duntroon you basically had to go to the defence academy. And they disbanded Portsea. Portsea was the other officer training establishment in Victoria. Disbanded that. Sent all the instructors and remaining cadets from Portsea up and they became our cadets and

15:30 we made space in the sergeants' mess for all their silver and regalia. And we put their colours up in the Duntroon chapel. And it was all a pretty emotional period actually. The Portsea people reckoned they shouldn't have been disbanded and quite stupidly they kept saying Duntroon should have been. Anyway right next door they built another academy. So Duntroon became Portsea in other words a one year – sorry

16:00 an eighteen month – if you went to the defence academy and did a degree whether it was engineering or – if you were army, don't forget all three services are there together. If you're army you came across to Duntroon to finish off your year. Twelve months at Duntroon rounded you off as an army officer. And you learnt all those things that I was teaching in the bush. But if you come off the street and sign up to be a Duntroon officer, you have to do eighteen months, so three six month packages.

16:30 And you graduated at the same rank of lieutenant as the guy next door. But he's got a degree and you haven't. So in the scheme of things when they're picking generals they'll pick the academy graduates as they have done with Duntroon graduates. There's not too many people get past brigadier that haven't been to Duntroon. If they haven't been to Duntroon they haven't got much of a show at all. It's a little bit like the old British school system in a lot of ways.

17:00 A fair bit of snobbery still there. If you're not Duntroon you're not nothing as they used to say.

But the education must be of some consequence?

Oh that's right, they want people to think and they want people to go the distance later on. One of my cadets did an honours degree in mathematics and ended up commanding a squadron in the SAS. Didn't matter. Degrees only mean you can think, that's all a degree means. It means you've got the power to use the library. Without getting lost too often.

17:30 But some of the guys used to do geography degrees you know because geography guy was a mad rugby fan and anyone that did geography at Duntroon and played rugby never failed. That's the way it was for twenty years. So having an influence on these young officers, to me was the best thing that ever happened to me in the army. It was just so good. I used to have them around for tea.

18:00 And I looked after them in the bush and have a look at them, and make sure people knew I was looking at them. And picked the right ones. And I just used to have a yarn to the guys and say, "Listen when you've finished a couple of years in Townsville put in for the regiment." And all those guys have. They haven't had many dunces out of that group. I was pretty rapt in that.

What did you find so personally rewarding?

Well you can see the results of it, that's the best bit. I was called WO [warrant officer] Malone.

18:30 Here's WO Malone. And I wasn't a turkey, I didn't treat people like shit there like a lot of other people did. A lot of warrant officers that come from other units and I won't say infantry battalions alone but artillery and armour, came there with this real English public school bloody prefect sort of attitude you know. And the cadets were nothing but something on the bottom of your shoe and treat them accordingly. Well I didn't I treated them like

19:00 soldiers. And one bloke gave a digger a hundred lines for having a dirty rifle. And I said, "Why don't you just make him clean the bloody thing?" I had no ideas where these guys were coming from, these idiots. But the cadets knew, they knew. They had a thing called a squash ladder. And it was an old squash trophy thing where they used to put little cards, slide them through as you moved up and down the ladder. If you were a turkey you got on the squash ladder. I never got on the squash ladder in the two years that I was there

19:30 but there was one guy. Artillery warrant officer who was never off the squash ladder and in the main was either one or two on the squash ladder for two years. Cadets just abhorred him.

What about yourself, what did you think of him?

Oh he was a dill. He had no idea poor bugger. He served on. He went on to become an RSM. But he made the fatal mistake of back chatting or did something to a young

20:00 army reserve officer. Or the army reserve officer told him to do something. He was the RSM don't forget. He's fairly – a high credential person. Anyway this guy charged him. Charged him with insubordination and the RSM got court martialled. And a second lieutenant bloody army reservist got him court martialled.

That couldn't happen very often.

Well it wouldn't happen in the regular army I don't think. But it happened there and I don't think it could've happened to a better

20:30 person quite frankly. But this guy had an attitude that would've brought it on himself and I didn't have an attitude like that.

I was going to ask you how characters with that attitude managed to survive so long?

Some corps, artillery – I won't single them out on their own but they were engineers – full of great blokes. They're called the grubbies. They built the road up at Bindoon so SAS could walk ten yards off it. That's what they used to say. But without them we

21:00 couldn't have built our Bindoon training area. So we were always rapt in the engineers. And they get their hands dirty. They're out there driving bulldozers and digging holes and stuff. Artillery have always been considered bit off the pace. I never ever considered artillery as much else than nine mile snipers. And armour, well armour thinks the sun shines out of

21:30 their arse. To me it's not what I wanted to be in. My uncle, my cousin were both armour. Infantry is the only outfit where true soldiering can be done. That was the beauty of the light horse. They've been blooded on Gallipoli and then went they went off to do their core business of being light horse they had all those trails and tribulations of serving as an infantry soldier in the trenches

22:00 of Gallipoli before they went off to the Palestine campaign. And it held them in good stead because when it came to real fighting, like getting off your horse and getting into it, they had all those skills they learnt as infantry men. So the infantry are really the bones of it all. The rest … it's really a waste of time a lot of it. And that's the worse bit about it, there are a lot of resources are pumped into these Abraham's tanks and things. That we can't carry on the end of our aeroplanes.

22:30 You have to redesign our ships to carry the bloody things. For what? To make tankies look good tearing down the highway. I don't know. I can't see how they can ever be used in action in Australia or in our

region. Anyway better off putting together another couple of squadrons of commando units or something.

You mentioned commandos earlier, what was the difference between the commando units and the SAS?

After Duntroon I got promoted to

23:00 warrant officer class 1. And sent to the 1st Commando Regiment as the RSM. Now that's an armour reserve unit. It's a chocko unit we used to call them. But they are sensational the old 1 Commando Regiment. It was the only unit in the army, the only army reserve unit in the army where you could say, "Yes this mob could deploy a war, they could do, they could go." And they were hard working part timers basically. They used

23:30 to call them 'woftams' and all sorts of things. But waste of fucking time and money but that wasn't how I saw it at all. My first contact with the army reserve and I'm the RSM of a unit. And I was very lucky to get an Order of Australia at the end of that posting. Mainly because I think I related to the commandos, I related to what they were doing. I rated them. I rated them quite highly.

24:00 Commandos are quite important to SAS anyway because a lot of those diggers from commandos go across to SAS and become very good soldiers. The guy that won the big gong in Afghanistan was one of my diggers from 1 Commando Company. He was the one that brought in the air strike and killed three hundred Talibans and saved all those American's lives. And downed choppers and all sorts of stuff.

Is that the bloke we saw on 60 Minutes?

Yeah. No was it. No that was the digger that worked for him.

24:30 That was signalman – I don't know he's a signaller, but his patrol commander was one of my diggers in chocko over in 1 Commando Company. And other guys have gone across, any number of commandos have crossed across to SAS and been very good soldiers. So it was a good posting to be in. It was the best posting outside the regiment, apart from Duntroon thing.

Well how would you compare a commando unit with SAS?

25:00 Well the beauty of the commando units is they're populated by a lot of SAS people now. All the ranks in the place are generally SAS. 4 Battalion Commando down in Sydney there. Everyone from the CO right down through the whole thing are SAS guys. Squadron commander, company commander, and the company CSMs are all SAS guys. And they're there particularly

25:30 to pass that commando thing on to these guys. But these guys have never done any commando work before. They're not bad, they'll do the job. I tell you. But 1 Commando Regiment is an amalgam of 1 Commando Company and 2 Commando Company in Melbourne. And 126 signal squadron in Melbourne which has now moved. And they brought all those three commando sub units into one regiment. And made it a regiment. They've got their fiftieth anniversary

26:00 next year which I'm going over for. All the RSMs and COs and everybody will be there. But they do a good job but they've never been deployed. Well they've had the odd bloke go to Vietnam and the odd bloke go to Timor. But they've never deployed as a company or a sub unit.

But by definition what's the difference between commandos and SAS?

Well one's a chocko mob and they can't be deployed overseas for a start. Even though Timor changed that.

26:30 They started to send army reservists to Timor but there's an Act of Parliament that basically stops them going overseas. And the other main difference is they're part timers. Every Tuesday night and one weekend a month. It's very hard to get the skills you need, the full time SAS skills at one Tuesday night a week and one weekend a month, you just can't do it. And you might have a six week camp

27:00 or a month camp every so often. Or one week camp but you still can't keep up. And the guys that do, do brilliantly. Some of them are very good. Some of them, it doesn't take much to get them up to SAS standard. Once they get across to the west they get immersed in the twelve month training cycle that goes on before they're allocated to go on a squadron and they come across with all those demolition skills to start with. And that makes things far easier. They're already parachute qualified. They're already maybe close quarter

27:30 battle qualified. They're very good shots. They're fit. So those guys are the main source of recruiting for a lot of the units and a lot of SAS blokes that come straight from commandos. And it's good but every time you take one you've got to try and replace him.

Is it true to say though that the commandos in the Second World War were like a precursor to today's SAS?

Yeah they are, they are. The double diamond outfits, that were

28:00 in Timor and all that sort of stuff, they do exactly what we do in the jungle. They – what we were doing

in the dessert was what the British SAS were doing in World War II in the dessert. But what we were doing in Vietnam and what they were doing in Timor and the islands is what we were doing in Vietnam. Oh no we have a very close link with them. The 2/2nd Commando Squadron Association down here have just wound up their business because

28:30 all their guys are too old to do anything else. We had a big spread on our last, or two – I'm the editor of the SAS journal Rendezvous. And two issues back we had a big spread on the 2/2nd and their big parade up at Kings Park. They are so old now those blokes but there were some tough cookies amongst that lot. God, they led the Japs a merry dance in Timor they really did. The Japs had a deployed division, you know twenty thousand odd men to Timor to try and

29:00 round them up and they're only a hundred strong. They did such damage you know.

They were cut off without a radio weren't they?

Yeah, Winnie the War Winner. That's what it was called. They came up on the radio after about twelve months and said, "We're still here." And they said, "Prove it." So all those parts and things were scavenged from the Japs around the place and they finally got coms. No it was a great story. There's a great – Winnie the War Winner

29:30 is actually in the war memorial in Canberra. We've got photographs of it in our museum down Fremantle there. There's a whole display there in the Fremantle of the 2/2nd Commandos and one of SAS in the other room. Which we're quite proud of.

That story about Winnie would have to be of inspiration to any young signaller?

Yeah. Yeah. But I think – I don't think – yeah I suppose a couple of our techs in our squadron could've built that radio.

30:00 But you really have to have a tech in your bent. You really couldn't just be a signaller and build a radio. I wouldn't have a clue about any different parts of it. But those guys in those days did. I remember we used to build crystal sets at school and that's really what they built a big crystal set. I think they had the valves and everything. And they had a power source and all that sort of stuff. I think they had a generator they got going or something.

30:30 **Brings out the importance of keeping up coms though I suppose?**

Well you can't do the jobs without coms. Bravo 2 Zero is a good example of that. They sent Bravo 2 Zero which is a reconnaissance patrol, an eight man reconnaissance patrol way up to the north of Iraq to set up an observation post and watch a main traffic route. But their communications were untested. They had radios they had never used before.

31:00 Only one bloke in the patrol knew how to use it. And they never got coms from the start to finish. And when they wanted to be picked up and were desperate to be pulled out they couldn't tell anybody. Oh no, coms were absolutely vital. But nowadays they've got satellite communications and all sorts of weird things that I don't even know about. Not even cleared to know about.

I think earlier we were going to explore the incident with the Black Hawk

31:30 **helicopter. Can you perhaps share with us your involvement or association to that incident?**

Oh well I was the second in command of training squadron. My last posting in the army. I worked for some good men. Neil Thompson and Tim McOwen. Tim McOwen's been back as commanding officer. He won a Distinguished Cross in Timor. He as the squadron commander. The CO, commanding officer under General Cosgrove in Timor.

32:00 And they kicked some serious arse up there. And when it happened I was 2IC of the squadron and I went up to the mess and all the families were gathering and it was a terrible thing. A terrible, terrible thing. I knew every one of them. They'd come through the squadron. And one of them, Andy Constantinides, one of my diggers from commandos when I was RSM there, a couple of postings before. Little Andy, little Greek guy from Melbourne. A tough little nut.

32:30 He said to me one day, "I'm going, I want to do the (car…UNCLEAR). I said, "Good on you. I hope you go well." And I've come across and here's Andy running around the regiment. And I said, "Oh how're you going?" But next minute he's killed in a bloody Black Hawk crash. It was a terrible thing, losing fifteen blokes. Cost so much time and effort to train that many. That's probably two full selection courses of guys that you lose.

33:00 It's millions of dollars. And millions of dollars worth of helicopters. And it was a terrible thing because we had two or three women, twenty one year old widows stuff like that. There were babies but out of all that mayhem comes good. We kicked off the SAS trust. We've raised half a million dollars and we've got that in trust and it's – the trust is run

33:30 by Justice Malcolm, he's the chairman of our trust and the role of the trust is to educate the kids of the guys who died. And we've got them all in private schools and we pay all their tuition till they finish. And one of the babies from Andy killed in Afghanistan. She was two weeks old when Andy died. So we've

covered her – we've got her booked in St. Mary's up at Karinyup and she will –

34:00 we will pay for her education right through till she finishes. And the terrible thing about it is it could've been worse. If it had've been a C130 crashing with seventy blokes in the back then you've got a hundred kids without fathers, then that trust would've been broke overnight. So we wanted ten million dollars. That's what we want in the trust, ten million.

Where does that funding come from?

We raise it.

How do you raise it?

Dinners. Breakfasts.

34:30 We have old Woosher and Chris Conley have a breakfast every month or so and we invite a hundred and fifty people and they pay a hundred dollars each to attend this breakfast and their money goes into the trust and those guys donate their time. We had a Breaker Morant dinner recently down at the Sheraton. You heard about it?

Yeah. No I've heard about Breaker Morant, I haven't heard about the dinner.

Well we had a big Breaker Morant dinner and we had two hundred and fifty people there. We raised a few quid

35:00 for the trust. I disgraced myself at that dinner. One of our mates, Phil Wilkinson, he's a wine maker from Penberton and he had his gold winning Pennowa on the table and I drank too much of it didn't I? I haven't had a drink since. I don't drink very much anyhow.

Apart from the Moondah Brooke that I saw earlier?

Oh that bottle lasted three days. Glass each day. That's all.

35:30 When you get to my age mate you've got to have a glass of wine for medicinal purposes.

Don't worry I've already started my medicinal program.

But the Black Hawk thing was an absolutely awful tragedy for the regiment and the people of Australia and it took away an enormous amount of skill and fabulous soldiers. They don't grow on trees. But you'll be pleased to know that every one of those guys was

36:00 replaced in that squadron by seven o'clock the following morning. That was the combat squadron. So if we had to go to war that squadron was going – had the guys replaced from another squadron. The ramifications of it were terrible. The blame game started. The enquiries and all that sort of stuff. I spent so much time at Karrakatta Cemetery watching funerals, it was just awful.

36:30 Had about nine funerals in a week. And you look at those guys and they were just young blokes coming through the regiment. They were me. It's just it happened to them not me. So you can't predict it, you don't worry about it. You just try and get on with your life. Like I said if a C130 crashed with a squadron. We had three guys on a C130 that crashed in the Philippines. There were twenty nine people onboard and we only had three people on board that.

37:00 We could've eight but the other guys were waved off. The other patrol ran up to the back of the Herc, the thing was churning and burning on the strip – two of them. They ran up to the back of the first Herc and the load master said, "Full go to the other plane." So they did, they ran around and got on the other plane. First one took off and crashed into the bay. Crashed in Subic Bay. They were talons too, they were black talons. Which are these

37:30 seriously secret C130's the Yanks had. They've still got but when the cold war was on. They were so chocka block full of electronic sensors and things, you could hardly fit anybody in these damn things. Anyway he flew out over the mountains and down over the bay and winged it over the bay and – one of the wings in the water. And one of the guys survived. The navigator survived the crash. He woke up with a broken leg on a fishing boat. He had no idea what happened. He bent down to

38:00 pick up his pencil as they bent. And that's all he remembers. He was just projected out of the plane somehow. Everyone else was killed. Three of our blokes were. And that was a terrible tragedy because Ewen Miller, the guy that was one of the sergeants that died, introduced Jo and I at that party. I was telling you about earlier, when I was dressed like a skank. So it was a terrible tragedy to lose him. He was a guy of great

38:30 knowledge and an important member of the regiment. As were the other two, a sergeant and a signaller. But you can thank your lucky stars every time the boys went to Iraq and never lost anybody wounded or killed. Unbelievable. And they were in action more than we were in Vietnam for God's sake. It's just fantastic soldiering. The blokes really had the wood on these guys. They had their woods on the Iraqis so heavily that

39:00 the Iraqis never stood a chance. I think the Iraqis thought initially that the SAS boys were on foot like

the Brits were in the first Gulf War but we wouldn't make that mistake again. The blokes were armed for bare, they had all the gear and before we knew it the Iraqis had vehicles shot out from under them and all sorts of things. They captured lots and lots of Iraqis and sent them home. Took their guns off them and sent them home.

How much knowledge do you have of their operations in Iraq

39:30 **recently?**

Not much. No not much. About the same as you. No they did well. I know the blokes, they're just young outfit blokes. The squadron commander I know him well. And they just did the job. Did the job because they had that extra element, that need to win thing. And they did, they really got stuck into it. Same as in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was

40:00 a bit different up in the mountains freezing cold. Twenty five, thirty below. The Americans had pulled out of the mountains because it was too cold and our guys stayed there for a further two weeks for God's sake. Oh no, you live at Swanbourne mate, it's not a good suburb to live in. If anyone's got to nuke anybody it'll be Swanbourne. No not really.

Is that why you moved up here to …

Yes that's right. Since 1957 they've been there.

40:30 And they've been an adornment on the army ever since. There's been a bit of scandal over the years. My mate Ray Mickelberg got acquitted the other day.

He's a mate of yours?

He was in our squadron in Vietnam. Very good soldier Ray. Very good soldier. I rang him up only three days before the acquittal and wished him all the best. And he said, "Oh well if it doesn't happen this time it'll probably never happen." And it did, it happened.

41:00 No Ray's a good man, I think he's been hard done by. I think he's been set up beautifully by somebody somewhere. Did Paddy Bacskay talk about him?

No.

So Ray Mickelberg is the sort of guy you need when a war's on because he had no intention of taking a backward step against anybody.

41:30 They had a big fighting patrol, seventeen men fighting patrol and was hit – they hit a bunch of VC coming down a track. And there was a wounded VC behind a tree with an RPD light machine gun really laying down some accurate fire. And the word came from the patrol commander, "Pull back pull back!." And Ray said, "Like buggery I'm pulling back." And he charged this guy. And raced across the track and shot this guy that was behind the tree. And basically saved the

42:00 whole situation. But he got into trouble because he didn't do what he was told.

Tape 9

00:47 **So considering the fact that you've seen quite a bit of action out there how important is Anzac Day to you?**

Oh vastly important. The best thing is about Anzac Day is both my kids have marched with me for years,

01:00 and still do. My daughter still marches with me now wearing her grandfather's medals. And my son always marches with me when he was here, wearing the other grandfather's medals. So yeah I've never missed an Anzac Day for ever. And I always marched with my father and my kids march with me. And I'd like to march as long as I can. No it's important to catch up with all the faces and see all the World War II guys there with their gongs and know that those guys have been up to their neck in it, and you've been up to your

01:30 neck in it and the new guys coming through have been up to their neck in it. And oh no it's good, Anzac Day's a good day.

What do you usually think about?

Well I always get a tear in my eye at the Dawn Service. We have a big dawn service out at Swanbourne, we get a thousand people attend that. With the maggies [magpies] singing in the trees and the dawn just breaking, just over the back of the hill. We have a choir that sings

02:00 Lily Marlene which is our slow march. We've got two German marching songs actually. Lily Marlene is the slow march and Happy Wanderer is the quick march. 'I love to go a wandering…' It's a wonderful song. And then we have buglers and they lay about twenty or thirty wreaths and the CO makes a wonderful speech. And when it's all over we all troop down to the mess and have

02:30 a gunfire breakfast. A gunfire breakfast is everyone pays a dollars or something and we have a bacon and egg feed and it's quite a big catering job. Then up to the house, we've got a house in Swanbourne barracks called the house and it's the association's house which we built over – quite a lot of people involved – over fifteen years. It's the old nurses' quarters from the 8 camp hospital that used to be there. And they

03:00 were going to condemn it and they condemned it and they were going to bulldoze it. So we said, "Can we have it?" and they did, they gave it to us. So the SAS association meet there, the place is always packed and then we get on buses and go into town and sink a few beers on the side of the road at the RSL headquarters there and then after the march sink a few more there and then go back to the barracks, where all the two up and all the rest of the stuff goes on. And have a lovely day. And my daughter stays with me. She drives me home sort of thing.

03:30 But I love Anzac Day for those reasons. To see people you haven't seen for a while, to remember those that went before and my kids.

How do you think Australian's perception of Vietnam veterans has changed over the years, if you think it has?

The two welcome home parades we had were welcomed

04:00 for the veterans to put to bed some of the demons. But I saw an RSL bloke standing on the side of the road in Sydney in the big back from Vietnam march or whatever it was called, with a big sign saying, 'We Forgive You.' And a couple of blokes were going to rip the sign off and shove it down his throat basically. That hurt because we thought, "Hang on what do we need to be forgiven about?" We were doing the bidding of this country.

04:30 The people of Australia basically were – fair enough there were two sides of politics – one side was louder than the other. The loud side basically got up as it did in America. Vietnam in hindsight was a flawed concept, the old domino theory has been disproven. But at the time that was the thinking

05:00 of the day. We didn't have any politics, we just did the job. We wanted to serve, we were soldiers, regular soldiers. But to come home and see ourselves being spat at – no-one ever spat at me I'll tell you now. They wouldn't want to, I'd have broken their neck. And a lot of my mates the same. A lot of my mates have been in trouble for punching people for doing stuff like that and saying stupid things like, "Baby killers," and stuff like that. We never killed anybody that wasn't armed.

05:30 We killed a lot of people but they were all armed I tell you now. Everyone of them. 'Cause in jungle you're dealing in a very close area. You're not bringing in air strikes from miles away that you can't see. And with the people of Australia Vietnam was a terrible thing. And we moved on I think, Vietnam veterans bottled it up for years and years and then all of a sudden it's broken out.

06:00 And the Vietnam Veteran counselling service was very important to dealing with this in the early days. And Veterans Affairs eventually agreed to take it over and fund it and call it Veterans Counselling Service. And that's still in place today and that's done a valuable service but there are still a lot of mad people out there. Fifty-five thousand people went to Vietnam and we've got twenty five thousand TPIs.

06:30 A lot of them are World War II and Korea, so it's not all Vietnam, but Vietnam wasn't a cathartic thing, it was a very brain numbing thing for a lot of people to be involved in, especially people who'd lost people killed. We lost no-one in my family World War I or World War II and we lost a third of our community in Vietnam. One out of three. I don't see – I'm not bitter at the government at all for having us there. That's why we were in the army, to do the

07:00 Government's bidding. But I'm bitter about the distortions and the stuff that went on later I really am. And to me the Gough Whitlam's and the rest of those fellow travellers, who did everything they could to dirk us and cut us down and make us less than – you know the red paint brigade and we put up with it, we had to because we were still serving. You couldn't do anything about it

07:30 and then to stand there at SAS and have Bob Hawke and Gordon Scholes. Kim Beazley was the only one out of all those people who'd give a damn about the army at all. About the defence force. None of them would give a stuff. Not a single stuff. And I think history will prove that Labor would rather roll over than fight.

Well on that philosophical note there,

08:00 **Mick I just want to thank you…**

John Curtin was good.

Just wanted to thank you very much for talking today for the archive. You've been sitting in the hot seat for quite some time and you've done a marvellous job.

Well thanks very much and I hope it's of use.

It will be I'm sure.

INTERVIEW ENDS