Australians at War Film Archive

David Thomson - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Can I ask you to start by giving us a brief summary of your life?**

My name is David Scott Thomson. I was born on the 21st of November, 1924, in Sale, in Gippsland. I grew up on a small farm, which is part of a much larger family property. I went to a one-teacher country school, eight classes in one school,

01:00 then to a little local high school and then finally I had one year at school in Melbourne, at Scotch College. I then went to the Royal Military College at Duntroon, in February, 1942, and I graduated in December, 1943. I then went to some army courses, and then joined a very good AIF [Australian Imperial Force] battalion, the 2/16th Battalion, AIF,

01:30 and eventually ended up in the Atherton Tablelands, and went into operations at the landings at Balikpapan. I was in hospital when the war finished, in fact, and then I volunteered to go to Japan in the Occupation Force and was in Japan for two years, with the 65th Australian Infantry Battalion, which became the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment.

02:00 Then home to Melbourne. Then I did a bit with the National Service Battalion, then back with 1st Battalion of Royal Australian Regiment in Ingleburn, New South Wales, which was preparing to go to Korea, with a lot of old friends who I had served with in Japan. Then I eventually became a company commander in Korea, with A Company, 1RAR [Royal Australian Regiment].

02:30 I was then posted to a staff job in Japan for almost two years. I returned to Australia, to army headquarters in Victoria. I did the best thing I ever did, I married my present wife. For six weeks after we were married, we were on a ship going to Pakistan. I attended the Pakistan Staff College…

03:00 We had a wonderful year at Quetta on the north west frontier of Pakistan. Home to Duntroon where I became an instructor at the Royal Military College.

03:30 I mixed this up a bit…I took part in the operations in Korea, then to Japan, then to Australia…Duntroon.

04:00 I was then posted to the Australian Staff College at Queenscliff for a few years. By that time, we had three sons, aged almost under three. Then to England where I was an instructor at the British Army Staff College in Camberley, in Surrey for two years. It was a wonderful job. Then home, briefly to Canberra, where I was then appointed to

04:30 raise and form a new battalion, the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, which was raised in South Australia. Went to Malaysia, served in Borneo during the confrontation with Indonesia. After that, I was posted to Canberra, briefly, and given a marvellous job as the director of infantry, and the regimental colonel of the Royal Australian Regiment.

05:00 Then I was promoted to brigadier to command a brigade in Townsville. Then for family reasons, which I will mention later, with many regrets I resigned from the army aged forty-seven. And the army were wonderful. We had to find something to do in the north, which I will explain later. We bought an old house at Palm Cove north of Cairns, and turned it into a very successful

05:30 and very expensive tourist resort. That was very hard work; we worked seven days a week, very long hours. And then my wife said there must be an easier way of living. She suggested that I should have a go at standing for parliament. Which I did. As a complete outsider, I won pre-selection for the seat of Leichhardt. And I will show you a map of this vast area.

06:00 From the south of Innisfail in Queensland to the Papuan New Guinea border, and out to the middle of the Cape. It was a huge area. I entered parliament at the beginning of 1976 at the age of fifty-one, which is quite old. I enjoyed it immensely, it was very hard work. My wife was wonderful, working in my electorate.

06:30 At the beginning of 1978, I was told I was going to be a minister. I was quite old, I was fifty-four, that was pretty old for a minister. I was minister for Science and Environment, later minister for Science and Technology. I won three elections and lost the fourth, when the government lost office. Then I

07:00 was offered various jobs outside. I was working with the government, or either as a company director, which I did for some years. I resigned from most of those when I was seventy-two. We came to live down here, where we are now, near Bateman's Bay. And now I am in the middle of writing family history.

07:30 **Can you tell me, in your family background had anyone been involved in the military?**

Oh yes. Six young Thomsons went to the First World War, three came back. My father was one of them. Three of them were decorated for bravery. So it was very much a family tradition.

What did your father tell you about his World War I experiences?

Very little. He didn't in fact talk about, he had a pretty tough time. He didn't talk about it very much.

08:00 I asked a few questions, but...

What can you tell me about his service, what he did and where he went?

He was with the 4th Light Horse in the Middle East. He got awarded the Military Medal and Mentioned In Dispatches. He was in the Battle of Beersheba. He did a lot of service. He came back in 1919,

08:30 and by that time he had inherited part of a family property from an aunt. It was a big property which was divided between all the boys and all the girls, which was unusual in those days. He then married my mother, who was quite wonderful...

You mentioned off camera that you had an unusual childhood. Can you explain that?

09:00 I had a wonderful childhood, to start with. When I was seven, and my younger brother was six, my mother died of an operation. We went to live with our grandparents on a nearby farm, until my grandfather died almost a year later, when we came back to our own house, with housekeepers. We were very fortunate. The first housekeeper was wonderful and looked after us very well.

09:30 They stayed three years. Then we had a succession of various housekeepers. By this stage, we were both going to a one teacher, one room school, eight classes in the one room. Which surprisingly, I learnt something. I was always told that I would go to boarding school in Melbourne, as the rest of the family had done.

10:00 By that time it was the Depression, things were going very badly, there was no money. Fortunately, at the time when I was about to leave school, the government started a local bus service to the nearest town, so I could go to the local high school. I don't know what would have happened if it had not been for that bus. I would have had to go and get a job I suppose. I spent four years at a little local high school - a total of a hundred and fifty students.

10:30 By that time, my grandmother had died and left me a hundred pounds, quite a lot of money in those days. I asked my father could I spend that hundred pounds and have my final year of school at Scotch College, and he said yes, which I did. I went to this very big school as a boarder, and I realised how little I knew.

11:00 The ones who had been there for years were much better educated. One of the problems of living in the country, as we did, we used to ride to our little schools by horses and we'd have to come home immediately after school to help on the farm. Then when I went to high school by bus, we had to leave immediately, so we never got any opportunity to play sport, which was a great problem. At Scotch College I decided to do two things I had never done before,

11:30 I rode and learned to play rugby. Which I did, and I played rugby at Duntroon...

What attracted you as a young man to go to Scotch College?

Because every other Thomson had been there. The first Thomson went there in 1859, and all the others had been there. And I also thought it would give me the chance to get a little bit of education.

12:00 I had always been told I was going there. If there had been any money, I would have gone much earlier. But there wasn't, there was drought and Depression. My father became very withdrawn after my mother died. He tried to do his best for us and did, but it was difficult.

What are your memories of the Depression and how it affected your family,

12:30 **and the district?**

Nearly everyone was very poor. There were three families of Thomson living together, side by side, on the farms on this property, all with problems. Some were better off than others. My grandparents were better off. They had a maid and someone to help in the house.

13:00 We had a great problem. Our car was in an accident and it was never repaired. I suspect it wasn't insured, so we didn't have a car. If we wanted to go fifteen kilometres into the nearest town, we either

rode our horses, or if we were going to do the shopping…In September, 1939, when I was fourteen,

13:30 and my brother was thirteen, my father said he couldn't afford to have a housekeeper anymore. I said, "How will we manage?" He said, "You and your brother Colin will have to do the cooking and the shopping and help on the farm when you can." It was difficult because we were in an area without electricity. Cooking was done on a wood stove in the kitchen.

14:00 There were fireplaces in the other rooms. When it was cold, we had wood fires. There was no refrigeration or electric light, we had kerosene lights. It was a simple way, but most people in the country, in those days, lived like that. Eventually electricity did come to the area, but we couldn't afford it.

Were you aware at the time of the hardship

14:30 **or was the Depression so...Did it have such an impact that everybody seemed to be suffering at the time?**

It had a great impact on us because we were a single parent family living in a fairly isolated area. We just didn't see many other people. We had one or two good friends locally. Unfortunately, one of our best friends died when he was eleven, which was very sad.

15:00 We knew we were badly off, we knew we were poor. But we accepted it. It was one of these things that happened. We accepted that our lives were very different from all our cousins, and the people living in the cities, for instance, who lived quite different lives.

How did the Depression affect the day to day running of the farm and the produce?

15:30 Well, just before my mother died, we had always had, what was called, a married couple living in the cottage next door to the house. The woman helped in the house and the man helped on the farm. They left just before my mother died, and I suspect it was because they couldn't afford it. I remember them fondly. And then my father tried to run the farm by himself. It was very difficult. We had helped where we could.

16:00 For big things like harvesting and the shearing and so forth, people were brought in to help. We were always there. Our father was good. We had two house cows, and we didn't have to milk those in the morning, before we went to school. But we always milked the cows in the evening. When we were looking after ourselves, we'd come home, set the fire, light it, cook the evening meal, wash up, do our homework.

16:30 So that was the sort of life we lived.

You said when you got to Scotch, it became apparent that you knew nothing...

Okay, I was really good at English. My mother and I both read a lot. It was one of the things we did. I only had one year at Scotch. My leaving certificate, the second last year of school,

17:00 and my final exams, I surprised myself by coming top in history, but I failed in French and mathematics. I sat what they called supplementary examinations for those, and passed. If I hadn't of passed that leaving certificate, I would never have got into Duntroon.

So what was the academic adjustment like, going from your country school to...

17:30 It was surprising. Very well equipped school, small classes, very good teachers. My chemistry master taught my father. There were Thomson names around the walls. We felt we were a part of it, even though it was only a year. But most of the others had had so much better preparation than we had had. So we struggled. It was a hard struggle,

18:00 trying to keep up. Very fortunately, I was determined to do as well as I could. I studied whenever I could. We had compulsory homework every night at the boarding house. The teachers were very helpful. You could go to one of the teachers at any time and they would help you.

What were the subjects you really enjoyed in that final year?

History and English.

18:30 I found physics and chemistry very difficult, because my preparation wasn't good. I found maths difficult and I found French difficult, because we hadn't had very good teachers at high school.

What particular aspects of the history lessons were you...

I was very lucky. At high school the year before, I had done British history, and that was the subject we studied in the final year, so I had already done it.

19:00 That was why I managed to do well. And I've always been interested in history ever since.

What were your aspirations for your future at the time?

When I went there, I had no idea. I knew that I would have to leave school at the end of the year, 1941. I

realised that there would be no money of any sort for me. By that time, my father had let our farm. He had gone and enlisted again and joined up and gone to the Middle East. My brother was living with an uncle,

19:30 so I had no home. There was absolutely no money. There wasn't really enough to pay my last term at Scotch College. Except the school said, "We'll pay." And they paid for my last term for me. That was why two of my sons went there. I really didn't know what to do. Fortunately, I had a friend who had come from a big school in Sydney, his parents had moved to Melbourne. His father was a brigadier in the army.

20:00 I visited them quite often. He had told me he was going to apply for Duntroon, and his father said, "Why don't you have a go, too, David?" And he told me all about it. So I had a go. I applied for a selection to Duntroon at the end of 1941. I went before a selection board of three brigadiers in Melbourne, and looked at all the other people there and thought I didn't have a hope. They'd all had good education,

20:30 they were all good sportsmen. The only thing I could do was ride and swim. We had nowhere to go for holidays that year, and a friend of my family's asked us to stay, and while we were staying with her a telegram came saying I had been accepted to Duntroon. That was quite wonderful. Without that I don't know what I would have done.

21:00 So in February, 1942, I went to Duntroon.

What did it mean to go to the Royal Military College during war time?

It was difficult, I had only just had my 17th birthday. The course at Duntroon was a four year course, half academic and half military. Because of the war it was cut down to a two year course with a reduced syllabus.

21:30 And I knew that when I graduated in two years, if the war was still going, I would be going to war. It was a difficult two years. They still had horses at Duntroon, in 1942, it's quite amazing but they did.

22:00 There was a marvellous old cavalry instructor, and all the new boys were brought down to see if they could ride. I put my hand up and said that I could ride, and the cavalry instructor said, "Right, get on that horse, fold your arms, put your stirrups over the saddle and take the horse over those three jumps." Which I did, because the horse knew what to do, in any case. And he said

22:30 afterwards, "You may have a horse for recreational purposes. If you want to go anywhere, you can take a horse."

How did your horsemanship compare to the other boys?

Most of them couldn't ride. There were very few country boys, they were mostly city.

And you mentioned that your father had re-enlisted?

Yes.

How old was he when he did that?

Much too old. He put his age right back.

23:00 It was an escape, I think. He never talked about financial problems to us, but I think there were severe financial problems. And he let our farm, to help pay off the mortgages I imagine, and he decided the best thing he could was enlist. We were quite proud of it, but he shouldn't have gone. But he did, and he served in the Middle East for eighteen months.

Just going back to the start of World War II.

23:30 **What are your memories of the declaration of war and the tensions of that time and leading up to it?**

Up until 1939, we didn't have a wireless or radio in our house. We had a housekeeper who said she wouldn't come unless we had a radio, so we got one, so we heard the declaration of war. We got a daily newspaper delivered

24:00 and read it avidly, and took great interest. Because by that stage, I had a number of older cousins who enlisted. In 1942, one of them was a prisoner of war, and wasn't heard of again. We found out later what happened. He was a wing commander in the airforce. And so we followed the family, and I had quite a few Thomson cousins also in the services.

24:30 Everyone who could in our family joined up.

And how did it affect the tuition and schooling when you were at Scotch during the war?

I joined the cadets. I was very keen, I loved that. It was great. I managed, and really, looking back on it, it was a very good, formative period of my life.

25:00 **Did you anticipate that you would be serving in the military in World War II?**

Once I decided to go to Duntroon, of course I did. In any case, when I left school I was just seventeen, I would have put my age up and enlisted, as a lot of people did.

So what was the preparation like in cadets and making that transition to Duntroon?

25:30 For one year you didn't learn too much, but I got some of the basics…

Can you explain what the basics were?

Oh, drill, handling weapons, learning to put a uniform on properly, saluting, learning to read a map, that sort of thing.

You mentioned that the course at RMC [Royal Military College] had been accelerated at this stage because it was war time.

26:00 **Can you explain what the tuition was on a practical level and an academic level in that first year?**

Okay. On the academic level, we did in a limited curriculum, English, physics, chemistry, mathematics, book-keeping, which I had never heard of and had trouble with. Things like that. The military side was all…We did a condensed course in all the military subjects because we were all going to join

26:30 different corps in the army. Some were going to infantry, armour, artillery, service corps, engineers… When I graduated, I had applied to be a infantryman as I badly wanted to be. I found out I was on the list to be a signaller, and so I took courage and asked to be paraded to the commandant, which you could. The commandant was a brigadier.

27:00 I said, "Sir, I don't want to go to the signal corps. I want to be in the infantry. Can I please change to be an infantryman?" And he said, "Yes." And I never regretted.

What attracted you so passionately to the infantry?

That's real soldiering. Everyone else in the army exists to help the infantry.

27:30 Field Marshal Wavell said, "All wars are won in the end by the infantry." And that is true. It is the corps.

You've had involvement with the military college since being a staff cadet there. How do you think your studies there were affected by the fact that there was a war on and it was anticipated that you would go into service?

28:00 I personally worked much harder on the important military subjects. I struggled with the civilian subjects. I did pass the civilian subjects, but just. I think the instructors might have encouraged me. Because the civilian instruction was done by civilian instructors. I did better at military subjects

28:30 because I was pretty enthusiastic, and I graduated about two thirds the way down my class. Not quite the bottom, but a fair way from the top.

What sort of emphasis was there on discipline and regiment in that first year?

Oh very, very disciplined. The senior classes would help train the junior ones, and they were very tough, learning their job, too, of course.

29:00 On the whole, the instructors were excellent. Many of them had been to the war and come back by then. I think we were taught very well. The sergeants and sergeant majors were absolutely excellent. They were tough, the discipline was very tough indeed. You were punished for any infringement of discipline. You had to get up early in the morning with your pack and go drilling on the parade ground.

29:30 On the whole, it was very good indeed. I will tell you later, I went back there later as an instructor. It's a different world.

So what sort of influence did the sergeant majors have on you?

They had a great influence. The fact that they all started as private soldiers and worked their way up. They were experienced

30:00 and one learned to respect. Not necessarily to like them, but you respected them.

Why is that such an important part of army training?

Because young officers don't know much, but the sergeants know a great deal. That is the real reason. And young officers have got to learn from the sergeants, as I found later.

30:30 **And what sort of activities would the senior class participate in in terms of that discipline?**

They would supervise you at meals. They would ask you questions about the history of the college. If you couldn't answer, you…I can't remember what they made us do, there were various things you had to

do. They also, I think, taught us as well,

31:00 because you lived together. When I was there, there was only three classes. Normally there were four, one in each of the four years. When I started, there were three classes, one of which graduated, the second class graduated halfway through my first year, and left third and fourth class. There were more cadets because of the war, but a much condensed course.

31:30 **How were you able to follow the progress of the war at that time, and what contact were you having with people who had been on the front line?**

You read the papers, we didn't have television of course, we listened to the radio, if you could. Returned servicemen did come to talk to us. One of them was the director of military intelligence, Brigadier John Rogers, who later on became my father-in-law.

32:00 **Can you explain in as much detail as you can recall what sort of knowledge he imparted on the students?**

He may have talked for forty minutes. He talked about the Middle East. He had been in Cyprus and Crete and Greece.

32:30 He talked about the organisation of intelligence, how intelligence was gathered, how it was used. It was a very interesting talk. I knew who he was, because he and his family lived two doors away from an aunt of mine.

I'm just trying to get a sense of you having access to these men who had been fighting in a war at the same time. How did they assist in your training and your preparation on a practical level?

33:00 Because most of the instructors had had service. The very senior ones had been in the First World War, others had been in the Second World War. They taught you practical things.

So when you went out on a training exercise, what would be an example of them doing that?

33:30 You would be given a job in an exercise. You might be given a job with rank, in charge of other cadets, and they would give you orders and you would carry them out and they would give you a critique afterwards. "You made an awful mess of that." Or, "That wasn't bad." They very seldom told you you were good, as we weren't of course.

Were you preparing or training in certain sorts of conditions?

34:00 All sorts of condition. The Canberra weather, very hot in summer, very cold, and we'd go out camping in the winter. It was tough…

Was there any sense of the Japanese, or were you preparing in your fighting exercises for fighting the Japanese?

Okay, the Japanese had come into the war

34:30 in December, '41, which is when I was told I was going to Duntroon. So it was very much involved, and Pearl Harbour was a tremendous problem. And the fact that the Americans were in the war changed the whole face of it. We learned as much as we could about what was going on, because we knew then if the war went on that we would be a part of it.

35:00 **How do they train you to be a leader at such a young age?**

Oh yes, there was a lot of leadership training. A lot of examples…You listened to the sergeants, the sergeant majors and the officer instructors. You see how they handled you. Some of them may not have handled you as well as they should. The good ones you tried to follow, and took their example.

35:30 **How confident were you by the time you left, of leading a platoon of men?**

I had just had my nineteenth birthday. I thought that I knew I great deal more than I had, then I did, but I suppose I had more confidence than I should have had.

Can you describe what the living conditions were like at Duntroon?

36:00 Each cadet had his own room with a desk and a wardrobe. You had to keep them absolutely, meticulously neat. Everything had to be folded the right way. The officers, or senior cadets, would actually come and measure your underclothes to see that they were folded the right way. They'd run their fingers around things for dust and if there was any dust found you would get into trouble. You were taught to look after things and to obey the rules and regulations

36:30 **And what would be the day to day routine in that final year?**

We got up early, had breakfast, then you'd either go to the classrooms, for lectures, or out in the field for practical things. You always studied after dinner

37:00 unless you were out having evening lectures, which you often had, or out in the field, at night. It was a tough life, but we were young. On the whole, I enjoyed it.

So once you graduated, what happened then?

I went and did two courses. One at the infantry centre for about three months, then I went to the jungle training centre at Canungra

37:30 to learn jungle warfare. They were good preparations. Sometime after July of that year, I was posted to an infantry battalion.

So can you explain to me in as much detail as you can remember, what you were taught on that first course and how you were prepared for your coming role?

38:00 You were tested on how you handled weapons. You were taught to organise range practices, shooting practices. You were taught to organise exercises. You were taught to train people. You trained each other. You had very good instructors there. It was very tough. It was a shortened course for wartime, but it was crowded with information. It gave you preparation

38:30 for your own infantry corps.

When you were eventually in an actual combat situation, how easy is it to recall that training? And how easy it to adjust to a practical environment, when it has been so crammed?

Well, you knew the job that had to be done.

39:00 If you didn't know, you asked an experienced soldier. If you had any sense, you took advice. Some young officers didn't, but I tried to.

So what role does a platoon sergeant then play in that?

I went to the 2/26th Battalion, a West Australian battalion, which was a pity because they were very clannish, of course, and I was a Victorian.

39:30 They had been in the Middle East, they had been in Syria and fought the Vichy French in Syria and had quite a lot of casualties. They had had two tours of service in Vietnam. They were very experienced. The CO [Commanding Officer] was a wonderful man. He had started as a young sub-lieutenant in the battalion at the beginning of the war, and he rose up through the ranks to be the commanding officer as a lieutenant colonel.

40:00 He was a great example. I had a number of other commanding officers later and he was...I was very lucky in getting the right sort of people.

And when you were at Canungra, how intensive was the training there?

It couldn't have been more intensive. Day and night. Everyone, all the instructors....

40:30 It was a very good course indeed.

Tape 2

00:30 **I just wanted to ask you a general question about what qualities you think are important for a good leader?**

Determination, intelligence, understanding of human nature, knowing your job. Being as expert as you can in the job that you are doing,

01:00 whatever it might be in the army, or anywhere. The same applies in other walks of life.

You mentioned that the battalion you joined were WA [Western Australia], and you were Victorian, quite clannish. How did you garner respect from them?

It took some time. I was nineteen.

01:30 Nearly all of them had a great deal of experience, several years of experience, some of them. I thought that I really knew more than I did. In the end, when I left that battalion, I realised how much they taught me and how good they were at teaching me

02:00 and giving me examples of how to behave. I wasn't a very good young platoon commander. And years afterwards, I was always sympathetic to the new ones that were arriving.

Why do you think you weren't very good?

I was too young. I was nineteen...I was twenty when I actually went on operations. To lead men,

02:30 some of them were thirty-five, I was just twenty, it was…Normally it wouldn't have happened. I would have been twenty-two or something, if it had been the four year course at Duntroon, but the war had accelerated. I had to work hard to catch up and do the job.

03:00 I'm not sure how well I succeeded there. In September, of 1944, I joined the 2/16th Battalion at a place called Stathpine, outside Sydney.

03:30 We were there for a short period, they had just come back from service in New Guinea and they were just getting themselves together and retraining. We then moved to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland, where a huge concentration of troops was preparing for various operations. And in June, of 1945, we got on board a ship and went to a little island called Moratai, what is now Indonesia,

04:00 but was then the Dutch East Indies. It had been Japanese occupied, but it was no longer. And there we spent two or three weeks and got on board a troop ship, the HMAS Manoora, and went to Balikpapan in Borneo, which is now Kalamantan in Indonesia. There was a large force of Japanese at Balikpapan, and we were given the job…

04:30 The whole of the 7th Division landed there on the 1st of July, 1952, and I've got a couple of photos of that there. We got into landing craft and went ashore. My company, B Company, in fact the whole battalion were in the second wave. There had been a huge bombardment by the naval guns beforehand, and Balikpapan was absolutely knocked around. Things were burning, there had been

05:00 a lot of wire and obstacles on the beaches, and many of them had been destroyed so there was a way through. The support was done very well, with big naval guns. We were in the second wave, and my company had a fairly easy time on that first day. C Company, next to us, had six casualties.

05:30 I don't think we had any casualties on the first day.

Could you describe what it was like to be in charge of a group of men on this landing?

Well, we had rehearsed this, on the beach near Cairns, so we all knew what to do.

06:00 We come out of landing craft and we knew how to deploy to get into positions. We landed with a platoon, which has got about thirty-nine people in it, three sections, platoon headquarters. We watched the fire. You see it in photographs, all the fire support,

06:30 and the devastation of that support at Balikpapan. Without that we would have had a very difficult time. As it was, the Japanese were absolutely demoralised, at this stage. I think they knew also the war was coming to a close. And we landed, and we saw very few Japanese on the first day.

07:00 We patrolled out into the rainforest jungle, and there were parties of Japanese around. We struck one party and had two casualties. Then we went out on a long patrol, looking for people. I did a foolish thing. I went out in front to see which way we were going,

07:30 just making sure, and it happened that I saw movement in the rainforest. I pulled up my rifle, I was carrying a rifle and a pistol, and a stray Japanese shot me in the arm. Fortunately it wasn't bad, it went through the flesh. We looked for the Japanese, a sign of where he had escaped, I couldn't find him.

08:00 I could walk, so they took me back to a local river where a boat came and collected us and I went to a hospital. At that stage, there was a portable hospital, the 2/12th Australian General Hospital in Balikpapan, I went there. I had an operation on my arm, they sewed it up. At the end of the war, on the 15th of August, I was in the hospital. So I missed the few celebrations there was.

08:30 The battalion came together. There were still Japanese coming in to surrender. There were Japanese prisoner of war camps put up. We put up tents. For the first time in a long time we were in proper tents. Previous to that, we just had our little two man shelters. When I came back to the battalion, I was posted to the battalion headquarters as the assistant adjutant,

09:00 a sort of junior staff officer, which was a very good experience. One very interesting thing happened while I was there. Lady Louis Mountbatten, who was chancellor of the Red Cross, came to visit. I just read a biography of her and I understand why there was such a fuss when she said she wanted to go for a swim. So I was detailed to take her for a swim. It's a long story, but she had to have a special tent. I wish there was some photographs, but no-one had cameras.

09:30 So there was no photographs of that incident…

You said there was a bit of a long story. We've got some time today…

Well, I don't know much about it, because I came into it…She said she wanted to go for a swim, and because my battalion, the 2/16th , was on the seashore, she was brought down and someone looked around and said, "David, you can take her for a swim."

10:00 Now we didn't have bathers. I have no idea what I wore. Presumably, someone lent me a pair of shorts, or I had a pair of cut-off trousers. But she was given a tent to change in, and there was some sentries guarding that tent of course, and she came out in this beautiful…She was forty-five and I was twenty. But I was very impressed. I took her for a swim, and that is the story.

10:30 **What did she wear to go for a swim?**

A beautiful bathing costume. She had a proper bathing costume. She was dressed in her Red Cross uniform, or an ambulance uniform…I'm not sure now, after all these years. At any rate, at about that time, the beginning of October, it was September when she was there, the army called for volunteers to join an Occupation Force for Japan.

11:00 **I'd like to go back and ask you some questions about Balikpapan. You mentioned the incident with Lady Mountbatten. Whereabouts was the battalion based at that point?**

At Balikpapan. Well, nearby. We weren't that far…We were in an area that was untouched by fire. From what I remember, it was quite a pleasant beach.

11:30 Which is why I think we were chosen for that. At that stage, many soldiers were waiting to go home. The ones that had been away longest got priority. We were getting proper meals for the first time in some time. Anybody who wasn't well was being treated properly. There was very little disease.

12:00 There was malaria in the area, but we had been taking, very strictly, every morning, every soldier had to, under supervision, take an anti-malarial tablet. So we had very little malaria. People were tired, but we had a chance to play sports, for instance. It was a relaxing period. It took a while to settle down after the end of the war.

12:30 I wasn't there for that, I was in hospital. I remember quite a number of people came to see me. I had a couple of cousins who were also serving in different units, and they came to see me in hospital. Then I came back and I was working in this junior staff job, which was good experience for me. At that stage my arm was still in a sling, so I was limited…I think that is why the CO put me in the headquarters.

13:00 **I will ask you about the landing. This was your first war time experience, having trained at Duntroon. Was it what you thought it was going to be like?**

I don't think I had much time to think about it. Yes, having done exercises

13:30 with live ammunition, I knew more or less what it was going to be like. Of course, I had a very experienced platoon, and a very good platoon sergeant who kept a close eye on me. I realise now how much advice he gave me, quietly, on what to do. Yes, a lot of unexpected things happened of course, they always do in a war,

14:00 but I was beginning to…I was still only twenty. I wouldn't recommend it for a twenty year old, it's too young.

You mentioned that you received some quiet advice from the platoon sergeant. Can you remember what kind of advice he would give you?

When I was wondering what to do next, he would make a quiet suggestion.

14:30 Or if I had made a mistake in handling one of the soldiers, he would give me advice on that, too. As I got to know them, it became easier. But having experienced people…Like the CO, he was a wonderful man. He would come around and talk, our company commander. Our majors were wonderful.

15:00 They were so experienced. I think they must have been a bit impatient with a young bloke like me, but I learnt…Later I realised just how much they taught me, because the next time I commanded a platoon I knew what to do. It was almost a process of osmosis. I learnt as I went, which is what you are supposed to do.

15:30 **Now those men had already been in New Guinea when you joined up with them...**

And in the Middle East, many of them, too.

What kind of stories did they tell you about what they had been through?

There was very little talk about operations and casualties. They didn't talk much about the people who had been killed.

16:00 As I found later, you don't talk about those things too much. It brings back problems, and you try to put them in the back of your mind. So there was not too much talk around the campfire at night after the war. There was a bit of talk…I just sat and listened to them in fact.

16:30 But it is very unusual for soldiers to discuss… Unless they've got a real problem that they want to come and talk about quietly. Sometimes later on, on other operations, people would come and say, "Look sir, I'm having a problem." But I was too young, no-one came to me with their problems, they went to the sergeant, at that stage. But later, soldiers would come for advice,

17:00 NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] would come for advice. Or you would call someone up and say, "Look, I think you're having a problem." It was very good training. I was very lucky to have those very experienced people.

Could you cast your mind back to that landing and perhaps talk me through what kind of instructions you had to give when you were coming in to land?

17:30 We had given the orders beforehand. Each section of my men knew exactly where they had to be, as soon as they were out of the landing craft. As you saw in those photographs, we jumped into the water and walked ashore from the landing craft. Then you lined up as quickly as you could in the positions you were told. One section on the left, one on the right, and one in reserve. And platoon headquarters, with the officer, platoon commander and sergeant, a couple of radio operators and an orderly,

18:00 would be in the centre, behind the rear. As soon as everyone was in the position the order would be given, "Okay, let's go." Whether we waited for the rest of the company, I don't know. I think we went to a position that we had been told to go to, on shore. And waited until everyone was together.

18:30 The orders had already been given, everyone knew what to do, all you had to do was keep an eye on it to see that it was happening as it should be. And with those experienced soldiers, I didn't have very much to do.

What's running through your mind as you're coming in for your first military operation?

It's very difficult to recall. I was concerned that I would be able to handle it.

19:00 I don't think I was frightened. You're too busy, and I discovered this later, if you're in a leadership position as I was on other operations, you're too busy to worry about what is happening to you. You were worrying about how the plan was going, what people were doing, whether they were doing the right thing, keeping an eye on it all.

19:30 I don't think I worried too much about myself. I was worried about if I would do the job properly, but that wasn't worrying about what would happen to me.

Were you aware, at that point, that the Japanese were in retreat?

Very shortly we did. Because C Company had quite a big engagement, right next door to us. And I think, if I remember rightly, they had six casualties.

20:00 We didn't have any casualties on that day. It then became quite obvious…You saw that photograph of that Japanese gun position, which is obviously not occupied. They weren't there, they had gone into the jungle. Our job then was to find them.

20:30 And that was the job until the war ended.

How did the patrols work when you were searching for the enemy?

Okay. I'll give you one. I did one patrol, in very thick country, and we had very bad radio. The radios weren't very good in those days. My company commander said, "David, I think you're going to have trouble with communications there.

21:00 You better take line." Now that means taking rolls of telephone cable, reeling out a line behind you, plugging in a handset onto the end of it, and talking back. And we did that to start with. I was very worried that if a Japanese party comes across this line, and they can follow it up and find out where we were. Fortunately they didn't, we were quite a long way out.

21:30 But not very much happened after that. I told you that, at the end, late July, I got wounded.

How would you organise the men on a patrol?

There would always be a forward section which would have two scouts out in front, leading scouts,

22:00 they would go out in front and lead the way. Usually you would use hand signals to direct them. Behind them would be a machine gunner. In those days we did have Bren gun, with an offsider, called his number two, behind that the rest of the section. Then the forward section had a difficult job. They were going into unknown territory and could easily be ambushed, so it was keeping its eye out for everything.

22:30 The platoon commander would be behind the leading section, with his platoon headquarters with his radio, if it worked. And behind him would be the other two sections, ready to deploy, to move out, if anything happened. And that's really how it worked all the time on a patrol. It doesn't matter where you were, in open country or a jungle, the same principles applied.

23:00 **You had jungle training at Canungra, how well prepared did you feel you were for those conditions?**

The training had been very thorough. We had done a lot of training on the Atherton Tablelands, in rainforest, in jungle. So we were quite well prepared for it. And of course, all my soldiers who had been in New Guinea knew far more about it than I did, and I learned from them. In the end, I think I would say,

23:30 it's much better fighting in close country, in jungle, then in open country.

Why do you say that?

You seem to have more control. People can't shoot at you from long distances, as they could, for instance, in Korea. If you came upon an enemy, it would be an ambush or you would find them unexpectedly and immediately a battle would take place, you would go into position on the track,

24:00 ready for anybody coming towards you, you would get guns into position, there would be sentries out and so on. I think a lot of old soldiers said, in the end, that they would rather fight in close country than in open country.

We've spoken to quite a few veterans who talk about the lack of visibility in the jungle. How did that impact on how you fight?

You go much more slowly.

24:30 You look for every sign. You try not to go on tracks, because tracks are obvious places for the enemy to ambush you. Sometimes you have to go along tracks if the jungle is too thick. The lack of visibility is a problem, but provided you are well trained, you can see signs of the enemy. A leaf on the ground, a broken twig will tell you.

25:00 And that's what the scouts job is, to look all the time. He will put his hand up like this, and give a signal, 'Perhaps enemy in sight.' And it was all done by hand signals.

Could you walk me through, again, what happened when you were injured and the moment that you realised it was enemy?

25:30 I didn't really see him. I opened up and had a shot at him, but he shot first because he was ready. He then disappeared. The platoon came up to me and I got berated a bit for being so silly to go out in front by myself. I should not have done it. That was a lesson I learnt. Fortunately, I wasn't badly injured.

26:00 It was just one of those things that happened. And then in the hospital, the war ended. That was the end of that war for me.

What was the pain like when you were shot?

It was painful, but you were too busy thinking about all the other things…. The platoon sergeant immediately took out what is called a field dressing, I pulled my sleeve off and they put it around my arm to stop the bleeding and that was it.

26:30 It was painful but I could still walk. And I walked out. They didn't have to carry me. I was determined to walk out.

Was that important to you as a soldier?

Oh, you don't want your soldiers to have to carry you. If you can walk, you walk. If you can't, you were carried. They would have probably had to make a stretcher to carry me. I don't think we carried one on patrol.

27:00 We didn't have a medical orderly, I know.

So how long did it take to walk out?

Maybe an hour or so, and then we waited on the bank of the river and they sent a boat to pick us up. And I was taken straight to hospital.

What was your feeling when you were in the hospital and you heard that the war had ended?

27:30 I was very pleased because it meant there would be no more casualties. The battalion, over the years, had had a lot of casualties, in the Middle East and New Guinea. A lot. They lost a lot of people, killed. I was aware that as the war went on, more and more people would lose their lives or be wounded. So it was a great relief.

28:00 While I was in hospital, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Japan, and the war was over. We didn't know about atomic bombs, but we soon learnt.

What was your view at that time about the bombing?

I thought it was a wonderful idea. I was sorry for the towns that had been destroyed, but the point is that what was being prepared,

28:30 and we knew what was being prepared….As soon as we finished in Borneo, we were to get together again, the rest of the 7th Division who were there, and prepare to go north for the Philippines and Japan. And no-one was looking forward to that. If we had invaded Japan, we would have got horrendous casualties. It would have been very difficult. All the Japanese would have fought.

29:00 I'm sorry for the people that lost their lives, but it saved thousands of other casualties. Both ours and the Japanese. Had we invaded the Philippines and Japan, it would have been…As it was, as the Japanese surrendered, and the Emperor told them to put down their arms, they did. They obeyed. Now had we invaded Japan,

29:30 quite the reverse would have happened. Every weapon would have been out of the thatch and men, women and perhaps children would have been fighting.

When you were based at Balikpapan after the war had ended, what kind of evidence was there of Japanese surrender? Were you witness to any of it in Balikpapan?

We saw Japanese coming in and there were prisoner of war camps set up at Balikpapan.

30:00 I wasn't personally involved in that, but I saw them and they were used as working parties, for instance, cleaning up and doing jobs, under guard and the same thing happened when…They called for volunteers to go to Japan and the 7th Division, which was at Balikpapan, was to provide an infantry battalion,

30:30 an artillery battery, and various other supporting arms. And the infantry battalion was to be called the 65th Australian Infantry Battalion. I volunteered for that and it was raised as a battalion on the 12th of October, 1945. It then became the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, and that is the battalion's birthday, the 12th of October. I was sent to be

31:00 a liaison officer on the new brigade headquarters. A brigade headquarters is the peak of where you have three battalions and all the other arms underneath, and they formed 34 Australian Infantry Brigade Headquarters as the new headquarters. We had a very good brigade commander. And I was sent, and each of the battalions,

31:30 normally sent a liaison officer to brigade headquarters, where you did all sorts of odd jobs. And I spent about two months at that, and then the people who were at Balikpapan all got onto troop ships and we went, I think, in November, '45, to a little island called Moratai, which had been

32:00 the headquarters. In taking the Japanese, it had become the headquarters for the patrol of the landings in Borneo. The whole brigade got together there and got to know each other and started training, waiting to go to Japan. In December, I was sent back to 65 Battalion.

32:30 And on Christmas Day, we had a great party and the first photograph was taken. I've got a copy of that photograph to take with you. It was the first photograph ever taken of what was to be a Regular battalion. I became a platoon commander with a platoon in C Company, with again, a very good sergeant, and one

33:00 or two people who I had got to know very well. One had been a year younger than me at Duntroon. We got together and we got to know each other very well, because we were much too long at Moratai. There was a lot of argument going on at government level what the role of the Occupation Force would be. What part the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, BCOF it was called, would play. What area we would go to.

33:30 It took a long time to organise that. I think it was February or March before we actually went to Japan.

So what did you do on Moratai for those months?

It was a little island. We trained, played a lot of sport. I know at one stage the soldiers were getting very bored. And so, one day,

34:00 word went around to the officers to stay in their tents, and the officers' lines were on the edge of a parade ground. And the battalion, without the officers, and I think without the sergeant majors, put on a marvellous parade, and asked for an explanation why they were still on Moratai. We were all very proud of them, and there they were, in this very, very sultry fashion. They marched on with the band.

34:30 It was called a mutiny, but of course it wasn't. It was just a protest, "Why were we being mucked about for so long? On this tiny little crowded island?" And this was where a lot of Japanese prisoners had been brought there, and I remember working parties of Japanese, under supervision, were doing things, clearing up mess…

What kind of expectation did you have about what Japan would be like?

35:00 I suppose we had some lectures about it. We obviously had lectures about the Japanese Army and knew more about them. Eventually, we got some photographs of what happened with the atomic bomb. We had no idea what the Japanese reaction would be to occupation.

35:30 They're a very proud race, and we had no idea what their reaction would be. As it turned out, they were completely subservient. We arrived, and when we arrived we went to a place called Kochi. There was snow, it was in the middle of winter…Having come from the tropics, we froze. We were all in a huge warehouse. We got some forty-four gallon drums and lit some fires.

36:00 I remember gathering around those fires. Then we were told, as a battalion, we were to move north. The place where we were was near a port called Kure, in Japan. We were told we were to go about an hour and a half train journey north to a place called Fukuyama. It was a small town,

36:30 Fukuyama, but next door to it had been a Japanese naval base, I think. Because it had runways going into the sea, for sea planes. There were quite reasonable, simple barracks. And I remember that the

officers' mess was in the observation tower, which had glass all around the top. So the dining room was on the bottom,

37:00 and we sat on top looking at the view of the sea. We were quite close to the base, and the mountains rose up into farmland, with the town of Fukuyama… There was an order that we weren't to fraternise with the Japanese. That wasn't always obeyed, but that was the order. We had a job to disarm the Japanese nation, that was the Occupation's job.

37:30 I remember we collected arms. We had to take…The policemen wore swords, for instance, as part of their dress. We made them hand over their swords. We collected all the weapons that we could find, and these were put into barges and dumped into the sea. So the first job was to disarm the Japanese. As it happened, we had absolutely no problem. They bowed and obeyed.

38:00 **Having heard about the atrocities that the Japanese had committed against POWs [prisoner of war], were you surprised by their subservience?**

I think so. I now, having read a lot of Japanese, I understand it. The Emperor had given them an order and they obeyed it. I wondered if the Emperor knew the atrocities that were carried out.

38:30 As it happened, I had a cousin, whom I was very fond of, who was a wing commander in the air force, who was captured, and it wasn't until after the war that we discovered he had been killed by the Japanese, as a prisoner of war. I'm not sure his family know how he was killed, so I won't say. We happened to have an interpreter, an Australian, a man called Albert Klestaf, who spoke Japanese in the battalion, and he went to some of the war crimes trials in Tokyo

39:00 and came back with the news about my cousin. There had been no news before…

Now you had that very personal…

I did. And we read about the terrible time the prisoners of war had as they were being released. I think we had seen some of them in Borneo.

39:30 I have a memory of saying something…I think that is why Lady Mountbatten was there, too, to see the prisoners of war. We didn't see much of them, but there was quite a number who were in Borneo. They were collected together and taken off as soon as they could, or put into hospital. We had very little to do with the Japanese. You weren't allowed to go into Japanese houses, or you weren't supposed to. Soldiers did, I suspect,

40:00 officers certainly didn't. Young soldiers and these women were something of a problem….We worked very hard, we trained…The barracks were surrounded by small Japanese rice farms, and there were a few villages around, and the town of Fukuyama, which had a railway station

40:30 and a police station. I have no idea how many people lived there. Two or three thousand, I suppose. We got to know the whole area very well. We had good food by this stage. It took a while to get good rations, but eventually good rations and the cooks did marvellous things, so we ate properly. I remember, in my company,

40:41 we got together and we bought tablecloths and crockery. I suppose we bought them from the Japanese, I don't think we stole it. And we made sure that they had, for the first time in the war, had crockery and knives and forks. It was only in the outer mess tents that there was crockery. We had a party to celebrate this, I remember that quite well.

Tape 3

00:30 …and talk to doctors. I had one or two doctor friends, and one particular one who had been a platoon commander in Korea, and got wounded and became a doctor, and became a general doctor. His name was Digger James, he was marvellous, and I will talk about him later. And he understood it and talked to me a lot about it. He keeps an eye on health even now.

01:00 There is a lot more understanding and a lot more sympathy now about it. I'm very sympathetic.

For the benefit of people who have no concept of military combat and what happens in a landing that has such massive bombardment. Can you explain the elements of it that do contribute to a condition of shell-shock?

Shell shock is a term. It may have nothing to do with shells.

01:30 The nightmares are very often of what happens to friends. A mate being killed beside them, someone being blown up, to seeing casualties bleeding, having to carry dead bodies… That is the problem, I think. I spoke to one of my old soldiers

02:00 who was in Korea, just last week. His friend was blown up beside him. For years he was all right, and

then he started to have problems, and he still has problems.

The Korean War was at times called 'The Forgotten War' and

02:30 **we know about the protests relating to the Vietnam War. In what way does that contribute to the problems?**

Everyone who was in Korea, on the whole, was proud of what they did. Many people in Vietnam were proud…Because in the Australia area, in Vietnam, we in fact did well, the Australian units did well. But it was reading the news and seeing the protests.…

03:00 I know one CO, who happened to be a young officer with me in Japan, came back and he was leading his battalion through one of the cities and someone threw red paint all over him. A terrible thing to have happened. I was bitterly opposed to the politicians who supported the Vietnam…They might have been against the Vietnam War,

03:30 but they should never have been against the soldiers who fought in Vietnam. And that is the problem. Certain politicians, whose names I won't mention, who led the anti-Vietnam…Some of them are still alive, and I was in parliament with some of them, and I was bitterly opposed to them then.

04:00 They let their ideological left wing sympathies…Because we were fighting the Communists in Vietnam, and we lost in the end, and we withdrew and we should have. But it was very hard on the soldiers, and that is one of the reasons that the Vietnam soldiers have so many problems. The Koreans had problems later, and they are recognised and the treatment does do a lot,

04:30 provided they take their pills. That is why I ring up every now and then, and just say…One of my friend's wives has been in hospital, and for the first time in years he has got to do the cooking and house-keeping. It is very good for him. It takes his mind off his own problems. He was talking about that only last week.

We know now, we are a lot more enlightened about post-traumatic stress.

05:00 **But back in 1945, if the battalion had been involved in a massive operation, like the landing at Balikpapan, how would men recover from that?**

Well, very often the effects weren't felt immediately. It came later. Later, when they were older, if they were having other problems in their lives, right, it tended to bring them on.

05:30 Let me talk about Korea. I can't remember anyone who was immediately affected, it happened later. Now, they may have been affected but they wouldn't admit it. Now how do you tell? Unless you're seeing them every day, you wouldn't understand. Now you can look for the signs. One old soldier who I know, who is a Vietnam veteran, he is a friend,

06:00 who never admitted anything was wrong with him, for many years. He went on, from job to job, very highly intelligent, well educated, and he had a very difficult life until he admitted there was something. It was only in the last two or three years, he was staying with us here, and he told me. I knew there was something wrong, but he was hiding it so well.

06:30 **We talked to a platoon leader in Korea last week, who discussed the emphasis at Duntroon on taking care of the men, his men, and how that was the most important job as a leader. Can you explain exactly what that role was when you were in charge of a platoon, and you were looking after them physically and emotionally?**

If there was a problem with a young solider,

07:00 usually the platoon sergeant, or one of the corporals, would say, "Boss, so and so is having a problem." And you would keep an eye on him and talk to him. And often by him, by a soldier realising he has got a problem, and somebody explaining to him what it is all about, it helps. But there was all sorts of problems.

07:30 A soldier gets a letter, and his wife or fiancée or girlfriend has run off with someone else. That brought on things like post-traumatic shock. If some soldiers who were having problems drank too much, it made the problems worse. And that was the thing to always watch.

08:00 But, of course, remember as a platoon commander and as a company commander, I didn't know about these problems. I knew one had to look afterwards…When we come to Korea, remind me and I will tell you about an NCO who came to see me one day and I will you the story of what we did about it.

Do you want to tell me now?

Yes. We had a very difficult time, and a lot of casualties. We had two killed, one died of wounds,

08:30 and twenty-five wounded in one operation. That was pretty shocking. And not long after that, one of the corporals who I knew well, came to me and said, "Sir, I'm having problems. I don't think I can go on any longer." So we sat down and we talked about it. And I said, "Okay, the first thing is you are going to go to Japan for two weeks leave."

09:00 There was no argument about it, I just told him. It was all organised and he was sent to Japan. He came back and he was perfectly all right. He eventually got promoted to a sergeant, then a warrant officer. He is one who I keep in touch with and he seems to be all right now. Every Christmas I get a Christmas card from him. That is the sort of thing. Soldiers must be taught to trust their superiors, their sergeants, their corporals and their officers,

09:30 and talk to them. If they can sit down and talk…We were sitting in a dugout in Korea, underground, and this bloke… In the end, I said, "Let's go out." I think it was summer. And we went outside and sat outside and we had a long talk. I said, "Go and pack your gear. Go back to battalion headquarters straight away." And he went off straight away. Nothing was said to his section.

10:00 He was just going on leave, people got leave. That's an example, I think, that leaving it can help. It brings back lots of memories, not necessarily bad ones. That in the end was a good memory, because he recovered. I think he still probably has a few problems.…He's not getting treatment, so he must be all right.

10:30 **Was there something about that particular time in the Korean War that contributed to problems that men might have had, when the Chinese were particularly aggressive in their…?**

The Chinese were a very good enemy, very well trained, very well led, and we all respected them. We much preferred those to the Korean Communists.

11:00 I ended up admiring the Chinese and, as there was no great opposition to the war…And remember we didn't have any National Service, they were all volunteers, that made a big difference. But generally…

11:30 Every now and then, every two years, our battalion has a reunion. We had one last year in Melbourne. There is one this year in Sydney. We get together and talk. They're all getting a bit older now, of course, the Korean ones.

12:00 **Just going back to Japan, what happened once you'd completed the…?**

We did a lot of training. We had a tour of duty in Tokyo, the whole battalion went to Tokyo for a month, I think. And put guards on the Imperial Palace parade ground. We were in public all the time. We had sentries on the Imperial Palace. We were quite proud of ourselves.

12:30 We had quite good barracks. There was much more freedom for the soldiers in Tokyo, and for the army. It was very different. In a village, you always knew what was going on, but in Tokyo they could let their hair down.

You mentioned earlier those non-fraternisation policies, and we have interviewed some veterans who had relationships and marriages to…

There were no marriages at that stage, I don't think. There were partnerships, perhaps,

13:00 but no-one was allowed to legally marry. When did the fraternisation law finish? Certainly when the Korean War started, things changed. Yes, it changed before that. A number of soldiers, in Fukuyama, in the battalion,

13:30 went home and got married and were allowed to bring their wives back to Japan. And I had a job of finding a house for one of the officers and his wife. An officer with a young wife. And I found a house, the Japanese family were removed and they were given this house. He is now dead, but his wife is still alive and I still talk to her, every week or so.

14:00 But fraternisation was then relaxed. Officially? I don't know. But I know there were married families in the battalion. And then later, there were the Vietnamese marriages…

14:30 In fact I quite often speak to an old soldier who has got a wife called Mary, who is Vietnamese. It's all very normal.

So what was the policy then, while you were in Japan prior to the non-fraternisation rules being relaxed? What would you have to do if you were aware of a relationship?

You tried not to be aware, I think.

15:00 There are other things I could say, which I think I probably won't, but we had a very wise CO who decided that… There were very bad soldiers going to the local brothels, for instance, where they could well be diseased. He said, "Okay…"

15:30 I don't tell this story very often, but he said, "Okay, we are going to an official battalion brothel. The doctors will examine the girls daily," or however often, "and the soldiers can go there." They had to be out by ten o' clock at night. And at night, an officer who was caught… He was not the orderly officer, he was called the 'Officer of the Night', he would take a truck and go in and collect all the soldiers.

16:00 Now that is a sensible way of dealing with the problem. And it really did. It cut down the disease rate, the soldiers had somewhere to go. The officers were not allowed to go there. It would have been very difficult. I gather some officers had relationships…But that was an example of a good leader. He said,

"Okay, let's solve the problem. We're not going to solve the problem. Let's make it better."

16:30 He was a wonderful commanding officer. I was very lucky with all my commanding officers. He commanded an AIF battalion for two or three years before he took over the battalion in October, 1945, in Balikpapan. His name was Dick Marsen, and was called by all the soldiers, Drover Dick. And we were all very fond of him, he was a great man.

Were you able to get an impression of how returned Japanese servicemen were being treated in Japan at the time?

17:00 I think the answer to that is no, I didn't know about it. They were returning all the time. We had very little to do with them. One thing we did have a good deal to do with. There was a lot of Koreans brought into Japan during…Japan occupied Korea for a good many years. A lot of Koreans were brought in as labourers.

17:30 And after the war, there was a lot of unrest amongst the Koreans. So it was decided to repatriate them all back to Korea. Special trains were laid on, and trains would stop at Fukuyama full of Koreans, and families and children. The soldiers from Kure would (UNCLEAR) go off, and we would take over and we would take them down to…

18:00 Kyushu, the southern island, where they were put on boats and sent back to Japan. There is one experience. I was sitting in a cabin with some of my diggers, and the soldiers were spread…When we stopped at the stations, you had to try and make sure the Koreans didn't get off and make trouble with the Japanese. And you also didn't want the soldiers to get off and get into any trouble, too.

18:30 A soldier came to me one day and said, "Sir, we have a problem. In the next cabin a girl is having a baby." There was no doctor and no medical orderly. So having been brought up on a farm, I knew about delivering calves and sheep, and so I went along and helped with the delivery. Someone had to do something,

19:00 and I happened to be the most experienced, by then I was twenty-one. But I was sorry for those Koreans, they had a very hard time in Japan. So I was always sympathetic when we eventually went to Korea…

How would that unrest between the Koreans and the Japanese manifest itself?

Oh, the Koreans were attacking the Japanese and getting their own back.

19:30 And so a decision was made that they would be repatriated. They were pretty tough, the Koreans. And the Japanese were, I think, upset at the time, but there was not much they could do about that. So they were put under surveillance by the Occupation Force.

20:00 **You spent some time in Japan working for a very prominent general. Can you tell me about that?**

Yes, I did for a little while. Let me go back a bit. By sheer accident, I became a captain.

20:30 What had happened, I had been made the assistant adjutant of the 65 Battalion. I went up on leave to Australia, and we were all given leave, it was the first leave we had after the war. I came back from leave in the middle of 1947, and the CO said to me, "David, I am going to make you the acting adjutant."

21:00 I was aged twenty-two. I thought, 'Dear me. That is being in the right place at the right time.' What had happened, the adjutant, who was a very good one, had been posted off to be a personal assistant to the commander in chief of BCOF, Red Robbie, General Horace Robinson. He wasn't replaced and I came back and he was gone, and the CO said, "I am going to make you the adjutant." I wasn't promoted immediately,

21:30 but very shortly afterwards they organised to promote me. It was a case of being in the right place at the right time. If I hadn't of been the assistant adjutant before he went on leave, I don't think he would have ever thought of making me the adjutant. Like other cases in my life where being in the right place at the right time… That was luck. So I became a captain. I learnt a great deal about the running of a battalion, as one does, sitting in the battalion headquarters, responsible for all the administration, upwards and downwards.

22:00 Towards the end of 1947, I was told I was going to go to the headquarters of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force it was on an island called Eta Jima, in Kure harbour. That was very interesting. The commander in chief, I think at that stage was still Red Robbie. I didn't actually work for him, but it was a tri-service,

22:30 army, navy, air force headquarters. It was quite large; it ran the whole of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. That was very good. I had never been on a big…I had no idea what it was like, I had never worked with naval officers. My boss, in fact, was an air force officer. That was a very broadening experience. I only had, for a short period…The beginning of '48, I completed my two years in Japan.

23:00 People who had been in the war were only supposed to have two years, I think, in Japan at that stage. I was posted to Victoria, and in those days each state had its own command headquarters. Southern

Command was the command in Victoria. And I became the personal assistant to a wonderful man, General Cyril Cloves. He had been the victor of Milne Bay, and he has never been given enough credit.

23:30 Lots of decorations, a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] at that stage. And he was very good to work for. He was called Silent Cyril, he didn't say very much. It just so happened I had nowhere to live in Melbourne. I had some friends who had a room, and the use of the kitchen and bathroom in their house, which happened to be on the way to his house. So he picked me up every morning and dropped me home at night. We would sit in the car and Silent Cyril would say very little,

24:00 and suddenly he would start talking. He was great. I spent almost a year with him, seeing how a very good general ran his command. And I learnt a lot about… I talked to the rest of the staff, whom were senior to me of course. I was a very junior young captain in those days. Again, a very broadening experience.

24:30 And the great thing about the army, if you get a variety of postings you learn to cope with all sorts of situations, because you come across them. Or they come across you, perhaps.

You mentioned that he was considered the victor of Milne Bay, but did get

25:00 **caught up in some of the political fall out. What do you think made him such a fabulous general?**

He was very efficient. He had a lot of experience. He was very quiet, he never lost his temper, always rational and calm, and I think that made him a good general. Because Milne Bay was the first time we had ever beaten the Japanese, at Milne Bay.

25:30 And he was the one who organised that victory. Lieutenant General Cyril Cloves. I've got very happy memories of him. At any rate, after a year of that job, he said, "David, I think you've had enough of this." He could see I was getting restless because I wasn't near soldiers. He said, "I'm going to send you off on a new job. You're going to be adjutant

26:00 of the 5th Battalion of the Victorian Scottish Regiment." A CMF [Citizens Military Forces] regiment at Hawthorn, in Victoria. So off I went. I got dressed up in my kilt. They were allied to the Gordon Highlands and they all wore a kilt. There was a permanent staff and a marvellous RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], who was very experienced, a small staff on the headquarters at Hawthorn.

26:30 Once a week, the battalion would parade in various depots spread around, they would all come along in their kilts. It was a very popular battalion, and the CO was another marvellous man, a Colonel George Wolf, DSO MC [Military Cross], and if you know what that is, they are two very good decorations. He had been a wonderful wartime CO, and he was a great leader.

27:00 I enjoyed working with him very much. He made the battalion team like a family, everyone was welcomed into it. Most of the CMF units had (UNCLEAR) troops; the Victorian Scottish had no trouble at all. The officers' mess was very close, the sergeants' mess was close, the diggers had their own canteen. There was a rule that you weren't supposed to wear anything under your kilt, and the CO would come along

27:30 with his sick and every now and again in the mess would flick up the kits, to see. I did serve with him again, but I had two years with the Victoria Scottish. During that period, an aunt of mine went to England to visit her married daughter, and said would I like to use her flat. It was in a place called Park Street, South Yarra. It was walking distance

28:00 to army headquarters in Southern Command. It was a one bedroom, very pleasant flat. Five minutes on the tram line, you could walk into the city in ten minutes. So I moved into that. She then became very ill and didn't come back, so I had that flat for years. When I went off overseas, on postings, friends used to look after it. There was a group of us that used to rotate through it.

28:30 It became a great gathering place of friends. Of course, if you know Melbourne, it was within two minutes walk of the Botanical Gardens and a few minutes walk to Faulkner Park on the other side. It was a great place to live.

29:00 Beginning in 1951, it was decided that every soldier who turned nineteen would do six weeks military training. And they formed National Service battalions. At the beginning of 1951, I was posted to a National Service battalion at Puckapunyal. I was only there a few weeks, my old CO of the Victorian Scottish,

29:30 George Wolf joined the Regular army and formed another National Service battalion, the 15th National Service Battalion in Puckapunyal. He rang me up and said, "David, I want you to come to the battalion. I want you to be the training officer." I said, "Sir, that is a major's job." He said, "Yes, it is. You are not going to be promoted, but you will be paid as a major." So again, luck. That never would have happened to me unless I had served with him, and presumably had done

30:00 quite a good job in the Victorian Scottish. I spent a year training intakes. Every six weeks you would get a new intake of young soldiers to train. I was responsible for organising their training. Again, great experience. I got to know a lot about young soldiers. They then had to serve for a period in the CMF.

They didn't have to serve in the Regulars, the Regular units, and I don't think they could be sent overseas, at that stage.

30:30 So here, in November, of 1951, I got (UNCLEAR) and was told to join the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. It used to be 65 Battalion, which I had joined on day one, on the 12th of October, 1945. I was sent to Ingleburn near Sydney. Of course, the battalion had been warned to go to Korea.

31:00 I was a young captain, I was second in command of A Company, and we were training furiously because we knew we were going to Korea, early the next year. And suddenly, the second in command, the senior major of the battalion, had an accident and hurt his back, and had to leave the battalion. He was a very good bloke. The senior major became the second in command, and there was a vacancy for a major.

31:30 By sheer accident, I happened to be the senior captain. And the CO said to me, another very good CO, Colonel Ian Hutchinson, also with a DSO MC, very highly decorated, very experienced battalion commander, who had joined the Regular army, I think, particularly to get this job, and he said, "David, I'm going to make you the company commander of A Company. That was another case

32:00 of being in the right place at the right time. It was just by accident that I happened to be the senior captain. I happened to be the 2IC [Second In Command] of A Company, which didn't have a company commander at that time. He said, "Okay, I'm not going to promote you yet, but you will be paid…" You got a thing called Higher Duties Allowance, you got paid as a major if you were doing a major's job. And so I was very lucky. I took over the company, which became a great company. We trained very hard; I got to know them very well.

32:30 He was a very sensible CO. I was only twenty-six at that stage, so he gave me two very experienced people. My second in command was a very experienced older captain called Harry Sayers, and my company sergeant major was a very good... Harry Sayers had a Military Medal by the way. Matey McLaughlin,

33:00 Matey was his nickname by the way, he was Sergeant Major R.O. McLaughlin, if my memory is right. He was given the English Conduct Medal. I think they were both sent to keep an eye on me, and we became great friends. We then went to Japan, and by sheer coincidence, we went back into that same cold draughty warehouse, at a place called Kochi,

33:30 where we had been when we went there for the Occupation. And it was in the middle of winter again. There we were, but we didn't stay there very long. We went to Pusan, in South Korea, on a troop train for operations. About that stage, I decided to make Harry Sayers, my second in command, the intelligence officer, because he was a very experienced officer, and he said. "David, I'm going to give you Peter Cook as your second in command."

34:00 Now Peter Cook had been in the [UNCLEAR] Battalion in Japan, and had become a close friend. Peter Cook arrived in January, 1952, he had just been married and two months later, he went to Korea. He remained a lifelong friend and he died last December, of cancer. I was very lucky that I had a man I knew and trusted.

34:30 We were close friends…he and his wife, and I got to know them very well. When he died, I kept in touch with his family. So, we went to Korea.

What was the intelligence on the Chinese at that stage?

None, because the Chinese…The Chinese didn't come into the war,

35:00 until MacArthur did a sweep north and landed in the north west part of Korea. And that is when the Chinese came in, and started the drive down. I arrived after that, and found the Chinese were doing very well. They came south and eventually they were stabilised on the 38th Parallel, running across the centre of Korea.

35:30 And that's where we went to on the train…We went to a railway station nearby, and did some training. It was springtime, fortunately, so there was no snow.

36:00 We did training and then went into the line. Right in the middle of the 38th Parallel was a huge hill, a mountain, called Hill 355. On the left of that, and below it, was a ridge line where we were stationed. In front of that ridge line, there were two bridges.

36:30 In front of that line were minefields and barbed wire, with gaps in the barbed wire and unmarked gaps in the minefields, so that patrols could go out. About four or five hundred metres opposite us was the Chinese position, called Hill 227.

37:00 We used to patrol every night to make sure the Chinese didn't get near us. Quite a few clashes, a number of casualties, but we were very good at patrols. Every night the battalion would organise a series of patrols to go out on the whole front. We would do our little front, we knew exactly where we had to go, the diggers could find their way in the dark. They could find their entrances through the barbed wire and the minefields. There were a number of casualties.

37:30 One day, one of the young officers, a pioneer platoon commander, who was in fact an engineer posted to

the battalion, was out fixing up some wire and the Chinese attacked, and he and two others got captured. He survived, and I still keep in touch with him.

38:00 **We've talked to veterans who were involved in the battle at Kapyong, and they seemed to suggest that when the Chinese were forcing the US back down, it came with an element of surprise. In your preparations, was there any indication of this Chinese reinforcement that was pending?**

Yes, it had already happened by the time we arrived. They were in control, they had taken over…

In your training or preparation, though?

Did we know much about the Chinese?

38:30 Yes, people who had been there, and come to talk to us in Australia, but we had very little time. I joined the battalion in November, '51. Peter Cook, my 2IC, joined in January. In March, we were in Japan and in April we were in Korea. So it was quick. We were very lucky, we had a lot of experienced soldiers.

39:00 Quite a lot of people who had been in the Second World War, quite a lot of them had been in 65 Battalion in Japan and stayed with the battalion. So it was not as if we were a mob of young soldiers. I had an experienced IC, a wonderful man, a company sergeant major, three platoon commanders, all who had commanded platoons in action. It was a very experienced group.

39:30 We had been told to be cautious with the Chinese and to watch them, and make sure we patrolled properly, because they patrolled properly, also. But we certainly admired them. They were good soldiers. They were well led and they were brave, and they were efficient. They worked just about as well as we did.

40:00 So if we had a clash, it was serious.

Tape 4

00:30 In June, '52…maybe late May, the commander in chief…The Americans said they wanted prisoners captured, they thought there was going to be changeover of troops in front of the front line.

01:00 And they wanted prisoners capture. And so one of the battalions that was in reserve behind us, the Welsh Regiment, B Company of the Welsh Regiment, was ordered to go up Hill 227 in front of us and capture prisoners. They came up and we told them what we knew about the place, and it was decided they would do a dawn attack.

01:30 So the night before, they came up to us and stayed with us, and in the morning, they lined up before dawn and put in a dawn attack. We showed them where the minefield gaps and the wires gaps were… But, they had a very difficult time. Every good army does what is called 'standing to' at dawn and dusk. And the Chinese, like every good army,

02:00 were standing to, alert, with sentries out, all armed, all in their trenches or dugouts, wherever they were, some were patrolling. And the Welsh, at dawn, put in a dawn attack. They got a lot of casualties. They came back, having not captured a prisoner. They were very aggressive, the Chinese there. I had a long talk to the company commander about it all,

02:30 and he was telling us what it was like up there. And not long after that, maybe a week or two weeks, the CO called me down and said, "David, we have been ordered to go and capture a prisoner. I have chosen A Company to do it, you are closest to the Chinese line," as we were. "And you are to do a raid on Hill 227.

03:00 Go and capture a prisoner." He said, "Go and think about it and come back with a plan." We had been looking at 227 for a long time, and we believed that the Chinese did not have anyone above ground during the day. We had seen no movement at all during the day. They were only a few hundred yards away. We had binoculars, we could see everything.

03:30 So I went back to the CO and I said, "Sir, I think we should do an attack in the daylight, after they've stood down, at dawn." He thought about that and he said, and a number of people said, "That's a good idea. Let's try it." And I said to the CO, "Okay, I would like permission to go and have a look at 227, just to see…If we're going to do a daylight attack, we've got to know more about it."

04:00 He thought for a moment, he was a careful old soldier, and he said, "All right, David. You can do it." So a couple of days later, I don't know what time it was, mid-morning I suppose, I went with my company sergeant major, Matey McLaughlin, who was a very experienced old soldier, who I knew wouldn't let me do anything silly, plus a young soldier, who was my orderly, Pat Sullivan.

04:30 Let me explain that. A company headquarters had a company commander, a company sergeant major, a company quarter master sergeant major who did all the rationing and equipment, two company signallers…One of them carried a radio set to communicate with platoons, and they swapped, when one

had the radio, the other was a runner running messages.

05:00 One of these two young men was Pat Sullivan, and the other was a man I will talk more about later, Ron Gordon. I also had a signaller from the signal platoon of the battalion, John Faulken, and he carried the radio set that allowed me to communicate from the company back to the CO. It was his job, to keep that communication open.

05:30 Major McLaughlin, the CSM [Company Sergeant Major], and I and Pat Sullivan quietly set off. There was, I think, two tanks in our company position, waiting. The whole of the division artillery, twenty-four guns, I think, were standing by. Every soldier in the battalion was awake and watching us and we carefully climbed up the top of Hill 227.

06:00 We got near to the top, there was a small ridge line, and I said to Pat Sullivan, "You wait here, Pat." It was interesting, I was talking to Pat Sullivan about this only a couple of months ago, and he reminded me, I had forgotten… We left behind to be a sentry, and he reminded me that we left him behind by himself. So Major McLaughlin and I just very carefully inched up towards where we knew the Chinese position was,

06:30 and there wasn't anyone there. We could see where there were dugouts and tunnels and digging, but not a soul. They were all asleep underground. That was amazing. I went back and reported that to the CO, and he said, "Okay, done. The attack will take place nine o' clock on the 1st of July." So we done a lot of rehearsals and training for this.

07:00 The platoon commander and sergeants were all experienced, a lot of people were experienced. Part of B Company, of 1RAR, came forward to take over our position during that night, so we could have some sleep. They put sentries and patrols out. The next morning we lined up,

07:30 in broad daylight…I think we were behind the small ridge. But I remember very vividly, the British Army were issuing rum for this sort of thing. We all got a tot of rum when we were waiting on the start line. That was a memory, it was a marvellous thing, and we all felt so much better after that small tot of rum. And off we went.

08:00 There were two platoons leading. I was in the centre rear with company headquarters and the signallers, and one of the platoons in reserve. 1 Platoon of A Company, 2 Platoon on the right, and 3 Platoon was in Reserve. And a section of 3 Platoon had gone to 2 Platoon, so they had an extra section. We climbed up that hill, and by this stage

08:30 there were nine tanks supporting us. Again the whole division artillery. The CO was on the top of the hill behind us with binoculars and a radio set, keeping a close eye on us. All the rest who were in sight of Hill 227 was ready to support us. We got up to the top and not a sign of the enemy. They were all asleep; we had done the right thing. But, and there is always a but in these things, beyond 227 there was a ridge of hills,

09:00 slightly higher than 227, occupied by Chinese. We had given these hills nicknames, there was Tom, Dick, Harry and Plug. And it was interesting. No-one came out of, we discovered later, these deep dugouts on Hill 227. But as soon as we appeared over the top,

09:30 the Chinese on the slope beyond, on Tom, Dick, Harry and Plug, opened up. At first there were small mortar rounds, sixteen millimetre mortars and then machine guns…Their rifle and machine gun fire wasn't very accurate. Their mortar fire was very accurate. And we still had a job to get a prisoner. The extra section from 3 Platoon was sent forward

10:00 to the right, to a place called Dugout Post, which was forward and looked across at the Chinese positions….And 1 Platoon, a good platoon commander called Gil Lucas, had the job of getting in to get prisoners. We discovered it was very difficult.

10:30 I didn't mention that we had support, we had a section of machine gunners and a section of pioneers with flame throwers, plus another section of pioneers with some very clever explosive devices to blow up tunnels and things. We discovered we were going to have problems. The Chinese had been very clever. They had dug these deep dugouts and covered them with logs and sandbags, and the tunnel into them

11:00 was dog-legged, it was curved, so you couldn't shoot directly into the tunnel and you couldn't get the flame directly in. Gil Lucas had some problems. He was a very fine officer. He grabbed a shovel and leaped on top of one of these dugouts and started digging through. At the same time, one of his corporals called Harry Patch, and a young soldier whose name I can't remember,

11:30 tried to get in the tunnel at the curve. They were both wounded, but they obviously got some shots in. They were carried out. And a couple of minutes later there was a huge explosion inside the tunnel and Gil Lucas, who was still digging on top, collapsed, the roof collapsed. I was very close by watching this, and two or three of his diggers raced in and they could just reach him.

12:00 Fortunately, he was digging in the area of the tunnel, not the main dugout, it would have been much deeper. We would never have got him out of that. He could put his hands up and he was pulled out of

that. This explosion, we think, had been caused by our people shooting the flame into it. And it had blown up. We closed it up then, and we think they were all dead.

12:30 It collapsed. So then started to try and get prisoners from other tunnels. We did have a lot of fire coming in and we were getting more and more casualties. And about this stage, I was quite aware of the tunnel…Gil Lucas had been digging in the top of the tunnel, watching it myself, all happen. I was in a small depression.

13:00 I had with me, on my right, there was…On my right Ron Gordon, a twenty-nine year old solider who had just been married before he came away, he was carrying the platoon radio, an 88 set. On his right were Pat Sullivan. These two had become great mates. They were very efficient

13:30 and highly intelligent young man. And we had a bit of bad luck. A Chinese mortar bomb landed on the top of Ron Gordon, and killed him outright and blew up his set. Pat Sullivan, lying on his right, was very badly wounded on his back and buttocks. I was that far away from Ron Gordon, wasn't touched. Everything went over me and I wasn't touched.

14:00 I had a problem, I had lost my set. Fortunately, nearby, was a corporal stretcher-bearer from battalion headquarters who had a set. I said, "Okay, bring your set over." And it was the set we used. He was a very good young operator. Then, very shortly after that there was another problem. John Faulken, who was carrying the 31 set, that was the set that communicated with the battalion, had a bullet.

14:30 He must have been turned away, talking to me perhaps, and a bullet went through his set and ruined his set and knocked him out. So I didn't have a set. Fortunately, I had with me an artillery captain called Paul Barrett, from Victor Battery 14 Field Regiment, a British Regiment. He was a very good officer, indeed. He brought two signals with him, and one of his signals was wounded

15:00 and he handed the set over to the other signal and said, "David, here, use this communication." Then at this stage Paul Barrett was wounded, so we were in a fairly bad way. I will just pause here for a moment, because in 2001, I got a message indirectly from Paul Barrett saying, "Where are you? Are you there?" We were in touch. I got his address in England. He was a very good officer, indeed.

15:30 So we were having problems. The reserve platoon had the job of carrying the casualties back to an aid post that had been set up in our company headquarters, with a doctor and a padre, and quite good medical orderlies. The Chinese had made a mistake.

16:00 When they had realised that we were on top, they didn't realise which way we had come, and they were mortaring another part of the bottom of Hill 227. But I think they must have seen from the distance, casualties being carried through our wire and minefield. They started mortaring the minefield and wire, and we were getting quite a lot of casualties. Just at that moment, I suddenly realised what was happening.

16:30 I got on the set to the CO and said, "Sir, we need some more ammunition, but we are getting a lot of casualties." Four minutes later, he sent the order, "Boomerang," which was to return. We had to withdraw. He realised; he was watching it all. And I was very impressed. I gave the order to withdraw and everyone knew exactly what to do. They withdrew in good order, carrying any casualties

17:00 they had with them, and any dead bodies. They all got through the wire. Matey McLaughlin, the CSM and I, were the last. We waited to see if there was something we could do. We watched to see. We were just going towards the wire when a mortar bomb landed beside us and I got wounded again in my right arm, just a minor wound.

17:30 I managed to remain on duty. Because we had a lot of casualties, I didn't realise at the time how many casualties we had. Had I realised, I think I would have asked permission to withdraw, about fifteen minutes earlier, which would have saved a lot of casualties. But I didn't. Hindsight is a great teacher, of course. And I'm very sad, I might have saved a number of casualties. We had a lot of casualties. Two were killed.

18:00 One was Ron Gordon and the other was Jock Denehey, I remember now, Jock. And Sergeant Alex Smith, who had been very badly wounded, a very good young sergeant who was doing his second tour of Korea, he died of wounds. We had twenty-five of our people wounded. Some of them with bullets from rifles and machine guns, most were wounded by mortar. There was one who we didn't think would survive,

18:30 he had a bullet in the head. His name was Sam Dawson. He survived, and he still comes to battalion reunions. But the other thing is, nearly all the wounded were recovered and came back. They weren't as badly wounded as they might have been. I was very sad because I had lost Ron Gordon, killed, and Pat Sullivan. They were the two people who were with me all the time. John Faulken who was carrying the set, recovered quickly and went home again.

19:00 But very shortly after that, the CO put us back in reserve, and eventually nearly everyone came out of hospital and rejoined us.

Why was it so important to capture a Chinese prisoner?

We thought it was a waste of time, and the CO thought it was a waste of time. I think General Jim

Castles, our divisional commander, a very good British…the British Commonwealth Division,

19:30 I think he thought it was a waste of time. But there was an American general, whose name I can't remember, who insisted that we go and try and get prisoners. It was a mistake. The Welsh had told us how deeply dug in the Chinese were. And that's why we took explosives and flame with us. That might have scored us a prisoner. If that dugout had not blown up, we might have got in

20:00 and got a prisoner there. There was another dugout that we flamed, and we smelt burning flesh there, so we…. There were six dugouts on the hill, but we think only two were occupied, and those two we dealt with. But we couldn't get in to get a prisoner. We had tried and Corporal Harry Patch…they were very brave young men.

20:30 I think there was only one more attempt to catch a prisoner. I think General Castles said, "This is nonsense. I'm not going to allow any more British or Australian or New Zealand soldiers to do this silly thing again." He was right. But it was an experience. In July, 2002, which is fifty years afterwards,

21:00 the 1st of July, I got the addresses of everyone I had, or telephone numbers, and I wrote a letter to them all saying I still remembered them. And I got some marvellous replies back. Some with problems, some with post-traumatic stress… And about that time, I tracked down Ron Gordon's widow, the man who was killed beside me, who had been married just before. And I still keep in touch with her.

21:30 She married again, and had two children, and now she's widowed again, so we keep in touch. And a lot of the old soldiers still keep in touch. It is now…52 years ago.

22:00 To try and capture a prisoner, it was a mistake. I think we all realised it was a mistake, but we had orders, we carried them out.

The American general who made the order, was that because they were hopeful of getting intelligence from them?

Oh yes, they wanted a prisoner. They thought there was going to be a changeover of the Chinese divisions, and they wanted information.

22:30 There were a lot of casualties trying to get that prisoner. The Chinese were very good. Our attack on 227 showed how good they were. They would not come out of their dugouts, because they realised they didn't have a hope if they came out. But the Chinese beyond were doing a very good job supporting them. And we got our casualties, mostly, a couple of people were hit…but it was mostly from the Chinese at the back.

23:00 **Do you know if the Chinese had communication between Hill 227 and the back hills?**

Yes, they did. I don't know how good the communications were. They obviously had communications to their mortars. There were sixty millimetre mortars and there three inch mortars, bigger ones. Mostly we got these sixty millimetre ones; fortunately, they don't do a lot of damage. But,

23:30 for some reason we'll never know, they artillery didn't start firing. If their artillery had fired on the concentration of troops we had on Hill 227, we would have had a lot more casualties. For some reason, the artillery didn't start firing, until we were all back in A Company lines, under the cover of darkness. And we didn’t get any casualties from the artillery fire.

24:00 I don't know why, whether something happened to their communications, or someone was killed, we will never know that. There's no answer to that question. They certainly had communication to their three inch mortars, but not good communications to their artillery which was very lucky.

The terrain you were working in, what was that like?

Open, no trees, all the trees had been cut down.

24:30 Hill 227 was a conical hill, steep sides, down into a valley, and then over to us, where we had our minefields. And we knew every inch of that valley at the bottom of 227 because we had been patrolling every night. We didn't patrol during the day, we had what was called standing patrols out during the day, dug in positions, on little knolls, and they were observing all the time.

25:00 It was open. You had no cover as you we were climbing out. There was no cover where we came from, there was no cover on the top of Hill 227, it was all bare. The surrounds beyond had a few trees, but it was mostly bare.

25:30 Remember, this had been fought over for a long time.

Was the ground rocky?

One thing that would have helped us a great deal, we were supposed to have an air strike the evening before. The weather was too bad, so the CO said, "I'm not cancelling it. We will have one at seven o' clock in the morning," when it would have been daylight. Again the weather was too bad,

26:00 and the aircraft couldn't take off, so we didn't have an air strike. And that might have saved us, because

if they had of had a strike on the positions behind 227, which we had asked them to do, it would have saved us a lot of casualties, I think. But, it is interesting, I think our fire from our artillery, our machine guns and our mortars…because our machine gun platoon, the Welsh machine gun platoon fired

26:30 thousands of rounds at these Chinese beyond us. And we wondered why they didn't mount a counter attack against us, and I think they couldn't move because our fire on them was so effective. Artillery, tanks, machine guns and mortars, all firing at these people. We know we caused some casualties, some were seen to fall, some were seen to be carried away.

27:00 There were will be a count. We reckoned there were quite a lot of casualties there, and a lot of casualties in the bunkers. One was blown up and the other was burning flesh. We will never know, we didn't capture a prisoner. It was never regarded as a failure. There was a couple of heroes. One was Peter Cook, this 2IC, he was responsible for casualty evacuation.

27:30 And the most wonderful man was a bloke named Corporal John Thomas, Doc Thomas, he was the medical orderly for the company. And he worked absolutely tirelessly, and why he didn't get a ribbon I don't know. There is another person I should mention. We had a piper in the battalion, a Scotsman called Jock Durgess, and I should have mentioned him earlier. Before the attack, I called on Jock and said,

28:00 "I want you to bring your pipes up on Hill 227 and play them." He said, "Sir, I want to use my rifle." I said, "Your pipes will be much more important." So Jock took his pipes up to the top and marched back and forth, back and forth, under fire, playing his pipes. And we were on the top of Hill 227 for about an hour and quarter, I think, and there was Jock. How we wasn't wounded, or killed,

28:30 I do not know. The diggers said afterwards… There was a lot of arguing about Jock. Some didn't like the pipes, and he was always playing them and keeping them awake. I loved them, my Scottish ancestry, and so did others. The diggers said afterwards while they could hear Jock playing on 227, they knew everything was all right. I still keep in touch with Jock Burgess, by the way. His wife has died,

29:00 but he still comes along and brings his pipes to play. Now, decorations. First of all, Doc Thomas, got a military…And this was an immediate decoration. There are two decorations, medius decorations and cesal decorations. The medius decorations are immediate decorations, after an operation. And every six months months there are periodic decorations.

29:30 The immediate decorations on Hill 227, Doc Thomas got a Military Medal. Corporal Smithy Tailor, who had taken the outpost…the dog outpost, the section, and stayed there under quite heavy fire until I ordered him to withdraw, he saved a lot of casualties because was supporting, against the Chinese, on the other hill.

30:00 He got a Military Medal, I got a Military Cross. [He] was the man that went into the tunnel with the flame thrower, and when the dugout collapsed, he was awarded the American Silver Star. Later, in Vietnam he was awarded the

30:30 American Bronze Star. Very rare to have both. He died, some years ago, he was living quite close to here. I had been in touch with him. I was about to go and see him when I got a message…that he died that day, so I didn't see him. The other person who got decoration, and was Mentioned in Dispatches, was a man named Tom Nelligan, he was a stretcher-bearer. He had been wounded three times,

31:00 not badly, and he dressed his own wounds and kept on going. It was his 21st birthday, and he saved a lot of casualties, and he was Mentioned in Dispatches. And that was the end of Hill 227.

31:30 **With the medals, how important is it after a battle like that to be recognised?**

It's fairly important. There is a photo of me there having a drink with Squizzy Taylor just after…I had gone to hospital in Japan, so I wasn't there that time. I was out of hospital and going back to Korea when local officers came and told me I had got a Military Cross, and the other announcements were made. It's quite important. Quite a lot of people got decorations later

32:00 in A Company. Bill Lucas, the man who was digging in the top, got a Military Cross later. Dennis Williams, one of the other platoon commanders, got a Military Cross for his patrol action. It's very rare for three platoon commanders, but they had done a lot. And you asked, is it important?

32:30 Yes, immediate recognition is important because it is rare. A number of other people got decorations later. It doesn't have the same impact as getting it a week or so later…The approval process is local, I think the division can authorise a number of immediate rewards. Yes, it is important.

33:00 **Why do you think it is so important?**

It is recognition of what people have been doing. It is good for the morale of the rest of them too, they all had a share in that. I recommended some others as well, they had to wait because there was only a certain number of immediate ones.

33:30 I suppose I was given priority. The CO wrote my citation, which I've got here with my letter. But, it reflects on the whole company, and the whole battalion. There was quite a lot of decorations in Korea,

over the period. That was the end of that, then we went into reserve.

34:00 **When you're preparing an attack like that, and you're making your way up a hillside and you don't really know what is at the top, what is the tension and the adrenaline like?**

Ahh, but we did know what was at the top, because Matey McLaughlin and I had been to the top. We had drawn maps, we had built models, all the diggers knew what was on top, they knew where the dugouts were,

34:30 they knew where to go. Squizzy Taylor who went to Dugout Post knew exactly where to go, it's marked on the map as Dugout post. We knew where the Chinese positions were Tom, Dick, Harry and Plug. We knew a lot about it. Had we not known, I think I would have been much more worried, but of course, you are worried, once bullets start going past you.

35:00 We were fairly use to bullets and mortars remember, because during the day we were very careful, we lived underground. But quite often you would get out and a bullet would whiz past you or a mortar bomb would land near you. A soldier at the next position, he made friends, and they were staying together, and a mortar bomb landed on his mate.

35:30 I hadn't been in touch with him for a long time, and somebody told me he was having problems. He was having nightmares about his mate. It took a long time for him to stop these nightmares. He's now all right. I got a number of old soldiers who knew him, to write to him and he got a number of letters from people. I gather he's all right now…

36:00 Post traumatic stress, I think I've said, can be delayed, but I didn't know…I checked, I remembered, that his mate had been killed, so when I was told of his problem, I knew what his problem was. I asked him is that the problem, he said, "Yes, it is." Another very good soldier called Byron Blade,

36:30 I know he went to see him or wrote to him, because he saw it happen, too. And that made a big difference, people remembered to help him.

Being in charge of men in that situation. You are giving instructions, they have the maps, the know what to do. What is running through your mind?

You're too busy watching what is going, deciding what you are going to do next,

37:00 to worry about yourself. I was so busy, there was so much…I was sending messages, telling people to do this and to do that, making sure the casualties were evacuated, that we were re-supplied, actually watching everything that was going on. Remember, I was up there, too, and I could see everything.

37:30 Company headquarters had more than its share of problems, but we kept going. I was so busy. I was very upset later about the casualties, but not at the time. I'm very lucky, I've never had nightmares…

You mentioned earlier that in hindsight, you would ask for permission to withdraw fifteen minutes earlier.

38:00 **When did that realisation hit you?**

Oh, quite recently, when I was thinking about it all, in detail. I suddenly thought, dear me… By that time, I had discovered a lot of casualties had been caused on withdrawal from the top…The Chinese weren't firing, dropping mortars on the withdrawal group, for some reason. They concentrated on the routes

38:30 through the minefields and the wire we had to get through, which was intelligent of them. But I realised later, and of course hindsight is a marvellous teacher, that I should have asked to withdraw. Perhaps I was too busy to think about it. The casualties were happening down the bottom of the hill, a lot of the last ones,

39:00 and I didn't realise until I got a message from Peter Cook saying there was quite a lot of casualties. Then I rang the CO and said, "Look, we have some information we are getting quite a lot of casualties." That is when he said, immediately, "Okay, come back," being the great soldier that he was.

All this activity and firing going on, is it for you as a soldier to be aware of, a) your men's safety,

39:30 **b) your safety and c) planning ahead?**

First of all, you can't worry about your own safety. You're too busy to worry about your own safety. You try and reduce the casualties of your own people by calling for fire. Our artillery…our gunner, Paul Barrett, towards the end, he called down artillery fire on the Chinese.

40:00 We had the whole of division artillery firing on them, and that stopped them counter-attacking. So I was doing things like that. Paul was with me all the time. We were sharing radio at the end and he got wounded. You bring down as much fire from your own side as you can on the appropriate places, making sure you are not bringing fire down on your own people.

40:30 That is always a worry. The worry starts afterwards. I am very lucky that I don't have the problems so many have. It really is luck.

Is that sometimes the hardest part, the post-battle analysis?

Yes, that was very tough. I was in hospital. I wasn't there…

41:00 That was done by Peter Cook and Matey McLaughlin, the CSM, and the platoon commanders, all of whom survived. In the end, I was the only senior bloke wounded, minorly…I was sent to an American MASH, a Mobile Ambulance and Surgical Hospital, which was the nearest one.

41:30 They took a look at me and gave me treatment and said, I had a piece of metal in my arm, they said, "We can't get that out. You better go back to Japan in case it gets infected." So I went back to Japan, to the hospital in Kure. So I wasn't there. It was Peter Cook, my great friend, who did all the work, cleaning up afterwards, and he handed over to a company of the Black Watch, the Royal Highland Regiment, and I've got a photo of them hanging over…

Tape 5

00:30 **I'll start by asking you what the level of fear and fright was?**

Well, anyone who says they were never frightened are either very foolish, very brave or very unsensitive. Nearly everyone is frightened sometimes. Often you are frightened after the event. I was too busy to be frightened.

01:00 Afterwards I was frightened. I was frightened if I was in a position where a bullet goes zip past your ear, and you think, 'Oh God, another two inches and that could have been me.' And a mortar bomb lands beside you when you're just in your dugout or in a trench. Yes. Usually after the event or when things are happening over which you have got no control. That is one of the things

01:30 Some people will say they were never frightened, but I don't believe them very often…

Can you describe when you went into a rest area on the front line, what the living conditions were like?

Well, at that stage of the Korean War, we all lived in holes in the ground, covered with logs and covered in sandbags.

02:00 So if a shell lands on top of you, you are all right. They were connected with fairly deep trenches, which you walked along. But you couldn't always be in the trenches, so lived in fairly primitive conditions. Rats were a problem. Rations varied. For the first fourteen weeks we were in the line, we only ate

02:30 American hard rations. We got so sick of various kinds of beans. Beans, beans, beans, the Americans love them. This was because it was too difficult for a vehicle to come up in daylight. We were in an exposed position, and any vehicles would have been mortared coming up. But later, in some areas we had… The cooks could actually heat up meals,

03:00 and bring them up and heat them up. We had marvellous cooks. The rations weren't bad if they could be cooked. But of course, it was sometimes difficult. Normally we tried to get one hot meal a day. If you were lucky, you got one hot meal a day. Keeping clean was a terrible problem, there were no showers. We cut forty four gallon drums in half,

03:30 filled them with water, and let people take turns to have a bath. Then we punched some holes in some kerosene tins and had little sort of showers. It was all right if things were quiet. If a mortar bomb just happened to land nearby, then you were in trouble. Keeping clean was a difficulty. We used to be careful about inspecting the soldiers feet and so on.

04:00 We used to inspect their bodies in case any of them were getting rashes or problems. The medical people did most of that, every now and then the officers used to inspect everyone. The living conditions were either reasonable or terrible. Depending. 227 was difficult because we couldn't have fresh rations there, it was too difficult to get up. Hill A55 was great, because you could have kitchens dug in at the back.

04:30 **While you were on 227 and you weren't on patrol, you were in the pits and not on the move. What sort of guard protection would you have?**

There was always some standing patrols out in front, two or three men, usually dug into their position, carefully camouflaged, in front of the wire. So if any Chinese started to come in, you got a warning, in daylight.

05:00 During the day, everyone had to get some sleep because they didn't sleep at night. Very few people got to sleep at night, because we were patrolling so vigorously. You were either standing to, on guard, on sentry duty, or you were out patrolling. I had a command post which was manned by a couple of signallers and a radio operator and an orderly or two. Quite often, I just put a mattress

05:30 on the floor and slept there. And I found you could sleep through the radio traffic, if you were tired enough, but if something happened you'd wake up immediately. It was almost a reflex action. We were very careful that we could never be surprised.

Was the reason for your night-time activity because of your proximity to the…?

Yes, yes. Well, you saw what happened when we went up Hill 227, we got into casualties, we got a lot of casualties.

06:00 We tried to avoid casualties, whenever we could. That is why we patrolled so vigorously, with people out at night…They would go out at dusk and quite often stay out all night, or they might only stay out a few hours. But during the day, everyone was to get some sleep, there was always other people awake. We did fairly well. In a war of movement, you'd live much worse than that.

06:30 We were in a static position.

When we were talking about Balikpapan and visibility in the jungle, how did you deal with visibility at night, on patrol, in Korea?

Well, there was always some light. You got to know the ground so well, you could find your way in the dark, more or less.

07:00 You just went very carefully and very quietly. You couldn't patrol at night. We tried it a couple of times and it really doesn't work. It's too noisy. Whereas in Korea, where there was very little vegetation, if there was any you could avoid it.

I've heard some really strange things about Chinese propaganda activities and things that were left on the wire…

07:30 Oh yes, on Christmas Day they left us Christmas cards on the wire. After 227, we were mixed with the marines. You could hear them calling out sometimes, "Hello Digger. Where are you, Digger?" The Chinese.

08:00 And sometimes I suppose the diggers replied to them, but not often. But they were good soldiers, they were disciplined, well trained….

Did their aggressiveness or their method of attack become more manic as the…?

No, not really. I think…they were always aggressive.

08:30 But we had so much artillery and tank support, it was very difficult for them to do anything during the day. They were never manic, as far as I know. They were always studied and resolute, and….good soldiers.

Was there any Chinese aerial presence at that time?

I don't recall any, no.

09:00 I don't think they would have had any, otherwise it would have been shot down very quickly. We had air superiority.

Was Bed Check Charlie around at that time?

Occasionally, yes. It was just an aeroplane…I really don't remember much about Bed Check Charlie.

What sense did you make of the act of leaving Christmas cards on the wire?

We thought it was a nice gesture.

09:30 Our Christmas Day…I don't know whether we did on their Chinese New Year, we probably did something similar….There was quite a good feeling. Now I don't think we would have done this with the North Koreans. It was a different feeling with the Chinese. I think I'm right in saying that.

How were they different?

Better trained, better led. Just on the whole better soldiers.

10:00 They were quite like us in many ways, as soldiers.

What was your experience of the South Koreans?

We had very little to do with them, really. We saw them occasionally, we talked to them occasionally. This was the South Korean Army. No, because we were in a British Commonwealth Division area, we tended to be very self-sufficient and we didn't have much to do with them.

10:30 One saw them out in the cities and towns, but we were very seldom in cities and towns.

Can you tell me about your contact with the US marine divisions?

Yes. After Hill 227, we came out of the line and we were then put on the left hand position

11:00 of the Commonwealth Division. We were put right on the left flank. Our neighbours on our left were the US marine division, and we got on very well with them. We always contact the next door company, or battalion, when we were going to patrol near their area, and they always contacted us. They were very efficient, very well led. They lived a harder life than…

11:30 If we were lucky, we could have one beer a day. They weren't allowed to drink at all, in or out of the line. After we had left their area, we took over an area that the Black Watch had had, and they had built a little mess for A Company, we took over the A Company Black Watch position. They had built a little mess house out of some logs and bark, and we asked three or four marine officers to come and have dinner with us. And the cooks really turned it on, we told them to exaggerate everything. We got some of the best wine,

12:00 we got liqueurs and brandy, and the marines couldn't get over it. We turned on a show for the marines. I think all the diggers quite enjoyed it. They were all listening in.

So in that situation, how would that co-operation work with the US marines, in terms of your joint role?

12:30 We always kept in touch by radio or actually going to see them. They always told us what they were doing in front, what patrols were going out so we wouldn't…The great problem is when you are joined together like that, if one of your patrols gets out of line, it might be shot up by the next door neighbour. We were never frightened of those marines. They were efficient. And we kept in touch.

13:00 Sometimes we didn't have a radio on their radio net to tell them what we were doing….

Was that the danger of friendly fire, was that an issue you were aware of…?

Yes, fortunately we were never on the flank like that. That was the only time, or with New Zealanders or Canadians with us. We were never on the outer flank of the Commonwealth position again, that I know of.

13:30 **Can you walk me through a patrol that you did when you were stationed there, and what the nature of it was?**

Usually a patrol was not much bigger than a section. Sometimes a whole platoon would go out. Never a whole company, that was too dangerous. Too many people. Usually a patrol would be ten or twelve men, sometimes with an officer, sometimes a sergeant, sometimes by a corporal.

14:00 They would be lightly equipped. They would carry some ammunition and weapons, they would carry some water and some rations, in case they got displaced. They didn't carry heavy equipment. Their packs and everything were left in the line. They'd be very carefully briefed with maps and air photographs. They were allowed to take maps with them.

14:30 I don't think they were allowed to take air photographs with them, in case they were captured. They would go out with a specific role. "Go to this area and have a look. Is there been anyone there? Has there been any movement? Is there any sign of movement?" Or, "Go closer to the enemy positions and see what you can see and hear, but don't attack them." A small party would get into trouble. Sometimes they would stay out all night,

15:00 they wouldn't be moving all the time. They would be told, "Okay, we'll stop here and rest." They didn't move all night. It was too difficult, too tiring. And then before dawn, they would come in again, through the wire. They were always in radio contact. There were always people waiting for them at the entrance to the minefield, on the wire, on the other side. On the enemy side, our people would always have a patrol waiting for them

15:30 in case they were followed. I think we did pretty well…Only once or twice did we have contacts on the wire.

And what happened then?

I think that was when we were being, I think, less experienced. I told you about the Pioneer platoon commander some of those soldiers being captured, because we didn't have enough people out.

16:00 We learnt a lesson after that. It could never have happened again. If anyone was every working out on the wire at night, there was always a large patrol out protecting them. A small Chinese group got through a patrol we did have, we didn't have enough people out. But that didn't happen again.

So if you were maintaining your ground, what were the Chinese activities? What were they trying to achieve?

Well, let's go and move to Hill 355.

16:30 **Can you set up the scene for us?**

Hill 355 was a large monolithic mountain. It was three hundred and fifty-five feet high, against 227,

which was two hundred and twenty-seven metres, or feet. It was a bit craggy, some of the sides were very steep, the back was quite

17:00 easy to get up and down, some of the front was steep. It was dug in all around, there were tunnels and dugouts all around it. We didn't go there until a Canadian battalion had been attacked. What had happened was the Chinese had dug a tunnel under their wire and minefield, and come in on their front.

17:30 I think it was in small groups. Then on a given signal they attacked, and they were caught. Eventually most of the Chinese were driven off, and we were told to go up there, take over and help them. We went up there, they had taken quite a lot of casualties. I must be careful what I say here; I suppose the Canadians won't hear this, will they?

18:00 We were appalled. The fact that they allowed the Chinese to come in like that. They didn't patrol out in front as we did all the time. I think they just sat on this big hill and it was a mess. Partly it was because it had been attacked, but we kept our place absolutely spotless. There was no rubbish ever lying around. No sandbags….the sandbags would burst and you would always replace them with new ones. No rotten logs because you could fall in.

18:30 Our latrines were always very well cared for. They were holes in the ground, of course. The shellcases, people would have a pit dug in the ground, which was quite ideal. We had a lot of trouble, for a couple of weeks, on Hill 355.

19:00 **When you say trouble, can you explain the…?**

Yes, the Chinese were still patrolling. We lost quite a lot of casualties by patrolling vigorously out in front. And the Chinese weren't used to people vigorously patrolling, and they thought they would get away with what they were doing. They couldn't with us, so we had casualties…the patrols would meet. They soon learnt their lesson, that we were

19:30 slightly better at that than they were. We patrolled vigorously, but we had terrible trouble maintaining all the defences and putting them back into order, in the way we thought they should be. The brigade commander would come and inspect us, and if there was one thing wrong…The CO would come up nearly every day, and I remember the CO coming up… He had a slow voice,

20:00 he was a very wonderful man called Ian Hudson. He was walking along the wire one late afternoon, and he looked out and he said, "David, there are some empty tins outside your wire. Get them out." I can remember his voice very clearly, he spoke slowly…You couldn't get away. Because our commanders were good, we had to be good.

20:30 Quite often, you would get unexpected visits, you had to be ready for them. We tried to keep the place, any defensive position we were in, in as good a condition as we possibly could. From a defensive position and a hygienic position. Hygiene was a big problem. People would get skin rashes or footrot, or other problems. Cold, in the winter, in the snow in the winter,

21:00 you had to be very careful. We used to change sentries every hour, they were out in the cold. Every hour sentries would be changed. Many people got less sleep, of course, in the winter. It was very cold. But it sometimes had an advantage. And I would like to tell you one story about one very good young officer. We had a couple of new officers, recently graduated from Duntroon. They had done all the training that they should have done, and they came to join us on Hill 355.

21:30 One of them was a tall young officer, nicknamed Digger. He had been called Digger as a child. He was Digger James. Digger was a very good young officer, indeed. Quite early in the piece, he took a patrol out. This was after the Canadian debacle. There was snow on the ground and he was leading his patrol,

22:00 and he stood on a mine. He blew one leg off, half the foot and damaged his other leg. He lay in the snow, and if it hadn't of been cold he would have bled to death. He tied a tourniquet around his legs and said to his soldiers, "Don't come near me. You've got to prod your way through this minefield with the bayonets." So they had to prod their way carefully forward so they didn't set off another mine. Anyway, he had a radio set with him.

22:30 Just about that time, the Chinese had heard this mine go off and they were prowling around outside. He with one leg and half a leg off, he called down artillery fire on the Chinese with his radio. Wonderful. He was eventually rescued and went back. I recommended him for a Military Cross, which he very much earned. He was so disciplined and controlled, the diggers would do exactly as they were told.

23:00 Undisciplined soldiers would have rushed in to try and rescue him. They didn't. They prodded their way gently in and eventually got to him. He was bringing down artillery fire, how he did it, I don't know. He was a wonderful young man. He tried to stay in the army, he joined a tank regiment, but it became impossible. So he decided to do medicine. His wife, he had been engaged in Korea, I think,

23:30 and he got married with one leg. His wife took a job and he did medicine at Sydney or Melbourne University, I can't remember which. I should remember. In his last year he got a telephone call from the man who had been our brigade commander in Korea, now General Sir Thomas Daley, who was the chief of general staff. Tom Daley himself, who knew about Digger and who would have approved the Military Cross,

24:00 he rang up and said, "Digger, the army wants you back again." He said, "But sir, you can't help me. I will never pass the medical board." And he told him, "Yes, you will. The chief doctor and I are holding a medical board on you in three days time. You be here and you will pass." It was a wonderful thing to do. Digger James joined the army, became a captain and eventually commanded a hospital in Vietnam. In Vietnam he was told he wasn't

24:30 to go out and join troops on operations. He disobeyed that order completely, and went out with a tin leg and half a foot. And the diggers thought that was wonderful. It was great for morale. They said, "Well, if we lose a leg, there is still a life for us." Anyway, he eventually became a major general. He is now retired, but he still keeps an eye on me. If I have a real problem. He is the one who helped with the diagnosis of the thing I've got now.

25:00 But it shows as an example what determination can do, and guts and intelligence. I think he is a great man and I am very proud that I was once his company commander. There's a book on Korea here where he talks about his time in the snow. I read it yesterday, so I am right up to it.

25:30 **How prevalent were mines in that area?**

Your own mines, you knew exactly where they were, because they were usually marked or they were very carefully marked from a map. Mines were a problem if you let the enemy get in amongst them. Because they would pick them up and move them somewhere else. The Canadian minefields,

26:00 the one that Digger James went into, it wasn't marked on the map, sometimes they would have red tape around them, to mark them. Mines were problem, but not if you knew where they were. In Borneo, they use to use jumping jack mines, I don't think the Chinese had them…where you stood on them, and they…I don't think the Chinese had them.

For the benefit of someone who doesn't fully understand

26:30 **mine technology, can you explain how it is possible to pick up a mine and move it.**

It depends. A clever engineer will connect two mines together with a bit of wire into the ground, so if you try to lift one the other will go off. So you had to be very careful that the mines aren't joined up together. If you dig carefully around a mine…You've got to stand on the mine, normally, to set the fuse off, the explosion off.

27:00 And if you dig carefully around it, you could lift it. These young soldiers, Digger James….they were digging. Sure, they didn't go over the top of a mine, when they found one, they would go at it. The mine technology has advanced tremendously in the last sixty years, so it is different. We had injuries from mines, Digger James and so on, not on our own if we knew where they were.

27:30 There was an occasion later in Vietnam…

What sort of booby traps were the Chinese using?

Grenades, usually. With a line to the striker, so if you pulled it, it could go off.

28:00 They had grenades around their dugouts on the top of 227. But fortunately we had a Pioneer platoon commander, and Pioneers, with us, who understood this and they found them and disarmed them before they went off. It was daylight, of course, it was easy to do. They usually used grenades as booby traps, and later on there was much more complicated sort of booby traps,

28:30 but technology hadn't advanced that far.

In terms of 355, in terms of the standards of that defence position slipping during the Canadian presence, was that a problem that was recurring? Did you find that coming back you would have to re-establish…?

It's the only time that it happened. We took over from the Black Watch, twice, and we always took over….

29:00 You tried to take over from the same company. A Company Black Watch and 1Company RAR, and we got to know each other very well. That's why I was so delighted when my son served with the Black Watch in Scotland. The only times we had problems with that….we're in Borneo again. The Americans were a problem in Borneo, because they were smaller, we always had to dig down.

29:30 No, I don't think we had any other problems. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry we took over from once, and they were good….We had such good commanders on the whole. And for part of the time, in our beginnings there, we were part of a British brigade, with a British brigade commander and two British battalions….29th Commonwealth Brigade, then they formed 28th Commonwealth Brigade

30:00 which was always an Australian battalion, and two British battalions…with New Zealand gunners coming in.

From an organisation point of view, or an institutional point of view, what do you think was wrong, and why with that Canadian regiment…

I've got to be very careful with what I say…Command, it's always when there is a problem like that it is the fault of the officers, the CO and the senior officers,

30:30 they didn't pick it up. And didn't insist they patrol. We were given orders from battalion headquarters if we weren't patrolling enough. The CO in his quiet voice would say, "David, I think you better…." We were very active. Black Watch were excellent, they were a very good regiment indeed.

31:00 The Welsh regiment I think were good, we didn't have much to do with them after that attack. No, no other problems that I can recall.

What was the schedule in terms of time spent in the line and time spent in rest?

I think at one stage we spent fourteen weeks in the line, that's unusual. Six weeks,

31:30 then out a week or so. It was different later on. I think probably six weeks. You needed time to get to know an area. You couldn't come in and out too quickly, because for the first few days you patrolled very carefully, until you found out. You would look at the maps, you would talk to your predecessors in detail. For instance,

32:00 if I had a problem, I would get on the radio to (Bang?UNCLEAR), and he was probably on reserve at the time, and say, "Look, what about this position?" He would tell you. You didn't want to change too often, because you needed to get to know an area. When we got 355 organised, we quite enjoyed it. It was a safe area, the Chinese were never going to get up their again.

So as a commander, when you are in a rest area, were you providing that sort of support for people who are in the line?

32:30 Occasionally you were called on it. Usually you were given a period of rest. With food, you needed good rations most, and a place to have a shower and get clean. It was a health matter, really, people got very thin.

33:00 Look, I would need to look at the schedules to tell you exact, but I think we spent much longer in the line than out of it, but you spent long enough out of it to get your health and fitness back again. You still exercised and trained and shot your weapons. At range practice and so on, there was always a range nearby when you are out of the line.

33:30 **So what were the circumstances of you leaving Korea?**

I got an order to go to Japan. I don't know why, I really don't. We had a new CO by that time called Barney Austin, he was a good CO. He suddenly said, "David, I have got a request that you should be posted to a job in Japan." I said, "Who asked for me?" He said, "Brigadier Campbell." Now I knew Brigadier Campbell, he was a very good officer.

34:00 He had two DSOs, for instance, from the Second World War, and he was quite a famous man. My wife's father knew him well, because of the Middle East, and Greece, where he had done some very good things. And whether he asked for me….I was told he asked for me…There was nothing I could do about it, I didn't want to leave A Company, I was very upset. On the other hand, I think the CO wanted

34:30 to give other people in the battalion experience. The man who took over A Company was the adjutant, a man called Alex Smith, who was a captain as the adjutant and as a major. He was here a week or so ago. I don't know, I didn't want to go at all, I had another couple of months still to do, but I went and I enjoyed….

35:00 I went to a place called Headquarters Australian Army Component. It was there in Japan to look after troops in Japan, and we had to do the Australian administration for them. We reported both to army headquarters in Australia and the headquarters of the British Commonwealth Forces Korea, which had taken over from BCOF. BCFK [British Commonwealth Forces Korea], we reported to them.

35:30 The brigadier or myself would visit the units in Korea frequently. About once or twice a month we would go in and check that all was well. If battalions were changing over at this stage….a new battalion would come and one would go, you very carefully checked them out. It was a small headquarters, I was a major, I had the peculiar old fashioned title. I was the deputy assistant adjutant and quartermaster general.

36:00 Now you will never hear that again, it is so outdated. In fact, I was the senior staff officer on this tiny headquarters, which had the brigadier and myself, a legal officer and two or three captains. One of the captains eventually came from A Company, and Pat Sullivan, the bloke who got wounded, eventually became a corporal and then a sergeant on the headquarters.

36:30 We tried to look after our own. Another bloke from A Company, whose name escapes me at the moment, became the mess corporal. He was a private soldier who wanted to serve in Japan, so we said, "C'mon, run the mess." And he did it very well.

What is it like as a senior officer to make that transition from a combat situation to an administrative one?

Well, I had a certain amount of administrative experience, only as an adjutant.

37:00 You learn, and I knew about soldiers. Our job was to look after the soldiers and the people on the ground, and I knew about them. We got a lot of support. I had three different brigadiers in that period, all of whom became senior generals and remained friends.

37:30 It wasn't hard. It was very interesting and varied. I got to know a lot about the other forces in Japan. I got the chance to go to Tokyo occasionally. Once you've got a certain amount of training you can handle most things, I think. It was very comfortable. The officers' mess was in

38:00 a building, which had been built for the brigade commander in this area, called Hiro, during the Occupation. It was a very nice house, and beside it had a small one room cottage, with its own bathroom, which had been his driver's house, which they gave me to live in. So the other young officers lived in the mess and I had this little room to myself, which was quite nice, with Japanese servants to look after you. We had a good mess

38:30 and good food, and lots and lots of visitors. We were always having lunches and dinner parties to entertain VIPs [very important person]. It was very interesting. I liked all the three brigadiers that were there when I was there. I used to go to Korea quite often. And when 1RAR left in April, '53,

39:00 I got permission to visit Korea to see them when they got on the train. I got on the train with them and went down to Pusan. We all had a few bottles and we had a great party, saying goodbye to Korea, and I went down and saw them off on the ship.

Had the Armistice been…?

Not then. They left, 1RAR, and then Armistice wasn't until

39:30 August, I think. Yes, a couple of months after 1RAR left. My memory fails me a bit, I should have remembered the date.

Can you recall what your opinion was at the end of the war then? Once the 38th Parallel had been secured?

40:00 Well, at least we had South Korea as being a great success story. North Korea has been an absolute failure, people are starving. South Korea is a wealthy country and we do a lot of trade with them. They are quite well governed, they've got a few problems at the moment, but they are a non-communist, democratic country. North Korea, which we left behind,

40:30 is an absolute…It's certainly the worst country in Asia. There are no countries as bad as North Korea, so we feel a certain guilt there. I'm very proud of South Korea and what they're doing, what they do.

So when you say guilt, do you mean that you couldn't have liberated…?

Oh yes, we failed to liberate North Korea.

41:00 There is no way we could have, after the Chinese came in. They were too big and strong. No, we couldn't, I don't think. I don't think we wanted to have immense casualties it would have caused. If you fight wars, the results have got to be worth it, if you can make it worth it. The results of our leaving Korea….We left at the right time.

Tape 6

00:30 **You said that there was something you wanted to mention about Korea?**

When I was in Japan, about a month or so, I think, after I left Korea, my sergeant major came to visit me. I thought, 'That's nice.' He came to visit me and he presented me with a gift. A six shot Winchester shotgun. And on it was written, 'To David Thomson, from the boys of A Company, 1RAR, 1952'.

01:00 And that is because there are a lot of pheasants in Korea. The diggers would often hear me say, "God, I wish I had a shotgun," because, and this is going back many years, my grandmother was a crack shot. At the age of eight, she taught me to shoot with a shotgun. And I had that shotgun for many years, until it became illegal to have automatic guns like that.

01:30 So I presented it to the war memorial, who took it and still have it on display.

I also understand you met some prisoners of war?

Yes. After the truce, I went to Panmunjom, it must have been. And there were three

02:00 prisoners from 1RAR particularly, I went to see. But all the Australians, I went to see. And I brought a young officer, a captain, I brought him back with me, and he stayed in Japan to get his health back a bit. And he talked and talked and talked. He wanted to talk about it, and it was very interesting. And I gather the others did, too.

02:30 They had a tough time, but it was nothing like being a prisoner of the Japanese.

What had been their treatment?

Tough, but I think reasonably fair. They weren't tortured as far as I remember. They had enough to eat, they were well fed. They were nothing like the Japanese prisoners. The Chinese, in fact, they were their captors and they had done quite... It was the Korean guards that they didn't like, but the bosses were Chinese.

03:00 **And how had they been kept?**

I can't remember, I'm sorry. I heard all about it at the time, but I can't remember.

You mentioned that you were in charge of men who were also a part of K Force [Commonwealth Division in Korea]. Was it different dealing with those men....

There was no difference at all. Most of K Force

03:30 had had previous service. They had been out of the army and volunteered to serve again. So they were just as good, some of them were better. They were very good soldiers. I didn't know of any difference between the two, you couldn't tell a difference. People asked that question later about National Servicemen and the answer would be the same. K Force worked because…

04:00 We were increasing the size of the army, we needed more people and we called for people to volunteer to come. They were all volunteers and it turned out they were great.

When you based in Japan after Korea, what was your specific role at that time?

Administration. I controlled the legal officer, three young captains, a chief clerk, a couple of sergeants. It was a small headquarters,

04:30 keeping in touch with what was going on in Korea. The reinforcements in Japan, we were responsible for looking after them. We were responsible for reporting to the headquarters of the British Commonwealth Forces Korea…It was an administrative job. I commanded some clerks, three young officers, but no, it was plain administration.

05:00 **You had been part of BCOF before Korea, what did you notice about the way that Japan had changed?**

The peace treaty had been signed by then, they were no longer enemies, they were beginning to trade with us, they were working hard, we were allowed to talk to them and meet them. We even went into a couple of Japanese houses. No, it was quite different after the peace treaty was signed. The Occupation and

05:30 the Korean, it was quite different.

How did you perceive the Japanese had adapted to life after Occupation?

They didn't have much alternative. Their country was in a mess. They worked terribly hard and built up their industrial might. Until now they are one of the most successful industrial countries. They've had a few problems recently.

06:00 But they worked hard, they were intelligent, they were well trained. On the whole, their governments hadn't been bad. They're having troubles at the moment. But no, it was much more comfortable being there.

Comfortable in the sense that you were more welcome?

We were more welcome, we could talk to them, they smiled at us and bowed, of course, always.

06:30 I'd spent, what, three years in Japan by this stage. I'd been back once since. I went to Oshima with a group of five or six other members of parliament, on official visit. We went into a mayoral reception in Hiroshima. And the mayor comes up to me, put his arms around me, kissed me on both cheeks

07:00 and said, "Thomson Tai-san. How good to see you." He had been an interpreter in Fukuyama, in '65 battalion. The other MPs [Military Police] were really quite surprised to see me and the mayor on such familiar terms. Tai-san was captain.…Just an interesting sideline.

07:30 **And what was it like to leave Korea and Japan behind?**

Oh, I was very glad to get home. I'd been away from Australia for far too long. I'd left a couple of girls behind who got married. I came back and I was given a job at army headquarters in Canberra, in equipment development. Which I enjoyed, because I knew a lot about the bad equipment we had been using and helped design new stuff.

08:00 But the most important thing that happened, a cousin of mine was getting married. And the bridesmaid to his wife was a girl called Judy Rogers, who was the daughter of the director of military intelligence, who, when I was at Duntroon, had come to talk about.… She gave a party for the bride, who were family

friends on both sides. I didn't meet her much then.

08:30 But then at the wedding I saw this attractive girl in a beautiful dress, and I decided then and there that I was going to marry her. And I told her not long afterwards that I was going to marry her. She wouldn't say yes. And then, much to my despair, I was sent off to do a parachute course. And I wrote her very large letters, and her mother was complaining because I didn't put enough postage on them. At any rate, she says that I

09:00 threatened not to pull the rip cord when I jumped out of the plane. That is not true, we didn't have rip cords. But six weeks after we met, we were engaged, and six months after we met, we were married. We had to get married reasonably quickly, because I was told that I was going to be posted to Pakistan. And so on the 22nd of September, 1955, we got married. We went to live for a month or so in the nice little flat,

09:30 which I still had, in Park Street, South Yarra. Then we got on a ship, went to Bombay first, got on another ship and went to Karachi, got on a train… It took about twenty-four hours to go up to the north west frontier, because I was going to the Pakistan Staff College at Quetta. Now, a staff college in the Commonwealth is a post graduate university for captains and majors.

10:00 There is one in Canada, there is one India, one in Pakistan, one in Australia and one in England. And it was great fun to be sent to the one in Pakistan. It was very interesting. It was several hundred miles from the nearest city. It was about fifty minutes drive from the frontier with Afghanistan. We weren't allowed to cross the frontier. We were allowed to go to the border and not cross. There was a whole division of the Pakistan Army at Quetta,

10:30 as well as the staff college. Judy wrote a story about it. It's called 'Remnants of the Raj', because although Pakistan got its independence in 1947, and this was '55, there were still Brits there. For instance, the commissioner of Belujistan, we were in the state of Belujistan, when we were arrived there, was a British civil servant, who had been in the old Indian civil service, he left and was changed to a Pakistani.

11:00 The political officer… Now the political officer's job was to look after the tribes on both sides of the border, and make sure they didn't misbehave in any way. He was a Brit, who I met….I met him years later, in Tonga, of all places. At the staff college, the commandant was a Pakistani, and there were about five or six British instructors,

11:30 the majority of course were Pakistanis. There were a number of other students from Commonwealth countries, and an Iraqi, which was interesting, who we got to know quite well. That was a great year because the Australian students had a nice house, we got the big house. We had to have five servants. You weren't allowed, under the union rules, to have less than five servants, because they had very defined things. We had this wonderful staff.

12:00 I was very busy, and Judy decided she'd start a little school, a kindergarten. We had both Pakistani and English kids used to come to our house, to the kindergarten. But because they had long holidays, it gave us the chance to travel quite a lot.

12:30 **What were the main parts of where you worked, after Pakistan, taking us up to the time you went to Borneo?**

I came home from Pakistan, and I was posted to the Royal Military College as an instructor, at Duntroon, which was great. I forgot to say

13:00 that my wife fell pregnant, and she was due to have a baby in March or April. The army said, "She can't stay in Pakistan, there are no hospitals in the north. She will have to go home. We will make a great exception and allow her to fly." Instead she would have had to go home by ship. So they flew her home and she stayed with her parents, and I spent an alone period, eventually getting home by ship. I got home two weeks before the baby was due.

13:30 He was born on the 7th of April, our eldest son. I had to go to Duntroon on the 10th of April. So I saw the child born then had to go. But it gave me time to settle into a house at Duntroon and we had a very happy three years there. In due course, our second son was born in Canberra. Then after three great years at Duntroon, it was a wonderful job, I was the senior instructor in tactics and enjoyed teaching the young cadets immensely. Then we were told we were to go

14:00 to Queenscliff, to the Australian Staff College for about nine months. That was to get experience, because they had already told me that at the end of 1960, I was to go to Camberley in the UK, as an instructor at the British Army Staff College, which was a very plum job. It was a wonderful job. So while we were in Queenscliff, which was near Geelong,

14:30 our third son was born, and poor Judy had a terrible time with three babies. The eldest was three and a bit. That was a difficult time for her. Then we got on a very good Dutch ship to go to England and we decided…. We met a girl who was a trained child nurse, so we paid half her fare to come and look after the children, because Judy was still breast-feeding. We had a very good trip to England, and eventually we moved

15:00 into a very nice house in Camberley, while I was an instructor at the British Army Staff College, which was a wonderful experience, with people from all over the world. All the British officers were given a batman from the regiment. I didn't have a batman from my regiment, they gave me a retired gunner sergeant, who was the most wonderful man, to look after me and run the house, then we employed a girl to look after the children.

15:30 We did a lot of travelling.

And how long were you in England for?

A little over two years. We arrived in November and we left in December, January…

And what did you do when you came back?

I got a job at army headquarters in Canberra, again. And by that time, we had bought a house in Canberra, which we moved back into, with three children. And we had a woman who was helping us with the children, in England,

16:00 at that stage, for ten pounds. You could have a ten pound Pom. So we paid her ten pound fare, she wanted to come to Australia, so she came with us and stayed with us and looked after the children for a while. She unfortunately died in England last year. She was married to an Australian, widowed, went back to see her family, and they rang us and told us she'd died. She became a great friend. While I was there at army headquarters,

16:30 my ambition was I wanted to command the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. At that time there was no hope because they had changed the organisation. And the two infantry battalions in Australia had full colonels as their COs, and they are much bigger than a normal battalion. So there was no hope of me getting that, of getting to colonel. Then I was told to organise the raising,

17:00 and write the raising instructions for a new regular battalion. I was told this in July. I was told it had to be raised by the 1st of February. I had to make all the arrangements for where it was to go, I had to find out where the soldiers were going to come from and write the raising instructions. I took it to my boss, a brigadier, who said, "David, I'm too busy, you sign it." The next day he called me in and said,

17:30 "David, I didn't tell you yesterday but you're going to command this new battalion." And I was longing to do that, of course, but I didn't think I had a hope as I had just come back from England. But, I had to stay in my job until the end of January. But I managed to do a lot of work. The only place for the battalion to go in Australia was Woodside, an hour and a half's drive from Adelaide,

18:00 in an old tin-hutted camp that needed a lot of work on it. It was the only vacant barracks in Australia, there was no alternative. It was ridiculous because we were being trained for jungle warfare. South Australia in the winter is the last place to train. At any rate, it had a hundred married quarters. The South Australian government said, who were very keen to have a battalion there, said, "Okay, when you fill those hundred married quarters," which we did very quickly,

18:30 "you can have as many quarters in the housing estate near Adelaide as you want." So a lot of young diggers who weren't really planning to get married, got married. We ended up with three hundred families.

You mentioned that you were training for jungle warfare. How much on the horizon were the issues in South East Asia at that time?

Oh, yes. I was told….The raising instructions said, "You will start the battalion on the 1st of February.

19:00 It is to be full strength by the end of March," which was two months later. People poured in, it had been organised where it came from. We were told to be ready as quickly as we could be. It took quite a long time to get a battalion together, get everything sorted out. Train NCOs, we had to make a lot of the more experienced soldiers…make them and train them. There were three things we were told we would have to do.

19:30 One was there were some problems on the border of Papua New Guinea, at the top. There was a battalion in Borneo which had to be replaced. That was the likely thing we'd do. The third thing they said, "If we have to send a battalion to Vietnam, which is possible, because we have a lot of troops there, you might have to go as well." In the end, they changed the organisation,

20:00 and 1RAR became a normal battalion again, so I lost my chance of…But I was delighted with 4 RAR, because to be a foundation CO was quite special. I got to know all the soldiers because I was almost their first. And because we were isolated in Woodside, we had to make our own fun and we got to know each other all very well. Then we went to Malaysia.

20:30 **Can you tell me about how that order came through?**

To go to Malaysia? I was just told that, okay, you've got to relieve… 3 RAR have just come back from Borneo. "You better go see them now while they're in Borneo." So they sent me up to see them. In early '65 we went to Malaysia, and we went to Rembau, Melaka.

21:00 Marvellous British built barracks, luxurious barracks. We had never seen anything so luxurious. Much

better than anything we had in Australia. We had a very nice house, we were terribly busy, but again, all the married soldiers got a house. Some of them were in the base, others they went to houses near the Melaka area. So everybody got a house. Three hundred wives, and Judy had a very busy job,

21:30 starting the wives club and getting organised. I was very busy training the battalion because we knew we were going to Borneo in March, April, '66.

Can you tell me David, in as much detail as you can, what information you had about the situation in Borneo at that time?

Before I went there, I had none.

22:00 The cross border operations, which were called Claret Operations, were top secret, Claret, and very few people were cleared for that. But of course, when I went to visit them, I was cleared and I got a certain amount of information. When I came home I was given a complete briefing of what was to happen, and what we were to do, and the fact that we were not to mention anything to anyone.

22:30 We went to Borneo by sea, and we landed at a place called Kuching, the capital Sarawak, then about an hour's drive from Sarawak, towards the border to a little town called Bau. It had a small barracks there that had battalion headquarters. There were huts with tin roofs and plaited palm leaves for walls, but it was adequate.

23:00 One Company was there. We were responsible for the Bau district and the border. I think the border we were responsible for was about forty or fifty kilometres long. It had three company bases spread far apart, closer to the border. We made great use of helicopters. Unfortunately, the battalion was supposed to have two small helicopters, they hadn't arrived,

23:30 but we were just lucky. A parachute battalion in Borneo, the CO and I, we had been on the staff at Camberley together, and one of the marine regiments, the CO and I had been…we were friends. They heard of my problem and they said, "You can buy helicopters, whatever you want."

So when you were back in Australia and you were given a full briefing, what were you told?

24:00 I was told that we were to stop. There was a great fear that the Indonesians would invade Sarawak and Borneo. They tried to. They landed parachutes in Malaya and they tried there, but they got knocked badly. They were bitter opponents of the Borneo territories joining the Malaysian Federation.

24:30 They said they should become part of Indonesia. But, of course, Sarawak had been British for a long time. A white family had ruled Sarawak for…Sabah, and the other one….They were a keen British colony. They didn't want to be Indonesian, they were pretty anti-Indonesia.

25:00 They thought they were much better off with Malaysia. So the British Commonwealth sent ten or twelve battalions of infantry to Borneo. We were in what was called, West Brigade, where we had two British battalions, an Australian battalion and a New Zealand artillery regiment. And we were given…

25:30 They had a very good British brigade commander who saw we were a pretty good battalion. And he came to me one day and he said, "Okay, David. I think you're read for Claret Operations. Here are three operations you've got to prepare for." He gave me the details. Security was so tight I couldn't talk to very many people in the battalion about what was happening. The operational staff had to know, the people in the headquarters who were planning the operations.

26:00 There were two maps. One in a locked cupboard in my office, another in the operation hut. One of them was fake, and had pins all along the border. The other one showed where patrols were over the border, Claret Operations. An officer who wanted to do one of those patrols wasn't allowed to talk

26:30 to anyone else outside of their platoon. There were some platoons who thought they were the only ones that went over, because security was so tight. I discovered, after a very short period, that there was a casualty. Caused not by the Indonesians, but by an elephant. Of course, we had to say that it happened on our side of the border. The doctor said, "It couldn't have possibly have happened…"

27:00 I realised that the doctor hadn't been briefed on Claret, so of course he had to be.

Why did he get suspicious and say…?

Well, because there were no elephants in our area. He knew that very well. An elephant had injured the soldier over the border. It was a very close secret. Everyone who went over were told they weren't to talk to about what they did over the border to anyone.

27:30 Now, we had a problem. When we first went there, they had started peace talks. No-one much believed in these peace talks, because Indonesia had had a change of government. There had been a Communist revolution, which had been put down in Indonesia, and Sukarno became the…We had great concern at what was going to happen.

28:00 So we were told we had to make sure that there wasn’t large forces assembling across the border. A Claret operation had to be approved by a general, who was accorded the director of Borneo operations, Dog Ops. They had to be very strictly controlled.

28:30 They were told exactly where they could go and what they could do, and the dates they were to do… They had to carry ten to fourteen days rations, and they could not be re-supplied by anyone at all. If they ran out of food, they ran out of food. They always had enough water, there was a lot of water around. They had to carry all their ammunition. And if they had any casualties, they had to be carried back. There was no helicopters allowed over the border. So there was no re-supply, no casualty evacuation.

29:00 We were told there would be fire support from artillery, only in emergency. Which meant never. They went over by themselves, thirty men, a young officer, a sergeant, corporals, very heavily laden, in very rough country indeed. They were away for ten to twelve days, living on hard rations, and they worked very hard and got very thin.

29:30 There were lots of funny stories. We weren't allowed to talk about it for thirty years, so a lot of the stories were lost. There was a full report made of each Claret patrol. We weren't allowed to keep any notes, any maps, nothing. All those reports were sent to brigade headquarters, in Kuching, then they were sent to London. As soon as we were allowed… The relaxation came in in 1996.

30:00 One of the young officers from 4 RAR was in London, on the staff. I said, "Go and find the Claret reports." He wanted to find his own of course. Look, we did twelve or thirteen Claret operations. I could only find reference to six of them. The rest were lost. So everyone had to search their memories. By that stage, a young officer called Brian Avery

30:30 had wrote a book called 'Our Secret War'. He had to get people to remember. We found one platoon commander who, against all rules, had kept some notes. Nobody else had. I had hardly any notes, no-one in headquarters had notes. There were some very interesting stories. In the end, in May and June, we were told we weren't allowed to fight a war over there. If they attacked us, we could fight back.

31:00 We had to look at their bases and see what they were doing. There was one interesting operation there, they came upon a base which had what they called a pig fence. Stakes of bamboo driven right around it to stop pigs getting in. And on this patrol, this young officer and a couple of soldiers, crawled undercover right up to the pig fence. They were told to watch and note

31:30 everything. They stared there for a while. Then suddenly there was a sentry sitting on a log, not far. He didn't see them. He came around to have a pee. And he almost peed on these two soldiers. One of them, as I said, said, "If that bastard had of peed on me, I would have dropped the so and so." There he was, like that, and the sentry must have been asleep or something, and didn't see them.

32:00 That was a story that wasn't told for many years, of course, but all sorts of interesting things happened over there. When they went back to Malaysia, not one soldier told his wife. There were three hundred wives. Not one soldier got full and talked about Claret. My wife had never heard of it,

32:30 until we were back in Canberra and she had the job with ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation]. She had a briefing from the chief policeman of Sarawak, a briefing for the ASIO staff, and she came back that night and said, "Now I know what you were doing in Borneo." No-one knew. And that was a great test of discipline, and I was very proud of that. Unfortunately, after nearly three years, when I got to [UNCLEAR] very well,

33:00 you are normally allowed to only [UNCLEAR] for two years, but because of the Claret thing I was allowed nearly three, and I was told I was going back to Australia. I hated leaving. I had marvellous farewells from all the companies, and gifts and all sorts of things. I came home and I was, for a short period, I had a job around headquarters…

33:30 **If you could just explain the first day of actual going to Borneo. I wanted to get an idea of where you left from and how that was actually done.**

We left Singapore on a small ship, with two companies and battalion headquarters. We had Anzac Day on board. We arrived in Kuching on the 26th of April. We then got into trucks

34:00 and were taken to Bau. Now, I've forgotten something. Previous to this, an advance party of an officer and a few people from each company were sent to Borneo, and were to represent Australia at each of the three company bases on the border. We took over from the 1/2nd Ghurkha Rifles, a good regiment.

34:30 In one of the company bases there were four or five Australians. Suddenly the Gurkhas were pulled out for an emergency somewhere else, and these five young Australians were left in this base by themselves, with no support, until a company arrived. They were fairly worried, I think, in case anything happened. We arrived and I soon settled into battalion headquarters in the reserve company at Bau,

35:00 and the other three companies went out. All of them had to be lifted by helicopter. One of them was….part of the way. There were no roads near there, they had just been started to be built. Two of the bases could only be approached by helicopter. They had landing strips. There was a company on each of the forward bases, which were very isolated. The only way for me to visit them was to fly in a helicopter. There was one gun

35:30 artillery piece in each place. This was against all the artillery rules, you never have single guns. But of course, there was no other way of doing it. There was only four guns in our battery, the battery of

artillery. A single gun and a single three-inch mortar in the base, which they could use for support if they were attacked.

36:00 The reserve company, we made sure we knew the approaches to all the bases, so they could be flown in quickly, if anything happened. Rations were either taken in by helicopter or air-dropped. There were a lot of funny stories about dropping things. They needed petrol for power, they had generators to produce power in the companies, for refrigerators.

36:30 They needed to be well looked after there, because after coming back from fourteen days, or more, on a Claret Op, they were very thin and so tired. They had to be fed up. They were given marvellous meals. They were allowed to tuck in, and they were fed very well indeed. The cooks did a marvellous job. But they got tired and thin.

37:00 They still had to patrol and work and do things. Then in June, we had a problem. We had an Indonesian incursion. Now most of the Indonesians opposite us were normal infantry soldiers. But they had brought in a group of Special Forces soldiers. RPKAD [Indonesian Commando Special Forces], I can't remember now what RPKAD stands for,

37:30 but it was their special forces. And we were told that peace was about to be signed. I had got quite friendly with the CO of the 2/7th Gurkhas, and he said. "Now it is peace, would you like to come and have lunch?" He was at Kuching. Suddenly

38:00 this odd telephone call, "Come back at once, we've got problems." So in the middle of lunch I went back and discovered that an engineering patrol, with a Chinese interpreter, had been in a village called Jalan Barrack. And they had asked for rations and asked for directions on how to get to Kuching."

38:30 One small group went off, because around Bau, where it was a very big Chinese area, there was something like ten or twelve thousand Chinese, and some of them were Communists and supportive of the Indonesians. And this group was trying to get to recruit the Chinese to call trouble.

39:00 One group got there, and the other one…The Chinese guard came back to collect some more, and he was captured. Before that happened, we had an area called the Border Scouts, a type of training in intelligence. A border scout in this village, where the Indonesians called, immediately got on a motorbike and came to the nearest police station and said, "There are Indonesians here."

39:30 About that time the Chinese guide was captured, he didn't talk for a while, but then we realised quite a large party was coming across, all ready across, this border, huge area, thirty of forty kilometres of it. We worked very hard for a long time to find them. The brigade commander said to me, "You can't do that with your troops. Here's a company of Gurkhas under command." Now under command means that they belong to you absolutely, and you can do what you like with them.

40:00 And they were wonderful. The Gurkhas are the most magnificent soldiers. Very well trained. They get on very well with Australians.

Why was it that the Gurkhas were better for you in that instance?

Because if we got….I think we would have had trouble with Australians from a different battalion, almost certainly if it is was someone from the British battalion.

40:30 It just so happened that the Gurkhas got on very well with the Australians. There was no difference. In the end, we had three companies of Gurkhas under command, so that was quite amazing. The CO of the Gurkhas was a friend, and I said, "You better bring your headquarters up; we'll run a joint headquarters." I had three companies of his, so he did and we had a joint headquarters at Bau.

41:00 And then, in one of our company bases, there was two Australian companies and one Gurkha company. And they decided that whoever had the most soldiers away from the base, would command the base, which caused a lot of confusion. The OC [Officer Commanding] of the Gurkha company happened to be the first young…. The other Gurkha officers were British. He was the first graduate,

41:30 and it was very good. He was a wonderful man. It caused a lot of confusion when he would answer the radio at this base, until they realised what they had done, they had decided who was going to command. At any rate, we had a number of contacts, and eventually we killed and captured.

Tape 7

00:30 **Can I just confirm with you the name of this operation?**

'Double Cross.' The brigade commander called it Double Cross because we were supposed to be signing a peace treaty. So it was Operation Double Cross and it went on for several weeks. At this stage, we had a contact and we had killed, and captured several. We had two badly wounded ourselves.

01:00 A young corporal got shot through the chest, and another young soldier got shot through the stomach. We thought they'd both live. The young corporal with the chest wound, he survived, but the other one

died. It was interesting; it was a terrible problem getting out to a helipad to be evacuated. They had to be carried for five hours through the jungle. There they were.

01:30 We had very good medical support dropped into them. They were in the bush, they weren't near a base or a helipad. The nearest helipad was five hours march away. They took them to the helipad, they arrived in darkness. They got their mugs, which they made tea in, put little candles in each mug and had a ring of lights around the helipad. And the RAF [Royal Air Force] helicopters came in to that little ring of lights

02:00 in the most wonderful… They weren't supposed to land at night, they landed at night and evacuated the few casualties. We were always grateful to them, the young pilots, they were quite wonderful. It was dangerous, they could have easily crashed, but they didn't. But they got these two people to hospital. One of them died, unfortunately, but the other one was fine and came back and played football for the battalion. At any rate, this went on for some time,

02:30 and eventually the remaining Indonesians were in the Chinese area. And I was furious. Australians weren't allowed to operate in the Chinese areas. I'm not sure of the reason, we were just given an order, we weren't to operate in the settled areas. So our friends, the First [UNCLEAR ?1/10th] Gurkha Rifles, went in and got the last few,

03:00 which should have been our target, and we were very upset about that. But, about this time, we had a visit from a war correspondent. He happened to be a man called Clayton Burns, he was with the Melbourne Age, he eventually became editor of the Melbourne Age. He was an old friend, we had been to school together. He came up to me quietly and said, "David, I've just been to the hospital in Kuching…" Ahhh, I missed a bit.

03:30 We had been ordered to say that the Indonesians were Chinese. We had to say that the people we'd captured and killed were Chinese. That was an order direct from the prime minister of Malaysia, Tunku Rahman. He said, "You must not for a moment admit while these peace talks are going on, that you are killing and capturing Indonesians. You've got to say they were Chinese." So all the reports went out to say we were having clashes with the Chinese.

04:00 Until Clayton Burns, this war correspondent, went to the hospital. How he got into the hospital I don't know, saw the patients, saw they were Indonesians and came to me and said, "David? What the hell is going on? Those are Indonesians that you've killed and captured." My only alternative… I had an intelligence officer called Ian Holmes, he's a retired brigadier,

04:30 he still shudders at this story. I took Clayton Burns into the secret Claret Ops room, with Leon Hearne being present, and I gave him a top-secret Claret briefing. So he knew everything that was going on in Double Cross. He was quite wonderful to me, he had a great story and he never used it. I had lunch with him last year in Melbourne. John Dyton, one of the company commanders, was there and we joked about this story.

05:00 **What was your logic, David, for sharing that story with him?**

Because if I hadn't of told the truth…If I hadn't sworn him to secrecy and given him top secret information, he would have been free to go off as a war correspondent and say that he had seen the people in the hospital, they were Chinese, not Indonesians. And that would have caused a terrible stir. So I took a risk. Ian Hearne, the intelligence officer, I don't think he's forgiven me yet.

05:30 But he never mentioned it, ever. It was the only way to…if he hadn't of been a close friend. He was based in Singapore, we used to use him on base in Singapore, and he came to stay with us in Tarinda. That is why I had to trust him. If I hadn't of told him, he could gone off and spread this story, and we would have got into great trouble.

06:00 **What would the families of the Australian casualties have been told?**

Neither of them were married, so these two casualties, they didn't have wives in Tarinda. They would have had to have been told. The wives knew that something was going on, they knew that Double Cross was going on, there was so much movement. There was a terrible complaint of not getting any letters.

06:30 All the (UNCLEAR) they worked. So I sent an officer back to Tarinda, got all the wives together, told the wives they would have to wait for letters, their soldiers were so busy they didn't have time to write letters. And there were some very apologetic letters went from the wives back to the diggers. That was an interesting sideline, but they didn't have time to write. We moved six thousand…What did we have in the battalion?

07:00 I suppose a thousand, if you take the Gurkhas. So we moved six thousand down in a week, and there were the helicopter lists…There was a thousand being moved around every day.

During Double Cross, what was seized of Indonesian equipment and intelligence?

Quite a lot. There's a photograph, of weapons and equipment. We seized quite a lot.

07:30 We set it up and we photographed it. Of course, we weren't allowed to publicise it, but now it is okay. It's very interesting. The commander of the Indonesian Special Forces, across the border, was a fellow

called Colonel, or it might have been Brigadier Swahro Iddi, who I knew quite well. He had been a student in Australia, and while he was a student he came to visit 4 RAR on that exercise in Queensland.

08:00 And I knew that he was on the other side, and commanding these soldiers on the other side. And when we captured this top secret operation order, I did what you do at staff college. I corrected it all in red ink, and sent it back with a comment, "This is very bad security, don't do it again." I said to the brigade commander, "Can I send this across the border to Swarho Iddi?" He said, "David, regretfully you can't."

08:30 Eventually I met Swahro Iddi many years later and told him the story. I would have loved to have sent that operation order back to him, because he had been trained in Australia about security.

So what were the details of the operation order?

It said exactly what was to happen. There was a series of groups called Manja. Manja One, Manja Two, Manja Three, who were to infiltrate into Sarawak. There were other operations going on -

09:00 Sabah and Labuan, but this was specifically for Sarawak. They were to infiltrate, and they were to contact lists of Chinese people in the communists, to help stir up trouble. That was the operation he sent. I had it translated and I've got a copy of it. It was interesting, what they were trying to do.

09:30 They failed. Malaysia is still grateful. They said they are going to mount a special medal for anyone who served in Malaysia or Borneo, the Australians. But at this stage, it was quite obvious what was happening. They had only got across the border because we had stopped Claret operations.

10:00 They would never have got across if we were all over the place over the border. So we were immediately told to start claret operations again, and we did. They went on until the peace was actually signed. We had two Claret platoons over the border then, and we had to summons them back. Communications were difficult. The Signal platoon had a very difficult job, because it was very rough country

10:30 and they used to put up relay stations on high points, and man them. A couple of diggers would stay four or five days alone on top of a hill with a relay station. Terrible job in bad weather. They had to communicate using code words telling us where they were. There was to be no conversation unless there was a contact which needed support. They were allowed

11:00 to take photographs of the Indonesians over the border. They very often came very close to them, and weren't seen. They were pretty good soldiers, they were really very good. In the end, we summoned the last two Claret operations back, and still they were never talked about. It is really quite remarkable that not one soldier... I'm very proud of that.

11:30 It shows the discipline and the loyalty.

You mentioned that if there was a contact then there would be support?

No, no. We were told we may get artillery support. The answer I got later was, "Never." That was just good for morale. You were never allowed to have helicopters. If you had a casualty, they had to be carried back, over the border.

12:00 It was tough. A battalion of men went to Vietnam…almost the same battalion. And they said Borneo was much, much tougher than Vietnam.

You said that you discovered during Double Cross that an Indonesian officer that had had experience in Australia….What did Claret reveal about the strength and the capability of those Indonesian forces?

12:30 No, he came as a student to the Australian Staff College. We had had Indonesians quite a long time. He just happened to be a special force commander, and a very good one. These special forces soldiers were highly trained, so much better than the average Indonesian. They were special forces, they were specially selected, specially trained.

13:00 And they fought very well, they were very brave. Two of them were caught hiding behind the root of a tree. Instead of escaping, they stayed there and shot at our people. Eventually they were killed. They could have got away, gone down over the side and got away, we were on a steep ridge. But they didn't. They stayed and fought. And our diggers were very impressed.

13:30 They were very well trained, committed soldiers. We didn't like what they were doing, but they were just obeying orders, just like we were.

So what sort of reconnaissance or intelligence would be received that would prompt a Claret Operation?

Often, on spec. The director of operations, the intelligence staff,

14:00 the brigade commander, or another battalion which might have been somewhere and seen something. And that was often…the reports coming in. "We think there is a track going here," or, "A telephone line going here. Somebody go and check it out." We did in fact find a telephone line. We weren't supposed

to, but the diggers couldn't resist, they cut the line. But they weren't allowed, it is very interesting, they weren't allowed to leave anything behind.

14:30 If they had ration packs they had to bury everything. They weren't allowed to leave any indication that they had been there in any way. And they didn't, they were very good indeed. And the discipline was absolutely excellent. There is a story. Two young soldiers set out on a clearing patrol. They were well over the border,

15:00 and they were sent out on a clearing patrol. They only took their light equipment and weapons with them, they didn't take any water or food or rations. They had water, but not food or rations. And one of them, in a swamp, dropped the compass. A compass in a swamp in jungle. The patrol commander waited. We had orders if someone didn't turn up, you had to wait for a certain amount of time and then you carried on with the job.

15:30 So he came back and he eventually got back over the border, where he waited. These two diggers, I see them occasionally, they come to all the reunions, and I see them occasionally and tease them about this. The senior soldier said, "Okay, you can drink but you can't eat anything that you find." And they took two or three days,

16:00 I've forgotten the actual time. But it took them several days to find their way back. They found their way back to this ridge line, they climbed up this and came across the border. They eventually found the rest of their platoon who were waiting for them. By that time, we were getting pretty worried because I knew they were missing. One of them is now a senior member

16:30 of the Vietnam Veterans Federation. I won't tell you his name. It was sheer… They should have had more than one compass, and they should have had food, but they travelled light. No-one in the battalion, in Borneo or Vietnam, went out without full kit, after that. It was a very good lesson.

What sort of assistance did local villages offer?

17:00 They were good. We got on very well with the local villagers. We did a lot of work. We built schools for them, our medics went there. We had a problem where the woman developed some sort of disease on the breast, and they were painted with blue paint. And they said, "Please, will you paint the other one with red paint?" So they did. The village girls were going around with red and blue nipples.

17:30 We got on very well with them, we got very good intelligence. They could move across the border and back very easily. They had always done so, and they had family and relatives on the other side. That was how I was going to send the operation order over, by one of the villagers taking it, but I wasn't allowed to. No, we got on very well with them. We did a lot of work to help people. When we had any spare time, we helped the village.

18:00 They lived in long houses, a couple of hundred metres long, in the village. You had to climb up very steep steps to get into these long houses. It was quite interesting, soldiers, fully laden, climbing up the steps. But we got on very well with them. They were very hospitable. They used to brew a rice beer called tuak.

18:30 A couple of our soldiers went up to visit one of the long houses, drank quite a lot of tuak. It was very strong, and had great difficulties getting down the ladders.

So how would you go about finding an intelligence contact in one of these villages?

There were border scouts in each village, trained intelligence people. That is how the border scout let us know

19:00 the Indonesians had been to his village, immediately. There was also an organisation called Police Field Force, policemen, who were armed, who used to assist us. They were intelligence gatherers, too. But there were two or three border scouts trained in each village, to gather intelligence and to report it. The intelligence was excellent.

19:30 Sarawak was divided into districts, and the Bau district had a very good Chinese leader, and a senior policeman, and it just so happened the senior policeman was an Australian, so we got on very well with them.

And what role did the SAS [Special Air Service] play?

They were there, and they used to go out in small groups,

20:00 two or three, three or four people at a time. We always went out in much larger groups. They were not supposed to fight. They were information gatherers. And they were very helpful. The commander of the SAS 2 Squadron, with us, later on became the (UNCLEAR) for 4 RAR. So we knew him pretty well.

Why were they not supposed to fight?

20:30 Because they were such a small group. If they had a casualty, it would be too hard to carry them back. That is one of the reasons. Also, their job was to gather intelligence. They were very good at it, and they went out long distances by themselves in these small groups. One of our platoon commanders was very amusing about them, about being briefed about going to a difficult area,

21:00 and the SAS sergeant who had been there, said, "You diggers will never get there." And of course, the diggers were furious and they did it very well. That story is told quite often.

This might sound like an obvious question, but what was the need for such high security?

21:30 Because the Indonesians kept the same security. A decision was made at a very high level by the government that we would not publicise any operations across the border. We didn't want to cause problems for Indonesia,

22:00 who were having great problems. They'd just had a Communist revolution and killed three or four hundred thousand Indonesian Communists. So things were difficult. And it was decided that we wouldn't make any publicity and it would be a very closely held secret. For instance, very few ministers in the Australian government…The prime minister would have known, the defence minister would have known,

22:30 and probably not too many more. We had an interesting case in Bau, when we had a visit from the chief minister of Sarawak, a wonderful man called Tan Sri Ningkan who came with his cabinet to visit us. By sheer accident, on the same day, we had a group of about eight or ten Australian parliamentarians headed by a senior parliamentarian

23:00 who was about to become attorney general. None of the parliamentarians had been briefed on Claret. But all the Bau cabinet, all the Sarawak cabinet, had been briefed. So we had to make sure they didn't meet on any trips that they were doing. But they had to meet for lunch. So we got the Sarawak cabinet together and told his chief and his ministers, they must never mention anything about Claret at lunch, and they all burst into laughter.

23:30 It was a very closely kept secret. Because, I think, it was a masterpiece….it was a masterpiece of political guile. We still kept an embassy in Indonesia. The British didn't, we represented the British. They had withdrawn their embassy.

24:00 We decided we couldn't, we were too close to Indonesia. And it worked very well. The Indonesians never mentioned it. They never mentioned the Claret Op, they never mentioned the Double Cross. There was no publicity about the casualties, their casualties. And it worked very well. I've talked to, seen Indonesians since, and very few know about it. It was tightly kept there, too.

24:30 **What would the outcome have been if the Communist rebellion had been successful, in terms of your operations?**

Oh, we would have had a very difficult time, indeed. We would have needed a lot more troops than we had, and we would have had to fight. In fact, they were doing an undercover job with the RPKAD, meant that we could control it with what we had, although it was difficult to do.

25:00 No, we do make great efforts to keep friendly with Indonesia, and so we should. They are our closest and biggest neighbour.

What sort of information were you receiving on Vietnam at the time, and how sensitive a time was it in terms of the threat of Communists in South East Asia?

It was a problem. By this stage, much to my envy, 1RAR had gone to Vietnam,

25:30 but I was very happy with minding 4 RAR. But 1RAR had been sent to Vietnam as the first battalion to go. Eventually we had three battalions there. I think it was very sensitive. The fact that we fought for three or four years in Vietnam meant that the spread of Communism was contained.

26:00 And a lot of the South East Asian nations said it saved them a lot of problems because we were there. They've never said it publicly. But the fact that the Australian and the Americans were in Vietnam helped stop the threat of Communism…Cambodia and Laos, in the end of course, there were…Vietnam is a Communist country,

26:30 but not like North Korea. It is a semi-democracy. They wouldn't have been, had we not been there.

What role did the experience from the Malayan Emergency play in the conduct and operations in Borneo, do you think?

Oh, yes. Quite a lot of people who were in the battalion and the previous battalion, had served in the Malaysian Emergency.

27:00 They knew about the jungle. They knew about the people. The people were different. But I think the experience they got was very useful. By this time, the Australian Army was getting pretty experienced.

Particularly in jungle…

Jungle warfare? Yes, we were world experts in jungle.

27:30 And the British were very good, too, because of their Malaysian experience. No, we were good and we still are.

Could you describe the bases for us again, and also describe what sort of security and guard would be there?

Okay, each base was surrounded by barbed wire, and sharpened stakes. It had radio activated alarms around the base.

28:00 The alarms would go off when people illegally tried to enter. It was one company in each base, most of the time, until we got the Gurkhas, then it was more. But generally one company with three platoons at each base. Sometimes two platoons would be out and one platoon, or less, would be left.

28:30 The fact that each base had a helicopter pad meant that they could be reinforced very quickly by helicopter, if need be. It was never necessary, in fact, but it could have been. One of them at Gombang was on a high, very secure hill. The rest were on flat ground, because they had been put there earlier by previous battalions,

29:00 and it made much more sense to keep all the equipment that was there, including showers and proper kitchens and so on, than having to start to build again in more tactically suited areas. In fact, we were worried about them on occasions, but nothing ever happened to imperil their security.

29:30 **How close did Indonesian troops get to the bases?**

At Gombang, they were quite close to the border, and that is the place where they heard the Indonesians calling out to the Australians. They were having us on at that stage. I think that happened just before the RPKAD came across on the other part of the border, and I think

30:00 we thought something was going to happen at Gombang, which was on the west area, and the RPKAD incursion was on the eastern area. So I suspect they were having us on. Around about that time, a couple of shells landed quite close to one of the bases, and we think again they were having us on, trying to deceive us in what they were doing with the RPKAD. They succeeded because we weren't allowed over the border, at that stage.

30:30 And so they got across without us finding them…It was very difficult when they got across because we had such a huge area. But they didn't get any help from the locals, which is good.

So can you describe how your role in Borneo came to an end?

Peace was signed. The peace with Indonesia was signed. Australia and Indonesia were at peace. We were withdrawn back to Malaysia, with three hundred very happy wives.

31:00 We settled down in normal….I think in September or October…Unfortunately, I had to go in November, because I had had my time. I had much more than my time. I was very lucky. I still keep in very close touch with the battalion. The tie is different now, because it's a commando tie, but I wear this one, the old one.

31:30 **So what happened to you then?**

Then I came home and I had a job at army headquarters for a brief period, then I was told that I was going to get the key job….I was going to be the director of infantry and be the regimental colonel of the Royal Australian Regiment. At that stage I think we had five regular battalions. In the next three years, while I was director of infantry,

32:00 we increased that to nine battalions. So we had nine battalions, and we are now down to six, unfortunately. We had nine, because we had three battalions in Vietnam and one in Malaysia. I had a very, very busy three years. It was a marvellous job. It's the ambition of every… Once you've commanded a battalion, the only really good job left is being director of infantry, as a full colonel. I got promoted to full colonel. I had a very good staff,

32:30 quite a big staff because we were so busy. I did a lot of travelling. I went to Vietnam a couple of times a year, and visited them. I went to Malaysia a couple of times a year. I went to the UK at least twice. I went to America and Canada on conferences and meetings. I went to the NBC [Nuclear Biological Chemical] Centre in the USA and gave a talk there. I was very involved with our own infantry training, and the training of the Australian Army Training Team.

33:00 As director of infantry, I was given the job of making sure they were properly trained, because they were sergeants, sergeant majors and officers who came from all corps, and they all trained at the infantry centre. Then once they were in Vietnam, I used to visit the training team once or twice a year. And one of them, who lives near here, was talking to me the other day and said, there he was, stuck right up on the border somewhere, miles from anywhere with a Vietnamese unit

33:30 and he had a visit from me. And he said that made all the difference, that somebody was taking an interest.

Given that Australia was at war in Vietnam, what were the priorities then in terms of your position, once you moved into it?

Well, we had to add to the number of the battalions, and raise new battalions and find people and train

NCOs and train officers,

34:00 and choose people to command them. It was a very, very busy job indeed. I left the job just after the 9th Battalion was raised at Woodside. And I think one of the young officers at Woodside was a young man called Michael Jeffries, who is now our governor general. It was 8 or 9, I can't remember which. But I do remember him as a young officer,

34:30 because I taught him at Duntroon. He was one of the senior cadets when I was at Duntroon. So the army gives you a huge range of people that you get to know well.

You said that it was the most fulfilling job that you could have, after commanding your own battalion. Can you explain that, please?

For an infantry…I mean, I went on to command an infantry brigade, but

35:00 it wasn't the same as being head of your own corps. They don't have a director of infantry nowadays. He's got another job as well. It has been a great pity they started to economise. We very badly need a proper director of infantry as a full-time job, to look after the corps. We are the biggest part of the army, and I think we've got six battalions at the moment. I think we will have another one in due course, because of all the responsibilities that the army has,

35:30 a lot of them are infantry. And for our commandos now, not an ordinary battalion now, although it went to Timor as a normal infantry one, it is now a very specialised commando force. It is not one of the normal battalions. So we really need another battalion. I say that as a strong infantryman. I think the army is very stretched with Iraq and Timor, and various other things.

36:00 The Solomons now, Papua New Guinea….Whether we have enough people to do all these things…We've really got to start concentrating more on places like the Solomons, PNG, and the other countries, Vanuatu, which is having problems. It is very important that we play our role. Obviously, we rely on American support a lot, but it is in our playing field.

36:30 **Does that come down to an issue of defence funding?**

Partly that. A lot more has been spent on defence. For example, our commandos have had a huge amount spent on them, many, many, many millions of dollars for new equipment and training. I think our defence is very stretched at the moment, it needs more funding,

37:00 but you are not going to get that before the election, I don't think. I suspect that it depends what the view of the new government is. But the general view is that we've got to take more responsibility for what is going on in South East Asia, like Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea is in terrible problems, much worse than the Solomons, and a much bigger problem than the Solomons and we've got to help deal with it. They're sending people there now, there are people on the way.

37:30 But the army is stretched. And if we had another problem like Timor, we would be in very big problems. Iraq was quite easy handled, because we only had a squadron of the SAS and part of 4 RAR Commando there. But in Timor, we had a thousand soldiers there.

What was the nature of the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] operations when you took over your new role?

38:00 Their job had always been to be the Australian Army Training Team helping to train the Vietnamese units. And mostly they were attached to Vietnamese units, and helping to train them and helping them to modernise their training and the way they did things. The majority were warrant officers; there were some officers, with a full colonel commanding them.

38:30 But they were all warrant officers. Some of them had been corporals and sergeants, being promoted, they were all very good, and they were of all corps. So they could help train in artillery, or armour or infantry. Mostly they tended to be infantry, I think. But they did a very good job indeed. Quite unsung, people didn't know about them. And once the training team… Of course, they went into Vietnam before we sent the first battalion there, and so once the battalions were there,

39:00 they got all the publicity and the training team didn't. And that is why I made an effort to go and see them.

And they were fighting in combat roles by then?

Oh yes, they were fighting in combat roles, yes they were. There were some casualties. I've forgotten how many. They were fighting. Some of them that shouldn't have been, were.

Tape 8

00:30 **You've been involved in the landing at Balikpapan in World War II, then you were back in Borneo later on. How do you think the Australian Army learned from its experiences in the**

Second World War?

Well, I learnt a tremendous amount.

01:00 I didn't realise until I went to Japan and commanded a platoon again, how much better I was than I was during the war. I had grown up, I had got experience, and I understood a lot more about soldiers and soldiering. And that has carried on. I think we have had a great deal of experience since the Second World War, and we are a very different army than we might have been without that experience.

01:30 **Specifically for jungle conditions, how did the techniques change over that period of time?**

Well, jungle fighting is always what is called close quarter fighting. You don't go out on mile long route marches; you normally don't fight at night in the jungle; you've got to be much more careful and read every sign.

02:00 If you see a leaf fall, or a scratch on the edge of a tree or a broken twig, you'd think that someone has been there, either an animal or a person, or a soldier. So, that has made everyone in the army much more conscious of things. Open warfare is different. Part of our experience in Timor was in open country, but most of it was in coast country. Iraq, of course, was completely in open country and a quite different experience.

02:30 No jungle at all. Out in the desert, most of the Australians were. I don't think we can talk too much about that.

How had the equipment changed over that period of time?

Remarkably so. Every year we have a birthday reunion, on the 1st of February. Normally, it is either

03:00 a national reunion, which is held around Australia, or normally in Sydney, at the battalion, 4 RAR. Last January we had a battalion birthday parade there, and they had a marvellous show of their new equipment. After looking at all this new equipment, I turned to two of the old diggers. I said to them, "Tell me now. If you could choose two things from this new equipment, what would you have chosen forty years ago?"

03:30 And they all said one thing, night vision equipment, and the communication equipment. Now every soldier has night vision, for fighting at night, and a little red dot goes onto a target. And if you point your bullet at that red dot, you will hit the target in the dark. So night vision is tremendous, you can see at night, which we couldn't do.

04:00 It was very difficult. You asked me that question in Korea, "How did we get on patrolling at night?" Nowadays, of course, it is easy. The second thing is the new communications. I told you the story of having to take a telephone line because the communications were so bad, and the problems I had with my radio sets in Korea, they were damaged. Nowadays, every platoon has a little satellite dish and can speak to the world,

04:30 just by putting up a little satellite dish. It really is quite remarkable. Every platoon has its own computer. They can all talk to each other quiet, on the net. The old diggers said, "These are the two things, night vision and communications." They have lots of other marvellous things as well. Decent body armour, better helmets,

05:00 a choice of weapons. 4 RAR has a huge choice of weapons, and for a particular role, the commander or the diggers themselves, can choose what sort of weapon they want to take. It is quite different.

Did you notice a change from the time you were in the Second World War to the time you were back in Borneo,

05:30 **in terms of the equipment and the knowledge that you had then?**

The equipment was immeasurably better. Everything was much better, communications….We didn't have night vision, which I would have liked to have had. The boots and load carrying equipment and so on, better rations, better communications.

06:00 Much better. And also, since then, immeasurably better now.

When you were in Malaysia preparing, what were you training the men in specifically?

Patrolling without being seen, preparing them for Claret.

06:30 They hadn't been told about Claret at that stage. They weren't told until they got to Borneo when they were actually given a Claret job. But they had been training for it all the time. We knew what was needed, so we quietly trained them. And it was just to make sure. The signals had to have special communications training, navigational training. We knew there were decent maps of most of the Indonesian parts of the border.

07:00 They were allowed to take sketch maps across, they weren't allowed to take their photographs across the border. They weren't allowed to take notebooks or anything, they could leave bits of paper around. Low level security, not even leaving signs that they had been there, which is difficult for a group of

thirty people.

07:30 They learnt, and I was very proud of them. And it's very interesting. The Commando 4 RAR, which is now a commando battalion, is doing some of the same things, different from Claret, but in a way similar.

What did you tell your wife?

Nothing. As I said, she didn't know until she got a briefing when she was working for ASIO.

08:00 None of the wives knew until 1996 when it was released, and it became public. Someone was writing a book about it. None of the other wives knew.

Did she know you were in Borneo?

They all knew we were in Borneo. They weren't clear what we were doing there.

08:30 The diggers were very careful what they said to their members. There was never any mention of Claret, I think they probably mentioned Double Cross, which they were allowed to do. I don't think they were allowed to say that they were Indonesians and not Chinese. As I said, during Double Cross the wives were complaining bitterly that they weren't getting letters, so we had to send someone to Malaysia to explain to them why. And as I said, a lot of sorry letters

09:00 came back from the wives to Borneo, saying, "Now we understand…"

I wanted to ask you about the political climate in Australia at that time. What would have been the repercussions for Australia if the operations had become public knowledge?

We would have had to break off diplomatic relations with Indonesia. The British had already done so. We had retained an embassy…

09:30 The Indonesians retained an embassy here. So they would have had to close their embassy. They would have lost their communication…We realised how important they were to us. A decision was made that we would take part in the Claret operations at a very high level, politically and militarily. There were lots of senior people in the army didn't know about Claret. Only a few were briefed on it.

10:00 I told you about the group of parliamentarians coming to visit us, and they didn't know. That is the answer to that question….

The fact that the Vietnam War was happening at the same time, did that make our relationship with Indonesia even more vital?

I think it did, because Indonesia had just had

10:30 almost a war against the Communists that tried to take over the country, and killed a great many of them. And they were very sensitive, I think, to Communist uprisings and their problems, and I think they were quite pleased that Laos and Cambodia were kept in a reasonable state, by us being in Vietnam.

Do you think the average Australian, at that time, understood the politics of South East Asia?

11:00 No, I don't think they did. I suspect a number don't realise now. I think Timor was an eye opener for many. The fact that the Indonesian Army had allowed things to go so wrong in Timor. I don't think many people… And the Solomon Islands for instance.

11:30 The fact that we're still there. The fact that what we're doing in Papua New Guinea is going to increase awareness of the importance of South East Asia.

You mentioned the truce in Borneo. Can you just explain what happened in those days when that was being negotiated. I understand there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing?

Yes, there was an awful lot of to-ing and fro-ing. Towards the end,

12:00 over a period of about three weeks, we were told one day to withdraw our Claret troops. We were told to put them back on the other side of the border again. Then we were told to put more people along the border, then we were told to withdraw them again. It was all when the peace talks were in the balance. In the end, there was a great sigh of relief…Those last two or three weeks were very difficult. We were getting conflicting orders every day from both political and military masters.

12:30 Rightly so, because they were worried. But it all worked out in the end.

What do you think their concerns were at that time?

They were frightened that there might be more special forces incursions into the Borneo territories. There were also incursions into Sarawak, and they were worried about that. Until the peace was signed.

13:00 Because the Double Cross operations proved that we couldn't really believe what the Indonesians were telling us at the time. Until the peace was signed, there was a problem. The fact that we stopped the RPK operation, with the help of the Gurkhas, made a big difference. And I think the Indonesians began

to realise

13:30 they had no hope of stirring up the Chinese.

So there were Australians, there were British, there were Gurkhas. Who were the forces that were actually in…?

New Zealand…There were thirteen or fourteen different battalions. Quite a lot of Malaysian…we worked quite closely with Malaysian people. In the end, a Malaysian battalion took over the Bau district from us, when the peace was declared, but they stayed there,

14:00 and they still have people there.

What do you think the repercussions would have been if an Australian soldier had been captured on the other side of the border?

It would have become public knowledge, unless we kept it quiet. And it's possible to keep it quiet. I think we would have negotiated his release, in fact, before it became public.

14:30 The Indonesians wouldn't want it to become public either. Just the same, if we…Well, we did capture some Indonesians, but they were on our side of the border so that was legal. The RPK people, where I showed you the photograph of the bandaged prisoner…No, different, depending on which side of the border you were on.

What did the Indonesians have at stake, in terms of keeping it secret?

15:00 Very difficult internal relations, I think, politically and otherwise. They had been through a very difficult time. The Communist revolution there, so many people were killed. And I imagine quite a lot of people who weren't Communists were also killed. But they were having a delicate balance, and they were trying to keep that balance…And we were trying to help them keep the balance by not publicising things. We understood, I think, their sensitivity.

15:30 The prime minister and the foreign minister and the defence chiefs understood the sensitivities. That's why we were so careful. We said, "No one is to be captured on the other side of the border. And if anyone is injured, you carry them back." We were very worried when these two young soldiers disappeared. They weren't lost, they were misplaced,

16:00 but they found their way back and they did it very well indeed, without a compass, in that sort of country, swamps and mountains and jungles. I was quite proud of them when I ticked them off.

What kind of instructions were the troops given about what to do in the event of capture?

They weren't to be captured, that was the first thing. There was to be no risk of capture. They were to withdraw if there was a risk of capture.

16:30 It's interesting, those two young soldiers that I told you, were nearly urinated on, right on the very edge of an Indonesian, and a sentry came over and almost peed on them. It shows you how close. Had that sentry seen them, they would have had to withdraw very quickly, with the main thing being, "Don’t be caught."

17:00 That's what the bloke said. He almost shot him initially, but he didn't, he was disciplined enough to not do it. It must have been tempting, so close…They were very good disciplined soldiers and I was proud of them.

Your role as head of infantry, while the Vietnam War was going on. I wanted to talk about the political situation in Australia

17:30 **and the public perception of the war…**

It was very difficult indeed. I was very upset by the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. And the fact that some senior political figures on the other side who were leading, or helping to lead, or stir up these… The demonstrations were very upsetting because the troops in Vietnam knew it was going on.

18:00 And we tried to make sure that if they came back as a form body, they were given a proper welcome, but of course, a lot of them came back as individuals and didn't get that welcome. And got criticised by their civilian mates, who didn't understand anything about what they did. It was a very difficult political situation. I won't mention names, but there were some very senior political figures

18:30 who were stirring up and leading anti-Vietnam demonstrations.

Did you think that the soldiers were becoming pawns in a political debate?

In a way, but they didn't think that at all. They had a job to do, and they had been trained to do their jobs and they did them very well. We did very well in Vietnam, in our area. In the Phuoc Tuy province, we controlled it.

19:00 We did very well there, it was one good place to be in Vietnam. The rest of the country was a mess, and the training team knew that. They were spread right throughout the country. They were very pleased to

come back and go to Vung Tau, which was the headquarters of a sort of rest and recreation place where they would come and have a few beers and some good meals, and there was some decent accommodation in Vung Tau.

19:30 We had a good set-up there for soldiers. And they loved to come back there from the places where they had been, where they couldn't relax. There was no safety in the country for them. They were with anti-Communist Vietnamese, fighting Communists. Often wondering, I think, who was who. The training team, I am talking about there.

Being in Australia and having men overseas,

20:00 **and being in a political environment where the debate is raging, how difficult is it for you to support your men and show them that they have that support?**

By making sure they are trained, equipped, fed properly. The evacuation and medical treatment is as good as it can be. If they know that they are being looked after,

20:30 they won't worry too much about the politics of it. And I don't think they did. They hated it when they came back, some of them…If they came back as a form body for instance, when 4 RAR came back to Townsville, most of them came back in January, I think, and we had a huge parade in Townsville. Then when D Company, the last company out, they were left behind to particularly cover the retreat of everyone else. When they came back they were given another big parade.

21:00 There was no problem. Townsville was very pro-army, of course, and it involved a large part of the population. Townsville was a good place to be, and I became the brigade commander in Townsville, at that stage, so I was deeply involved in making sure they were welcomed back properly. And they were.

At that time you mentioned, too, that the number of battalions was growing.

21:30 **What kind of strains and stresses did that put on the army itself?**

Tremendous strains, but everyone knew why it was being done. The infantry corps were quite pleased. We had never been so big and so powerful and so important. So really, it was accepted as necessary. The government had made a commitment, and it was up to the army and the services to meet that commitment, the navy and the airforce as well. And we did meet the commitment.

22:00 We met everything that was demanded of us.

What did you have to do to make that commitment?

Raise more troops, and remember we had National Service, compulsory National Service, and people could be sent overseas who weren't volunteers. In fact, very few went who weren't volunteers. We tried to make sure people volunteered to go. The first National Serviceman to go overseas joined 4 RAR in Borneo, in the middle of 1965,

22:30 and they were very good indeed. Two officers and about forty young soldiers. When the battalion was warned to go to Vietnam, nearly all of them volunteered to stay on and extend their service. The two officers and…ninety-five percent of the soldiers volunteered to stay on. They got very attached to their job and wanted to stay with the battalion.

23:00 **You'd been involved with training National Servicemen, previously.**

That was different. That was only six weeks and no overseas documentation. A National Serviceman in the Vietnam period, they did exactly the same recruit training that all Regular soldiers did, and they were liable for overseas service. I think the propaganda was pretty good, and most people who went, volunteered.

23:30 **What was your view on the decision to introduce that system?**

It was inevitable. We would have never raised those nine battalions. I think it was inevitable. I suppose at the beginning…I didn't like, but having had National Servicemen in Borneo, I knew how good they were. And they were two very good young officers, both of whom stayed in the army, both of them are helping one of the battalion associations in South Australia, interestingly enough. They are still committed.

24:00 I spoke to one only the other day, because Queensland had sent him a battalion banner to use on Anzac Day, and he was one of the National Service officers. I think he retired as a major.

What had been your initial reservations about it?

I wondered how we were going to send people overseas when they didn't want to go. In fact, I think our training was so good, and the influence of the Regular soldiers was so strong,

24:30 that once they got into a unit, they wanted to stay with that unit. Like the ones that I told you about at 4 RAR in Borneo, they wanted to stay on, extend their service for another eighteen months, to go to Vietnam. And they did. So I lost most of my reservations after my experience with National Servicemen in Borneo.

How do you think the army changed through the system of National Service?

25:00 **Did the culture change in any way?**

It certainly became more closely involved with the community. And a lot of people who come to these battalion reunions are National Servicemen. I think quite a number for our battalion reunion. We want to go to New Zealand... who served in Vietnam as National Servicemen. And would want to go and see their Kiwi mates, because we had two companies in each battalion that went to Vietnam.

25:30 There were a number of Kiwis. I think on my last list, I had six hundred people who volunteered to go to New Zealand. How a little town like Rotarua is going to cope with that, that is not my problem. The Kiwis are making immense efforts to do the job properly.

This is the reunion you are having?

The reunion in January next year. More and more people are volunteering.

26:00 You have to pay your fare. Getting on a plane is going to be terribly difficult, they will all be filled up with ex-soldiers.

You mentioned that you would try and make sure that any National Servicemen who went overseas had volunteered. How would you do that? What was the system you had in place?

There was no system. It is just a matter of example. All the Regular diggers would be talking to them, they weren't told to, but they did because they wanted to keep their team together.

26:30 And really it was very successful. There were some people who went to Vietnam, having not volunteered, who came back very pleased that they had been. Because of the comradeship, what they achieved, the self-esteem that they had gathered by doing a good job. And soldiers do gather self-esteem by doing a good job. Just as they did in Timor and Iraq, and they are doing in the Solomons and PNG.

27:00 **How often would you go to Vietnam yourself?**

Once or twice a year, and stay for a couple of weeks. By the time I had travelled around the training team…It took time. I used to spend a couple of days with each battalion, all in the same province. The task force headquarters in the province.

27:30 And I would try and get out, if I could, to go and see most of the National Servicemen. That meant getting a helicopter. The army was very good in letting me use helicopters, or the air force were, and some of them were quite difficult to get to. Whoever was there locally had to protect the landing pad.

28:00 **During these visits, what were your impressions on how the war was going?**

I thought in some areas it was going quite well, but in other areas the reports we were getting were saying it was not going well. The Communist units were getting stronger. More and more resources were being poured in from the north. It was very difficult in the end.

28:30 When I was the commander in Townsville for two years, the battalions were coming back from Vietnam and battalions were heading off from Townsville, where I was responsible for training there. There were really only a few problems.

What year did you move to Townsville?

June , 1970.

And what was your role there?

I was the commander of a Regular task force, let's call them brigades, it is much easier.

29:00 They were a Regular brigade and then a CMF brigade. After a few months of that… And I was also the area commander of the North Queensland area. So I had three different staffs. I had a full colonel as a deputy. In the end, the army realised that this was too much for one man, so they put a full colonel up to command the CMF brigade, and I just kept an eye, he was independent. I commanded the area and the Regular brigade.

29:30 **How often were men going over to Vietnam at that stage?**

Well, a battalion would stay for a year, and then come home. It depends on where they came to or came from. 4 RAR came back in 1968, '69, from their first tour, and went again in 1971 for their second tour.

30:00 So the changeover was quite rapid. And all the battalions were having the same problem. 4 RAR were much better off because they had been together such a long time. There is a statistic I've got, which I quoted the other day. I went to a meeting last month of all the soldiers of 4 RAR Commando. We were a whole crowd of old diggers in the soldiers club.

30:30 I said to them, "When the battalion came back from Vietnam, I was invited to a party at the sergeants' mess in Townsville. The 4 RAR sergeants' mess. And I asked for a list of the names of everyone that was

going to the party. I looked at the names on the list. There were forty-eight names on the list, and thirty-five of them had been in the battalion for eight years, and served with me at Woodside, Borneo and Malaysia. Can you imagine how strong that sergeants' mess was,

31:00 after basically being together for eight years. Most other battalions didn't have that experience.

For the men coming home, what kind of support could you give them?

Okay, they came back to Townsville, they were welcomed home. Those whose National Service time was up, were discharged. Those Regular soldiers whose time was up and they hadn't volunteered to go into discharge,

31:30 and they became civilians again. Whilst they were in the army, they got as much support as we could give them. Townsville was always very pro-army. The main industry in Townsville was the army, the Lavarack army barracks and the James Cook University. It made a tremendous difference to what had been a small country town. Now it is a big city.

Do you think there were difficulties for the National Servicemen and the Regular army personnel

32:00 **who left the army, straightaway? Do you think they had more difficulties?**

It depends on their friends. If their old, previous friends were anti-Vietnam, they might have got some problems. And there were problems, because of the anti-Vietnamese feeling. They'd be teased and disregarded and so on.

32:30 Unpleasant things were said about their service, which were quite ridiculous because they had been serving their country. But people leading these demonstrations didn't think that way at all.

Was it a difficult time to be in the army?

It wasn't personally difficult for me. I think for the young soldiers it was difficult. For the National Service officers,

33:00 and there were a lot of them, there was a professional National Service school training National Service officers for commissions, and they were very good. And a lot of them stayed in the army. But some soldiers had problems, there is no doubt about it, until things calmed down.

I would just like to ask you to reflect on the Vietnam War and how it progressed. Do you think that anything could have been done differently?

33:30 Not while we were trying to stop the expansion of Communism into Asia. And it was only when it became obvious that we weren't winning everywhere, that the decision was made to withdraw. I was in Townsville when the last people [returned from the] action. They thought they had done a good job, and they had.

How did you feel when that decision was made to withdraw?

34:00 To withdraw? I felt it was the right thing to do, yes.

Was that done at the right time, do you think?

I don't think I could comment on that. There were many more political and military reasons which I probably wasn't aware of in those days. I think the timing was probably just about right. We couldn't cut and run too quickly, it had to be done gradually and it was.

34:30 **There are some veterans we've spoken to who feel, in a way, that Vietnam was unfinished business and they carry that with them.**

It was unfinished business, there is no doubt. We withdrew before we won, whereas in Korea we had won, for South Korea, and we had won for Sarawak and Sabah. But Vietnam was different.

35:00 We didn't win in Vietnam, and that is why they would feel it was unfinished business. But there was no way we were going to finish it against that very difficult opposition.

What is your view about the way the Americans progressed in that war?

I don't know that I've got much…

35:30 Some Americans were good and some were very bad. I think on the whole that we were very good. The Americans had a problem. We replaced a battalion with a new battalion. The Americans had individual replacements. As soon as a man's time ran out, off he went and another man came. So they had a mixture, and they didn't have the family feeling of units like 4 RAR.

36:00 Their rule of individual replacement was quite wrong. It was the easiest way to do it. It was much harder to bring a battalion back, train and send them back again, which we did. But it worked. And the American system didn't work. They had a lot of dissatisfaction. They didn't have the family feeling. You couldn't have a sergeants' mess coming back (forhour?UNCLEAR), most of them have been in the battalion for eight years.

36:30 If you had individual replacement, that couldn't have happened. You'd just stay in your unit for a year and then you left.

When you visited Vietnam, would you have meetings with Americans while you were there?

Occasionally, in the areas where the training team were, yes. Mostly not much, no. The people on the task force, the commander and so forth,

37:00 had more contact. I tried to have not too much political contact.

Was that a well thought out decision on your part?

That was an inevitable decision. Every soldier tries not to get involved with political things, in conflict with his duty. That is why it was so interesting when I eventually became a member of parliament. I made a decision when I left parliament that I would never make a public statement

37:30 about defence or politics, and I haven't. This is as near as I am ever going to get. I got asked the other day if I would make a statement on a former prime minister, and I said, "No." I've never made a public statement on anything to do with defence and politics.

The higher you get up the army ladder, does it get more and more difficult to divorce yourself from the politics of the decisions that were made?

38:00 I didn't find it so. I suspected now it is more difficult. I didn't get high enough to know. But then I looked at it from the political side and saw quite a different view. I think that the senior officers today have a pretty hard time, with the things that they have got to do and say.

Why do you think that is, and why do you think it has become political?

38:30 Well, Iraq was a problem, politically, obviously. The support of some officers that were given for what we did in Iraq, what we are still doing in Iraq. There are things that need to be done there, and we're going to keep on doing. Whether the government changes in Iraq, there will still be troops in Iraq. They might be doing different things, but there will still be troops there. There will certainly be troops training Iraqis to be soldiers.

39:00 There will certainly be troops protecting our embassy. At the moment, we do all the air traffic control at the airport, but that will change. But we will be training and protecting, and we can't avoid that. And I think the opposition has now come to that position, that they will have to stay. And they're quietly changing their public views, and quite rightly so.

39:30 **Do you believe that it is unfair pressure to place on the defence forces, to be involved in the politics at that level?**

No, I won't comment on that because it is inevitable that some things will become political. But I won't comment on that, no. I won't answer political military balance ones, for obvious reasons.

40:00 **When you were going to visit Vietnam, what was your primary goal when you would go over there?**

To make myself available to as many soldiers as I could. In those days the director of infantry had great influence on postings, and there were people in the infantry… Most sergeants and below were given postings by the director of infantry. Officers, you always did it in consultation with others,

40:30 but you always listened too. So lots of soldiers would come to me and say, "When I go home, sir, can I do this?" "Or do that?" I would take a note and go home and see if it could be made possible.

What was your general impression on how they were coping in Vietnam?

I think our soldiers were coping very well, indeed. They had good commanders, good units.

41:00 We were in a province that we controlled. It was more difficult for some members of the training team, but they all thought they were doing a good job, and they were, too, within their fairly narrow field, they were doing a very good… All in different roles.

Tape 9

00:30 **I wanted to ask you about your reasons for leaving the army?**

All right. I was age forty-seven. I was probably the youngest brigadier in the army. One of our children had a problem, an educational problem, and the experts said it would be better if he wasn't going to be changed from school to school,

01:00 which was going to happen. There was a rumour I was going to be posted to Western Australia, for

instance, and that would have been very difficult. And so, between us, we made a decision that his education was very important. It was the right decision and it worked. He was at a school with some very good remedial teachers and got special attention and is now fine. If we kept on moving, it would have been more difficult.

01:30 So I was out. And the army was absolutely marvellous. They bent over backwards to help. And I explained to the senior people exactly why I was resigning. And they said two things. "First of all, as it is becoming public that you are resigning, quite a lot of your young officers and friends are wondering why you are resigning. Would you mind writing a letter and spreading it as wide as you can, the reasons for your resignation."

02:00 I thought about that very carefully, which I did. They also said, "We're not going to let you resign now. If you resign now, you won't get a pension. But if you stay in the army, and there's an easy way you could stay in the army, you have six months furlough leave open to you. We are going to put you on half pay for twelve months. So you will stay on in the strength of the army, and in that time we think there will be a new pension scheme that will entitle you to a pension."

02:30 They couldn't have been better. Like General Tim Vincent, who was the chief personnel… He was quite wonderful, and he made my road very easy. So I left the army and I stayed in the army. We then had to find something else to do. I was on half pay, I didn't have a pension, and there was no certainty that I would get a pension.

03:00 Although I had thirty years service. But I had let…The brigadier's retiring age is usually fifty-five and I was only forty-seven, so they had to make some special rules. But we thought about it for some time. And I had been up to a place called Palm Cove, north of Cairns, to look at a place that we were going to buy

03:30 as a holiday resort for soldiers. Particularly all of those that were coming back from Vietnam. We wanted a place where they could have really good relaxation in a pleasant place. And the estate agent took me along the Palm Cove beach to see another house. It was empty, it had been used as a restaurant with a few guests and it had failed, but it was the most beautiful position, there was a wonderful garden and quite a good house.

04:00 We decided that we wanted to stay in the north for educational reasons. And so we decided to buy this place. We had to sell our place in Canberra, we had to mortgage this place, we had to borrow a lot of money, but we did it. We bought this place, which had been called the Reef House by the previous owners, and we kept on that name. And we decided that it wasn't going to be a public restaurant. We did some building, and spent more money.

04:30 And this beautiful garden, and this very nice old house, with quite a magnificent swimming pool out the back. We added to it so we could accommodate seventeen guests. We had eight double rooms and one single room. We lived in part of the house ourselves, with our offices. We decided we would run it differently.

05:00 We would give people three meals a day. I think the first tariff was twenty dollars a day each, which was quite expensive for those days. It became more expensive in the end. But we aimed at an expensive night. We wanted to give them service. Everyone was met at the airport by someone. We had quite a lot of staff. We met people at the airport, we organised trips and took them out to the reef.

05:30 We taught them to snorkel if they couldn't. We helped those who could scuba dive with the gear and had licenses. We used to go out to the reef, leaving at five a.m. with the breakfast on board, and coming back before dark. They were very slow old boats in those days, there was nothing fast. And we turned out to be a great success. Our first guest

06:00 was a correspondent, a very senior journalist in The Bulletin, and he wrote in the visitors book. We bought the place at the beginning of June, and on the 17th of July, he suddenly turned up. He had heard about it. Judy's brother was a friend of his, and he knew who we were. And he wrote in the visitors book ‘How wonderful to be the first lotus in lotus land.’

06:30 And then he wrote an article about us…Because we gave such good service, nobody else was doing this in Australia, giving people three meals a day, letting them have their breakfast by the pool, or in the dining room, or in their room, as they wanted. Lunch was nearly always the pool. And dinner at night was always around one big table. We gave a dinner party every night, for up to twenty people. To do that we had quite a large staff. We got a wonderful German chef.

07:00 We always had a young teenager who had just left school who wanted a job for a while before going to university. We always had a young man, who were always the son of friends, doing some of the work. We could have up to ten or eleven staff, for seventeen people, and we worked very hard ourselves. It turned out to be a great success. People like Gough Whitlam came.

07:30 Sitting by the pool one day, he said, "David? Would you ever think of standing for the local seat as a Labor candidate?" And I said, "No, Gough. I am never going to go into politics." At that stage…It was interesting and I suppose it sowed a seed. We had nearly half his ministry came to stay. Bill Hayden, all the people like that came to stay. We had people like the governor of Tasmania. We had senior American and British people came to stay. The word got around, because Vogue Living did an article on us,

08:00 and other various magazines came and took photographs and quoted them. But we were very careful to select the people who came to stay. No-one could come up to the door and book. Once or twice, we changed that rule. One very nice couple came one day, and Judy and I said, "They look all right. We will have them. They will fit in with the rest." It turned out to be the

08:30 the managing director of our bank, he owned the place. He laughed about that for a while, too. We were quite careful what we said when we thought somebody wasn't suitable, we just said, "We're full. We're sorry."

You mentioned initially that you wanted somewhere where Vietnam veterans could...

This was a different place. This was another resort nearby, which was specially for the army in Townsville to come to

09:00 for a week or so off. It was nothing to do with this one at all. It was just by accident, this estate agent and this guy in the army was showing me this other place, which the army bought. He said, "There is another place you might look at." And he showed me this other house on the beach, which sowed a seed. When we were deciding what we could do, Judy came up and had a look at it, and we decided to go ahead. It needed an awful lot of work, but it was a beautiful place, right on the beach.

09:30 Palm Cove was a very quiet little backwater. And there was no competition in Australia doing what we were doing.

Given how extensive and action packed your career was, what was that first year like out of the army?

I missed it, sadly, but I was determined not to miss it too much. We were so busy, starting off the Reef House, that we really concentrated on the job.

10:00 It was like taking a new posting. You concentrated on the job in hand. And we were very lucky with our staff. Our chef was a German, who was in Australia. He was a very good chef. And he said, "Look, I've got a wife and family in Germany, will you nominate them?" I said, "Yes, we will do better than that. We will buy the cottage next door, and you can bring, your family can live in the cottage." It was literally part of our land almost.

10:30 So we bought the cottage, on the advice of an estate agent who was staying there. He said, "You would be mad not to buy this." So we said to the chef, his name was Wolfgang, "Bring your family." He had four children, two late teenage daughters and his wife, they all became staff. They couldn't speak very good English to begin with, but they were wonderful and they did a very good job. And two schoolboys who went to the local school. They helped when they could. We gave them the house to live in, and they stayed

11:00 right to the end. We eventually sold it, and he stayed on as the chef and died of a heart attack, shortly after we sold it. But the staff were marvellous, and we still keep in touch with his family, for instance. When we go to Cairns, we always contact the people that are still living there. We eventually sold the Reef House because it was becoming a very full time job. Giving a dinner party for twenty people every night was a quite a business.

11:30 Judy did all the administration and the accounts and the bills, and I stocked the bar and we both ordered food. It was a big job. And because we were living on the job, we could never escape. In the end, Judy said, "There must be an easier way to earn a living." And she said, "Why don't you try for parliament." And so, we had a close friend, Doug Anthony, who was deputy leader of the opposition in those days, and leader of the National Party.

12:00 I took his advice, he said, "David? Why don't you stand for the local seat of Liechhardt." Which has always been a Labor seat, but it was worth trying. I'll show you a map of Liechhardt. It went from South Innisfail in Queensland, to the border of Papua New Guinea, and out into the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was about seven hundred kilometres by six hundred kilometres in size.

12:30 It was a huge electorate. And very little of it was vacant. It was all populated with lots of little pockets. Lots of Aboriginals, all the Torres Strait Islands, for instance, all of whom originally voted for the Labor Party. I stood for pre-selection as the absolute outsider, twelve local people stood for pre-selection.

13:00 We had our selection meeting. I was called back a couple of times to answer questions. In the end, they announced that I had been chosen as the candidate. I don't know why. I suspect the fact of my army career and a successful business career, might have had something to do with it.

What was your platform?

'Fighting for the North.' The far north was a very neglected place at that stage.

13:30 Judy was very good, she was wonderful. We decided that once I got pre-selection, we would put a manager into the Reef House, we go to another house nearby, and we would campaign, and went around the whole of that vast electorate. Driving and flying. It was very expensive. Fortunately the Reef House was doing quite well. We could spare money. If we were going to do the job for standing for parliament, we wanted to do it properly.

14:00 And we reckoned by properly organising and getting yourself known and getting the right publicity. Every week Judy wrote an article in the local paper, and I will show you some of those called, 'The Wife's Side.' And she was a very, very good political brain. She was excellent. So we went around this vast electorate, until about June of '75. There were rumours there might be an early election.

14:30 So we made a very difficult decision. We asked an old friend who lived over in the Gulf country, if he would come and run a campaign for us. And he did. We paid him from our own resources, and we had volunteers from all over the place, on the campaign committee. Every state electorate had its own federal campaign committee, and they were from Thursday Island, the Torres Straits, right down and over to the Gulf. A friend lent us an office in Cairns,

15:00 and we started campaigning. In early November, we had an offer to buy the Reef House. So we accepted the offer and sold it, not having got into parliament. But on the 11th of November, I was addressing a women's meeting in Innisfail. On the afternoon on the 11th of November, I got a telephone call from Cairns

15:30 to say, "Have you heard? The governor general has sacked the prime minister, Malcolm Fraser has taken over and there is going to be an election in a couple of weeks." So I gave my first political speech as a candidate. And we worked very hard on the local support, and we had marvellous support around the place, because people knew us by then. We knew someone on every Torres Strait Island

16:00 to help us. We had a committee on Thursday Island. We had a committee on Weipa, and Korumba. All the little villages and towns scattered around there had branches supporting us. And on the 13th of December, I think I've got my dates right, an election was held. The Coalition parties won the election, with a very big majority,

16:30 and I won the seat, by about two thousand votes. It was still pretty marginal, but I won. And I went down to parliament and was sworn in in January. And the first person to congratulate me was Gough Whitlam, the former prime minister. He strode across the house and came over as I was being sworn in and said, "Congratulations, David. Welcome to this place." I thought, wasn't that a nice introduction?

17:00 He smiled a bit and said, "I did offer you job in politics, didn't I?" At any rate, we then worked very hard. It was a very hard job, of course. Every Monday, when parliament was sitting, I flew to Canberra, and that took eight hours, three different aeroplanes. Every Friday, I flew back again, to Cairns. And then every Saturday and Sunday we travelled that vast electorate. We went somewhere every day , and when parliament wasn't sitting we still travelled. It was very stimulating.

17:30 It was quite different from the army, but it had similar challenges. Judy was very good at it. When I was away, she ran the electorate. She says she didn't, but she was in the campaign office every day talking to the campaign staff. They were wonderful, they had stayed on. And the campaign director said, "Look, I think I've got just the right secretary for you." Because I was entitled then to a secretary in Cairns, being paid by the government. He said, "She was in the navy.

18:00 She was born in the Gulf country on a cattle station. She went to school in Charters Towers and now she runs the Flying Doctor’s Service. And she knows more about the far north than any other single person." Her name was Beverly O'Hara. She became our secretary and stayed secretary all the time that I was in parliament. It was quite wonderful. I still ring her every month or so, and we see her every time we go to Cairns. I had other staff eventually.

18:30 Then at the end of 1979, we had just moved house. We had built a house in Cairns. We were living out on the beach, in our hideaway, and we decided it was too much trouble, and I was wasting too much time travelling and I needed to be in the main centre of the population. So we built a house in a rather nice place in Cairns. And I was just helping a young man build a work bench when I got a telephone call from the prime minister.

19:00 He said, "David, I want you in Canberra tomorrow, you're going to be a minister." Now I was fifty-one when I got into parliament. I was fifty-four when I became minister. Which is very old when you think of it. But he decided I was the man for the job. I was a National Party member and he was a Liberal prime minister, but we got on well. He said, "You are going to be minister for science and the environment."

19:30 So I went down and I looked at my new department, and I discovered that the head of the department, who had just been appointed, was an old friend. His name was John Clarence and he had been a chief defence scientist. He was wonderful. He said to me, "David, most ministers when they want to deal with their department have to go through the departmental head. If you want to see anyone, don't tell me. Just ask them to come and see you and tell me later." It was wonderful being able to do things my way.

20:00 **Would you have been interested in a defence portfolio?**

Of course. But I was far too junior…I would have loved a defence portfolio.

What do you think you would have brought to it?

I would have brought a huge knowledge of defence. I would have been too biased, perhaps, to be absolutely affective. But I was too junior, and my ministry was changed.

20:30 I was told in the 1977 election, that after, productivity, which was the technology department was going

to be abolished. I said, "Well, why don't you join it with science and have science and technology together. I enjoy the environment immensely, but it is much better for the environment to be a separate department." And the prime minister agreed, and a separate environment department was set up and I became the minister for science and technology.

You said that politics had similar challenges to the army.

21:00 **Can you explain that?**

Oh, you couldn't command people anymore, you had to persuade them. But the challenges were similar. You were still dealing with people. It's a people thing. the army is a people thing. Politics is very much, particularly in such a vast electorate. It really was very, very big indeed. They told me in the northern part of my electorate,

21:30 they told me at a low tide I could walk to Papua New Guinea. I did never try it, because of the crocodiles and sharks. But they said, "Oh, we do. We've got relatives in the village. You can see the village in Papua New Guinea? We've got relatives over there." We worked very hard. The Aboriginals and the Islanders had been a very neglected mob, I think. And because one in six of the electorate were either an Aboriginal or Islander, they became a very important part. And they had all been Labor voters, always.

22:00 And we set out to woo them. And we did all sorts of things. We visited wherever we could; we went to all sorts of celebrations; we stayed on islands with the Islanders. And we realised that we had succeeded in the 1980 election when at midnight, we were counting the votes, and we were very close.

22:30 We were getting the votes coming in from all over. I got a phone call from one of our people in Bamaga, which was a big Aboriginal Islander settlement on the tip of Cape York. The said, "David, we have Bamaga. We've never won Bamaga before." So we all had a drink and reckoned we had now won the election. We had won Bamaga, we were going to win the election. And we did. And we won it with a slight increased majority.

23:00 We were quite pleased with ourselves….

I was going to ask you to reflect on your army career and what perhaps were the single highest and lowest point that you can recall?

I don't think I can tell you low points in the army. I was very lucky. I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

23:30 I don't know where I might have gone had I stayed in the army, but becoming a minister in the government was a compensation for that. And that was a high point. The hard work was a low point. It was much harder being a member of parliament in Leichhardt than being a senior army officer. Without Judy, I don't think I could have done it. And I had a wonderful staff, and all sorts of friends and supporters.

24:00 When I would go to places like Tiara or Thursday Island and someone would say, "We're giving a lunch for you." And about fifty people would be on their way to lunch. There were lots of high spots. The hard work was the low spots. And the fact that at that time, all of our children were at boarding school. But they came home every holiday and helped and worked for election campaigns.

24:30 I suppose the low spot of politics was when in 1983, the '83 election, we thought we were going to win, because Bill Hayden was the leader of the opposition, and I'm very fond of Bill. He had been a Reef House guest, and I got to know him quite well. And I thought, 'I think we can beat Bill.' But the day the election was announced, Bill Hayden resigned and Bob Hawke took over as the leader of the opposition. We all breathed a great sigh

25:00 and said, "This is going to be harder than we thought." Because he had been president of the ACTU [Australian Council for Trade Unions], he would have a very wider audience, and he did have. When the time came, the government was lost. And had the Fraser government won the election, I think I would have won the seat. But if they were going to lose, I was going to lose my seat. It was that sort of seat. Now they have cut it in half, and it is much smaller and easier.

25:30 **How do you reflect these days on the death of men under your command?**

It worries me. I think all soldiers get used to death….not used to it. But if you are sensible, you don't let it pray on you too much. For instance, every now and then, I ring the widow

26:00 of young Ron Gordon, the fellow who was killed lying beside me, and we have a talk on the phone.

What do you say to each other?

She just says, "Thank you for what you did for Ron." They were only married a few months when he was killed. She then married again and had two children. She is now a widow again. I tell her what is happening and tell her about the battalion, I tell her about Ron… She knows that I was very fond of him. And my mate Pat Sullivan,

26:30 who came and stayed with us recently here, is now having problems medically. You asked about… Of

course, you regret people that have died. But if you're a good soldier, you don't let it prey on you. Otherwise I would probably have post-traumatic stress and I don't. So I still keep in touch with Ron Gordon's wife,

27:00 I keep in touch with a lot of soldiers. I keep in touch with a lot of my Korean veterans. A lot of them are now old, and dying. I keep in close touch with 4 RAR and the new battalion. So, I've still got a lot of interesting excitement in life. After I lost the election, I got onto some very good directorships.

27:30 I became a director of the American company, Lockwell, a vast, huge company that was expanding in Australia, and they took me to the States every year, and had a wonderful time. I became a chairman of a young company called Laser Dynamics, which was a new laser company, that was very interesting. I did a couple of other jobs. I became a committee to build a new building for the National Party in Canberra

28:00 called John McEwen House. I've been the chairman of that and got very involved in that. I've led a very busy life. When I was seventy-two - and when you should legally stop being director, if you're asked, you can stay on - I decided to resign, from everything, and I decided to write. So I've been writing family history, which I'm still doing at the moment.

What do you believe the role of the defence forces should be in Australia?

28:30 Exactly what it is, protecting Australia's interests as the government directs them. And it still is, it has always been that. The government says, "Do this," and the Defence Force tries to do it as best they can. As they did in Timor, as they're doing in the Solomons, as they're going to do in PNG. I don't think that has changed.

29:00 It has always been, the Defence Force, at the behest of the government. The government says, "We want you to do this." You either say, "I'm sorry, we can't do it just yet, you will have to give us a few months." Or you say, "Yes, we can do most of that now." And because I have seen the political side as well, I became much more aware of the political imperatives

29:30 on the defence service, and sympathetic to them.

So then how do you accommodate that role in terms of politics and international alliances and humanitarian objectives?

Well, let's say that I disagree with the present government on some things. I think we're at long last doing the right thing with people on temporary protection visas, for instance.

30:00 That is a sensible thing. But on the whole, we were generally doing the right thing, internationally, and nationally. Generally. There are always things you will disagree with, but I will never talk publicly about the things I disagree with. I am happy with the balance between the demands of politics and the demands on the Defence Force. There has always got to be a balance

30:30 between those two demands. In the national interest, and that is really the key…

This is an Archive project, so in fifty years time people will be accessing this information. What would you like to consider is the legacy of your service

31:00 **and the conflicts that you have been involved in?**

We've won some of them, lost others. I've made a lot of good friends, and with my old soldiers I keep in touch with a large number of them. It is a very fulfilling part of one's life, going along to reunions of 1RAR…

31:30 I go to all the 4 RAR….I'm going to 4 RAR Commando on the 28th and staying for two days. I think I am very lucky. I still take some interest in politics. In May, I went for a four or five day meeting of former members of parliament which was held in Canberra, and I met a lot of old friends, and talked politics with old friends.

32:00 So I've got a foot in both worlds. The defence world and the political world, and they're both very interesting and challenging. That's all I'm going to say on politics and defence, I think. I've been a very lucky man and I've had a great life. I have got a wonderful wife and family and grandchildren. And living in this beautiful place. What else could you ask?

Can I ask you what Anzac Day means to you?

32:30 Oh, memories. I think about all the people who are….I always think about those who are dead, particularly. Those particularly killed in action. I think about family members who had problems. Usually spend Anzac Day at 4 RAR and go to dawn service,

33:00 where the whole battalion turns up, with a lot of old diggers. Then we all go into Sydney and march behind the battalion banner, and then go to a lunch. I didn't go this year, I happened to be in England. I had a three year old grandson who had this birthday on the day before Anzac Day, so I couldn't get home in time. I had to stay for that.

33:30 **Is it a day that presents some difficulties in terms of memories?**

Yes, but there are lots of good memories as well as sad ones. And on the whole, the good memories prevail. The comradeship, the friends one has made, the people that you know all over the world, almost. Here we are going to New Zealand next January, for instance, which I wouldn't normally do. So no regrets.

34:00 **Thank you, David.**

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS