Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Gration - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:47 **Shall we begin? Thank you very much for sharing your time with us today, it couldn't exist without your support so to you from us and everybody, thank you. The first thing we need, as I just explained, is a summary of your career,**

01:00 **so perhaps starting with where you were born, can you take us through a point form summary of your life?**

A point form summary of 72 years!

Yes, a difficult task.

Okay, well I was born in Richmond in Melbourne on the 6th of January 1932. My parents lived in the suburbs of Melbourne, a suburb called Hartwell. My early schooling was at a government school. At the second year of secondary school I

01:30 won a scholarship to Scotch College where I finished my education. When I left when I matriculated from Scotch I had the option of going to Melbourne Uni [university] direct. I had a scholarship to Ormond College or entering the Royal Military College at Duntroon so I chose Duntroon. Four years at Duntroon, as was the custom then, I went from Duntroon for two years to Melbourne University, to finish an engineering degree because I was going into the army engineers.

02:00 When the degree was finished my first posting was to Malaya as a troop commander during the Emergency. I won't give you every posting as we run through but I'll give you the significant ones. After return to Australia I had two years on attachment to the Snowy Mountains Authority which was a very good, broadening experience. I then went to command a, I was promoted to major, command a squadron at Puckapunyal in Victoria, a construction squadron. The highlight of that was

02:30 taking them for a year to Papua New Guinea to work near the town of Wewak. Finished there, I went to the British Army Staff College at Camberley to do a 12 month course there, one of the real milestones in the career. Came back instructor of the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra and by this time the Vietnam War had started so Canungra was a very busy place. Posted to the... command the Civil Affairs Unit in Vietnam, 1969-

03:00 '70. Shortly after coming back I went to the Australian Joint Services Staff College, Army Training Command, producing army doctrine for a couple of years, then another major milestone in the United States Army War College which is where they train their generals. Shortly after coming back I became a brigadier and shortly after that again, at the age of 47, I became a major general and I was a general, a major general then a lieutenant general

03:30 and then a general for the next 14 years and I retired from the army in 1993.

And during that period you were Chief of Defence Force?

Yeah, my last six years, which is a very long time, I was Chief of Defence Force. A lot longer than anyone's ever been.

And since your retirement, what have you been involved in there?

A lot of things. I was chairman of the council of the War Memorial in Canberra

04:00 for five years I think. Paid employment - I've been a director of the company Tennix Proprietary Limited. I was... they were originally Transfield when I joined them but then Transfield split into two and I went with the Tennix half and I've been a director of Tennix since '97 and I still am and I chair one of their subsidiary companies. I'm also the chairman of the General Sir John Monash Foundation which is setting up Australia's equivalent of the Rhodes Scholarships, and numbers of other things.

04:30 **The other aspect of your life we'd like to just touch on is your family life; when you married, can you tell us a little bit about that?**

Well my childhood family life, I was very fortunate, I came from a very stable and loving family so I had a very fortunate childhood. I married my first wife Dallas in 1961. She died about two years ago from cancer and I married my second wife Anne, who I had known for about

05:00 40 years, just before Christmas last year.

Children?

Two children, two boys. They're both lawyers, one's a company secretary of Telstra, the other's a lawyer in Sydney.

As you say, touch on the significant postings, and we'll probably have to come back for a little more help going through that career again.

As you said you just wanted the heading!

No that's perfect.

05:30 **For what we wanted as introduction that's perfect! Obviously you're very good at this, had some training. We'll start back at the very beginning though, can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up and your memories of your family house and the area around there?**

When I was... very early days we were living in Warrigal Road Burwood, but we moved when I was about four or five from there to a suburb called Hartwell which at the time

06:00 was a new suburb, all the blocks weren't even built on and the suburb was full of young families like us. It's now a very old, established suburb. A lot of childhood friends there, went to the local Hartwell state school, a good school, very supportive family, very happy days. Brought up fairly strong Christian influence, was sent

06:30 to the local Presbyterian church which was good, you know they had a lot of social life and footy teams as well. So early childhood, it was a pretty happy experience.

Tell us a little bit about your parents, starting with your father. What did he do?

He was a businessman and the last 25 years of his life he was the managing director of a company called Falcon Grimwade who provided dental supplies, you know they were a medium sized

07:00 company. But the biggest experience in my father's life and the most formative was his time in the First World War. He was one of those who joined up, put his age up to join up so he was actually in France in the trenches when he was 17 and he was there for about two years and that really drove the rest of his life. He was very strong in the RSL [Returned & Services League], quite conservative,

07:30 strong family man, but that First World War experience and his commitment to the RSL was really the strongest things in his life. He never pushed me to go into the army, but he was very pleased that I did.

What did he tell you as a boy about his First World War experience?

Very little, very little detail, but he had artefacts like a German gas mask and these sorts of things, which as a young boy I found really exciting. He had bits of German uniforms and

08:00 a lot of printed stuff, great pictures of the Great War and that sort of thing. While he never pushed me, on reflection it was really that I think that pushed me towards the army. But he never spoke about his, the only time he ever spoke about his World War One experiences was in a sort of interview like this, a few years before he died that some high school was doing things and interviewing veterans and they got him and suddenly it all started rolling out.

08:30 **Have you, you obviously listened to that interview, did you find out things you'd never heard before?**

I didn't hear it when I was being done, but I obviously was very interested after it and yeah, I learnt a lot of things.

Apart from his commitment to the RSL, I mean looking back now can you see any effects that the war experience might have had on his personality?

Yes. It varies from a sense of comradeship and loyalty and you find amongst all the

09:00 particularly the World War One men, they were a very strong band, they were all volunteers, they'd been through some pretty horrific experiences, but they were just loyal, a sort of stoicism of putting up with hardship without complaint, were very strong and that and a love of the outdoors I guess, very strong outdoors sort of pioneering spirit.

09:30 His family had come from Rutherglen and they were a pioneering family and my mother was Scotch, she was actually born in Scotland and emigrated when she was six years old.

Just a couple more questions about your father, we'll come back to your mother in a moment, what did you do on Anzac Day, do you have any memories of that as a boy?

Yeah, very early memories. My father always marched, and being taken to the Anzac Day marches as a little kid and worming your way

10:00 through to the front so you could see, yeah, very strong memories.

And what did that mean to you at the time?

I guess I thought it was a large part of Australia's heritage, what had been done in the First World War and as a small boy of course, you don't understand very much about it. In fact I had very confused views, for many years I thought the whole war was Gallipoli and I had a very confused image in my mind of what

10:30 that was about as well, but it was this very strong sense of Australian heritage here and these guys that had really been and done something.

What was your relationship with your father like, what was he like as a father?

Oh very, very strong, inspirational, very good.

What sort of things would you do together?

I think I mentioned he was very strong on

11:00 outdoors and stoicism and putting up with hardship so camping, fishing, horses, dogs, all that sort of thing and it was very strong, it was a good thing to be out in remote areas doing that sort of thing.

Where did you go to do this?

Well it seemed remote to me

11:30 at the time but of course it's not. We were out in the mountains around Melbourne, Healseville, Warburton, up round the Howqua River I had an uncle who was my father's brother who had a sheep station on the Murray [River], a lot of time up there. I didn't go but they all went off to central Australia which I thought was a tremendous thing, you know Ayers Rock in the early days.

12:00 **What about you mentioned your mother was Scotch; can you tell us a bit more about her?**

Yeah she came; she was the oldest of a family that was eventually of seven and they emigrated when she was six years old which was 1907 or 1908. Her father was a furniture maker from a place called Beeth, this is how we're going to fill the day in! They emigrated and it was

12:30 often was sort of an awesome decision for a man, he was a working man, a furniture maker with a family, to move up sticks and move from Scotland to Australia, in those days there was no real assisted immigration and they were on their own except for their Scottish community when they arrived in Melbourne and it was all a bit disillusioning. They'd sold all their clothes, all their winter clothes before they left Scotland because they believed the posters about sunny Australia and they arrived in the middle of the Melbourne winter and they were all

13:00 freezing and my grandmother was very homesick and my grandfather promised to take her home again if she really wanted to, so after the First World War they all went back to Scotland again and they stayed for one winter and then all came back for good. But she was a very fine person as well, very loving and a very stable home life.

Were there ties to a Scottish community in Melbourne that you remember?

Oh yes, yeah. On my mother's side, the

13:30 Scottish communities are quite... it still is, quite a tight knit community, and my life my memories on that side of the house were a house full of pictures of Robert Burns [Scottish poet] and Scottish paraphernalia and we followed a Scottish soccer team, I didn't know about Aussie Rules at the time, so there was a strong Scottish influence. And we listened to Scottish music and they talk they talked about Scotland as home, even when my

14:00 mother was quite advanced in life, Scotland was always spoken about as home. And when they visited, as they did occasionally, it was 'visiting home' which she never got over.

Did that have a sort of antipathy to the English, that's so common in the Scottish community?

Oh yes.

And given that most Australians at the time spoke of England as home, how did that change your relationship?

Well it was a sort of proud assertion that home was

14:30 Scotland, yes.

What about your father, he wasn't Scottish?

No, no he was Australian, he was Australian born. His father came out in... I don't know how relevant this all is, but his grandfather came out in 1848. He was a stonemason and his name was David Gration and he was a member of the labour party and he was instrumental, he was the main mover of the eight hour day, and on the

15:00 Trades Hall in Melbourne still his name is up and carved into the stone and he's buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery and the Labor Party about four or five years ago refurbished his grave and picked out all the lettering again and held a little ceremony there. Interestingly, my father, who was very conservative, never told us about this, I think he thought having anyone associated with the Labor Party and the eight hour day was on the wrong end of the spectrum and sort of

15:30 family black sheep and we never heard about it. But this guy David Gration is was a very formidable man and really left his mark on the country. He pushed the eight hour movement.

So you only found out about that subsequently much later on?

Yes, after my father had died.

So how did your father and you mother's heritage affect you and your identity as a boy, I mean did you think of Scotland as home, were you an Australian?

Oh I never thought of it as home. In fact

16:00 all me and my brother and cousins we all thought it was funny that they were all talking about Scotland as home. But nevertheless the Scottish I'm sure rubbed off on us.

Did you have Hogmanay celebrations or were there Scottish...?

We didn't call it that but we did that. New Year's Eve or Christmas was a bit of a yeah we did that but it wasn't important and New Year's Eve was the big thing.

What would happen in your household on New Years' Eve?

Well they were

16:30 all god-fearing people who didn't drink very much except on occasions like this and there was always some good scotch around and there was a lot of that around but some very positive memories of it.

You had one brother or...?

One brother yeah.

And was he older or younger?

He's four years younger and he went on to become Chief of the Air Force. He joined the air force, when I was CDF he was Chief of the Air Force which is a very unusual combination.

17:00 **It implies a certain amount of sibling rivalry, is that something you found growing up?**

Oh not too bad. The reason he joined the air force was when I first went to Duntroon he came up in the first May holidays to visit me and I took him in and showed him the cadets' dining room and it was about two in the afternoon and the evening meal was already set out and it was steamed pudding with custard on it which... it congealed and was stone cold and was sitting there

17:30 at two o'clock in the afternoon and he said, "If this is what the army is it's not for me." and he joined the air force instead.

Were you close as boys?

Yeah, still are.

And did you were you a protective older brother, what was your relationship?

I guess it's not to a marked extent but it was a very good relationship, it still is.

Who controlled the discipline in your family?

My mother.

And what would she do?

18:00 **to control it?**

Well, my father was sort of always the ultimate figure in the background but the day to day application of discipline was my mother. Corporal punishment, yeah we got smacked every now and again but nothing vicious or anything even remotely like that, but she had a very strong set of Scottish values and virtues and she insisted that that's how we were to live and carry on and we did.

18:30 **What did you get in trouble for? Are there any times you remember crossing the line?**

Oh petty stuff, not coming home on time, spending too much on sweets [candy], yeah it was really petty

stuff but I suppose being cheeky every now and again would attract a thump.

Fighting with your brother?

Yeah,

19:00 scuffling I'd say rather than fighting.

During the '30s as you were very young, Australia was in a time of depression, were there any memories of hardship in your family or did you avoid that?

No. We managed to avoid it. My father was never unemployed and while it was a fairly lower middle class family it was comfortable and

19:30 we were never short of anything. You know it was a modest house that we lived in and it was always comfortable and there was no real... I was barely aware of it. I was aware that men were out of work and that there was a fair bit of hardship around but it didn't really affect us.

Well, what are your memories of the Second World War and the breakout of the war?

Well when the war broke out I was seven years old so

20:00 it was a boy's view. I suppose I first of all thought of it as an adventure and I thought of it in terms of in a simplistic way it would be a re-run of the First World War and I thought it would probably go about the same length of time and I was you know in a boyish way concerned, wondered if I would be old enough to join in before it was over you know those sorts of thoughts.

20:30 And I had a, hero worship is not the word, but a great admiration for the men in uniform and you know I thought they were much to be admired.

Were they much around, do you remember images of the war from your own childhood?

Yeah, there were... well there were obviously a lot of men in uniform around and then there were a lot of Americans arrived in

21:00 1942. There were a lot of Americans in and around Melbourne. One of the memories I guess is at my local school we dug trenches to protect us so we could all get in when the air raids came. And in our backyard we dug a trench and a shelter so I don't know what we thought was going to happen. There were

21:30 mild inconveniences like petrol rationing but we were never grounded, we always had enough to go and visit people or do whatever we wanted to do and the food rationing was only the mildest inconvenience. In fact I think one silly little memory, I thought people looked better during the war with some sort of mild restriction on what they ate they looked sort of slimmer and

22:00 better than my memories a few years earlier, but so it wasn't a hard war for me.

Well was it frightening to be digging a trench, did you understand what that was all about?

No it was exciting more than frightening and I remember one night we had a sort of practise that turned out to be a steam train on a distant railway line was blowing and my mother thought that this was the air raid siren going off

22:30 so we were all pulled out of bed and made to go and sit out in the trench until we realised there was nothing going on. But it was a pretty easy war for me.

Given your father's military background, what did he do during the war?

He served in the Volunteer Defence Corps, the VDC, and he used to Saturdays and Sundays get into a uniform, put his rifle over his shoulder, go off and go off and do whatever they did. He was very,

23:00 quite proud of that. Years later when that television series came on, what was it called, Dad's Army, he was quite indignant about that, making fun of what he thought was a sacred thing, or not sacred thing, but a very important thing, although he came eventually to see the humour of it. But he was a bit miffed that they were taking the mickey out of this organisation he'd served.

23:30 He was a very good rifle shot too.

Did you go shooting with him?

Yes.

Where would you go and what would you do there?

We used to go over to down along the Mornington Peninsula, I don't know if you know the area, the Ryde back beats [?]and going out towards the Omeo Road where there are at the time a hell of a lot of rabbits and we would go rabbit shooting. He also taught us to shoot with a 303, he had his own 303.

24:00 **Looking back, I mean having your father in uniform in the voluntary defence corps and seeing**

men in uniform during the war, do you think that was a formative influence for you at the time, do you think that's where your first military leanings came from?

Oh yeah I'm sure, added to what I was saying earlier about relations with my father I'm sure it did. Because when I joined the army in 1949 it was very much in the lee of the war you know, and all that sort of thing was

24:30 very much uppermost in our minds.

Where there ever any other ambitions you had as a boy?

No, but I make it clear I didn't have a sort of burning ambition you know, this is what I'm going to do, this is my destiny in life and all this, in fact there was quite a toss up at the time whether I did that or whether I went straight to university.

We'll just come to that in a moment. Firstly you got a scholarship to Scotch,

25:00 **can you tell us a little bit about that?**

Well there's not much to tell.

Well tell us about the school, what was your time there like?

Oh great, it was and is an excellent, a great school and I just enjoyed every minute of it. It was, you know academically I did pretty well and sporting wise I joined in on everything that was going around and I was a good, confident,

25:30 perhaps above average performer but not brilliant at sport. I was in the second footy team and not the first, I was in the second cricket team, I was in the relays and the athletics and not the individual events.

What were your favourite academic subjects?

The maths and the sciences. I did Latin for four years; I was pretty keen on that too.

Was there any leaning towards engineering for instance or...?

26:00 Well maths and science leads you towards engineering.

But that's not something that you knew much about at the time or...?

Ah no, but I found I could handle things pretty easily.

What about sport, I mean how important was that to you growing up?

Pretty important, well I enjoyed it and as I said I was probably above average but not brilliant but I joined in on everything that was going on and I played sport the year round and it's always been a big part

26:30 in my life.

What football team did you follow?

Carlton. In fact that's not true, while I was at school Hawthorn, because Scotch College was in Hawthorn and a lot of Scotch men went to play with Hawthorn but subsequently Carlton through the good years and the bad.

Was it a different culture back then, a culture of sort of the AFL [Australian Football Leaguesupporters and?

27:00 Ah well it's VFL [Victorian Football League] obviously, no I think it was pretty much the same, everyone was pretty keen on their team but the school placed a lot more emphasis on doing it, you're actually playing sport rather than watching other people doing it, it suited me well.

Were you also involved in the cadets at Scotch?

Yes, I had three years in the cadets and became a cadet under officer.

27:30 One of the amazing things of... that was during the war, before the war had ended and one of the amazing things on today's standards was we all had a rifle that was complete with bolt. You know today you wouldn't dream of it but all these little schoolboys turning up every Thursday in the tram with our rifle over our shoulder and the bolts and everything complete but I guess there were just so many weapons around at the time that the governments just weren't worried about it but on today's standards you couldn't even think of it.

28:00 **What did you do in cadets?**

Oh pretty predictable basic training. You know, drills, basic weapon training, occasionally special subjects like first aid and so on, but unlike today where cadets is more like an adventure training sort of a thing, it was very much military training. This was preparing you to take your place in an army. I

actually have often said I joined,

28:30 went to Duntroon, joined the army, not because of my cadet training but despite it because it was pretty uncomfortable and I didn't find all that inspiring. For example when we got to camp at Puckapunyal every year, once a year there was a I think it was a week or a fortnight but the camp every year and you know the old tin huts at Puckapunyal in August in the middle of winter it was freezing and we didn't have beds we slept on palliasses on the floor

29:00 like the real soldiers did and when I got to Duntroon and found that we actually had a bed to sleep in I was quite agreeably surprised.

Was the discipline similar to the real army, the cadets?

Oh not really. I mean we all did our best and behaved like we thought we were expected to behave but it wasn't really the same.

Moving towards Duntroon

29:30 **I guess, because unfortunately we haven't got a lot of time to talk about your schooldays, but what were the options then when you graduated, you said Duntroon was one, what were the others?**

Well I think I said earlier I'd won a scholarship to Ormond College and so the other option would have been to go to Ormond as I did later but gone direct to Ormond and I would probably have done engineering then. And so that was one or anything.

30:00 But the two options were very clearly going to Duntroon or going direct to Melbourne University.

And how did you make that decision, I mean what influenced you either way?

Well, all the indirect things we've already spoken about and I've been, with hindsight I'm sure of the factors that were pushing me but I'd applied for Duntroon and went through the selection process and then got the letter saying that I'd been accepted and I had a feeling I was just sort of drifting along with the current and if

30:30 I didn't do anything, that's what was going to happen, that's about what happened and I in a sense sort of drifted into it but looking back it was all those other factors. There was one thing, General Blamey who came and spoke to the school, I think in my final year and I found what he said, he was urging people to go to Duntroon, join the army, and I found what he said

31:00 quite convincing and I guess that was also a factor. But this sort of drifting into it was how it seemed at the time.

Did you discuss it with your father?

Oh yes.

And what was his point of view?

Well he didn't, his line was, "This is up to you." Because of the things we'd spoken about, First World War and RSL and I'm sure he was very keen that I'd decided to do it. He was also a bit hesitant in that

31:30 the pre war regular army had been a very small.

He was hesitant, sorry?

Well he was hesitant because he didn't think the career prospects were very bright and you know I'd done pretty well at school and academically and otherwise and he was concerned that the regular army wouldn't offer much of a career and if it had been like the pre war regular army indeed

32:00 that may have been the case, but it didn't turn out like that.

Were you aware of how that was changing at the time?

Yes, I thought oh that was pre war you know, things are much better now, things are going to be differen,t and it was as it turned out but the pre war regular army was very small, badly paid, very limited prospects, pretty boring stuff but it was never like that.

What was the selection process?

32:30 **You had to go through to get into Duntroon?**

Well, apart from filling out all the normal stuff about your education and so on there was a number of tests that we did which in little groups of candidates we'd sort out, I don't know your practical skills, your leadership bent, I don't know whether you could get things done in a group, and an interview with a very formidable board of

33:00 senior officers sitting round a table, that was about it.

Were those well they used quite complicated, what's your leadership test today, how complex

these days?

Oh not too complex at all. These group tests were little contrived incidents where you had to get a load, a weight or something and get across a minefield without putting your foot into it and you had spars and ropes and

33:30 then you'd... it was quite difficult, in fact some of them had no real solution and they were more concerned about how you went about it than what happened, but it wasn't the very heavy psychological overtones that we have now.

So you drifted into the military college, what did you find when you got there, what were your first impressions of the place?

It was pretty hard adjusting to the life initially, but no harder for me than for anyone else.

34:00 But it's a big leap from the life of a civilian teenager to the life of a cadet at Duntroon but it's not an impossible leap to make and just about everyone did it, but the first year at the college was pretty hard then, probably still is. But it was enjoyable, you have the strong sense of camaraderie because you're all in this together and the senior classes make

34:30 life pretty hard for you, but you're all in this together and you very soon learn how to live with the system and get on top of it and a lot of sport and the work we did I found very interesting, so it was good vibes, good.

Immediately good vibes or was it difficult...?

Oh it was pretty hard, the first few months of senior class.

35:00 The theory was to accelerate your transition from an idle, layabout teenager to a young officer cadet and learning how to look after yourself and keep your room and your equipment and everything all the time spic and span and be very punctual and very long working days you know, you'd have to get up at 6.15 in the morning and live a very regimented life and this there was a lot of pressure on you in the first few months to adapt

35:30 to this but everyone, it's just what everyone did.

How did the senior class both look after you and make things difficult for you?

Well it's a very strong hierarchy and the theory of it was the incoming cadets, you had to get all their sort of lazy civilian habits out of them and get them into a military mould as quickly as possible

36:00 so you had to treat the seniors with a great deal of deference and they treated the new class the opposite way. There was a lot of pressure put on you to do things properly, to always be properly turned out, to have your room and everything and there was a fairly strict punishment if you didn't toe the line and if for example the most common punishment was what was called an extra drill which meant

36:30 that at twenty-five past six in the morning you have to turn out in all your marching order, all your equipment your rifle and everything and for 20 minutes, extra drill. But the main effect of that was it threw you into chaos trying to meet the already tight deadline to get yourself organised for the start of the day, so if you got into the... you got a few of these it made it even more likely you were going to get more and you had to sort of pull yourself out of it.

37:00 But by and large it was liveable and at the end of the first year that all stopped and you were then part of the hierarchy of the college.

There's a lot of talk these days about bastardization, did it ever go too far in your experience at Duntroon?

There was a lot of that around and it went quite a long way but I never thought it went too far.

37:30 In fact the people who were handing it out, and I was on the receiving end, I became very friendly with them in later life.

Can you give us an idea of what these punishments were that might have gone a long way?

Well, the extra drill was the formal punishment but there was a lot of for example, making you learn a lot about the history of the college and the customs and

38:00 all that sort of thing which indeed was a good thing to learn; in fact now I think they teach them formally rather than if you didn't do it you would be given little jobs to do or kept hanging around when you really wanted to be getting away or getting organised and putting more time pressure on you but all this is liveable.

Can you still recite the inscription on General Bridge's grave?

Oh yeah, 'Major General Sir William Rodney Bridges, KCV, CMG,

38:30 A gallant and erudite soldier he was the first commandant of this college...' and so on.

Was that something the kind of thing you're talking about that you had to run off and...?

Oh yes. A lot of that incidentally, seeing as you brought it up, was not that thing but a lot of that stuff was imported from West Point somehow and for some reason which I don't understand. For example, there was a little a question, 'What is the time?'

39:00 and then the response went, 'Sir, the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of my chronometer are such in accord with the great sol dial movement by which time is commonly reckoned that I cannot with any degree of accuracy state that...' anyway it went on like that and when I was Chief of Defence Force I visited West Point and I sat down and had lunch in the cadets' mess there and somewhere along the line someone mentioned this and the West Point cadets to this day are going on with this sort of thing and as soon as someone

39:30 started trotting out this little thing I was able to finish it for them which he found amazing as did I.

Did you have a senior cadet appointed to look after you?

Oh yeah well, you're asking the question you'd probably know that. It was called 'your lord and master' and he was a third class cadet you know when you first got there, third and second, first and he was a third class cadet and he was appointed to

40:00 keep a close eye on you and in fact show you the ropes and show you how you had to do your stuff.

What was your lord and master, who was he and..?

It was a man called Allen Roberts and you know he was pretty good; he died years ago but yeah.

Did everyone...?

Showed you how to clean your boots and get the right shine on them and keep your room in order and all that sort of thing.

40:30 **Did everyone adapt to those first few months at Duntroon?**

Not everyone. There were, I think in my class about 57 or 58 some number like that who came in and of those in the first few months there were maybe three or four who just couldn't hack it and this is not for me and went, but the majority did.

Were you at all homesick for normal life?

Yes but not... of course I was homesick, I think everyone was but it didn't disrupt what I was meant to be doing and I could handle it.

Tape 2

00:48 **Most people that were at Duntroon around your time speak of the RSM [the regimental sergeant major], with awe.**

01:00 **He was quite a famous person?**

With awe and great admiration and liking. He was Fango Watson who was, he was the biggest single influence on our lives as cadets. I mean there were all the officers and commanders and all that sort of stuff and the civilian lecturers, but the guy who really struck awe into the hearts of the cadets and really ran the place was the RSM. He'd

01:30 been a guardsman, I don't know which of the guards regiment but he'd served in the guards in the British Army and he was fantastic.

And how did he run the place as you put it?

He controlled the cadets directly in running the parades and teaching us drills and inspecting us and if an officer came around to inspect you weren't all that worried,

02:00 but if he came round and you had even the faintest thing wrong you knew you were gone, but at the same time he built... having struck awe and respect into everyone he then built a great rapport with us and everyone just loved him you know, after four years, and 50 years later he is the most admired and respected figure and whenever classes get... I'm sure others do the same, whenever our class gets together for a reunion

02:30 all the stories are about Fango Watson, the commandant hardly ever gets a mention or the officer instructors but Fango does, he was an amazing figure.

Could you tell us one of those stories, one of those things that Fango did that stands out in your mind?

One day we were drilling on the square and a bee came and landed on my face and he came up and

stood in front of me and said, “Stuff that Gration

03:00 you’ve got a bee on your face,” and I said, “Yes Sir,”, and he said, “Well what are you going to do about it,” and I said, “Nothing Sir,” and he said, “Well step out of the ranks and get rid of it!” ‘Cause you weren’t allowed to do anything while you were... if you wanted to do anything you had to step out. So I stepped out of the ranks and brushed it off and it flew onto him and he was waving in his face, but he was there are legions of stories and there were... we all tried to imitate him and later when we went out to

03:30 do a bit of time in a national service battalion as sort of make believe lieutenants you could spot these guys anywhere all trying to carry on like he was, and I heard once one of my class was imitating him around the barracks and he did a very good imitation of him. He roared out this command and he roared out, “Stand fast!” which means everyone had to stop and they all thought it was the real thing, but then the real thing came along and heard this going on and stood behind him

04:00 and you know, grabbed him. The poor cadet was desolate, but it was all done in good humour; he was an amazing bloke.

In hindsight, I mean his qualities become obvious to you perhaps, but at the time was he seen in that light as a cadet?

Eventually, I mean you never lost huge respect for him but we came to like and love him and

04:30 He... it was all done with. not quite humour or certainly was not tongue in cheek. but we realised why. He set a terrifically high standard, you know his own turnout was just gleamingly brilliant and we knew that he would accept absolutely nothing but the very best if you... any part of your turnout was less than perfect you were gone and that sort of feeling. I saw him,

05:00 he became, he was commissioned after he left Duntroon and I think he rose to the rank of major, but when he stepped down from that job he was obviously more senior as an officer, but he never had the same influence- the jobs he had was nothing compared to when he was there. He actually lived around here until he died maybe 10 years ago.

Did you have any contact with him as a senior officer?

Yes, I was the battalion quartermaster sergeant that was the second most senior cadet so

05:30 I had a lot to do with him just you know carrying out my responsibilities. On the morning we graduated, there was the graduation parade and the ball and all that sort of stuff. The next morning we all had to return all the gear and it was my job to do it and there was one sword missing when I returned it all and we’d all been sort of wondering how we were going to address this great man when we were merely lieutenants and he was a only a warrant officer.

06:00 And we were going to call him RSM or whatever, but he came up this morning in a fury that was one sword missing and any idea I had of calling him anything but ‘Sir’ just went straight out the door, he was an awesome figure.

What sort of things did you get extra drill for? I mean, what did you find difficult?

In my first year I got quite a lot of extra drill, oh just, petty stuff like buttons undone or

06:30 mainly little sins of omission. ‘Cause as I say earlier once you got on this train there was 20 minutes taken out of your vital time in the morning so it was easy to get another one, nothing serious.

Well what was your favourite part of the training at Duntroon?

I enjoyed the military work as we got further into it, things like the

07:00 training and tactics and the military history. I also enjoyed the civil work, the academic work which I felt I could handle quite well. I guess the thing though that I would have to say most of all would be the camaraderie that develops within a class at RMC ‘cause you were all in this together and you all went through this sort of crucible together, which lasted the rest of your life,

07:30 50 years on we’re still having reunions and keeping in touch with each other.

Did you have a particular friend or someone that you palled up with at Duntroon?

Oh yeah there was well yeah, I had a group of quite very close friends. Unfortunately one of them, a couple of them have died and one of them is very ill now.

During your time there the Korean War broke out, how did that change things at Duntroon?

08:00 Oh well it didn’t change what we were learning, but what it did was give a much sharper focus to it, that we all might have the prospect that we might be sent there as indeed a lot of them were, it gave it a much sharper focus that this was not all theory we’re learning and you may well be doing this next year, so it really sharpened our perception of what we were doing.

When you say it didn’t change your training, I mean where were the tactics and

08:30 **the military training you were doing coming from, was it Second World War stuff was it?**

Oh yeah, Second World War stuff as was the Korean War, you know the tactics were real Second World War stuff. Most of ours at the time by the way came from the British Army. We put a bit of Australian doctrine together based mainly on our experiences in the Southwest Pacific, you know New Guinea and so on, but the basic tactics and the training

09:00 pamphlets we used were all British. It wasn't until the 1960s that we started developing our own doctrine and sets of pamphlets and so on. There was nothing wrong with it you know, it was good stuff and our equipment was all good, the uniforms that we wore and the webbing equipment and the weapons were all British.

Well what were your ambitions then, I mean, did you have the urge to put your training into practise in Korea?

09:30 I didn't have an urge to do it but I thought it was on the cards, but it was deferred in my case, as I said earlier, being an army engineer I knew that when I finished at Duntroon I had to go to the university but if the war had gone on another year yes, I would have gone.

How did it happen that you were put into engineering corps?

A couple of things. One that I had a good record in

10:00 maths and sciences which you needed, and secondly, if as I did you wanted to go on to the university, you only had two choices. One was to become a signaller and one was to become an engineer. So all that came together fairly easily and I became an engineer. You remember I told you earlier that my alternative course was to go direct to university at Ormond College but I didn't, I went to Duntroon so I still had that alternative

10:30 in mind there and this allowed me to do it.

Well just firstly, what was the academic component of the training at Duntroon like?

Oh, it was pretty good. Of the four year course it was meant to be roughly fifty percent military and fifty percent academic so that I found later that the work we'd done put us in good stead at Melbourne Uni. I didn't feel disadvantaged at all by what we'd done at Duntroon, in fact in a lot of ways

11:00 it was how I felt it was better, you know we had a better preparation when I went into the third year at Melbourne uni, so yeah it was good. Having said that, that was how I felt about it but a lot of the cadets didn't, they thought this academic work was just something they had to put up with before they got onto the real purpose of why they'd come to the place which was to be an officer.

With that in mind, a lot of the focus on your officer training would be to go to infantry; was that the popular

11:30 **choice at the time?**

There were more people went into infantry than anything else and the Australian Army central concept is that everyone no matter what corps they go into, has a basic grounding, a strong basic grounding in infantry. I think it's an excellent concept and I hope we never do away with it and it makes us quite superior to, for example, some of the American officers,

12:00 I just pick America as an example that we've seen a lot of, but they've become very skilled in their own speciality, but they're narrowly skilled whereas Australian officers have sort of knowledge across the board and I think it's always been one of the strengths of the Australian Army that we do that.

Given that there was a chance to go to war at the end of your course, were you disappointed that you weren't in the infantry corps?

No, I was never disappointed that I wasn't in the infantry.

12:30 I guess in a sort of boyish, enthusiastic way I regretted that I hadn't gone to Korea. You know, a lot of my mates in the class did and I guess I always felt a bit sorry that I didn't do it.

You made it sound like you were placed in engineering; did you have a choice, what was the situation?

Oh yeah, it was pretty inevitable that I went into engineers but you were given a choice. You didn't... you were asked to

13:00 make a choice and there was no guarantee you got your choice, the powers that be decided where you went, but I opted for engineers and it was pretty straightforward.

Tell us about your graduation, what was that occasion like for you?

Oh great. At the time it was in December 1952, at the time we had the graduation parade on in the afternoon and

13:30 now they have them at nine o'clock in the morning before it gets too hot, but it was at two o'clock in the afternoon so the memory is really very hot. It was a typical, hot Canberra December day. People put huge effort into polishing their boots by putting lots of polish on and working it all up, but then when you get out in the sun that all just melts and instead of having gleaming shoes your boots just look bland.

14:00 Perspiration running down you; you're standing out there for however long it was, people who had trouble standing up fighting not to faint, but it went very well. At the subsequent ceremony, I got the Queen's Medal and most of the other prizes, so I've got good memories of it.

You were obviously one of the top cadets; you didn't mention that before,

14:30 **was it something that you had been throughout the training at Duntroon?**

Yeah, when they do select you to go in there, I don't know if they do it now, but at the time they would rank the cadets selected to come in, in order, and I was ranked number six out of 60 odd and for the first set of exams in May of the first year became top of there and I just stayed top from then on I guess.

Was that mainly an academic thing, how did that work?

15:00 Oh it was academic and military. The academic work I could handle better than most but the military stuff I enjoyed and did well at as well, I got the tactics prize and the history prize and whatever.

Was it a competitive environment for you, were you striving to be in that number one position?

It wasn't competitive in that... trying to beat someone but it was competitive in that just trying to give as good an

15:30 account of yourself as you could.

Did you get any advice or comments on it when they passed on the medal or...?

Oh yeah, there was an army pre archiver who made some statement at that time that he was a future chief of the general staff which I thought was stupid. Anyway he did that sort of thing.

At that point did you have any ambitions of that

16:00 **nature?**

No, I never thought in those terms you know, the clenching my teeth and saying that I want to be the chief of the general staff, but at the same time I never had any idea that I had a ceiling, that I just thought I would keep on going, but I never said what I wanted to do was be chief.

You were certainly no longer drifting along though, as you said when you went into Duntroon?

Yeah that's true.

16:30 Once I got there I gave it all the effort.

What was behind your passion for the army by the time you graduated, I mean what was the core of that?

I found the work we did intensely interesting, particularly the military work, you know I said the tactics and the history, and I realised there was a great deal to learn and a great deal in it.

17:00 And the idea of being a professional officer, being the commander and all that stuff, I found quite an exciting business and by the time I graduated I could really hardly wait to get out and start practising all this stuff. It was a very good course; I reckon as good as anything I have seen around and I have seen around the world for turning out professional officers.

17:30 **You said you won the history medal? What part did patriotism and tradition have in that passion for you?**

Oh well, patriotism yep, pretty strong on that, tradition, not overwhelming but very conscious of the traditions we were sort of following along. I mentioned earlier that one of the things when on arrival you were made to learn was all that sort of stuff which I thought was a good thing, and as I said now

18:00 they teach it to them formally rather than letting cadets sort of make them learn it, but it was a good thing to know the Australian Army traditions and we learnt a lot about the British Army traditions too, because there was still a sort of a feeling that we were an offshoot of the British Army. As we were in a number of ways.

Was there a sense of Anzac as there is today?

Yes, although surprisingly

18:30 Gallipoli didn't loom as large in the mythology as it does now.

Who came to see you graduate?

You mean?

Did your father or mother or…?

Oh yes, they came and uncles and aunts, all the people you would expect.

Your father must have been especially proud given his background?

Oh yes, yes, he was very pleased.

19:00 I also got this swag of prizes which I guess made them pleased as well.

Did that translate into any direct, better posting or is there any other element to those prizes for you or…?

No, the practise then and still is that... or I'll reword that.

19:30 The order of graduation at the time set your order of seniority in the on the officer list in the army so if you graduated first you were senior to all the rest of them and they changed that in subsequent years, but there was an idea that that was a phase of your army career, you've done it and you've now set that behind you and that didn't sort of flow on into what you were going to do next you know, in a sense you all started again when you were commissioned and how you performed determined how you got on.

20:00 **Were you sent directly to uni or did you go to a national service battalion at that point?**

No we went directly to uni. While I was at Melbourne University I… and there was a handful of others there we all went together, we were attached to the Melbourne University Regiment and were there, did that attachment for the two years I was there.

And what did you have to do as part of that?

Oh not much. The regiment wasn't quite sure what to do with

20:30 us, these brand new Duntroon officers. We weren't given command jobs in the regiment like commanding a platoon or whatever. We were put to work writing exercises, training exercises, training programs, that sort of thing.

Were you a civilian in civilian clothes or basically just going to university like any other student during that time?

Yes, it's very sensible, the army made, apart from this detachment

21:00 a Melbourne University Regiment which is pretty undemanding, we were just on our own for those couple of years.

So where did you go after you graduated from university?

I went straight to the School of Military Engineering to do what they called at the time a regimental officers' course which was the sort of things a young engineer officer had to know like the sort of nuts and bolts of the trade

21:30 and learning about practical bridge building and mine warfare and water supply and all the other things that engineers do and that was about a three or four month course which was pretty good and then I was posted to Malaya.

Well just maybe you could explain a little bit about that course and in doing so about the Corps of Engineers and what they do in the army.

Yeah, the simplest way to describe what the engineers do is

22:00 They help the army to live, to move and to fight. And the living part is providing the army with accommodation, with services like water supply which becomes critical in places like Iraq or even in East Timor. The moving, the army engineers at the time had what was called the transportation corps which was involved with controlling movements say by rail or by

22:30 road and we also had little army ships; and the fighting part was the combat engineering of demolition, mine warfare and building bridges in the combat zone, building roads and air fields, that style of thing. And of course the School of Military Engineering gave us all new lieutenants a sort of hands on grip of this, we learned how to build Bailey bridges by actually

23:00 building them. You're actually lumping the stuff around which as an officer you didn't have to do, but you had to appreciate what it was like having to do this and we learned about water supply, we learned about how to handle the plant, we learned basic surveying, those sorts of things, pretty good.

What component does a military engineer need to know that you would not have covered in your civilian course?

Ah well, the civilian degree was

23:30 concerned with building multi-storey buildings or huge concrete dams, all that sort of thing, but the things that we learned at SME were real hands-on what the army calls field engineering and it was a very good, practical introduction to engineering after the lofty heights of finishing an honours degree. As I said multi-storey buildings and sophisticated analysis of structures and all that style of thing,

24:00 like that was fine and I'm very pleased I did it and it gives you sort of a very good professional background for the rest of your life, but this was real hands on stuff, this was what young engineer officers had to know about.

What did you know about Malaya at that time?

Very little. With the benefit of hindsight, very little. I know a lot more about it now, the origins of the Emergency.

24:30 I knew there was an Emergency going on, I knew that Communism was the back of it on the other side, but that was about it. And also, with the benefit of hindsight that the army was quite remiss in not telling us, not briefing us very much about it. I don't know whether they, someone imagined that we learned all this ourselves or someone else would tell us, but we really didn't know much about it.

So what lead up did you get to

25:00 **that posting to Malaya, what were you told and how much information were you given?**

Well very little. We knew where we were going but we didn't know, I knew that, well first of all I should tell you that I was posted as a troop officer, a field engineer troop, that's a troop of about fifty odd engineers and there are two officers in the group, a captain and a lieutenant, and I was the lieutenant and we knew we were going to

25:30 join a British field engineer squadron as we did, but that was about all we knew and there was, I had no detailed tactical knowledge of the sort of things we'd be doing or the tactical situation at the time, which I think in hindsight was pretty remiss, we should have been given a much better briefing. Our preparation to go was entirely up to us. You know, you're going there in three months time, you've got three months to prepare, get

26:00 yourselves ready. Well as a quite inexperienced, sort of no practical experience lots of theoretical knowledge, officer, that was a big ask, in fact I think what we did was okay but we could've done it better.

Was there a theoretical textbook or pamphlet that was telling you about the tactics on offer in Malaya?

Yeah, there was. It was called the ATOM pamphlet, anti

26:30 terrorist operations in Malaya. It was a British pamphlet produced as a result of their by then almost seven years of experience there and I wasn't even aware that this was around until we got there but then we made a lot of use of it. It was a very good thing to put down all the lessons the Brits had learnt in those years and how to deal with it and it was excellent, but we in Australia never heard of it.

So it was very much learning as you went when you arrived?

27:00 Yeah it was. The basic skills we had the sappers they're called, engineers, their basic skills were all good and we were able to apply them but there was nothing that we'd been told to specialise in or bone up on this or that.

Just while we're talking about it, what did the ATOM pamphlet contain, can you give us an idea at the sort of tactics that they were using?

Yeah well, it gave

27:30 quite a bit about the tactics they were, we called them Communist terrorists in that that was the other side, and the tactics they were using and the counters that we used for example there were counter ambush drills, you know if you were in a vehicle and you get ambushed, what do you do. If you're on a foot patrol and you have a contact, how do you handle it in the jungle? What protective measures do you take around a static camp?

28:00 All those sorts of things. And there was a lot of detailed knowledge about patrolling in the jungle with that enemy which was different to say, fighting the Japanese. We'll call them Communist terrorists, well that's what we called them at the time, they would avoid contact if they could, unless they had specifically planned that you know, their whole object was to not have a contact unless they'd planned it and where they've got a

28:30 strong concentration of force at the point of contact and when we were there, by the time we got there, one of the difficult things was actually finding them and you would patrol for a long time with no contact, which was quite different to fighting the Japanese.

Just stepping forward for a moment, this would feed directly into Australia's experience in the

Army Training Team later on in Vietnam?

Yes.

So tell us where you arrived, you went to join a British squadron.

29:00 **Tell us firstly about where they were and what they were doing.**

Yeah well I took the advance party to Malaya in August of 1955 and the main body, the advance party, I think there were about seven or eight maybe ten, and the main body followed up in November. The British squadron we were to join was at Kuala Lumpur, or just outside Kuala Lumpur at a place called Sungai Besi.

29:30 The Australian advance party landed at Panang, where the infantry battalion was going and I had to take my little party by train and then down to Kuala Lumpur and join the British squadron. The British squadron at the time was part of a Ghurkha field engineer regiment, 51 Ghurkha Field Engineer Regiment. So we were the British squadron and there were I think, three Ghurkha squadrons as well in this regiment, which is very interesting you know, seeing the Ghurkhas and working with them.

30:00 The sort of work they'd been doing was a bit of road work, airfield construction deep in the jungle, I think they were the main things. But when I joined them we went up, oh I can tell you that bit later, but that was where they were and that was what they were doing.

Alright, firstly let's go through this in a bit more detail now because we're getting on to the bits that we

30:30 **really want to cover in as much detail as possible, what just firstly were your first impressions of arriving in Malaya, I mean what did you think about the place?**

Excellent, exotic, totally different country, enough of a war going on to give what you're doing an operational urgency, all of these exotic sights, sounds, and then when I had to take my little team of ten and

31:00 head off on the train down to Kuala Lumpur, great excitement, some apprehension of how we'd get on with the Brits but that was needless because we got on very well with them. The first job that I was given was to take my people and with a little vehicle convoy to cross the mountains to meet a British team who'd been building an airstrip in the deep jungle and they were coming out and I was to receive them as they came out down the river and

31:30 load their plant on the train and bring them home and I thought this was terrifically exciting. There was the possibility of ambush, it didn't happen fortunately, but taking a team off across this unknown country through all these jungle roads and meeting with people, I thought it was terrific, very exciting.

So firstly what was the purpose of the advance party, what were you ten people off to do?

Well

32:00 it was to prepare the way for the rest of them, to make sure that the squadron knew how we were equipped, any special needs we had, to make sure the accommodation was ready for them when they arrived, to make sure that we were ready to fit into the squadron's training and operational program and all that sort of thing. Also the troop, the policy was that the married men brought their families, which was strange.

32:30 I think in retrospect it wasn't a good idea, but one of the other jobs was to start looking for married quarters so that the twenty odd families that were going to come up would have somewhere to live when they arrived.

So this first job that you just mentioned, can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Well, the British squadron had put these small detachments out into remote jungle areas to built small airstrips

33:00 so that security forces operating in the area could be resupplied and there was a way of getting supplies into them or evacuating people or changing them over, deep in the jungle. And the squadron had been given the job of building several of these airfields. The aeroplanes they used to fly in there were, I think I can't say they were called Beavers but they

33:30 were very short take off and landing aeroplanes; and the party we were relieving had been working in the state of Pahang, which is on the east coast of Malaya and it meant to get from Kuala Lumpur to there we had to go up over the mountains and down the other side and set up our own little camp in a little village on the Pahang River, one of the mighty Malayan rivers, and this team having finished the rest of the job, came out by

34:00 boat and we set up there and we had to receive them and make arrangements to put all their tractors and plants and things on the train and then take them back ourselves across the mountains, back to their home base. This was a great job for a young lieutenant to do.

How were you transporting everything?

Oh well, in the unit's vehicles you know trucks and

34:30 land rovers.

And what were you told about the possibility of ambush, what was the situation with the Communist terrorists?

Well, they used to classify a road as black or white. A white road you could go in a single vehicle and the likelihood of an ambush, I think there was grey as well, there was little likelihood of an ambush. The black road you had to go with convoys so there was more than one vehicle; you had to be prepared, armed and ready for ambush and the road across

35:00 the mountains, the mountainous jungle to get there was black. And I was very conscious that this was one of the first operations the Australians would have done since we arrived and if the word of it got out I thought probably wrongly ,that the CT [Communist terrorists] might make this as an example that they'd show these Australians what's going on here. But fortunately it didn't happen.

Given that you were a little bit ill prepared as you said earlier, how did you set up to

35:30 **protect yourself from this sort of unknown enemy?**

Well we followed all the normal precautions you know, everyone armed and had ammunition, and before we did this, in-country we practised our counter ambush drills which we now had the benefit of the proper training and doctrine. And if anything had happened we would have given a reasonable account of ourselves.

So there was a period of training

36:00 **before you embarked on this? Where were you and what was happening?**

Back in Australia?

So you didn't get the pamphlet till you arrived in Malaya or…?

Yeah, we got the specific knowledge about how the war was being fought in Malaya after we arrived.

So did anything of interest occur during that operation, you weren't ambushed?

There was no ambush or whatever, we did what we were meant to do and

36:30 all got home again.

So where was home?

Back to Kuala Lumpur, a place called Sungai Besi which then was a little village outside Kuala Lumpur but now is taken, is encompassed in the greater Kuala Lumpur and it's where the Malaysian Royal Military College is and it's a big army camp, they've got one or two brigades there now. It's a big army camp too there now, but it was quite small at the time.

37:00 **And so you mentioned that there were people building airstrips out in remote jungle? What else was the squadron on the ground there doing?**

I don't know, that's all I can remember. That was quite a commitment you know, that several of these teams were out. Shortly after we'd done that job we moved from the north of Malaya into the state of Kedah to do a bridging camp

37:30 where the whole squadron was brushing up on our bridging skills and in fact we were up there when the main body of the Australians arrived.

Well tell us a little bit more about your bridging skills, I mean what techniques were you using at this time?

In my opinion bridging's a big deal because it's higher rainfall, tropical rainfall, and there are a lot of big rivers and if you're moving anywhere across country, getting across rivers is a

38:00 big challenge so bridging was important. There are two sorts of bridging, there is dry bridging where you erect like a Bailey bridge from one bank to the other and there is floating bridges which is sitting on pontoons. You put these boats in the water and build across where you'd cover much bigger gaps. And the bridging camp up in the north we were doing mainly floating bridging.

38:30 **And so what do you use to make floating bridges?**

Well, the standard equipment of military pontoons and then there's military bridging which you erect on top of the pontoons.

And was all this stuff transported over great distances to wherever it was needed?

Yes it was. That's part of the deal. In fact the camp we went to was specifically for

39:00 bridging training and all of the gear was left there so we went through and did it and then some other unit would have come through and done the same thing.

Can you briefly just describe how you set up a pontoon bridge?

Oh yeah. You assemble the pontoons which are usually collapsible, like a collapsible boat that you pull up the sides of the boat so you've got so much freeboard above the river.

39:30 And you float these pontoons into position and you link them together and then you put the superstructure on it across this line of boats which are all across the gap.

And how are they bound together?

Well there are metal pieces which link each... link the boats together but then the superstructure that goes on that carries the load of the vehicles also ties them together. On top of that the bridge is anchored by cables to the bank.

40:00 **And was this something you could only construct given the river was flowing too fast it would knock them away or what were the challenges?**

Oh yeah, particularly in the Malayan rivers which are subject to flooding and so on, that this was a big consideration and it's quite an art to do these things.

Tape 3

00:41 **When we finished off you were sharing with us building a pontoon bridge; what other sorts of things were you building over in Malaya?**

Well, when the main body of our troops arrived

01:00 it was in November and we didn't do anything much, just familiarisation training for the first couple of months over Christmas and we stayed in Kuala Lumpur but then we moved to the state of Pahang where we were to build a road through the jungle alongside the railway line, the east coast railway line, to open up again so the security forces could get in the counter terrorist business. The east coast railway line was there but there was no road access for quite a long

01:30 stretch of it and our job was to put a road in it so we could drive in there; and we were down there for six or seven months, very interesting period. We were building a road and because the jungle there is absolutely laced with rivers there was a lot of bridging had to go on as well.

How long was this road that ran along?

Ah, the stretch we were doing was probably about 25, 30 miles.

02:00 It wasn't only our squadron, the rest of the Ghurkha engineer regiment were doing bits of it as well. It was very interesting; we went out on the train and just offloaded at a clearing in the jungle and set up our camp and operated from there.

And interesting because of what things went on?

Well, there was the terrorist threat was there all the time so as well as building a road everyone had to carry their weapons and we had

02:30 sentries at night and we had to patrol around the worksites in the morning before work started to make sure that there was no-one sitting in ambush. The actual engineering of it was interesting and unlike anything we'd ever done; they were building roads through the jungle, the big job of clearing all the jungle and working with the continual rain and so on. So it was both technically interesting and operationally interesting.

03:00 **There's a few things that come up there, we can talk through them one at a time, firstly the building of the road, you've talked about cutting through the jungle, obviously foundation is important, can you basically talk us through the process of what was done to make the road?**

Yeah well, the first thing was survey to work out exactly where you're going, which wasn't all that hard because the general brief was to build the road beside the railway, so as far as possible we were feeling near the railway so you know, we didn't have to create

03:30 diversions. The next thing was basic road design, you decide what standard you wanted the road, what gradients, what sort of corners and then you have the next step, clearing the jungle so that the sun can get in and dry it out which is a big job, then excavation to get the sort of finished shape of the road, then putting the

04:00 wearing surface onto the gravel onto the top so you don't get bogged in the basic dirt, and while all that's going on, the drainage works and culverts and side drains and in this case a lot of bridging and

the bridging we put in was Bailey bridging, equipment bridging.

And were these bridges to be temporary or…?

No they were temporary and eventually they were to be replaced by the civil

04:30 publics work department with permanent bridging which is what happened.

In respect to building roads, are you given sort of an idea of what traffic will be used on it, heavy trucks or light vehicles or…?

Yeah, the people who task you to build a road have to specify that sort of thing and what class of trucks are going to use it so you know how strong to make the bridges, what volume of traffic so you know how wide to make it, what sort of surface to put on

05:00 it and what gradients are acceptable, all that's got to be specified by whoever wants the road.

And who were going to be the major or what size trucks were going to be the major users of the road?

Well the army five tonners were about the limiting thing. Remembering that we were doing this so the security forces, the infantry battalions could get into that area to carry out their operation.

What were some of the difficulties that you came across in building

05:30 **this road?**

Well, for example, all the rivers, there were numerous small streams, there were no really major rivers but numerous small streams, and getting the equipment from one side of the stream to the other so you could prepare the bank to put the bridge down. If I could digress on that a bit, on one of these rivers I couldn't see any way to get, I wanted to get a bulldozer on the far bank to clear the bank and get it level with

06:00 and get everything so we could put the bridge across, and I couldn't see any way to do this except the railway bridge which was sitting there just 50 yards away. So I knew that every day there was an express train came through about three in the afternoon so I told the boys that we wait till the three o'clock train goes through and when it's gone past get, those up we'll just trundle across the railway bridge and no-one will ever know and it was easy. On this day there was an unscheduled train came

06:30 and they waited till that one came past at the appointed time, got the dozer up on the bridge and then the express, the passenger express came roaring along you know, great excitement. Fortunately it stopped in time between the dozer and the middle of the bridge and the Indian train driver was in a high state of excitement as well he might be, you know terrible when I think about it and he was gonna report us and he was gonna do this that and the other thing and we might've twisted the lines

07:00 and all this sort of thing. Anyway, he wanted us to back off and go back to where we came from but I wouldn't do that, I said I still wanted the bulldozer to go on the other side of the bridge and he backed his train up a bit and we got the bulldozer off but he was going to report me and I was gonna have my head cut off at the very minimum, but it's an episode that I never forgot. Nearly the end of a promising career!

Did you ever get reported?

07:30 If I did, I'm sure I got reported but it never it sort of never came back down the line again.

Did the Communists ever try and attack the actual train line itself?

Yes. By that time in the Emergency not frequently, but it was but they made a thing called a Wickham trolley in front of passenger trains, particularly at night, and this was a sort of armoured trolley, not a great job to have, and its job was to set off any explosive charges or

08:00 whatever that were on the line. Yeah, not a popular job running that in front of the passenger express. But yeah, there'd been numbers of incidents of the trains being ambushed. It was dead easy because the line ran through the jungle yeah, the railway line for most of the way was going through jungle so it was very easy to ambush.

Did you ever use any of the resources around you sort of the wood or whatever was lying around?

Yes, yeah well because we were clearing the jungle there was a huge amount of

08:30 timber and wood available so that was what we used for building culvert, temporary culvert head walls and that sort of thing, bearing in mind that the public works department were going to come along as they did in our wake and replace our temporary structures with permanent ones, but we'd basically got a trafficable all weather road through there.

Great stuff. Animals, everything from mosquitos through to snakes, what sort of

09:00 **animals gave you problems in the jungle?**

Snakes were a real problem; there were a lot of snakes around. There was evidence of elephant, although we never saw them, we saw the droppings. There were said to be tigers although we never saw tigers either, there were a lot of monkeys of various sorts and there were lots of mozzies.

And so what was done about the snakes and the mozzies?

I remember my commanding officer, there was a

09:30 cobra that appeared on the site and he accurately pulled out his pistol and shot the thing but we just had to be careful. We never had a snake bite which was fortunate.

And malaria?

We were very strict on malaria, anti-malaria precautions, which was avoiding being bitten so at sun up and sun down, you had to be all wrapped up but that's when the mozzies were most active. But everyone took the, paladrine I think it was,

10:00 that was the anti-malarial pill at the time and that was quite effective, in fact if you took your paladrine you were almost sure you weren't going to get malaria and it was taken as evidence that if someone got malaria, it was taken as evidence they hadn't taken their paladrine. Now since then the mozzies have got totally resistance to paladrine and most other drugs but at the time paladrine was working quite well.

Was that an offence at all?

Yes.

So what happened when a fellow got malaria?

10:30 Well it was a chargeable offence and I can't remember that happening with us but yeah, one heard that it had happened with other units. On the morning parade each morning you gave everyone, every man was given their paladrine and you had to take it while they were watching.

What did they taste like?

Oh well you didn't chew it, it tasted pretty awful but you just swallowed it.

So there was no particular reason for a man

11:00 **not to take it then?**

No and it never cropped up. No-one ever said, "I'm not going to take paladrine." you know we all just took it.

Any other illnesses while you were building this road?

By and large we all stayed pretty healthy. We were very strict on hygiene 'cause we were doing our own cooking and we'd set up this camp from scratch and so on and we were very strict on hygiene so we didn't have too many gastro troubles.

11:30 A couple of the people had a bit of, I could call it 'psych' problem but sort of being out in the remote area for a long time and they found it got to them a bit, but by and large we stayed fairly healthy. We were all inoculated up to the ears against every known disease and malaria was no doubt the big worry, but fortunately we didn't get it.

You mentioned psych problems,

12:00 **what were sort of the habits or behaviour that demonstrated this?**

We had a British national serviceman tried to convince us he'd gone sort of quote, 'troppo,' and I was never sure whether he was really that way or he just wanted to get sent home, but if he didn't want to get sent home I always thought it was a pretty dangerous way to do it, to convince people you'd gone silly, but anyway he was evacuated, but I was never sure whether he was serious or

12:30 not.

Well what did he do?

Oh he appeared outside the officers' mess tent on a Sunday I think, and there was a lot of water around and he was swimming in one of the puddles, really totally irrational behaviour. We had one of our sergeants, got to him a bit too, he had to be evacuated but they were isolated instances.

13:00 **And what happened to the sergeant?**

He was evacuated back to Australia.

What was his behaviour demonstrating?

He had some sort of a fit and collapsed on the job and I think when he was evacuated and got home he

got over whatever it was but he couldn't carry on in that tropical environment.

Was there just one camp or there were several camps

13:30 **along the way?**

There were several camps along the way but my troop we just had the one camp, we operated out of the one camp that we built back this way and then built forward that way.

Could you just describe the layout of the camp?

Yeah, it was in a clearing of grass beside the railway line, maybe 40, 50 metres before you got to the jungle's edge. It was on the banks of a stream, a fairly fast

14:00 flowing stream, fairly level ground, quite clean in the sense it wasn't muddy or swampy. We had wire around the perimeter obviously, the whole thing would have been 70, 80 metres square, there were lines of tents where the soldiers lived, we put up a sort of

14:30 shelter with jungle timber and corrugated iron roof as the cookhouse, they had a marquee which was where the soldiers' dining room was, a roof and no sides. We had another marquee as the office and then another one as the officers' and sergeants' mess, well the officers' and sergeants' mess sounds a very grandiose term but there were two officers and two sergeants so that was where we ate together. That was a

15:00 tidy little place.

And was the accommodation sleeping in the tents?

Sleeping in the tents oh yeah, with sort of stretchers.

Was there a camp guard or soldiers had to take turns?

Oh no, soldiers had to take turns.

Could you describe sort of the shift mixed with sleep and work?

Well there were 50 odd soldiers so each night there would have been probably half a dozen involved in sentry guard.

15:30 So a soldier would have got it say once a week or so, he would have to do this, and the system is two hours on and four hours off, but it's quite demanding, you don't get a good night's sleep, but it was absolutely essential. We knew there was terrorist activity in there, we knew that there were and had been terrorists in the area so it was absolutely essential.

What were the signs there was terrorist activity in the area?

16:00 Well, we knew from the intelligence reports that there had been contacts with the infantry battalion that had been there the previous year, had had contact so we knew and we knew the name of the CT unit that was in the area. We used to get occasional reports of the sappers and so on, sightings. Once we found footprints around a site that we didn't think were ours, because of these reports

16:30 we put our own patrols out. We found a camp that had been used we thought, maybe a month or two previously. So while we were never shot at or interfered with we were very conscious that the enemy was around and we had to be, if we wanted to avoid being shot at, had to give the appearance, not only the appearance, but had to be on the ball and alert and so on.

Was it easy to identify them as Communist terrorists? Like was there a uniform or did they have a certain look that you'd identify them?

17:00 I never saw one. They wore, they were recorded, another told me that they wore a fairly basic uniform but it might have been a pair of black trousers or they may have had something more elaborate or some sort of military shirt. Almost all wore sandshoes because they spent much of their time in the deep jungle they were very

17:30 pale in complexion.

You mention that you knew the name of the Communist unit that was around you?

Yeah I can't remember what it was; it was such and such a company of such and such a regiment. We were called on once to, there was a British Army infantry battalion was operating in the area, they believed they had got some CTs into a fairly confined

18:00 space but they needed more troops to put around the perimeter while they drove through it and they called on us and we provided some men to dot around the perimeter but that happened occasionally, that the infantry in the area would call on us to provide extra men or whatever.

You mentioned about the camp and the guard and sending out patrols occasionally, but on the actual road when you were building it, was there a

18:30 **guard posted out?**

Yes, in the morning, around the road head or where a lot of people were working we would do a clearing patrol in the jungle. On a site where numbers of men or machinery were working we would always have one or two sentries, people who weren't involved in the work and whose job was to be alert and keep an eye on what was happening.

You also mentioned to Chris that it was

19:00 **interesting working with the Ghurkhas, eye opening, what was particularly interesting working with them?**

First of all they to an Australian they're an exotic group of people you know they're sort of famed Ghurkhas of the British Army. Everything one had heard about them was true. They were terrific soldiers, you know they loved being sharply turned out and the infantries, their combat

19:30 side of the thing and they have their kukris [knives] and very soldierly people. In the few months we were with them, we also got to know a bit of their customs, I think they called it their dai shearer [?] festival which comes just before Christmas, there's a lot of dancing and feasting and so on and we got a good look at this. So they were just very interesting, having heard of the famed Ghurkhas,

20:00 to meet them close up and to work with them. I felt sometimes they didn't quite know what to make of Australians who carried on a different way to the Brits but the Australians seemed to get on pretty well with them, with the Ghurkha soldiers.

What were some of their habits that they used to do, or customs as you said?

Well apart from their religious, the festivals and that sort of thing,

20:30 they were very strong on the soldierly virtues, but they were new to engineering and anything technical was sort of fairly new to them, so they were pretty raw on the technicalities. I think it was only after the Second World War that the Brits started getting the Ghurkhas into other than infantry, into signals units and engineer units and so on. But when they were explained what to do they would do it in spades you know, if you said

21:00 we want a mound 50 feet high here the next thing you know you had a mound 50 feet high and they also when they were manning, having sentry go on the gates of our barracks when we were back in Kuala Lumpur. They were absolutely fierce and on the job of checking everyone who came in, they'd been told to check everyone that came in and they would check it in spades, you took no liberties at all with the Ghurkha soldiers.

21:30 They'd say, "Who are you?" and you wouldn't say Ned Kelly or Mickey Mouse or anything like that then you wouldn't be in trouble.

Did you learn anything from the Ghurkhas during your time with them there?

Not in a direct sense but in an indirect sense of just great admiration for them you know, I thought they were good people and outstanding soldiers.

What stage was the crisis in Malaya up to at that stage?

22:00 It had passed its peak and it was on the down in that the number of incidents had dropped off a hell of a lot and the emphasis on operations was actually finding and making contacts with them. In previous years around about 1949, 1950 when it had just started the CTs would initiate a lot of incidents, you know road ambushes,

22:30 they killed the British High Commissioner in the Cameron Highlands and ambushes, patrol ambush and so on were quite common. But by 1956 it was more a case of endless patrolling to search out and try and establish contact so the whole thing was on the way down, but it wasn't ended and there were occasional contacts.

The locals, the local people, what were they like?

We had very little to do with the local people so I can't really say much about that.

23:00 When we were working on this road down in Pahang, we had almost no contact, we were out in the jungle anyway and there was no-one out there so we had very little contact with them.

After this road was there other things that you worked on as well?

Yeah we went from there we went to the north of Malaya, to Butterworth, which is opposite Panang Island and we sort of rested and regrouped and maintained all our

23:30 equipment and we were given a job on Panang Island of digging out Japanese aerial bombs from a World War 11 magazine which the Japanese had dug into the side of a hill and they'd left all these 500 pound bombs in there and the locals had started bringing them out and knocking the nose cones off to sell as scrap metal and inevitably one had gone up and it killed

24:00 numbers of people with it and we were given the job of getting all these out of the hills and disposing of them.

Could you talk us through that process?

Well, there were two parts to it but it was quite tricky actually. The first part was getting in and doing the excavation and that was like a mining job, you had to put up props and things so that it didn't collapse, and then bringing these things, these bombs out you know, you expose them and put them on a stretcher and you carry them out in the open and then

24:30 there was the problem of disposing of them and my first solution was just to clear the area and just blow them up, put a mat on top of them and detonate them, but then the explosive experts came and said that they were all far too sensitive to do this and you got away with that one charge but if you do it again you're likely to set the whole hillside off and I'm not an ammunition expert so I could just accept their word that this was so, there wasn't

25:00 green sort of stuff coming out of these aerial bombs so I accepted they were very sensitive but then that rose the question of what we could do with them, they said they're too sensitive to move and they're too sensitive to blow up on site and no, we don't know what you can do with them and sort of wiped their hands of the problem and walked away, so I took matters into my own hands, I was a lieutenant at the time and this problem had gone right back up to the headquarters in Malaya

25:30 Command and generals all involved in it, and I teed up with an RAAF flight lieutenant, another very junior officer who ran the crash boat which was kept there in case the airfield at Butterworth guys went into the drink, they would go out and rescue them. So I teed up with this fellow that early on a Sunday morning I would bring all these bombs out and we'd take them out to sea and we'd dump them, which is what I did. And without incident, and then I went back and told my boss that you know

26:00 we'd solved his problem, we've got rid of all the bombs, they've been dumped at sea and there's no further problem. And then he didn't know whether to court martial me for being so stupid, which he should have done, or given me the OBE [Order of the British Empire] for solving this problem which no-one could see how to solve. With the benefit of hindsight it was a silly thing to have done but it worked.

So how many bombs were actually in this area?

In fact there were numbers more we found later ,but I'm talking about

26:30 40 I think something like 35, 40 something like that.

And so just talk me through the process loading the boat, how many trips out?

We didn't need all that many. It was very early Sunday morning, five o'clock Sunday morning, daybreak on Sunday morning I did this when there was no traffic around, and each bomb we just put on an ordinary stretcher and carried it on. We put sandbags along the deck of the little boat and just loaded these bombs along the deck and too off out to

27:00 sea and got rid of them over the side.

All 40 at once?

Oh no, no. One at a time.

No, but all 40 were in the boat at once?

Yes.

And how many of you were in the boat?

Oh there were about 10 of us I suppose.

Obviously you knew about the issue of transportation, they might blow up?

Yeah, but I thought it was all exaggerated, I mean, as I said, it was a very silly thing to have done but it worked.

27:30 **Later you found, or more bombs were found what did they do with those ones?**

I honestly don't know what, I think eventually the same sort of solution you know, they didn't want to, they said that they're too sensitive to try and disarm them and normal technique is to drill into the side of them and drain the stuff out or to burn them, but they said they were too sensitive to do all that and I think that was the solution that they did what I did.

28:00 **While you were there, did you find any other sort of relics from World War 11 around?**

I didn't but there's a lot of them around. On Panang Island, the main British barracks there, Mindin Barracks and the Japanese had occupied that for three years of the war and there were still quite a bit of odds and ends from the Japanese there. The fighting during the Malayan campaign in 1942 was further,

28:30 the bits that the Australians were in was mainly further south where we were, but I believe there was a lot of stuff lying around.

After just being or becoming a bomb disposable person, did you do anything else while you were over there?

Yeah, we were sent up sometime after this, further up north near the Thai border to act as infantry for a period and we did, we had about

29:00 eight, ten weeks patrolling as infantry in an area up near the border. Again we had signs that there were CTs in the area but we never had a contact, just lots of patrolling.

Can you talk me through a patrol, what you actually did?

Yes, first of all there was the planning and the preparation, gaining the intelligence

29:30 of recent sightings or what we thought was in the area, then there was the patrol preparation or the physical preparing, getting the rations, briefing everyone, test firing weapons, going over the ambush drills so that if it happened everyone was quite clear what we would do. Then the actual mounting of the patrol,

30:00 in Malaya we would always do this before first light, we'd get in, from wherever our camp was at the time, we would get in vehicles and the vehicles would go to the drop off point and just pause briefly, just time enough for everyone to get out and then the vehicles would carry on, with the idea of not revealing where the patrol had gone in. So by the time the sun came up the patrol would be inside the jungle's edge and then we would

30:30 start on whatever pattern of search we were going to do. The custom was to base up round about two, two thirty in the afternoon, so that before it got dark you had time to, everyone have a wash, cook some sort of evening meal over their little cookers, put out our clearing patrols and get the night sentries in position. And we would usually go in for three days, three, maybe four days and then

31:00 depending on what happened you would come out to a rendezvous point and get picked up again, that was it.

And what equipment did everyone have?

Standard pouches and things for carrying ammunition and radios, packs for carrying three, maybe four days' rations, everyone had two water bottles, standard weapons, someone had to carry a radio. Everyone carried a

31:30 single blanket, which was all you needed at night and plus the cape, the poncho, which you used as a shelter, you never needed anything at the side because you never got sideways wind, but it would rain just about every day and every night and you slept under these things. And you would get wet as soon as you went in the jungle, you got wet if not from the leaves and everything from sweat.

32:00 **And armaments that fellows had, guns?**

Ah yeah we had standard rifles, one or two machine guns, sub-machine guns.

Okay and food what would you eat out on patrol?

We were using the British ration pack of the day which wasn't bad at all, but the soldiers would chuck away a lot of the fancy stuff like chocolate and fancy biscuits and that, and most of them would take

32:30 more rice than was in the pack and the standard thing that we would eat was sort of curry. There was tinned meat in the pack and you cooked the rice and added a bit of meat and a bit of curry powder. They were quite a good pack actually.

Was there a reason to throw away or put aside the chocolates or biscuits?

Mainly because they didn't eat them and you didn't take anything that you absolutely didn't have to carry or you didn't want, so if you didn't want it you didn't take it.

33:00 **And how many fellows were on these patrols?**

A normal patrol would be, of the sort we're talking about in this situation, there would be maybe 15, 20 people. And we usually take a, what was called a surrendered enemy personnel with us or a fellow who had been a CT and then surrendered and he could help you in identifying tracks and sort of generally knew his way around.

Could he speak English or

33:30 **was there an interpreter?**

Ah the ones I had always spoke English, a bit of English, enough English.

Did you find anything interesting on those patrols?

I found on two occasions tracks indicating that someone had been there but we never had a contact.

And what you spoke of also earlier, of ambush response, if you were under ambush what would you do?

Well there were standard drills not only with vehicles but with a foot patrol,

34:00 how you dealt with this thing.

What were they in respect of foot patrols?

Well, if you walked right into an ambush, the immediate drill was to charge the ambush. If you were right in the fire zone and you couldn't get out it was turn around and charge into whoever was firing at you. If you weren't pinned down like that, the standard drill was either a right or a left hook, you would leave someone engaging the enemy and then you would do a

34:30 either a right hook or a left hook to go through the bush and then engage them.

After the patrol work did you do anything else?

I didn't, I came home after that.

Before you came home and discussing that, rest and relaxation, what did you do during that time, where did you go?

We've already spoken about what the war was like; it was on the rundown so

35:00 there were quite a bit of things we used to do. Rugby Union was a big deal; I played actually for three of the state teams as we moved around. Each state had its own team and there was quite a bit of army competition about with rugby union. We had some very good players in our troop and there was a hope that our squadron would win the Far East championship and we

35:30 didn't win it but we did quite well. So there was quite a lot of that. We encouraged a lot of activities, like volleyball was quite popular and I myself had a racehorse that I used to ride myself in the amateur races which was about once a month.

Outside the army were there places to go or nightclubs to visit or those sorts of things?

36:00 Yes, we were near that, there was those sorts of when we were near KL for example, but it was still a bit of a drag to get from Sungai Besi maybe 10 kilometres into the city and most of the soldiers just didn't bother. When we came back from being out in the bush of course everyone wanted to go and try out the bright lights for a while but most of them preferred just to

36:30 stay in the camp. When we were up doing that infantry patrolling there was nowhere for them to go there. When we were at Butterworth they could go over to Panang Island or go over to the local bars and things.

Was anything said to the men about fraternising with the locals?

No. There was a lot of instruction and cautioning about VD [venereal disease] and how not to get it but there was no

37:00 prohibition on fraternising.

And who was responsible for giving the information about VD?

Well it was the troop officers, ultimately the medical people, but the briefing of the soldiers was our job.

And was anything given to the soldiers in respect to taking care of themselves if they did?

Well, condoms were readily available and they were told they had to do this and there were what they call

37:30 prophylactic aid centres that we told them about, where they went if they had contact with one of the local women but they ought to go there afterwards.

If a fellow did end up on charges, sorry, not charges, if a fellow did get VD would he end up on charges as a result?

No, no. If you did that sort of thing you know they wouldn't report it which is really not what you want at all.

So after the patrols in

38:00 **Malaya what happened to you, where did you go next?**

Well I came home just before the 1956 Olympics and I was posted to the Oxley Cadet School at Portsea, as an instructor for two years.

And what were you instructing in?

Well I was the engineer instructor, but there were I think, seven officer instructors so we all taught everything you know, I instructed in tactics and administration and current

38:30 affairs as well as a bit of engineering.

Any particular memories that stand out from your time at Portsea?

It was a good course. It was turning out second lieutenants; it was a 12 month course by this time. It started off in 1952 as a six month course but they'd extended it to 12 months. It was well run, the staff was quite small and later really blossomed out and

39:00 I think we turned out a good product. There was a man called Bob Halvorsen who left the air force and became eventually became speaker of the house of representatives, he was one of our cadets.

And any characters like the Fango Watson type thing at Duntroon?

Nothing like him, nothing at all.

And what was your rank?

I was a captain.

And after Portsea where

39:30 **did you go then?**

I was given a two year attachment to the Snowy Mountains Authority as a civil engineer, that's two years right away from the army to work as a civil engineer with the Snowy who very good, oh superb, professional experience but also a very good life experience with all the different nationalities that were there and so on.

Well just before we talk about the Snowy Mountains was there further study that you needed to do in

40:00 **respect to engineering or?**

No the degree I got a few years earlier was plenty.

Tape 4

00:42 **Just coming back to Malaya, were there any accidents where people got injured or killed?**

There weren't in my time, but later, after I left, the troop were doing more of this excavation of the bombs and the shoring up collapsed and a man was killed.

01:00 The thing fell in on him, but I'm sure there were accidents but I can't think of any others.

Just on that the shoring up falling in and killing him, that was an engineer issue?

Yes.

Coming out of the Snowy Mountains Authority, how did the opportunity arise for you to go there?

Well the army had made a deal with the Snowy that they would send at any

01:30 one time two army engineers to work as engineers on the Snowy and this was to the benefit of both parties, for the army guy you got this terrific professional experience, and for the Snowy they got the services of a qualified engineer for free, everyone was happy and it was for a two year period and each year there'd be a new one come along. The British Army was doing the same thing by the way, they were sending British Army engineers to work on the Snowy.

02:00 **Okay, so how many military fellows like yourself were there at any one time?**

There was me, there was one Australian and one or two Brits.

And so what happened when you arrived there? What did you find, what was the situation in the Snowy?

I was sent, I first of all went very briefly to a place called Cabramurra, I don't know if you know Cabramurra, the highest town in Australia at 5,000 feet and

02:30 then I was sent very shortly after that to be the engineer in charge at Jindabyne where we were, the Snowy was putting the Alpine Way through up from Jindabyne up through Thredbo and beyond. And I stepped straight into this position of being the engineer in charge of this production which was really

throwing you into the deep end and a good thing too, you had to get on top of the local procedures and this mountain road building

03:00 pretty quickly. I was there for about five months, then I went back up to Cabramurra where I was for the next 18 months for the rest of my time, where I was just one of the engineers up there.

So firstly the roads, what were the local procedures that you had to become familiar with?

Oh, the way the accounting was done and they way you booked time sheets and the arrangements for using the plant and

03:30 paying for it and costing the jobs and I was also the engineer, being the engineer in charge I had a responsibility that the camp in Jindabyne was properly run and the hygiene was being properly done and the meals were okay and all that sort of thing. It was just the job for an army engineer, it was good.

What was your relationship though with those who worked for you, given that you weren't in the military and couldn't I guess?

Well most of them didn't know that I was in the army because I didn't wear a uniform or anything really

04:00 and they just thought I was another engineer who was an engineer who happened to be doing this particular job.

What were some of the difficulties building this road?

The technical problems of building roads in any mountain, in high mountains that the stability of the soil, you get fairly extremes of weather, you get strong storms in the mountains which causes flash flooding in the creeks.

04:30 In the Snowy there is the onset of winter and snow falls and so on and just the pressure, as with other things to get everything done and there was a sort of spirit to get on with it and pressure to get things done quickly and economically. Handling the multinational workforce was also quite a challenge; by and large they got on pretty well, remarkably well.

05:00 There were Germans and Croatians and Italians and Irishmen and by and large they all worked with each other but every now and again there'd be a bit of a bust up but yeah, particularly late at night in the canteen someone would pick on someone else.

Can you share with us one of these experiences and what you did?

Well there's not much more to say than that. There were

05:30 those responsible for discipline, the sort of equivalent to the military police and as the engineer in charge, unless it got really out of hand which it never did, you weren't involved directly but you heard about it the next morning and you'd have to deal with it. But it was an excellent experience trying to work with all these guys and understanding where they came from.

So you mentioned the next morning you'd have to deal with it, in what respect would you deal with it?

Well you might have to take

06:00 disciplinary action against one or another of them. In an extreme case, if someone really tried to kill someone else he'd probably get sacked, but if it was just a bit of a punch up you'd give them a warning or whatever.

And did you ever have to?

I never had to sack anyone, it never got that bad, but quite often you had to give them a warning you know, "If you ever do that again you're out."

Besides that as an experience,

06:30 **how was it different building the actual roads to what you did in Malaya?**

For one thing the plant and equipment we had was much bigger. The bulldozers we had were much bigger and there were many more of them and there were, whereas in Malaya we had men on the job here we had five, six hundred. Just the sheer scale of the thing and the special engineering problems of doing heavy earthworks in

07:00 steep, mountainous country and the techniques of drainage and the special techniques to seal the pavement and so on, they were all different.

And who was your boss in this particular job?

Well, when I got back to Cabramurra, my boss was a man called George McRae, who I've kept in touch with ever since and who is now a very good friend but that's 40, 50 years.

07:30 So that was who it was.

Is there anything while building the road, is there anything you in particular learnt from working in the civilian force, like tips to help you in the future in the army?

Yes, a much more acute appreciation of the cost, the value of people's effort and plant effort that in a civilian project like that you have to cost everything and you've go to be very

08:00 conscious of keeping the cost down, whereas a military engineer doesn't have to cost it and you're more concerned with whatever the price, just getting it done quickly. So for the rest of my life I had a quite keen perception that I or others were using people to their best advantage and if they had a lot of equipment and machinery that they were using that to its best advantage. That's probably the big difference between military engineering and civil engineering.

08:30 **So you're suggesting at the time you had to manage budgets and those sorts of things?**

Yes.

Was that something totally new to you or…?

Yes, but it was a good thing and it was with me forever.

And accommodation before you went to Cabramurra, where were you living in while you were there?

It was a camp at Jindabyne and as I said, it was in many ways like a big army camp, there were huts that the men lived in and there were central kitchens and messes

09:00 and there were latrines and wash places, just like an army camp and the same sorts of problems when you've got a lot of people living like that you've got to be really hard on the hygiene to make sure that you didn't get outbreaks of sickness and so on.

Was there sickness at all?

No, it went pretty well.

I mean weather conditions can change there dramatically, what were some of the situations where weather really impacted on what you were trying to achieve?

Well,

09:30 Jindabyne's not so bad. Jindabyne's around about 3,000 feet but Cabramurra is over 5,000 feet. It's the highest town in Australia and you're very conscious of the weather there. During the summer you get quite violent storms, thunderstorms and very heavy downpours of rain and then in winter of course the whole thing was under snow and you had all the challenges of that. The authority had given the contractors who were building the big power station a guarantee they would keep the roads open the year around.

10:00 So during the winter our own road building efforts stopped and we were engaged in snow clearing, of keeping all the roads open which was a totally unique experience for an Australian. It's the only place, just about the only place where you would get that experience, but it was a continual challenge of where you watching the weather maps and watching the sky.

So being the engineer, I mean what was your role in keeping the roads clear and

10:30 **all that?**

Well it was really an organisational one, that you had to make sure the plant, the graders or the ploughers or whatever were where they should be in time and whatever to make sure the roads were never closed, so it was really an organisational bit of making sure the right effort was in the right place at the right time.

And what was your role in Cabramurra when you got there?

I was one of the junior engineers on what was called

11:00 Field Force B I think it was, but there was an engineering group at Cabramurra engaged in roads, air fields, aqueducts and in the winter, snow clearing and I was one of the engineers in there.

What did you particularly do during that time?

I sort of specialise in building aqueducts which are on the many little creeks running into the main rivers. If you can pick a creek up high enough up near its source

11:30 it won't run downstream of the dam feeding into the power station. You take a line round the hillside and tip it into the power station so you don't waste that water, it runs through the turbines before it runs down the river and my main effort was building these things and aqueducts are these big concrete pipes. You've got to build a ledge round the side of the hill where you're going to build it and then you dig a trench in that roadway

12:00 and then you load the pipes into there and backfill it.

Well what stage was the dam up to, or the hydroelectricity?

T1 power station had just been finished and they were building the T2 power station on the Tumut River. The big works on the Murray were just about to start, hadn't started but were just about to get underway. So it was pretty, it was probably the peak of activity in

12:30 the scheme of it, a lot of people and huge effort going in.

Accidents that occurred there during your time?

Yes, the by the nature of the thing, the Authority put a lot of emphasis on safety, but by the nature of the thing yes there were accidents, with all that heavy machinery around and so on. But more by the contractors working, the people working underground tunnelling or

13:00 putting in the underground power stations had a bigger accident rate because it was a much more hazardous job, but on the surface we also had accidents.

I've forgotten the friend that you made who was your boss, what was it about him that you admired and liked to continue a friendship?

Oh he was a very good engineer, very good at handling people, good leader, he had a technique of handling people avoiding

13:30 confrontations and being very conscious of the way he did things with people. The engineers tend not to be all that good with that and they tend just to sort of shout at people and he was much better than that. In fact I learnt a lot about man handling from him, man personnel management.

Did your skills here in respect to personnel management have to be different to that of the army in the future or…?

Yes, it was a bit different in that

14:00 you didn't have the military discipline system to back you up whereby if you're an officer and you gave an order it was against the law not to follow it and you could be charged and punished. It was a bit different to that, but not all that different because the punishment you could use was to fire someone and all the guys were there to make money, all these new Australians, and that was a very serious punishment.

14:30 So by and large they worked pretty well.

The salaries, were they quite good for the workers there?

Very good yes.

Did the army compensate your salary?

No, I was probably the worst paid person there.

You mentioned the aqueducts, what was the most difficult thing apart from doing that in your job?

Doing the aqueducts or the rest of the job?

Well I guess the aqueducts first.

Well the aqueducts

15:00 they're, by their nature they're on very steep hillsides but there's these mountain streams coming down and you go back up high enough and you put a little concrete dam in so getting access, cutting a bench around these very steep rocky hillsides was a real challenge and because of the ecology aspects of the thing, preserving the environment, you weren't allowed just to push the rock over the edge and let it go hundreds of feet down to the creek bed, you had to chuck it out and you weren't allowed to spill stuff over the edge so you didn't

15:30 destroy the environment. And then digging a trench, you made the trench maybe about as wide as the room and then you had to dig a trench down the middle where these big pipes got laid in. Safety was a big concern, making sure you were on a sound footing and it wasn't going to give way and you'd lose someone over the edge, it was quite challenging.

You mentioned the word environment, I mean what thought was there in respect to looking after the environment?

16:00 At the time we thought it was extreme, you know as the engineer doing it and you wanted to get on with it and these jobs were all bonus jobs so the faster it was done the bonus the men got, I didn't get but they got, so you'd be pushing all the time to get on with and I thought it was a bit extreme, the worrying about the environment you know, not dropping rocks over the edge because they would damage the trees, but with the benefit of hindsight

16:30 it wasn't extreme and today there would probably be even more stringent provisions. But we thought it

was pretty extreme at the time, you know, you knock a couple of trees over so what, but they're a big so what. The environmental people were continually coming around the job and looking at your drainage and where you made a cut through a along a cliff face you had to re plant

17:00 vegetation and all that sort of thing and they were very tight on it. One of the things we did do was plant a whole lot of willow trees 'cause they're very easy to plant and if you're in a wet area they take a huge amount of moisture out of the soil so there were willows planted everywhere, but in the last few years the purists have said this is absolutely terrible having willows up in the Snowy Mountains and they're going round cutting them all out, they only want native trees.

17:30 **What did you do with your time off, your relaxation time?**

In the winter, which is a long six months, skiing, which has stuck with me for the rest of my life, I still ski. In the summer we used to horse ride. The Snowy had horses that were used by the surveyors that we could use at the weekends or walking or swimming in the lakes. And there was a great camaraderie between when you're living up in that

18:00 remote area with snow and high mountain peaks there's a great camaraderie just about being there so I made some terrific friends and it stuck, who I still have.

What did some of the workers and men do for entertainment during their time off?

Drank; there was, obviously they weren't into skiing was not popular with men, some did but not many.

18:30 So most of them, the Europeans, their purpose of being there was to get as much money as they could, as quickly as they could, to get themselves established in the Australian community or bring their families out or whatever. So the things I've spoken about, skiing and all that sort of thing, they weren't in and one of the offshoots of that was that they wanted to work as much as possible and if you let them work seven days a week they would've. Because their main preoccupation was

19:00 with earning money quickly.

Was there a restriction on how many days a fellow could work?

Oh well you've got penalty rates at the weekend so if you were running a job, you had to have good reason to be paying someone double to work on Sundays. But there were good amenities in that there were movies every night and there were good canteens and there were a sort of club thing where there were billiards and that sort of thing.

19:30 **While you were working in the Snowy Mountains, did the army require you to keep up any military studies during that time?**

No.

Were you at all under review or did you have to sort of keep in touch with someone on the military side?

No, surprisingly, I tell people that and I didn't have to write a report, I did write a report but I didn't have to and

20:00 the army, my boss, my army boss very sensibly said, "Well you're off up there for two years, go, see you when you come back."

You mentioned the British also sent over an engineer, who was that?

Well they were the same as I was, they were captains in the Royal Engineers you know I was in the Royal Australian Engineers and they were about the same, they were the same seniority as I was and some of them I am still very friendly with.

20:30 They were there for the same reason, to get heavy engineering experience.

And do you work with them, accommodate with them, what was your relationship with them?

Well I socially had quite a bit to do with them but they were working in a different area, a different department, a different branch to what I was but.

Excellent, so after the Snowy Mountains Scheme what did you do next?

Well I was promoted to major, two years before my time and I went to command

21:00 21 Construction Squadron which was at Puckapunyal base construction squadron and I was there for about three years but the highlight of that was going to New Guinea. I from July '62 to July '63 I took them to Wewak in the northern part of New Guinea to do, the main job was road building from the port of Wewak over the Prince Alexander Mountains which were just near the coast, jungle covered mountains, to get into the Sepik River valley where there was a very large

21:30 population but no surface access. The only way you could get in there was going up the Sepik River so we put this road in there that enabled them to send all their produce to market.

So preparation before you actually went to New Guinea, what did you have to do?

It was mainly administrative because the work we did when we got to New Guinea was road and bridge building and airfield building was within our competence anyway, so it was mainly making sure that

22:00 people were fit and administratively prepared and had all their needles and had their teeth filled and all that sort of thing.

So what sort of people make up 21 Construction Squadron?

There were about seven or eight officers of whom about half were qualified engineers, then there were warrant officers who were like supervisors in civilian life, very

22:30 skilled people who'd come up through the trade stream and then there were numbers of tradesmen like plant operators, drivers, carpenters, electricians, painters, vehicle mechanics, it was like a small self contained construction company.

How many people are we talking all up?

In Puckapunyal there were about 120 but when we went to New Guinea I took another troop from Brisbane, so I had about 170 when I was up there.

23:00 **Okay. Before we talk about New Guinea, you mentioned you got a promotion in a sense ahead of schedule if you like. Coming in and taking command I guess of a new squadron or a new group of people, what sort of things do you have to do to stamp your authority and get to know the men?**

I was one of the first, young officers to have command of this outfit and the people who had it before I was had been old

23:30 ex AIF [Australian Imperial Force] officers who ran a different sort of ship to the one I wanted to run so there was quite a bit to do when I arrived to get it running like I wanted, but the men responded very quickly. Once they knew what I wanted and the way I wanted it run they were very comfortable with that, which is a sort of general point that I reckon if people are in an orderly, disciplined environment and are quite clear on what their boss wants then

24:00 most of them are only too happy to do it. They know what's expected of them, they know what they can do and what they can't do and we got this and it worked pretty well. I'm still very friendly with most of the... and I still keep contact with some of them and that's pretty positive.

Could you share for the Archive just the contrast between the fellows from the AIF who

24:30 **did run the squadron before you actually got there to what you actually did?**

On the discipline side, I made them all parade in the morning at eight o'clock and I made all the officers appear on parade as well, because there'd been a tendency that the officers wouldn't come on the morning parade and half of them would sleep in and the whole thing was pretty sloppy; and on the technical side, the technical engineering that I'd brought with me from the Snowy, I made them run like that which was

25:00 being very concerned that everyone was giving a full day's work, you know when I was speaking earlier about costing people's labour and costing, and we had all this machinery, making sure that it was all properly used. The first time that I went into their workshop it was a shambles and I made them, gave them 48 hours to get the whole place cleaned up looking like a respectable workshop and they in fact were much happier instead of working in a mess, they were working well. I had to sort the stores accounts out and

25:30 all that sort of thing but the end result was a very good unit, a very happy unit.

And given those changes I mean was there any baulking at the fact that this new fellow's coming on the block?

Oh yeah, a lot yeah, young smartarse, who does he think he is, sort of thing.

And what disciplinary problems did you have trying to sort them out?

Well once we got over the initial shock of what I was gonna do, very few. You know the guys came along very well.

26:00 **And you mentioned you brought with you a technical engineer from the Snowy?**

No not an engineer, engineering expertise, having worked in that huge organisation and seeing how to do things that's what gave me a lot of technical expertise so I could make sure that what this squadron was doing was done well.

Terrific. In respect to the skills of the men in 21 Construction Squadron, how did they actually compare with the skills that were demonstrated

26:30 **on the Snowy Mountains?**

Oh very well, I used to tell those guys that when they left the army not to undersell themselves. Yeah as tradesmen they were very well trained and the plant operators were very good and as most of them did, they could hold their own anywhere.

What projects were they working on at Puckapunyal?

Oh they were a mixed bunch. We had the building of fire stations, putting access roads out onto the training range,

27:00 sealing the ordnance depots, sealing the hard standing areas, that sort of thing. We were refurbishing big warehouses down in Broadmeadows, but nothing comparable in magnitude to excitement if I can use that word, what we did when we got to New Guinea when we were driving this road over the mountains.

When did you hear news that you were going to New Guinea?

About six months before we went.

27:30 We went in July ’62 and round about February I think, we heard about it.

And how did you know what requirements and how many men you’d need for the job?

Well there had been, the army engineer in chief had teed this up and the army was sending a succession of squadrons of which we were the second. So there was a squadron already there and I went up as soon as I heard this to have a look around and see what they were doing and what I’d need and what I wouldn’t need

28:00 and how I would tackle it. We were the second of I think four who went through.

And what were the difficulties of the job that you were doing there?

In New Guinea? Weather, it rained all the time. It didn’t rain all the time, it rained much of the time, just about every day it rained. The mountains were steep and unstable, very steep gradients covered in jungle and if you started excavating, it would all just tend to start to fall away so

28:30 putting a road through this stuff was very challenging, but we did.

How did you overcome these difficulties?

Oh well the rain we couldn’t do much about. What I did do though, was work two shifts. Instead of just working a normal day I put the squadron on two shifts so that any time when it wasn’t raining and the sun was shining, the work was proceeding. I cut the jungle back for a full hundred metre width

29:00 which is wider than you normally would and I employed hundreds of locals to do this. It was too steep to use bulldozers on it and we used a lot of soil stabilisation and drainage techniques that I’d learned in the Snowy to get a firm base going through these very steep mountains, very steep, sloppy mountains and it worked.

Could you just talk through the stabilising techniques that you learned in the Snowy and implemented in New Guinea?

29:30 The drainage was the first and the key thing. To keep this daily rainfall out of the work where you were working on and make sure it got away which meant much more, much bigger drainage than you do back here in Australia because when it rained you know, it really pelted down. We use what’s called soil stabilising techniques where you produce a very weak cement mix, you just turn cement into the soil which you’re working with, which hardens it all up and

30:00 whereas it might have been soft and sloppy you get a reasonably hard sort of surface, really a weak sort of cement. We used the jungle timbers a lot to give an initial stabilisation and if you could hold it for a month or two, the growth starts again very quickly and once that all got on it would bind the slopes together.

Any relics from World War 11?

Oh yeah, that was where

30:30 World War 11, the finish of the fighting right at the very end of the war was just at that Wewak area and the bits we were driving through ,there was stuff everywhere. There were weapons, there were still some unexploded shells and things around, we found an old Japanese one pounder gun and there were helmets and stuff everywhere.

What did you do with ordnance that hadn’t exploded?

31:00 Recovered them very carefully and the guy who turned them over would say something profane you know, “God!” when we’d turn up an aerial bomb or something but then we just dig it up and put it for disposal somewhere. Fortunately we never had an accident with it.

Was there a bomb disposal group a part of…?

Yeah there was a group that had been working since practically the end of the war in

31:30 PNG [Papua New Guinea] doing just that so we put the stuff to one side and they eventually got round to coming and blowing it up and getting rid of it. They'd blow it up in situ.

Did you collect any relics yourself?

No, this is not to my credit, we should have but we were had our minds set on driving the road through and we weren't very historically minded and

32:00 there were crashed aircraft and all sorts of things that would have been very interesting in hindsight to have picked up, but I'm sorry we didn't.

Well a pity you couldn't see forward to your War Memorial days, you would have loved to?

Yes, I've often thought of all that stuff that was lying around up there.

After New Guinea, where'd you go to from there?

I was sent to the British Army Staff College in Camberley in Surry in England, which was you know a wonderful

32:30 experience. The British Army Staff College was the first staff college around the world specifically to train staff officers. It was the first and it was arguably the best. It was a really high grade course to be on and I got a great deal from it. It was a twelve month course. We had three months before the main course started at the Royal Military College of Science

33:00 which was meant to give the infantry officers a smattering of scientific knowledge and then we had this twelve month course at Camberley, a great year.

Did you choose this college or could you choose other colleges, what was the situation in respect to these further studies?

At the time you had to do examinations to get into the staff college and I topped the examination and the custom was then, the one who was first on our list

33:30 was offered to go to Camberley and I don't think anyone would ever knock it back and that was how we got there.

So how did at Camberley sort of differ from Duntroon days, obviously you…?

Oh Duntroon's training cadets who are not yet officers, you know young men 17 to 21 years at the time. But Camberley is training captains and majors to be staff officers. These are guys who've been commissioned for six, seven, eight years so they've been around.

34:00 The Brits have had, most of them have had great experience in the African colonies or in the Suez War in 1956 or whatever. And it was a very interesting group of people to be with.

What particular relationships did you strike up there?

Oh excellent, and I still maintain regular contact with my friends in England that I made then and they come here.

34:30 I'll give you a bit of spice. In my view the ones we got on best with amongst the English were the sort of upper crust [upper class] ones who felt they had nothing to lose. The ones that were a bit difficult and bolshie [radical] were the lower end of the British spectrum who were trying to climb up the ladder, if I could put it that way. Some of the

35:00 lesser infantry regiments or the military police or the service corps or whatever, and they tended a bit to go on about 'colonials', so we tended to gravitate towards the upper end of the spectrum who were great and we still keep contacts with them.

What other men from different, what other nationalities were represented there?

There were about 40 in a student body of about 200 there were 40 foreigners and there were just about everyone you could think of. There were

35:30 NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] people, Germans, French, there were a couple of Yugoslavs there were Americans, they were from all the former British colonies you know, there were Malaysians and Indians and Pakistanis and all the African, Nigerians and Sierra Leone and so on. It was a great mix.

Was it simply just studies or were there other activities as well?

Oh it was mainly just studies, it was teaching you to be a good staff officer, how to write and communicate and

36:00 more on tactical training, historical studies, quite a bit about the strategic situation at the time, a lot about how to operate in the higher defence quarters like the Ministry of Defence, really high grade

stuff.

Just in…

Played rugby union on the squad.

Just on a personal side, we you married at this time?

36:30 Yes.

When did you get married?

’61.

And what year is this at the staff college in Camberley?

1964. So I had one boy and my wife was pregnant with a second.

And where did you stay as a family while you were at Camberley?

Well I had married quarters at Camberley, quite good married quarters, and we stayed in there.

What lessons did you learn from your study here that sort of lasted you throughout your military career?

37:00 How to yourself be a very good staff officer and how that reflected on my career was I guess being very demanding ever since then on people that worked for me, that they follow these meticulously high standards, written work or verbally communicating, I guess that was the main thing.

Did you know where you were heading as far as your career goes? Did you know

37:30 **where you wanted to be in five or ten years time?**

As I said earlier, I never sort of gritted my teeth and said, ‘I want to be the top of this organisation.’ but at the same time I never thought that oh I’m only going to get so far ,I just sort of assumed one would keep going. But I’ve known people who have gritted their teeth and said I want to be the top man and then none of them have made it. If you start manoeuvring and becoming obsessed with that sort of thing and I my view you’re

38:00 likely not to get there.

Okay after Camberley you went to…?

I came back to Melbourne for a while then I went as the staff officer then I went to Canungra as an instructor, then by this time Vietnam had started up.

Okay, what did you know about Vietnam at the time?

Not much, let me tell you this in a nutshell. When the war first started I unquestionably accepted

38:30 what was the line the government was putting out, but then, and I just parroted it off if anybody asked me you know, ‘You’re in the army, what do you think about it?’ I just parroted off what the government was saying. At Canungra we spent a lot of time, because we were instructing on it, sort of thinking about what was actually happening in the war and why it was happening and we spent a lot of time reading about the French experience in Vietnam and then what the Americans and us were doing there

39:00 and I became progressively pretty disillusioned with the fact we were there in the first place and the way the war was being fought, to the extent that by 1968 I was quite convinced that the war was lost, which it was, and so I’d done a sort of complete about face in those years. But much of it with my fellow instructors at Canungra, the more we thought about this and looked at it,

39:30 read about the history of it which you heard very little of in the public arena, we realised this was not a good thing.

Tape 5

00:41 **Just want to start right back about Malaya, when that experience wound up what had you learnt in that, I mean coming at the start of your career it was obviously quite an important posting, what did that set up for your later career?**

Well there’s two things I’ll mention. One

01:00 was man management because that was my first experience of actually commanding men and I guess I made some mistakes, but I also learned a great deal about how to do this, how to interface with men and communicate and get the best out of them. That would be the first point and the second point was just the technical bit of practical engineering. You know, my head was full of as I said before, of

designing multi storey buildings and advanced analysis

01:30 and all this sort of thing. But then getting our there and actually hands on basic engineering of how to use plant and that sort of thing.

I know it didn't turn out to be the most dangerous or front line of environments for you, but did that, the fact that it was an active conflict engagement….?

That was what gave it a sharpness and a point to the whole thing. That it was an operational environment and the enemy was still out there and if you dropped your guard

02:00 you know, they'd jump on you. That gave the whole thing an urgency that otherwise it wouldn't have had.

Coming back later on when you went to Canungra, was the experience of patrolling that you had in Malaya a relevant one?

Yes, because when we were talking about patrolling I wasn't just talking about theoretically or parroting off what someone else told me you know, I've done this. When you talk about how far a patrol can move in an hour in

02:30 primary jungle, or what sort of security do you put out, and clearing patrols and ambush drills and all that sort of thing. I had first hand experience; I knew what I was talking about.

Given that you didn't come up against any contact situations, was that patrolling done along similar lines to what you would see later in Vietnam?

No, Vietnam was quite different. Quite different in that the enemy in Vietnam was much more powerful and better equipped and

03:00 wasn't as, was in Malaya in 1956 reduced to quite small numbers and obviously had lost the initiative and their main objective was to keep out of the way until they could concentrate enough force to initiate an action which was very seldom, but in Vietnam it was quite a different business.

So did that affect the way you moved and the way you camped and stuff in Malaya?

Oh yeah, yes. I mean I guess the principles were the same, base up about the same time in the afternoon and

03:30 we still had clearing patrols and there was probably more emphasis in Malaya about techniques such as silence, because noise carries a long way in the jungle you had to be terribly careful not to bang a fork against a mess tin and we moved from aluminium water bottles to plastic 'cause aluminium you were always knocking on something and it was rattling. We were terribly careful about

04:00 smells, you know, the smell of western style cigarettes was apparently a dead giveaway and things like that. But the basic experience was there.

Just on that subject of patrolling in Malaya, these were the things that we mentioned before were in that ATOM pamphlet. What other tips did you take from the British experience?

Well I think I there's not as much

04:30 to add to what I've said.

Just on patrolling in general I just wanted to go back to… you mentioned silence as one, were there other things?

Yes, oh you're really getting back to basics here. But there were things like not cutting. You carried a machete but the first instinct of people un-drilled in moving through the jungle is pulling out the machete and cutting the vines and that was an absolute no-no. One because of the noise it made

05:00 and secondly the very obviously trail it left behind you so if someone came across a line of cut they just had to follow that and there you were; and thirdly it exhausted people, that was the sort of technique. The techniques of navigation in jungle were a very important thing that I learned and got quite good at it, but it was something we'd never done before. It's quite different to navigating your way say,

05:30 around here in open country and to be able to navigate in primary jungle and get to where you wanted to be was quite a skill.

Was that done with maps in Malaya or…?

Yeah, there were maps, pretty basic, but not too bad but you had techniques, you navigated more like a ship at sea. You had to march on a compass bearing, you had to read the terrain very accurately or how many little rip streams you'd crossed and you had to have someone counting

06:00 the paces, or more than one person, so that you had a rough idea of how far you'd gone and therefore where you were. It was a real art.

Did you move along tracks?

No, oh I say no. You're very wary of tracks; usually you didn't because if someone was going to ambush you that's where they'll ambush, along a track, so not never move along tracks, but you would tend to avoid tracks.

06:30 **Another technique of counter insurgency service was the ambush itself, did you ever set ambushes?**

Yes and they never were sprung. We never had anyone come into them, well in my personal experience.

And just briefly in the Malayan experience, did they use mines, what did they use to set an ambush?

Us or the CT?

You, yourself.

No we never I was never aware of

07:00 using mines and we didn't have the Claymore mine at the time so the ambush would be just using the firepower of your rifles and your machine gun. The CTs use a bit more of the techniques we saw much of in Vietnam of using pangee sticks ,you know those sharp spiky things that would come up through the sole of your boot, sometimes pits, such as for trapping animals that you would, if you weren't careful, walk into.

07:30 We just saw the beginnings of that.

Okay I just wanted to pick up a few of those because they will become relevant later on when we talk about Canungra. Moving on from that, about your Snowy Mountains experience you did mention you didn't go into much detail about the different ethnicities that you were coming into contact with there, could you tell us a little bit more about how that expanded your experience?

Well, for example, I wasn't really aware

08:00 of the problems between the various European groups, you know I just never had occasion to do it, but then seeing the Croatians and the Germans for example. Not so much the Croatians but some of the other Yugoslavs, the Croatians were quite friendly with the Germans but some of the others with recollections of the German occupation in Serbia for example, during the war, mostly they would work okay

08:30 but every now and again when they'd had too much to drink this would break out and someone would get hit over the head with a piece of four by two or something and nearly get half killed, and understanding, first of all understanding all those relationships, how the Italians felt about the Germans and how the Irish felt about the lot of them and about the Brits and so on. The Germans tended to be engineers and supervisors, the Italians tended to be just about all labourers,

09:00 the Yugoslavs, the Croatians or the Serbians or wherever they came from tended to be supervisors or gangers, sort of like junior NCOs in the army. And understanding all these relationships and understanding that when we put a working gang together that you had to be very aware of these relationships and who you put in there, if they were to work together in a productive way. So there was that sort of general education about

09:30 sensitivities and relationships and a bit more, always adding to the store of handling people, man management.

Were there any language difficulties working with the men up there?

Yes, but they're not enormous. Yes, most of them most of the Europeans had quite basic English. A few spoke English quite well but most of them, it was pretty basic. But the sort of work they were doing you could almost by demonstration explain

10:00 what you wanted done, or their ganger who would generally have a bit better English could do it for you. Very aware of the languages, you'd hear twenty different languages spoken but it wasn't a problem.

What insight did that give you in hindsight about the kind of country Australia was becoming and the multicultural experience?

It was my first exposure to that and it was... my reaction was positive.

10:30 I saw and listened to these guys speaking and I realised there was an enrichment coming into Australia culture. You know, things that we just hadn't thought of or done before. For example in the town of Cooma, that was my first real experience with different food styles. There were all sorts of restaurants set up in Cooma where these guys giving you the benefit of their cuisine. It was quite an enriching

11:00 experience.

From what you saw of those men, you mentioned how hard they worked to try and set themselves up in Australia, were they committed to Australia from what you saw or...?

Most of them were, not all of them. Some of them, I was going to say particularly Italians but that's maybe not fair, but their object was to make their pile and then go back home. But at that time in the late 50's, early 60's, Europe was still a bit of a mess, you know it was recovering,

11:30 but it wasn't like it is today, and they, having seen Australia, most of them wanted and did settle here after they'd done that time up in the mountains and got a bit of capital.

The Snowy Mountains scheme is historic in Australian history, did you get a sense of that, of the importance and the scale of what you were doing at the time?

Yeah it was very, the guy that was running it, Sir William Hudson, was

12:00 instrumental in making everyone aware that this was a really history making thing we were doing, you know this was something really important nationally that had never been done on this sort of scale before and we're really gonna make a go of it, not only the engineering but also the social side and of the multinational work force and all these sorts of things, and we're all quite conscious of that, and it gave an urgency to it, something akin to the operations when we're at war you know, when we were talking

12:30 a few minutes ago about Malaya and the sharpness of having this enemy around, well this consciousness of this sort of national endeavour we were doing was much the same.

It would've had later reflection of civil affairs in general and the work you did expanding infrastructure in Vietnam, I guess there was great pride that you were expanding Australia's infrastructure?

Yes, yes.

The same could be said of the road you built in

13:00 **Papua New Guinea?**

Yeah, that's still there by the way and it's been improved and it's been sealed. We didn't seal it and it's still a main, busy road you know, there's trucks, I went back there just before I retired in '93 and there's traffic charging up and down there all the time and it was very gratifying to see that all this work we'd done twenty years earlier was really being used for what it was

13:30 meant for.

What was the local reaction to what you were doing at the time in Papua New Guinea?

First of all they were very pleased because we employed about a thousand people. I had two budgets at the time for employing locals. There was an army budget from which I could employ people to help in the kitchens and do the laundry and things like that and that was terribly strictly controlled, very, very tight,

14:00 and if I wanted to put another one on I had to write a letter and reply and all this sort of thing, and it would take forever but then on the other hand I had a construction budget and if I wanted to put another five hundred on I just went and did it, so I used to laugh to myself about all this army administrative business about hiring one or two people and then I'd go out and put hundreds on with my other hand. So they got, there was a lot of employment and money flowing into the community. Our

14:30 soldiers by and large treated them well. There was no sort of colonial posturing and looking down on them, there wasn't very much fraternisation but we generally got on; we treated them well and they treated us well and we got on pretty well. When I went back in '93 a lot of the villagers turned out and

15:00 much shaking of hands and lying, said they remembered me and I lied and said I remembered them and all this sort of thing, but it left a good in depth feeling behind.

Were there any locals that you had particular contact with during that time?

Oh yeah, my personal driver was a local and you know, I got to know him very well. Did you mean dignitaries or...?

No it's exactly what you said, your personal

15:30 **driver was attached to you all the time.**

Yeah, and he drove me everywhere and so we got to know him and I got to know about his family affairs and all this sort of thing.

Well what did you learn about the New Guinea culture through him?

Not directly through him, I learnt quite a bit about the way their society's organised and the differences and all this sort of thing. It was the time they were just starting to be allowed to have

16:00 alcohol you know, the sort of paternalistic, Australian government had probably quite rightly said the natives weren't allowed to be served with alcohol and they had just changed this rule and it was interesting watching how that was applied. For example, my driver would send his wife walking about five miles into the pub in the afternoon to bring a couple of cans of beer home for him to drink at night, which was an interesting sort of slant on the position of the woman in New Guinean society and

16:30 how they all operated.

Where there any particularly exotic or wilder kind of New Guinea people, tribal people that you came across?

No not really because Wewak on the coast had been settled if that's the word. Europeans had been there for a long, long time. When you get into the highlands it was a different story altogether. In the southern highlands there were a big group of people that

17:00 the whites only found they were there in the early 50's you know, that was only ten years earlier but on the coastal settlements it wasn't like that.

You mentioned the rain, obviously that was one engineering problem in New Guinea, what insight did you get from the conditions you experienced up there and the things you saw about the lot of the World War 11 soldiers that fought in that environment?

Oh just a better appreciation.

17:30 I mean I said that right off the tip of my tongue, it rains every day, which is almost literally true. We had a period once where it went about four or five days without raining and then it was awful, you know everything was dried out, but it just rains every day and if you're living out in the bush and I made my people do a week's exercise in the bush, just exercising the infantry, just to get a feel what it's like in the jungle and if you're in there and just continually being wet

18:00 and moving through primary jungle and so on, it just gives you a much greater appreciation of what these guys did during the war when they were in this area there was no road or anything, just sort of foot tracks through there.

It would've been while you were in New Guinea that the Australian commitment to Vietnam began, is that right?

Yes.

What did you know about that at the time?

Oh hardly anything. It was in 1962.

18:30 Not hardly anything, I didn't know anything about it. I'm sure someone else has told you that we sent the Training Team up first in 1962, just a handful of people, but I didn't know anything about that.

So how did your awareness of Vietnam grow, I mean what were the stages in that?

Well, I was saying earlier that

19:00 as our commitment built up, and particularly in 1965 we sent a battalion group there, because Australia was getting committed, we're talking about a thousand people, Australia was starting to get committed, sort of one started to read about the war and I didn't really put much original thought into it I just accepted what was being put out, and for example as one happened one was invited to speak at a Rotary club so I just really

19:30 parroted off what the government was saying about it without really understanding what was going on. That was sort of phase one for me. And then when I went to Canungra as I was again saying earlier, and we were now quite heavily engaged in the war and in 1966 we built up from a battalion to a brigade, the Task Force. It became quite serious and it became the Australia army's main preoccupation and we weren't doing too well and so us

20:00 tactics staff at Canungra we were really reading about this and thinking about it and trying to understand what was happening and then I realised that I'd changed my view on the war. I thought it was pretty dodgy the reasons that we got involved, and we haven't paid anything like enough attention to the French experience, and then by the time of 1968, February 68 when there was the big Tet offensive to my mind then and now that was the

20:30 turning point of the war, and we really had lost the war by then, that was it. You know, the Americans, I can tell you more about that if you want to, but the Americans by then were when [President Richard] Nixon was elected their preoccupation was to just get out with as much dignity as they could muster and hence the Vietnamisation programs and so on, but that February 1968 was the turning point, so I then was in quite a different view of the war by then.

21:00 **Without getting too much into that wider history of the war which we can talk about a bit later perhaps, how did it impact on you personally, I mean you're an officer in the Australian Army, they were committed, that realisation that you weren't winning the war must have had a great impact on your career I suppose?**

Well, it wasn't too bad as it turned out. The army then, and I think still does, have an annual essay competition called the Oswald What annual essay

21:30 competition or its Oswald what's the key word anyway, and you put in anonymous entries and I put in, well its anonymous, the judges don't know who they are, but I wrote I put an entry in this in 1968 telling the same as what I've been telling now you know, I think that analysing the background of the war and the impact of this Tet offensive in 1968 and said you know

22:00 the war's lost, and I was given the prize that year but they wouldn't publish the essay as they wouldn't publish it as sort of subversive it so it was a strange situation. I'd written this and then all my superiors knew I had written it and I got the prize but they wouldn't publish it so.

It doesn't seem to me obviously I haven't been in that environment myself, but it doesn't seem to me like being an officer in the Australian Army is particularly good environment in which to take up these sorts of

22:30 **discussions at that time?**

Well I think it said a lot for the army at the time that I could do that and as it turned out I was right, what I said, and the army was big enough to accept that and not sort of crucify me or tell me to get lost or whatever. I though it said a huge amount for the army at the time that they could do this.

What flak did you cop at that time?

A bit but

23:00 not much. There was some muttering about withdrawing my security clearance which would have been silly and never was done and you know, "We'll send you to Vietnam." which they did too, and you can see for yourself what's going on and which I did, but it didn't alter what I'd said which was what actually happened.

You said you weren't alone in developing these ideas, I mean who were you discussing this with?

Ah, they were pretty few and far between.

23:30 The people at Canungra where we'd all started thinking about this you know, I spent a lot of time talking to them about it.

And was there a discussion group or were there particular people…?

Oh no we were just on the staff and we were sort of writing exercises and coming to teach those who were going to Vietnam. You know, I was on the tactics wing, the tactics that we used there and you know one

24:00 couldn't help but start thinking about all this but by that time the allies had a huge military superiority over the Viet Cong slash North Vietnamese and we got onto this by saying well, why aren't we winning, you know what's going on, why with this enormous superiority why hasn't the war been won ages ago? And then you start going into it and what sort of war it was.

Were your objections to the war

24:30 **mainly on a military level or did you have wider sort of moral objections as to what was going on?**

Well, I started off on the military level but I thought what we are doing is just not right, you know taking and losing hundreds of numbers in our case, five hundred people and the Americans 50,000 people and we're not going to win this, and I thought the strategy, the early strategic decisions were faulty and the strategy we were following was faulty.

25:00 But then you realised how we got into it and you wider questions then sort of emerge. But it was initially from the military tactical and strategic point of view.

That was your job at Canungra, can you just tell us a little bit more about what you were doing there and when you first arrived and then later on?

Well, I was on the tactics wing at Canungra and Canungra at the time had two main wings. There was the battle wing and

25:30 eventually or from about '66 onwards, '65 onwards, everyone who went to Vietnam, officers and soldiers, had to go through the battle wing to be given the sort of basic Vietnam war skills, the things we didn't have when we went to Malaya. You know, the sort of things we've already talked about, patrolling, security, ambush drills, weapon handling, all that sort of thing. But everyone had to go through the battle wing.

26:00 And the tactics wing on the other hand was for officers who were at various stages of their careers, you know the captains, majors, lieutenant colonels came, and we're not a… the tactics of fighting in Vietnam although that was about half of it but also conventional war tactics and there were about six or seven of

us tactics instructors who wrote the exercises and ran the course.

Who was taking that course?

Well most of... just about every Australian Army officer would have to. There were

26:30 I said there were three levels of courses. One for captains, that was the most junior basic one, then for majors, a bit higher, and then lieutenant colonels who were sort of battalion commanders and things.

Obviously, without going into extreme detail, can you give us an idea of what sort of tactics you were teaching?

Yes. Talking about the counter revolutionary warfare, you know the Vietnam... we would teach the

27:00 tactics of search and destroy methods, how you did it, of ambushing. or in a wider field of mounting big helicopter borne operations to move into an area, of patrolling programs when you knew there was a particular sized enemy in the area and how you would organise your, how you should organise your patrolling programs, that type of thing.

27:30 **Was there any engineering component to this for you at the time?**

Yeah but I wasn't, yes there was, but I wasn't only... I was the engineer instructor but I wasn't just instructing on engineering. All of us, there was an armoured guy, two or three infantry, a signaller and so on, but we all taught across the board.

What were the engineers doing in Vietnam at that time?

There were

28:00 two aspects, combat engineering and construction engineering. Your question's probably about the combat engineering. It had a very big mine warfare role, first of all in laying that large barrier minefield that's called, Australian pronunciation, Dat Do minefield. They were involved in when we were patrolling, when our infantry were patrolling, of going with the infantry so if they

28:30 struck a mine or suspected mines they could help with the detection or help with the clearing or evacuation of casualties. At that time they were strongly into tunnel warfare, you know when, I don't know if you've heard of the Cu Chi tunnels for example, but not only Cu Chi was the biggest example but all over the place including in Phuoc Tuy Province you know, the Viet Cong had tunnelled and their headquarters were underground. Usually in a village and the entrance of the tunnel would

29:00 be concealed by like a well or under the mat in a house or something like that, but these tunnels had to be cleared and it was the engineers' job to go down into the tunnel and do the first sussing out of what was down there. That was the sort of combat engineering side. On the construction side there was setting up the camps first of all that we lived in at Nui Dat for example or at Vung Tau and then later on they got involved in the

29:30 rebuilding of the province. It was a very big engineer effort in Vietnam.

Just to get us back on the timeline, the years you were at Canungra, how long were you there for and what was the...?

I was there 1966, '67.

And so the Civil Affairs Unit started up in Vietnam in 1967 is that right?

Yep.

And what did you know about that at the time?

Not much!

30:00 **What about that civil infrastructure program that you just mentioned?**

Ah yeah, well I knew we had the Civil Affairs Unit and I had a vague idea what they were doing and I thought generally it was a good idea because that was starting to demonstrate that we had a realisation that the support of the people was the critical factor in that part of the war. But I really didn't know much about it then.

Prior to that, had the

30:30 **Australian engineers been involved in civil projects?**

No, not really. Nothing significant.

And what was that realisation on the part of the higher command about 'winning the hearts and minds', how did that start?

Well, as the war went on, and people really started to think about it you know what's this all about and why aren't we winning and why can the Viet Cong you know, however many Viet Cong we kill they keep

on regenerating,

31:00 Yeah, what's going on here and how do we regress this. They realise you know [Chairman] Mao's famous talk of 'the fish swimming in the sea of the people' and that's what was going on and the Viet Cong could only keep on regenerating and getting their intelligence and getting all their supplies and all that through the support of the people and the key in that sort of warfare was to prevent that, to stop the people

31:30 supporting them. Preferably by the hearts and minds effort, you know making them want to stop supporting them, but if not by that then by physically stopping them supporting them. And that realisation had started to come into Australian thinking I think by about that time. Yeah it wasn't just a matter of getting up there and shooting as many supposed enemy as we could, you know there was a lot more to this war.

So what did they do then, when that realisation started to hit?

32:00 Well the formation of the Civil Affairs Unit was one angle. We also produced our own counter revolutionary warfare doctrine and pamphlets around about that time. And drew quite largely on our Malayan experience but also on the early feedback from the early years in Vietnam and I think it was a very good doctrine we had.

How did that particularly Australian doctrine differ from what was already

32:30 **out there?**

Well, the Brits weren't involved so it didn't affect them, but the Americans I don't think ever came to the realisation that it was other than a military problem. Although having said that, a lot of Americans did, but the American sort of strategy that was followed in Vietnam just hadn't really come to grips with that. But as I said but a lot of Americans did understand it.

33:00 **What dealings with Americans did you have before you went to Vietnam?**

Oh very little, very little. I'd never been to America; you know I'd never really worked with the Americans.

Was there some sense then when you were talking about the thoughts you were having with the military soundness of the war that it was, you know,

33:30 **in Australia's interests to be involved with America or…?**

No I didn't think it was. Initially I had no doubt. When we first got involved I was like yeah, this is just what we do, this is okay, but then I came not to think that.

Well what about the argument that it was important for the alliance with the United States?

Yeah, that was a reasonable argument, but I thought there were other factors that went against that.

34:00 Today if the same decision came up I'd say don't touch it. I think it's still possible to have our alliance with the United States without becoming involved with every military venture they get themselves into.

Well we'll come back to those more recent events later in the interview. How did you end up in Vietnam? The Civil Affairs Unit was formed, you weren't at Canungra, you weren't at Canungra at that time?

No I was

34:30 at Canungra when the unit was formed but at the end of 1967 I got posted to Canberra as a lieutenant colonel in the army headquarters in Canberra. I did that job for about a year but then the civil affairs command came up in 1969 and I got it so.

In your job down in Canberra and your travels in that time, did you see much protest against the war in the Australian community?

No more

35:00 than everyone else. That was before the big Vietnam moratorium marches and all that sort of thing but I was aware that there was a gathering disenchantment with the war. Bear in mind, '69, '68, we'd been there in strength for three years and that phrase, 'light at the end of the tunnel' was being bandied around but people were starting to say hey, you know' what's going on here? There were now over half a million Americans in Vietnam, they've got this enormous air power, total

35:30 superiority and tanks and people sniffers and the whole garbage and the enemy we're fighting doesn't have any of this and why haven't we won, you know what's going on here?

You mentioned the Tet offensive yourself a moment ago, how did that impact on Australia views of the war?

There are two things to say about that. I said and I know now I said at the time and I now know it was

36:00 right, that that was the turning point of the war because after that Tet offensive, [US] President Johnson said he wasn't going to run again for office. The US commander, General Westmoreland wanted another hundred thousand men and he said no, you're not getting any more. So the Americans clearly decided that we were getting out of this and there was an enormous impact on the American public at home. You know, when they'd been told the war was just about getting there and light at the

36:30 end of the tunnel, these images of the US Embassy in Saigon under attack and all that went on there, that really, there was no chance the Viet Cong and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] could defeat the Americans in battle but there was every chance that they could persuade them to give up and that's what they did and the mechanism was this Tet offensive. You know from that time on the Americans decided it wasn't worth it. But that's one thing. The second thing about the Tet offensive is that

37:00 it was a severe tactical defeat for the VC/NVA, you know, they lost thousands and thousands of people and the anticipated countrywide uprising simply didn't happen, but they did occupy key provincial capital cities for long periods, you know two weeks, that sort of thing. But the most important thing was that message that had been sent back to the Americans that this is not worth the candle, we were not going to win this and we're gonna get out with

37:30 dignity. Now the first part of that message, sorry the second part, about the tactical defeat was really what the Australian Army and what the Australian Government picked up at the time and it was being said oh, this has broken the back of the Viet Cong, they've lost umpteen thousand men and the whole thing was a terrible defeat for them. Well tactically it was, but strategically it was a master stroke. If I'd ever been fortunate enough to meet General Xiap

38:00 who's still alive, I would really like to have spoken to him about this, you know did you know what you were doing when you mounted this country wide offensive, did you know this was going to be the final convincing of the Americans to give it away, that you know they knew they weren't going to win? I suspect he would say yes I did know that, and that he was prepared to put up with the huge casualties they took and so on, but I don't know.

So from what you're saying, in the very short term, in 1968,

38:30 **it actually had the reverse impact on Australian policy and on the Australian Army?**

Oh yeah I was actually, before I went to Vietnam in early '69, it might have been late '68, getting one of the briefings in Canberra, you know preparing me, was we'd broken the back of it and what we were really doing now is mopping up and you know it's all downhill from here. You know, totally wrong, rubbish, it was exactly the opposite, but that was what I was being

39:00 briefed about at the time.

A lot of that is you talking in hindsight obviously; I mean what did you feel at the time when you were getting those briefings?

Well I didn't believe it because I... and I went on record by writing all this down. So this is not something 30 years later where I'm saying wouldn't it have been sort of clever, this is what I said at the time and I said well I'll take that with a grain of salt, you know, I don't think that's

39:30 what's happening at all.

Again what was the reaction of the people you gave this rebuttal to?

Well I didn't say that, I just sort of sat there and said yeah, yeah thank you, and in a sense it was sort of true in Phuoc Tuy Province in that the local VC battalion, D445 Battalion had been badly knocked around during the Tet offensive and I cant remember

40:00 which NVA, but there was an NVA unit there as well so the sting was taken out of the local Viet Cong in the Australian area. But it was only months, let alone years that they regenerated and were back on the job again. You know, going as strongly as ever. So that idea that we'd broken the back and were running down was just wrong. The only reason I mentioned it was to indicate the sort of official thinking at the time. You ask me how did the

40:30 Tet offensive impact on the Australian thinking, well that was it yeah.

Well, it was a very good answer. This process that you said had been set in motion in America and had since been talking about the turning point in their view of the war, did that have an effect on what the Civil Affairs Unit was doing when you did get posted to Vietnam?

No not really. I mean that was pretty grass roots stuff. I knew that this you know the game was up but nevertheless one I was a professional officer, you do your very best to keep things going, there was a very good program which I can talk to you about, an American program it was called cords, COORDS which was a pacification program which if anything had been going to work that was it, but it was too late. Anyway, but we threw our weight behind that. There was no sense in which I got to Vietnam and said, "Listen fellas this is all over or we're wasting our time." I always hope that I was wrong and what we were doing would be and we can talk about this later but in the long term I think it did bear fruit. In the present day attitudes of the Vietnamese in that area too, the Australian.....

Tape 6

00:49 **Just a question we had before we went to lunch, in respect to the essay you wrote concerning the Vietnam War, were you worried or**

01:00 **concerned at all that that might have a negative effect on your career or where you were?**

Yeah I had thought about it, but decided I'd do it anyway and I've never regretted it. And as I said earlier, I think the army was big enough to accept that you could have a dissenting view without you know, the roof falling on you.

Do you know if anyone else had written an essay on a similar subject, coming to the same conclusions?

01:30 No. I'm sure there were people around but the honest answer to your question is no.

Okay. Coming back to where we were just before we left for lunch, you were in Canberra at the time, what did you know about what was going on and Vietnam concerning the Civil Affairs Unit?

I had a broad idea what they were doing, you know, winning hearts and minds, but the detail I didn't know very much

02:00 about at all, and it wasn't til I got the posting, I was told I was going, that I started bringing myself up to speed.

Do you know how the opportunity came up that you were going to be posted to this particular unit?

Yes. Do you know, asking me the question?

Yeah.

Do you want me to tell you?

Yes I do!

Yeah well, the man who was posted there went there for a short time but he had to be medically evacuated and they wanted someone to step in at short notice and I did it.

02:30 **The man who was there, why did he have to be evacuated, what happened?**

You do know?

No.

Let's just say he was medically evacuated.

Because you don't want to say or was he injured or…?

I don't think it's necessary to say.

Okay.

03:00 **So at short notice you were going to Vietnam, what were your feelings when you heard the news?**

Ah, they were sort of mixed. Mixed in the sense that you know, I'd be leaving my family for a year, the same as everyone going to the war but I was very pleased to be going, quite excited about it and commanding this particular unit, I was very pleased to be doing that.

03:30 **What did you actually know of what was going on in their particular role at the time?**

Well I knew the role but as I said a few moments ago, I didn't know the detail of what they were doing. You know broadly I understood it and I thought it was a very worthwhile thing but when I got the word I then said about in finding more detail getting briefed and so on what was happening.

The information coming through of what was happening, was that, who was passing

04:00 **on that information to you?**

I got it through a couple of sources. Through the war diaries which came home, through the force in Vietnam, I think monthly reports they were, because I would read what they were doing, and I got a brief from the psych corps, the director of psychology of the day.

04:30 So when I did get that brief I very respectfully listened to it all and took it all in and finally said, "What's it got to do with you?" and he pointed out that really this whole operation was a psychological thing, it was meant to influence the thinking, it was meant to influence the thinking of people and sway them from one point of view to another and therefore it was very much a psychology affair in that sense.

In that respect, was this Australian thinking or was this American

05:00 **thinking?**

Oh it was Australian thinking; consistent with the philosophy we had of counter revolutionary warfare which was good, which we were talking about before.

So what were the basic principles in which this operation was going by?

My principles?

No, the principles of winning the hearts and minds?

Well, we can talk a lot about this. Basically it was by doing

05:30 good deeds, good things for the people. Either providing essential services like medical and dental services or providing assistance with the infrastructure or with English language or that style of thing. Probably most of our effort went into infrastructure development, but the medical and dental services, a bit of agricultural advice were all important too. But all this was directed at winning the support of the people.

06:00 **So how long from when you received news or word that you were going overseas to the point of actually travelling there?**

Oh it was about two and a half months I think, something like that.

Were there any particular preparations you had to do personally?

Ah yeah, I went to... well professionally I went and did what was called a colloquial Vietnamese course. It was a I think, three, maybe four weeks crash course in Vietnamese which was very useful. And plus the normal then

06:30 preparation, administratively getting yourself ready and so on.

Did you know anything about Vietnam culturally?

No.

Was any information...?

A good honest answer to that and true. No, I really didn't, but I started accumulating this pretty quickly.

Through the military or through...?

Through the military and through just whatever I could get my hands on. Doing the colloquial language course is a very good sort of first

07:00 introduction. You know, by starting to learn something of the language and just what you say while you're learning the language, you begin to get a feeling for the culture. I found it very useful.

In respect to the language side, who was teaching you? Vietnamese people or...?

No they weren't. It was the RAAF School of Languages and the two instructors I had in fact were Australian.

07:30 I think there was, I hesitated slightly, I think there was a Vietnamese on the staff there somewhere but he wasn't working with us.

How did you get to Vietnam?

You mean physically? Is that what you mean?

Yeah, travel.

In an aeroplane. I went up on one of the normal weekly charters, a Boeing 707 run by Qantas. They run one every... at the time there was a charter would go up once a week.

08:00 Taking an aeroplane full up there and bringing another load back again.

And when you got to Vietnam, what were your first impressions?

Apart from obvious things like it's very hot, I wasn't too impressed with Saigon and the headquarters stuff, but that's fairly normal. You know, I thought these guys are having a pretty cushy war here in Saigon.

08:30 Where they were living and the sort of life they were living, and I was very keen to get down to Nui Dat where the Task Force was, where my unit was. I was quite encouraged and very complimentary of the work my predecessor had been doing. As he showed me round the place, I really got seized with a lot of interest and challenge in what we were doing and thought it was very worthwhile.

09:00 So I guess excitement was the other, excitement and anticipation were pretty high.

To look at each of those things, Saigon, was that the Australians…?

Oh yes, but don't make too much of that, that's the normal man in the field looking at the headquarters in the capital city who are living in comfortable hotels and can go out to restaurants at night and all that sort of thing. It was distinct from the

09:30 troops out in the field. But don't make, I wouldn't make too much of that.

No. Again we're not trying to make anything of it, just trying to get your impressions of the place itself, but, I mean you've spoken a bit of their comfort, but what about the organisation that was in Saigon and how it was actually running, were you impressed by that?

Yeah, I think it was quite a lean headquarters for what they had to do and it was functioning well.

10:00 You know, as a headquarters it was doing its job well.

What was the role in Saigon of the headquarters?

It was called Headquarters AFV, Australian Force in Vietnam, and it was the national headquarters that looked after the national interests of Australians, the army, navy, air force that were there, as distinct from tactical direction, how to fight the war or what we were meant to be doing in the war. We were part of the American chain of command for that, but the Australia national

10:30 headquarters worried about getting Australian reinforcements in and out of the theatre, ensuring we had Australian items of supply like Australian uniforms, ensuring that we were paid properly and that casualties were reported and all those national things as distinct from fighting the war. We got our directions from the Americans.

When you arrived in Saigon, did someone brief you about the situation in Vietnam?

Yes, I was quite taken aback. We arrived

11:00 about mid morning I think,and after a very brief introduction I was taken, very hospitable, I was taken out to lunch in a very fine restaurant which if I hadn't been flying all night in the aeroplane I'd really have rather gone to sleep, but this was nice of people to do it. But it was a strange introduction to the war, and Saigon at the time was a really bustling, commercially busy city. There was traffic everywhere and commerce going on and

11:30 it was in a way accentuated the sort of unreality of the war.

What were the signs that a war was going on in Saigon?

At Ton San Nhut air base there are not only civil air craft moving in and out like ours but there were a lot of fighters based there. Each night there were fire fights and air strikes going on around the city. You could sit up on the roof of whatever hotel

12:00 they used to put us up in, I can't remember the name, it wasn't the Carravelle but whatever it was you could sit up in the roof garden and you could watch air strikes going on just beyond the city limits and there would be the crack of a fire and occasionally there would be a rocket or two would come into the city. You know, all this alongside this bustling, commercial, busy town, full of Americans and other servicemen.

Was there any danger being in Saigon at that time?

12:30 Oh sort of minimal, but it wasn't zero. The airbase as I said got rocketed every now and then, that was on the outskirts of the city. In the approaches to the city, you wouldn't go there at night unless you had to and every night you would see these air strikes going on or fire fights taking place, so it was a… the danger was there but except at times like Tet or when there was a mini Tet the year after, the danger the

13:00 actual danger in the city was pretty minimal I guess, but it was all around you.

What was said to you during this lunchtime conversation about Vietnam and…?

Oh I can't remember. They used it as a an introduction part of my introductory briefing, you know the staff officer on the headquarters at Saigon who looked after the Civil Affairs Unit he was the one who took me to lunch with a couple of others and they took the opportunity to brief me on how they saw what the unit was doing and the things I was to concentrate on and

13:30 that style of thing.

Can you give me an idea of what you were to concentrate on in particular?

I can't remember now what they said.

How long were you in Saigon for?

Just a few hours, in that afternoon I got on the Caribou, the Australian Caribou flight that flew us from Saigon, a 20 minute flight down to Nui Dat. So it was a pretty brief stay.

And what did you find at

14:00 **Nui Dat?**

Oh well the big Task Force base. It was only about half full because at the time the main the main headquarters and one of the infantry battalions and a number of the supporting army were up at the on the approaches to Bien Hoa because they were expecting what they were calling a mini Tet offensive, you know, twelve months after the big one

14:30 with knowing there were a lot of VC/NVA forces around in that area in Bien Hoa and the Australian Task Force minus the one battalion that stayed behind was up there helping to defend the approaches. So the base was comparatively empty to what it was when everyone was in there.

I take it once you got of the aircraft you were greeted immediately by your predecessor?

Oh yeah. He was very pleased to see me I might say, it meant he could go home.

15:00 **What did he take you through in respect to your role there and outlining the base itself?**

Yeah, we had three or four days of handover, and in that time he explained in the office what we were doing and what the programs were and how it was paid for, but more importantly he drove me round the province sort of just showing me the lie of the land and we were doing this and we were doing other things.

Did

15:30 **he also go through the dangers of being there?**

Oh yeah, and what you could do and what you couldn't do.

Such as?

Well at that time you we didn't, most people unless you were actually patrolling in the field came back inside the base at night and unless there was an absolute emergency you didn't drive anywhere at night. There were the security procedures if the base was attacked, which it was every now and again.

16:00 What, where you went and what you had to do. My unit just happened to have the alternate command post for the Task Force so if our main command post was put out of action then we had the radios and everything where we were to take over for it just by the way. And he introduced me to the Americans we had to work with in the province and to the key Vietnamese figures. He took me down to Vung Tau where we had a bit of an

16:30 operation running, not much. He also took me up to Bien Hoa. We flew up there by helicopter to where the Task Force commander was and the rest of the Task Force by just generally what you would expect by way of orientation.

So who were… looking at each of those areas, the key people in the Americans that you were introduced to?

There was a province senior advisor who was

17:00 the American advisor to the Vietnamese province chief. He was the senior American in the province and he was a civilian and he had a uniformed deputy at the rank of lieutenant colonel who commanded all the American advisory effort in the province. There was quite a bit of this, every one of the five districts had an American advisor to the district chief, we can talk about that later. And in addition there was quite a big training camp run by the Americans

17:30 in Phuoc Tuy Province and this uniformed deputy senior advisor, the lieutenant colonel commanded all this lot.

So the lieutenant colonel commanded your particular area and not the others or…?

No, he just commanded the American advisory effort in the province. There was.. in each district headquarters there was an American and there was this is was called the Van Kiap training centre and

18:00 there were quite a lot of American instructors in there. Or rather American advisors now I come to think of it. There was an agricultural advisor and a psychological warfare advisor and various other odds and ends Americans there.

You mentioned the Americans had what a civilian, involved in what they were doing; did the Australians have any civilians involved in what you were doing?

Yes and no.

18:30 I can't think of any, no I don't think there were any Australian civilians in the province but there were two or three Australian Army officers who were in a civilian role, were filling these advisory positions as

part of the American advisory effort. So they were actually uniformed officers but they were wearing civilian clothes and working as part of the American team.

As far as the Vietnamese, who did you meet there, anyone interesting?

The

19:00 province chief was a lieutenant colonel being in the Vietnam Army, being the republic of Vietnam. Each district, the five there were five district, each district had a district chief. Most of them were majors; I mean one of them was a captain. I met the heads of the Vietnamese government departments like the province engineer, the province medical chief and one or two others like that

19:30 on the Vietnamese side.

Okay, and you also mentioned some work was being done at Vung Tau?

Yeah well the I don't know if you know what was at Vung Tau but that was our point of entry and it was also where our logistics support base was. It was where, when the [HMAS] Melbourne went up there carrying troops too and from Vietnam, no, that was the [HMAS] Sydney. When the Sydney went up there that was where it docked and unloaded people.

20:00 The RAAF helicopters were based there, our main hospital was there and this logistic support group. That was quite a big Australian presence in Vung TAu which was primarily an R&R [rest and recreation] centre, an in country R&R centre. What we suspect for the Viet Cong as well as for our own people but you know and just to lessen the impact of this fairly hefty Australian presence there they were doing minor sort of civvies action work there in the town. But it was very much a

20:30 very low priority for me. They were running it well and you know it didn't need much oversight.

So I'm not certain, what was the Civil Affairs Unit doing there in Vung Tau?

Well the unit wasn't there but there were officers from the Australian units that were there like the hospital and the helicopter flight and so on. They were doing good works like they were helping out at an orphanage or taking kids out for an outing or that style of thing,

21:00 pretty low key stuff, but it was meant to get them a bit closer to the civil population and to lessen any adverse impact from all these Australians running round there.

And was there anything else that your predecessor took you through?

Oh no that was about it, that was enough.

Who were some of the men working under him in this particular unit?

Do you mean names?

Names and what they were doing?

21:30 The second in command was a Major Alec Weaver, who was actually Austrian, who was a real character, and he was there for about the first three months of my tour. There were various, there was an education officer, there was an agricultural advisor, there was a doctor, there were a couple of engineer officers and three linguists.

22:00 And then there was... the unit itself was quite small, I think just under fifty strong with about these seven or eight officers.

And just so I get clear, what was your sort of proviso, was it to develop the work, to continue the work that was going on, what was your thing?

My first brief was just to continue what was going on, there were a lot of programs half way through or under development or whatever and my

22:30 first brief and what I indeed did til I got a grip on it myself, was to just continue what was being done which was not all that much compared to what we were later doing.

So there was a bit of work going on at Vung Tau, what were the...?

Oh well it's not... let's just set that aside because that was self sort of generating, low key and I just kept a sort of a fatherly eye on it. But in the in the Phuoc Tuy Province itself there was infrastructure development, there were the medical

23:00 programs, a bit of agricultural advice, those sorts of things. And my first inclination was just whatever my predecessor had had running and not to say everything stops, the new man's here, but just to keep it running until I got a grip of where I was going to head the thing.

Okay just before we actually discuss taking over and putting it in a direction, in respect to Nui Dat, where was the Civil Affairs Unit? Could you just describe the layout of Nui Dat and where you were in respect to the base?

23:30 No. Not that anything will be useful for you. Nui Dat was a very big area, it was probably about, just think of it as a circle roughly and it was about three kilometres across, quite a big area. Nui Dat just means 'red hill' and there was one prominent red hill in the middle of it and there was an airstrip that would take these light aircraft, or aircraft like the Caribou, short take off and landing,

24:00 there was a very big helicopter pad where when we had big heli-borne operations you could put perhaps a dozen helicopters on the ground at once. And then it was divided up into numbers of unit areas. Each infantry battalion had a big chunk of an area with a bit of the perimeter, the armoured people had another chunk and each unit in the Task Force had its own area with a bit of the perimeter to look after. The Civil Affairs Unit being a smaller unit where you didn't have

24:30 enough men to have any sizable bit or the perimeter unlike the battalions that had seven or eight hundred people, we were not on the perimeter but we still had our own area just next to the hospital which was quite convenient. Next to the hospital and near the central headquarters.

When we talk about an area, are we talking about a building you worked from or tents or…?

At the time, most

25:00 this is in '69 remember we'd been there for three years by then and the place was quite highly developed. Almost every unit had some sort of hut for its headquarters. Most people including us were still sleeping in tents. The headquarters was in a sort of hutted accommodation and things like the messes were by this time were usually under some sort of hut, corrugated iron roof and wooden frames and so on.

25:30 And everyone but everyone was still sleeping in tents. Oh I understand when the Task Force first moved in there it was described to me as very much like Gallipoli. When I got there I said is it more like Holsworthy or Puckapunyal than Gallipoli, but someone reminded me when they first moved in it was pretty rough, but after three years it was all quite well developed. Sealed roads.

You spoke a little bit about Saigon and your

26:00 **first impressions there, what were your impressions of the way Nui Dat was run and its command there?**

Oh it was pretty good. It's hard, I don't think there's any other way it could have been done. We were obviously there to stay, we were there from '66 to '72, six years, so with all those people you had to have some degree of permanency. You had to have an assured water supply.

26:30 There was no point in the dry season going around with roads that were throwing dust everywhere. People had to have somewhere to wash, you had to have messes so that when the battalions or any unit was in base and not out on operations they could come back and rest up and get clean. So I think it was pretty well laid out. As I said, we had the airstrip, we had the big helicopter pad, inside the base there was a quarry where we got

27:00 road metal for sealing and concrete and so on and by the time I'd arrived it was well laid out, it was functioning well and smoothly. There had been a quite strong VC threat when it was first set up you know that lead up to the Battle of Long Tan, a famous battle. That was when the Viet Cong and NVA were making it quite a… were about to attack the base in strength but that never occurred again.

27:30 The base was attacked periodically usually with rockets or mortars. You know, they'd get out somewhere and just fire them in, but there was never a concerted ground attack again but if there had been we were pretty well prepared for it. There was wire all around the perimeter; the perimeter was manned every night, through the night, so it was pretty well set up. My only criticism and we'll come to this later was that we own the province during the day but at night we all withdrew into the

28:00 wire and shut the gate so the Viet Cong had a fairly free run.

Well I guess I was also asking about leadership, what your impressions were of the leadership?

Oh pretty good. It was more than pretty good, it was very good. The Task Force commander when I arrived was Brigadier, then Brigadier Pearson who was an outstanding leader and he was succeeded by Brigadier Weir who was a an equally but different leader. Equally outstanding but

28:30 different sort of leader. But I thought it was well commanded, no problems there.

Who did you report to in the position that you had?

It got a little bit diffused this. I was actually a, what was called a comaffy[?] of Headquarters, AFV unit. I wasn't part of the Task Force order of battle, but because all of our work was down there I was living in the Task Force area

29:00 and I became part of Brigadier Pearson's what we called orders group. And for all intensive purposes while my former line of responsibility was back to Saigon to the general in Saigon for tactically and what I did day to day I was I reported to the Task Force commander in Nui Dat. That sounds a bit involved, but that's how it was.

So just so I understand correctly I mean the work you were doing

29:30 **amongst the community that was in respect to reporting back to Saigon, but your work in respect to fighting an enemy was to report obviously to the officials at Nui Dat, is that right?**

Not quite. I was... for all the real work at the

30:00 Civil Affairs Unit I was responsible back to the general in Saigon. I had to report for monies expended and I think I sent in a weekly if not a monthly report on how we were going and all that. So I coordinated my operations with what the rest of the Task Force was doing and the squadron, I had to know what they were all doing and I didn't, and I had, I didn't want my unit to get in the road of some other operation and if we were targeting a particular district at the time whether it was an operation going on that was going to need

30:30 civil affairs support then I had to know what the Task Force was doing, so my day to day work was really more looking at the Task Force than worrying about the general in Saigon, although he was the one I ultimately reported to. He provided the money and things like that.

What was the feeling amongst the other men of the Task Force or the soldiers and officers in respect to the role that the Civil Affairs Unit was doing?

When I arrived there it was still in the

31:00 aftermath of Tet 1968, and as I said they were expecting another mini Tet in 1969. So the rest of the Task Force was properly focused on big combat operations and they were as I said most of them were up at Bien Hoa guarding the operations to Bien Hoa. So the efforts of the Civil Affairs Unit back home in Phuoc Tuy Province of being the link between the Task Force and the province population and doing good for

31:30 the population were regarded as a bit on the margins of what was happening and you know, people said how interesting, but felt that it was a bit irrelevant to what they were doing. But then this all changed in May 1969 when the first priority of the Task Force became pacification in the province. They all came home from Bien Hoa so we had the whole of the Task Force back in Nui Dat and we were then focusing our efforts on Phuoc Tuy Province

32:00 because while the Task Force had been away the cat was playing. You know, the VC as soon as we took the pressure off then they just there was an upsurge in VC activity getting quite strong. So the Task Force was brought back to put the lid on this again. Now the pacification effort, I can talk more about it in detail but it broadly had two bits. It was providing security to the people first thing, keeping them all, or stopping the Viet Cong coming in and committing

32:30 terrorist acts of coercion, and secondly it was providing civil type help with the view of getting local government up and running again and generally generating support for the government. And in this new context, the work of the Civil Affairs Unit became quite central to the process that was going on, you know it was our job to do just that, which was now the Task Force main priority and

33:00 because of that the Task Force commander then gave every unit in the Task Force, the infantry battalions and the armoured squadron and everybody, had to take part in the civil action program. They had to provide civic action teams and they were each given a bit of the province, a few villages, and they had to take part in my program running right around the province. So from being on the margins we became central to that side of the whole pacification effort.

33:30 So from being no-one was too interested in what was happening, they suddenly everyone became interested.

As far as command it sounds they became particularly interested in what you were trying to achieve but as far as the regular soldier was concerned what were his views of what you were doing in respect to helping the Vietnamese?

Well it varied, different people had different views. But mostly it was acknowledged that what we were doing was important, it was

34:00 certainly good in the sense of you know a nice thing to do, helping dispossessed and very unfortunate people in these sort of circumstances, there was that sort of altruistic side of it. But the more thoughtful realised this was an essential, if we were going to get anything out of the war this was an essential part of the effort, in fact it was central to this pacification effort. And most of them, most of them

34:30 acknowledged that. I say most of them you know, I couldn't claim that everyone did. I'm sure there were still people who still thought this was all a bit 'Mickey Mouse' [amateurish] and the main effort was going out on operations to shoot the Viet Cong but if you thought even shallowly about revolutionary warfare and how the Viet Cong could not only remain in existence but recruit and

35:00 strengthen themselves and recuperate and still carry out operations in the face of everything against them, it was realised that they did this because they had the people backing them and if we were to get anywhere we'd have to break that nexus and the civil action wasn't the only part of it obviously but it was quite an important part.

Given your views on Vietnam at the time, and the likelihood that we were going to lose this

35:30 **war, how important did you think this work was that you were doing?**

I said earlier I hoped I was wrong in that judgement, well I didn't think that I was and I wasn't, but I hoped that I was wrong and there were certain spin off effects came as well. I never had any evidence of direct tactical benefit, like people coming forward and giving us vital intelligence because of the civil action work. But it certainly generated a

36:00 background positive feeling towards Australia. In fact a Vietnamese, Catholic priest who I was talking to late one night said that we Australians, our heart was in the right place and we weren't bad people you know, we were good people but you're backing the wrong side. And it was a strange thing for a Catholic priest to say but he did. Also there is an ongoing good feeling towards Australia that this is,

36:30 I haven't been back, I'm going back in a couple of months time, but people who have been back there in the last few years, the last year or two, have told me there is still a strong residual feeling of respect for Australians which is, if we achieved nothing else that that's pretty good. But it also immediately had the affect of lessening the adverse impacts of us on the province. In carrying out operations we inevitably did some bad things

37:00 too, we had armoured vehicles rushing through little villages and there were occasional people killed if they were in an out of bounds area like in the forest chopping wood or something, and they there would be an air strike nearby and they would get caught in it and just lessening this abrasive effect of us being there, I think that was a very useful effect as well.

When you arrived, how were you

37:30 **received or... by... obviously you were replacing a fella who was moving back to Australia, how were you received by those who were already there?**

By my unit? Oh well they didn't know me, here comes a new boss, we wonder what he's like, we're all old hands, yeah we'll have to break him in. For example I was a bit aghast at seeing my soldiers buying and eating

38:00 the local food, you know the medical briefing in Australia would be you'll die at once if you eat that, you're gonna get all sorts of stomach upsets and you mustn't ever even think about that. And I realised before I'd even been there very long that was silly, and the local food was delicious and I ate lots of it during my twelve months, but my unit I'm sure thought they had to break me in and get silly ideas like that out of my head which they did. So it was respectful but they had the unmistakable

38:30 air of you know, they're nine months veterans and here's this new guy so I had to establish my presence with them

Are these sort of the same sort of issues you had with 21 Construction Unit?

Oh no it was a different set up, different situation to that.

Tape 7

00:40 I can check it accurately if you want to know.

Perhaps we can check up later or someone can look at your records and check it out. You arrived in late February, March '69?

Yeah, it was either late February or May, or it might have been the first of March or something around about like that.

You were just talking to Michael [interviewer] about how you were received, how did the Civil Affairs Unit work? It obviously didn't rotate en masse like a battalion?

01:00 No, it was individual replacement.

And so you were working with men who had generally been there for nine months?

Nine months. This had a fine, good effect though because it meant they all went home after I'd been there about three months and then when the next lot generally arrived, I was the guy who'd been there and knew all about it so.

Let's just talk about how the Civil Affairs Unit was organised when you arrived.

01:30 **We might know a little bit about it but for people in the future who are watching this, it had different units and they dealt with different things?**

Yeah, it had four or five sections. There was an engineer section who was responsible for infrastructure work obviously, there was a medical section, the doctor and two or three medical assistants. There was

an education section, there was an ag [agriculture] section, very small and I think that was it.

02:00 And on the headquarters itself there was a normal, there was a commanding officer, second in command, an adjutant, a quartermaster and these three linguists, real linguists not... I just did a real quick snap course and I wasn't a linguist but these three guys were very good.

Was there also a liaison section?

Well they were called, the linguists were called the liaison section.

And were they separate to the advisors that were working with the Americans that were working before?

02:30 Yes.

They were also native speaking?

Oh I don't think many of the American advisors were Vietnamese speaking. There may have been one or two but generally not.

And the Australians were?

They weren't, I need to be careful of what I say, they weren't real stars, the American advisors. They were people I think they found a bit hard to put anywhere else and they... professionally we didn't have a very high opinion of them.

I'd like to go into a lot more detail

03:00 **on each of those different units, so maybe we'll start with the engineering unit, could you tell us what they were involved in, in a bit more detail?**

Yes. I said in May of that year that the Task Force changed priority and we became quite central to the effort and my engineer section was responsible for developing the infrastructure and their job was to do these sorts of things. Firstly it was to

03:30 investigate ... if the Vietnamese approached and they wanted us to do something, to investigate the reality of it. For example if they want us to put up a school, or a marketplace I wanted to know all about it, did someone own the land and was the design they were proposing consistent with the way Vietnamese did it, who was going to benefit from it, who was going to contribute money to it. So the initial

04:00 investigation they had to do, if there was a design, an engineering design needed, as there almost always was, even for quite simple buildings like a marketplace someone still had to draw it all up and the size of the timbers and so on, and then they, in small cases seeing as there are only a handful of them, seven or eight of them, they would do the work themselves if it was pretty simple, or they would arrange for someone else to do the work, either a local Vietnamese contractor or when we got the whole Task Force involved, teams from the various units.

04:30 So they investigated, planned, obtained the materials, funded and executed it one way or another. They sort of.... so what am I talking about? Things like medical dispensaries, or we called them medical health. Each little village or hamlet would have a little building where the local medical nurse or whatever operated from. We did a lot of schoolroom, classroom building,

05:00 we did a lot of marketplaces where you know, once a week they all came in and sold their produce. We did a fair bit of work in the central hospital; we did some major work building a new high school in one district, Long Bien High School. That was done by army engineers. And towards the end of my year we rebuilt most of the trunk roads around the province.

05:30 These were old French colonial roads, they were quite narrow, they'd been sort of sprayed with tar at some stage but the pavement was breaking up, it was very hard to, you bounced along them and it was hard to pass and all that. We widened them, rebuilt them, sealed them, rebuilt the bridges and this enabled commerce to start flowing around the province again and was quite a big part of getting the place back on its feet. It also, and we were criticised, this

06:00 wasn't altruistic but it also enabled the Task Force to deploy much more quickly if we wanted to go somewhere.

It was obviously important that you weren't building things randomly; the need for these had to originate within the community itself?

Yeah, I developed a policy on this, you know, out of my head. We never originated, in the early days of Civil Affairs Unit they looked around and said what you guys need in here is

06:30 such and such and we're going to give it to you, and the Vietnamese would say alright, you know, go ahead if you want to do that. But it became it was never theirs, it was always the Australian windmill or something which was just allowed to sort of fall over. And I said I would never originate projects, that they would have to first of all let them know we were available to help and then they would have to come forward and say well, what we want is another room on the high school or we want a water supply

or a marketplace or whatever.

07:00 So they had to originate it first of all. And then I insisted that they contributed so it wasn't entirely an Australian thing. They either had to put in money, and I knew how much money they had 'cause the government was giving each hamlet or village about $4,000 to do this sort of work. Doesn't sound much, but it went a long way there, and I would make, they would have to contribute some of their money and they would also have to contribute some physical effort, labour, to do whatever we were

07:30 asking. That was a big ask because all the men of military age were off either with the Viet Cong or with the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]. So that was often children or teenagers or women, but nevertheless there was someone who had to do it so that it wasn't the Australian project it was theirs, and this gave them a great sense of ownership and yeah, it had all sorts of good effects. They took care with it; they looked after it after we'd moved on and so on.

How then, if they originated the projects did they identify

08:00 **that they needed something and how was that passed onto you?**

This was again my organisation, but I mentioned I had three linguists, very good, very great, young officers and I divided the province up between the three of them, so I think there were 27 villages in the province and each of them had about a third of these and their job was to be my eyes and ears in these villages and I told them I didn't want to see them hanging around during the day, they were to be out

08:30 in the villages and they could come back and tell me at night what they'd found. And it was through these guys who came to know the villagers very well and they were the channel by which the village sort of fed its... what it wanted back to me. And I would then have to check it on the Vietnamese system you know, if someone said we want a new school here I'd go back to the Vietnamese education people and say we've had this request, is this genuine, do you really want a school there, can you find teachers for it and if all these things

09:00 were clear for it we would go ahead. And my linguist would then be the link between us and the village. This, if I may I will just tell you a little anecdote about this, I said I required them to put some money in to every project so they had a sense of ownership but this was misinterpreted. There was one place in particular we were putting in a water supply and they were getting very... sucking their teeth about this, and they finally came out and said look we think this is a bit

09:30 rich, we've had to bribe the district chief so much and now here you are asking on top of that so much, thinking it was me for putting my hand out for it. I said no, no, no that's not what we're doing, but their perception was this tradition of bribing officials had sort of extended to us so we had to explain no, that's not what we do.

It does bring up the issue though of the political system or the system that was governing the villages at that time, I mean is that what your liaison

10:00 **officers worked with or did they go under it to a grass roots sort of community?**

In a sense we were going under the centralised system of administration which they had, which sort of flowed down from the province headquarters down through the districts and down through the villages. But it was at the stage of the war where they were incapable of doing that themselves and it was just sort of the window of opportunity that we could operate like we did. A few years later if it had gone all smoothly instead of

10:30 the way it did go, we wouldn't have done that. We would have had to work through the Vietnamese system at the top. But the whole system of government it sort of collapsed and one of the objectives of the pacification campaign was to get it up and running again. So we never bypassed it, but because I had so many resources I was getting the feedback of what was needed and I would plug it in the top level of the Vietnamese system and if they were together we'd go ahead.

11:00 And whenever we handed over a finished project it was always in the name of the Government of Vietnam. We never said you know, this is a gift from the Australians, although they knew very well who'd actually done it but we always did it in the governments' name.

This government was collapsing at the time?

Oh, it had collapsed. I mean there was still a central government in Saigon. You remember the whole series and the coup after coup after coup but the

11:30 administration out in the provinces had really just collapsed. You know, this the war had been going on ten years, the second phase of the war, the American war, when we became involved had been going on eight, nine, ten years, and you know, given all that had happened the grass roots administration had just collapsed and it was trying to get that re-established again was one of the big objectives.

How did

12:00 **you know that this infrastructure wasn't benefiting your enemy? Was that a concern for you at the time?**

It wasn't a concern but it's a good question, something that we thought quite a bit about. Several points to make on this. The first was whether we should be working with the pro-government villages or the VC villages. The pro-government village, if we worked with them the argument was the

12:30 rest of them will see the big advantage of working with the government you know, you get all these good things and it will encourage the others to come across. Working with the VC villagers was like preaching to the heathen and not to the converted and I found it much more productive to work with the VC villagers, so I tended to put my primary effort into the areas that were strongly Viet Cong. You know, if you want to change people's point of view then you work directly with them.

13:00 Did it benefit the VC? In the sense that they believed they were going to win as they did and the improvements in the infrastructure were in their interests, yes. I think that was one of the reasons why they never interfered, or hardly ever interfered with what we were doing. And then probably the third point to make is that they saw that we were helping the people

13:30 by doing something they really needed, you know new dispensary or whatever it was, and it would be counter productive for them if they came in and messed it up or blew it up. You know, the Australians have come and helped you build this great new thing and they came in and blew it down again, it would be very counter productive for them, so they never did. I said to Neil there was once.

They did frustrate you in other ways though?

No, and we've had feedback,

14:00 I haven't myself but people who have been there in the last year or two have been discussing these things and the points I've just made, the Vietnamese have made to them. You know, there was no... the Australians were helping the people, there was no mileage for us in disrupting their efforts you know and we were going to inherit it anyway. That sort of argument.

I can imagine that wasn't necessarily a popular argument within the Australian and American administration, that you would go into the VC villages?

14:30 Yes it was, yeah it was. It was quite...

It was never you never faced any opposition from within?

It was never put to me anyway. That was the areas in my view of the greatest need and that was where we worked. Pretty tricky stuff that.

I can imagine there was a fair bit of politics involved?

You mean Australian politics or Vietnamese politics?

You were sort of straddling the two in your position?

15:00 Yes.

Is that fair enough to assume? And did you get a handle on that quickly? How long did it take you to get used to that?

About nine months, six to nine months. And one of the sad things was, having got a handle on it, then I was almost due to go home. But that was the way one of the weaknesses of our twelve month things. In a job like this you just got a grip on it and it was time to go. I'll tell you a

15:30 an anecdote or two about this working. One of the strongest VC villages in the province was a place called Phuoc Hoa Long where most of D445 Battalion came from, you know this was the enemy. And it had been a no-go area, we just never went in there, you'd get shot if you went in there, and I thought to hell with this, so we did go in there and we found I want something that they really needed doing

16:00 and the roads through the village were awful, you know, they hadn't had any attention for years so I said, we'll do up the roads for you and the Australian Army engineers being good engineers said right, we'll send in 23 trucks and three graders and we'll knock this over in one day and I said no, I don't want that. The objective is not to build the roads; it's to get close to these people. So we only put a small team in, one small team and a grader and one truck and the job went on for weeks and these

16:30 guys got very close to these people, and then we'd had a mine incident one night where a patrol had trodden on a mine near this village and we were very concerned when the men went back in again that there might be other mines in the village. But the day they went, the morning after they went back in again, the village people came out and walked in front of them down the street to make the point that there are no mines, we'll look after you. But the grader operator was a blonde-haired

17:00 young guy from Sydney who had several offers of marriage from the local girls and it really worked. We really got close to this lot. From then on I could go into Phuoc Hoa Long without any trouble.

Yourself, how much of the area did you physically see during your time there?

All of it.

And how did you do that?

Well I spent a lot of time, I'd spend all day

17:30 going round, most of the day going round the villages and seeing what was going on, talking to the village chiefs through my interpreters, the linguists. Some of the areas, particularly early in the tour when we hadn't opened it up you had to fly, but that was alright. I got to know all the district chiefs and all the village chiefs pretty well.

Just on that issue of straddling the two, the politics of

18:00 **the army infrastructure and the village infrastructure, did you have any problems on the Australian side, if they didn't oppose what you were doing, did you have to struggle for anything on that point?**

No.

What about on the other side, I mean did you have problems with the village chiefs and what sort of problems did you have?

Generally no, and it took a while for them to think I was genuine and there wasn't some horrible, ulterior

18:30 purpose in what we were doing, but by and large they came around and became very friendly. I used to; well we'll talk about it later.

No, sorry, what were you saying?

Well I used to, I introduced on the medical side, night medical things that I mentioned earlier. I was sort of disturbed that apart from our fighting patrols

19:00 that everyone in the Task Force came back inside the wire at night and we shut the gate and that was it. So I thought what we ought to be doing is getting out in the villages at night, and this was pretty dodgy business. But anyway, we set up this, we call them ICAPs [Integrated Civil Aid Programs] and we would go out with our medical team and some others and some infantry protection and turn up at a village about five in the afternoon, set up, we'd show a film, a movie, an entertainment

19:30 movie and the doctor and the dentist would set up and would hold their surgeries and things and we would stay in the village for the night and then go home again the next morning. And these proved to be a very effective way of getting close to the people, and after we'd finished showing the movies or the doctor had wound up all he was going to do, we would usually sit and talk with the village elders, the village chiefs and just sort of chew the fat about the war and what they were doing and what we were doing and so on, and

20:00 you'd produce a bottle of whiskey and we'd knock this off and it was a very good way to get to know them quite well.

Was there an official intelligence gathering component to your work?

In those ICAPS we tried, and I think with a total lack of success, to use them as an intelligence, or to see, to give people the opportunity to give people some intelligence but it really didn't work.

20:30 **What about your own linguists, they must have been privy to all different sorts of?**

Ah yeah we got a bit of a feedback. I don't think we ever really got any hard sort of evidence in the sense that there's going to be a Viet Cong patrol at this cross roads at three o'clock in the morning or any of that sort of thing. We got a very good feel on what people were thinking and you know the general drift of what was happening in the province.

Were there agents or intelligence officers working within those villages?

21:00 Ah, quite separate. There were none that I know living in the villages because it was pretty dodgy. If they thought someone was an intelligence operative living in the village he'd get his throat cut fairly soon. But there was a separate intelligence organisation in the province which was working quite separately to me. I had one night on one of these things, my Land rover was booby trapped. Someone put a grenade

21:30 and tied it to the front wheel so that when the wheel started to turn the pin would have been pulled out and the whole thing would have blown up but a young boy came and saw this being put in and came and told us so we were able to delouse it which I thought was very gratifying.

Did you feel safe?

Oh pretty safe. Well, I mean that was an example of not being too safe but yeah, pretty safe.

22:00 **How much did you trust the people you were working with?**

Well as I said, whenever we did these night operations we always took, depending on where it was, an infantry section and whatever with us to give us protection so I wasn't being entirely silly, but pretty safe and none of them ever let us down.

Did that incident with the Land rover shake you up a bit? How did that affect you?

Oh yes, yeah.

22:30 Well our adjutant came and got me while the thing was, the doctor and the film and everything was still showing and they said, “Come and have a look at this.” so we went and looked at it and they said, ‘This young boy over here pointed this out to us.” so that was told you to be a bit nervous and a bit careful.

What did you do with the boy, you must’ve…?

Oh nothing and one of the media guys said, “Oh we must take his picture and put it in all of the papers.” and I said, “Well if you really want to get this kid’s throat cut then that’s what we’ll do, but we’re not going to give him any publicity

23:00 at all.”

I want to come back to some of the projects, specific projects that you worked on in detail, I just want to go back to the structure you were talking about before, apart from the engineering unit there was a medical unit, they were involved in these ICAPS you mentioned?

Oh, well they were an invention of mine which none of the other commanders did. I understand when I left, they stopped as well. But the doctors, the main one, eventually when we got set up so that every village in the province got a

23:30 visit from a doctor once a week and they got this quite highly organised in that they were... when it started off it was pretty rough and ready but eventually they were keeping records, you know medical cards and all this sort of thing and we got the dentist involved as well. They only did extractions and it was pretty rough, but you know if you had an aching tooth you were pretty happy to have it pulled out. And I only had one doctor in the Civil Affairs Unit, but we got other doctors

24:00 from around the Task Force to take part in the program. So, as I said every village once a week got a call from a doctor. And where there was almost no organised medical service on the Vietnamese side because of the war you know, there was just all that sort of thing had collapsed, this was a, in my view a great way to get close to people. It had its critics, they said you were raising expectations that we can’t fulfil and when we

24:30 leave they will fall over, which was probably true. But nevertheless I countered that. If you have a sick child or an aching tooth that sort of thing doesn’t concern you and the humanitarian act of curing you now, will go a long way to influencing the way you think.

Where did that criticism that you just mentioned come from?

One of the battalion commanders was... didn’t like doing this at all

25:00 for the reasons I’ve just given.

What were the major health problems affecting the local people at that time?

Oh, they were typical problems in a peasant, farming community that doesn’t have any medical service. You know, there’d be cuts that had gone septic as well as sort of serious diseases. There was the odd

25:30 appendicitis, skin diseases, all that tropical sort of stuff where there was no medical treatment available.

That was the medical side, moving on to the education unit, what were they involved in?

Principally giving English language lessons. I think originally it was envisaged that we would help and

26:00 give advice to the Vietnamese own school system. But their school system was functioning reasonably well, you know they had teachers and when we provided them with classrooms and sometimes with the wherewithal like paper and books and things it ran fairly well, so our education section became mainly involved in giving English lessons.

And what was the purpose of that?

Oh again, part of this process of

26:30 getting closer to the population and eventually influencing the way they thought about ...certainly the way they thought about us and hopefully the way they thought about their own government.

By helping them communicate or understand your culture?

Yeah, oh well, even then it was regarded as being a very good thing to have English. Twenty years earlier it had been French but I think many of them could see or certainly with the Americans around and us around that to have a command of English would put you a

27:00 step or two ahead. And I think there was probably a broader perception that English was becoming the global language.

So while on some level it might have been seen as paternal or imperialist thing, it was actually, they were realistic enough to understand?

Oh yeah and it was what they wanted. You know we weren't saying, "Hey you're going to learn English." they were coming up and saying, "Please can we join the class?"

And so there was a certain amount of the needs originating from the community as far as you were concerned?

27:30 Yes. But the two biggest efforts were the engineering and the medical; you know the education was there.

So the other unit then was the agriculture?

Yeah.

And that was smaller?

Yeah it was smaller, it was only one corporal when I was there during my year but that was done with the good intention of advising the Vietnamese on

28:00 ways to get better crops and better husbandry of their farm animals and things, but it really wasn't very productive. They were pretty good at it anyway and we could tell them about new strains of rice, all that sort of thing, but for an Australian ag guy to go to a wet, tropical country like Vietnam and try and advise the locals who'd been doing this for 500 years, better ways to do it was really a bit stretched. So it was quite a modest effort.

28:30 **Were there any other that we haven't talked about, they were those main four areas? Going back to the major projects then that were under way when you arrived, what were they? Were there any that stand out in your mind?**

There was still a project of providing one or two of going and providing windmills to villages to give them a different sort of water supply. This was initially

29:00 seen as a pretty brilliant thing to do you know, the windmill doesn't need any electric power and what it did was pump the water out of the existing village well and reticulate it with taps throughout the hamlet. But unfortunately, it was an erroneous assumption that windmills don't require any maintenance, in fact they need a lot of maintenance, and it was not something the Vietnamese thought about, we just said, "Hey we'll give you a windmill

29:30 and this will give you running water throughout the hamlet." and we still had one or two to put in when I was, by the time I got there and I think we did one of them but ruled it off at that and unfortunately the windmills deteriorated pretty quickly and that really wasn't a success. There were one or two school projects were going, but nothing major.

What methods were usually used to get

30:00 **water around the hamlet?**

Just from a bucket out pulling it out of the well. I mean, you can see they thought that hey, we've got to have this great Australian thing, the windmill, well you won't have to put buckets down the well you just have to turn on the tap. You know, that makes it alright if you want to do that go ahead and do it, but windmills do need a lot of maintenance and unless they get the maintenance before long they're not working.

30:30 **You mentioned in May 1969 things changed, the ATF came back into the province and there was a pacification effort. I just want to talk a bit more about where that term came from and who declared that that was the case?**

It's a fairly old term and it sounds nice, pacification, you know making peaceful, but in a lot of

31:00 The past the word had had a pretty harsh connotation in that the pacification programs say in Algeria or somewhere like that, and probably in Vietnam when the French, they just involved shooting a lot of dissidents you know, you pacify the place by killing everyone who got in the road; but this program was designed at that stage in the war where the military situation had been restored fairly well

31:30 to a reasonable level of security and the rural, government structure was non existent and had to be rebuilt if we were ever going to get a self sustaining, stable Vietnam. The time was right for a pacification program and the program had a… it was initiated extensively by the Vietnamese but actually by the Americans and I thought it was a very good program

32:00 and if anything had a chance to work it was that. There are about eight points to it. The first one was security, that was the job of our infantry battalions and the armoured units to keep the VC units away from the population so that the village chief wouldn't get his throat cut in the night. But then there were six or seven measures to develop local government. There was giving them these

32:30 infrastructure projects to work on, there was eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure who were the Viet Cong political cadres living amongst the population. There was encouraging the Viet Cong to surrender;

there was economic development, probably one, two or three others. But I thought it was a very good program and if anything at that stage of the war was going to work that would be it and we had a

33:00 quite central part in this.

Was it a program that was still aimed at winning the war or do you think it was part of a winding down of the conflict?

Both. It was part of the winding down, you remember we, or I said earlier that after Nixon was elected in 1968 and following on the Tet earlier that year that the American objective was to get out of Vietnam with dignity and one of the

33:30 necessary measures was to leave behind some sort of stable form of government and this was direct to establishing that stable form of government in the provinces, in the sticks.

Is it linked to the term of Vietnamisation in the…?

Yeah that was another part of it, whereas in the whirlwind years of ’66 and ’67 the American approach was the push the Vietnamese out of the way you know,

34:00 they were useless, I’ll do it, and they would probably do it more efficiently, well it was to stop doing that and now to concentrate on getting Vietnamese skilled and back into positions of authority so that again part of this process the Americans could step out without the whole thing falling on its face.

Did it work?

It worked up to a point.

34:30 In the rural areas and particularly in our province, Phuoc Tuy Province, it did work pretty well. All the measures we’ve been talking about, you know the road rebuilding and new markets and schools, the whole place was sort of up and running again so that commerce was starting to move again, they were starting to plant rice paddies that had lain idle for years.

35:00 The roads which had been no-go areas, just by then or the traffic that was moving along and it became passable, all the kids were going to school again. You know it started to come together. I think that we were probably better than most provinces. We’d given a reasonable level of security although the Viet Cong provincial battalion, D445 was never destroyed or knocked out of operation but it was.. sort of kept the lid on it. So in that

35:30 province area, yes I think it had worked reasonably well, but at the higher levels of government things weren’t at all good, and there were a lot of other provinces up near the North Vietnam border that weren’t in such a happy state as we were. But if anything was going to work I thought it would have been that.

You mentioned that some of the

36:00 **Task Force operations needed civic affairs support, what were you talking about when you said that?**

In the early days of the Task Force they they did some of this resettlement of bringing people in from the outlying areas and putting them in nearer the centre. This was copied from the Malayan Emergency where it worked very well, of bringing in Chinese sort of settlers from the jungle fringe and putting them in a new village with a big ring of wire around it to separate them from the

36:30 insurgents. Well we tried we did this a few times in Phuoc Tuy Province in the early days and it wasn’t very successful, but part of our operation of getting people resettled and giving them new houses and plots of land and giving them something to do in their areas fell a lot to the Civil Affairs Unit but it really wasn’t very successful. And we stopped doing that after the first few months. Other operations during my time where we

37:00 needed the Civil Affairs Unit to be tied in. You might have heard of the Battle of Binh Bah where in June of ’69 a North Vietnamese regiment instigated an action against one of our tanks and for the next day or two around the village of Binh Bah this battle waged backwards and forwards. Well at the end of it, it started on the Friday, and on the Sunday morning it was just about we knew that just about cleared the North Vietnamese from the village,

37:30 but an essential thing then was my Civil Affairs Unit had to come in as soon as the village was cleared to look after the population and we didn’t know what condition they’d be in, but we were there with food and clothing and blankets and ready to help with housing and so on and the doctor was there. That was an example. Another example was we wanted to open the road running near the Long

38:00 Hai Hills which hadn’t been used for years because the Viet Cong had a stronghold in the hills and the only way we could get traffic to use that was to cut the sort of bypass road that had been in use and we wanted to put new bridges on that bypass road anyway, so we cut the existing bridges and immediately started building stronger ones, but in the meanwhile told everyone they had to follow this other road. It was our job to explain this to the people, what was going on

38:30 and to tell them that that morning as we had, we'd swept that road for mines and there was a good deal of protection along there and we got people using it, but that was an integrated effort of my unit and the Task Force.

How did they contribute to your efforts in with the opposite case? You mentioned some of the doctors would come from the battalions.

From about June onwards the Task Force commander had ordered every unit that they were to take part in the

39:00 civic action program, so every unit, battalions, armoured units, squadrons, workshops, everyone had to join in this and they had to provide little teams and to do projects. Now I lined up the projects for them, got the materials, did the liaison with the locals, but they actually had to do it, and it was possible to do this because we had the national servicemen in... every unit was probably more than half national servicemen, and amongst these guys there would always be tradesmen and you'd find

39:30 a couple of carpenters and a painter who were there as a rifleman but they could do it, and this worked pretty well. So they were doing the engineer jobs as well as the unit doctors providing the medical support and so on, and it worked well.

Given the stresses of the work of the combat role those blokes might have been playing they must have enjoyed it?

Yeah piece of cake. And also it worked two ways of getting close to the people that these

40:00 guys, say from the battalion, would never have got an opportunity to get close to the local people, to meet them or even talk to them you know the nearest they'd come would be the bar girls when they were down in Vung Tau for a bit of an R and R visit. And I insisted that these projects were to be spun out a bit, I didn't want them done in two days and then out again, I wanted them there day after day for weeks so that the people got to know them and they got to know the people, and they set up, not only

40:30 did they do a good job building these simple things but they struck up a very good rapport with the local people, you know that blonde-headed guy who had all the proposals of marriage is just the sort of thing that happened, and the people would take them into their homes and give them lunch and generally look after them and when the job was finished they would hang the flowers around the neck sort of thing. It worked very well.

Tape 8

00:44 **Peter, you mentioned earlier that the VC hardly ever interfered with some of the projects, but there was one that they blew up?**

Yes. It was a water supply on an island called Long Son Island.

01:00 I think we didn't do our homework well enough and we... it was a pretty simple water supply. It was putting a small dam on a creek uphill from the village and then piping the water from there down into the village and they blew up the pipeline, it was pretty minor stuff, but nevertheless they did. That was the only one that we ever had any interference.

Not doing your homework in what respect?

Maybe we didn't tell the, make it

01:30 clear enough to the village that it was their project and we were only there to help them and it wasn't an Australian project and maybe that didn't get back to the VC. But in any case that was what happened.

So it was more a liaison thing with the villagers?

Yeah and it was offshore, only just offshore but nevertheless offshore island, but that, of the probably hundreds of things we did that was the only one that they knocked off.

02:00 **Given you and your unit were really sort of the right hand of getting to know people, the villagers and stuff of the military, what was the people's view of the war itself?**

Pretty philosophical that, for us we were there for a twelve month tour and the tendency was to want to go flat out and really make a name for yourself.

02:30 But then at the end of twelve months you went home and that was it. The war for them had been going on since 1946 with a bit of a gap in the late '50s. So survival was one of their first preoccupations. They also assumed correctly that we would one day we would go home and they had to be very careful about giving open allegiance to us and

03:00 our side and they were right. Those who did come and were openly working with us I understand had a

pretty hard time come 1975. So but having said that, I believe there was quite a lot of goodwill. There was a guy up there a couple of years ago I was talking to a month or two ago, who said he was talking to some of the Viet Cong of the day who

03:30 were in D445 Battalion and asking them what in retrospect they thought of us, and they made about three or four points which I thought were interesting. They said they respected the Australians, they didn't say like, they said respected, because one you didn't commit atrocities like the Americans, secondly you buried our dead and thirdly you did a lot of good work for the people, which is the sort of things that we've been talking about now and that

04:00 goodwill has lasted over these 30 years. I think that's quite a good thing.

The pressures on the men that you oversaw, what sort of pressures were on them?

Our men?

Yeah.

There was always the feeling that they were vulnerable, as indeed they were. I suppose as time went by and no-one ever struck them, it would have been very easy to just for a sniper just to knock

04:30 someone off. And the fact they never did just gives us less of this feeling but there was always this feeling of vulnerability. You know, a couple of our men out working in a village somewhere, by themselves all day, it would have been very easy to knock them off ,but they never did. I was never aware of any that found a sort of cultural difficulty in working with them, mingling with the Vietnamese. And in fact the more they did it the more they seemed to like it.

05:00 Sometimes there was a bit of friction with me about some of the things I made them do, but, for example, I made them clean out the drains in one of the marketplaces and they thought this was a bit much which it was, but the fact that the Australian soldiers were ready to pitch in with them, they weren't doing it by themselves, but pitch in and give them a hand to do this pretty awful job made a big impression on them. And by and large they

05:30 took a lot of pride in what they were doing. They really felt you know in this war this was something pretty useful we're doing. And it gave this little unit a lot of esprit de corps which continues on, that this is a very strong unit association, early this year we put a plaque at the War Memorial in memory of the unit and so on. So I think they were pretty good.

Under these pressures that they could be

06:00 **shot by a sniper or die by certain circumstances?**

Well if they just wanted to kidnap them it was terribly easy just to grab them, you know there they were. Two or three men in a village all by themselves, there all day.

What did men turn to for comforts?

Oh the same as everyone else. I don't know what they got up to during the day, I like to think they stayed at work, I think they did. But you know there's the same… they came back at night, all those who weren't going out with me on the ICAPS you know back at night.

06:30 There were the normal sort of things, movies. If you're talking about alcohol there was, I never had a problem with excess, anyone drinking to excess in the unit. I think these guys had a pretty high opinion of themselves.

You shared with us earlier, before Vietnam you learnt people management skills on the Snowy River and other places, what issues came up in respect to managing the staff under you?

07:00 Fairly typical things in most organisations, that I changed the way the place was run and I had to adapt the unit to this new role we got, so we ran things differently. It was keeping people happy and on side while accommodating sort of

07:30 major changes in the way we went about our business. I guess that was the main problem. Before I arrived there was a bit of a problem with one or two people with that was hearsay from my predecessor, but yeah, that went pretty well.

What were the issues there?

Probably a bit of excess alcohol and

08:00 finding the whole thing a bit daunting; difficulty in face-to-face communication with the Vietnamese for whatever reason. But most of the Australians do particularly well at this. I do make the point that… I've got to make it somewhere. that the Australian soldier is very good at this. People have said well why, what is it about the Australian soldier, and it's quite hard to put your finger on exactly.

08:30 But I think it's most of them are fairly laid back and don't have sort of racial tickets on themselves, you know, through feeling that we're better just to start off with and we're working with inferior people. Most of them would say to that, 'Oh come off it mate!' if you even suggested anything like that, and they

seemed to have this ordinary people, just this ability to hit it off and no posturing and

09:00 sort of easy to get on with the local people. The Americans found us quite difficult in Vietnam, most Americans, but not all. Most Americans and they clearly had the same problem in Iraq; you know, they just find it very difficult mingling and working with the local people. Brits seem to do it better, we do it better still.

You mentioned the Americans were sort of given the role because they didn't fit in anywhere else, that

09:30 **was another major thing, because the Australians were obviously selected or chosen for what they did?**

Yeah. That may have been a bit harsh, but not too harsh. The Americans I was talking about were the advisors to the district chief. The Vietnamese structure was the province chief, each district had a major or a captain in charge of it, and these American advisors I'm talking about were the usually lieutenants or captains working with the Vietnamese district chiefs,

10:00 there was one in each of the five districts. And they weren't very impressive at all and in the later stages of my year, as well as my own linguist out there, we put Australian advisors in each of these district headquarters as well. And when we did that, because these were better people and also they had access to the Australian forces which were the allied military in the province, there was no, or no useful American

10:30 forces there, the Vietnamese district chief started looking at our people instead of the American guy there who was the advisor. He was sort of young, wet behind the ears and didn't know much about anything and this circuit of advisors also reported to me. So by the time I left I had a real network of people around the province reporting to me.

Were you able to at all liaise with the Americans and tell them sort of the ideas you had? What

11:00 **feedback and what conferences did you have with them?**

Well I used to, from time to time I'd go and talk to the American senior advisor, but it was more the Task Force commander, the brigadier who spoke to him, but they used to invite me along to their weekly conference and I'd brief them or the Americans gathered and I'd brief them on what we were doing and where we were going and why we were doing it. Feedback from them was generally okay, sort of

11:30 I guess you get questions like, why are you trying to rebuild the province, and I said well, you know. But I tried quite hard to keep the Americans on side. They could well have had their nose pretty well out of joint that the Australians were sort of taking over their role and so on, but we put a lot of effort into trying to keep them onside.

Supplies, bricks and mortar, tractors or whatever you needed to use, where did that actually come from?

Quite a bit came from

12:00 Australia but that sort of thing was fairly readily available. I don't know where it came from, on the Vietnamese market. Things like cement, there was no problem about getting that. We had our own quarry for producing crushed rock. A lot of the timber we used came from Australia and specialist things like the windmills obviously came from Australia. But it wasn't a major problem getting any material.

Did any overseas sort of civilian organisations like the Red

12:30 **Cross, through to whatever, also assist and send you supplies for local people?**

Yes. From Australia we used to get what we call commodities for distribution to the local people, clothing, tinned food sometimes. I thought... I kept this just for emergencies; it was the worst sort of civic aid to hand out stuff.

13:00 It usually produced ugly, crowd scenes if you were handing out anything for free, clothing or food, and the people sort of fighting each other to get to the front and trampling the kids to be first in there, and I kept that sort of commodity distribution for emergencies like after that Battle of Binh Bah where I thought people might need emergency supplies or clothes or whatever. But there was quite a flow of that came into the unit from well meaning organisations in Australia.

13:30 But just giving stuff out is an awful way to help people.

Just coming back to one of the things you shared with Chris [interviewer], just going in with medical teams and showing some cinema, I mean was that, how was that operated, was it American pictures?

No, they were Vietnamese pictures in the Vietnamese language. I don't know whether they were good movies or not, but people seemed to think they were pretty good. We'd put on the back of a truck, we'd put a big screen up with a projector and there was no television

14:00 so this was a really big deal you know. None of them went anywhere at night except the Viet Cong, you just didn't drive around at night, and to have this entertainment was a big deal and everyone came, the whole village would turn out.

Chaplains, Salvation Army, did they have anything to do with your work?

No very little actually, very little.

14:30 Why? I don't know. But just to answer your question, no. I also had to oversee the air force civic action effort at Phang Reng where 2 Squadron were. There's was as I was describing earlier in Vung Tau more the sort of altruistic action of well meaning people, helping out in the local orphanage and things, things like that sort of taking kids out for an outing. And that was run by an air force chaplain but he was the only

15:00 chaplain that I had much to do with. Why was that, I don't know.

The media, did you have anything to do with the media while you were over there?

Yep, a lot. And generally speaking I was happy with what we got from the media. I had a… well, it went on all the time. I had a...

15:30 I can't think of his name and it doesn't matter, a guy from one of the Sydney papers who spent a week with me and he said at the beginning of the week, "You ought to know I'm looking for some dirt to write about." and I carried him round with me the whole week and showed him what we were doing and at the end of the week he said, "Well, I've got I'll write this up positively, there's nothing I want to criticize in here." which I was very pleased with. It was Peter; a guy called Peter someone from the 7.30 Report [television show] also

16:00 spent quite a bit of time with us.

What was your view at the way the media was representing the war?

Let me just distance what we've been talking about, the Civil Affairs Unit, which was quite different to the overall media reporting of the war. I think, what can we say? There was probably some exaggeration

16:30 and concentration on the bad things which was not helped by the simple incredibility of the briefings they were given. Things that they were told that were not true and exaggerations and so on but by and large, I think they gave a reasonable representation of the war. They had an enormously powerful effect of the outcome of the war, it was bringing home to the people what the…

17:00 In the sitting rooms, a commonly used phrase, what was actually going on, and while it may have given it an exaggerated picture and not told all the good stories, it certainly let people back home know that the people were winning the war and the light at the end of the tunnel and so on that wasn't necessarily the case. It's very hard for a military commander who's trying to carry out operations to have, in his feeling,

17:30 being white anted by the media, but by and large I think they gave a reasonably accurate account of what happened and I think they had a very powerful affect on the outcome.

Before you worked with this fellow from the Sydney Morning Herald or the 7.30 Report, was anything said to you about how you or what you showed to the media in respect to the war?

You mean in the accounts they gave?

Was anything said to you

18:00 **by from the army in respect to what you could and couldn't show these guys?**

Oh no, no it was up to me. But there was nothing I, I mean it was pretty easy, there was nothing I sort of had to put under the carpet. What we were doing was all as I've been describing to you. So I was quite happy to show them what we were doing and explain why we were doing it.

You mentioned the Sydney Morning Herald guy wrote obviously….

He was The Telegraph I think.

Sorry, Telegraph guy,

18:30 **he was looking for dirt but wrote some good stuff, what about the 7.30 Report?**

Oh that was pretty good, factual stuff, but it didn't get a lot of mileage. You know it's not a good news story, Australian soldiers doing great job in providing village infrastructure, they'll report it but it's not the earth shattering story of the day. You know, things are going well; they're doing a good job.

So you obviously weren't the major

19:00 **focus of attention for the media?**

No.

What pressures, we spoke of the pressures sort of the men that ou oversaw, what pressures were on you?

Oh none, no unreasonable pressures. When the emphasis shifted to the sort of focus on us it obviously made the whole job very busy and I had to be both on the ball and making sure my own unit staff did what they were supposed to be doing, but also in portioning my time

19:30 between who was I going to be speaking to, the Vietnamese or the Americans or how much time could I spend round the villages and so on, but that was reasonable, there were no unreasonable pressures. I had to deliver, I was delivering, I had a lot of resources to work with, it was good.

R and R,

20:00 **what did you do while you got while you were in Vietnam when you got some time off, where did you go and what did you do?**

Well I used to take my unit down about every six weeks we'd have a weekend off and I'd allow them all to go down to Vung Tau and I'd go down with them for usually two nights I think. We'd go down on the Friday night and come back on the Sunday and they could, the troops would all stay in the Australian logistic support area.

20:30 If they wanted to stay in the town they could, but you know they had to pay for that in the hotels and it was a very good break. I felt that the sort of work they were doing every few weeks this was a good idea to get down there and we did.

Things to do in Vung Tau?

Oh there was the beach, there was the swimming pool, in the Australian area we had our own swimming pool. There were

21:00 a lot of shops selling junky sort of stuff, touristy sort of stuff to the Americans and to our people. Then there were the bars and the bar girls and so on, it was a good break.

I mean did the break actually refresh the men at all or were they still under the stress of war?

Oh no, it was quite refreshing. They came back ready to get on with the job.

And did you get leave while you were in Vietnam?

Yeah everyone got, I think it was a

21:30 week, back to Australia which I took as well.

And was that good going back to Australia?

On the whole yeah. I mean I've heard people argue that they would prefer not to have done it, that it was disruptive to their family to see them home again but they were only there for a week and they were gone again and it upset the children and so on, and I'm sure there must have been cases like that. For me personally, I was very pleased I did. I think it's quite a personal thing whether you

22:00 felt that it was good or bad. But I would think most people thought it was okay.

You mentioned when we were discussing Malaya, a few fellows that struggled under the stress and sort of may have gone troppo [had a breakdown], did you come across anything like that while?

No, nup. I understand, the truthful answer to your question

22:30 is no, but I have read about instances of that but I never experienced it.

Okay. Is there anything else that we've missed in respect of discussing your time in Vietnam?

Oh no, I think you've covered it pretty well.

Just to throw the question to you, a particular project that you worked on which is a good demonstration of what you were doing?

Yeah well, I've told you about building the village

23:00 roads and that hamlet at Phuoc Hoa Long, the VC hamlet and that we drew that out over several weeks so that people got to know and it went very well. There was a similar project one of the infantry battalions, I think it was 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] had to put a team into remote little hamlet on the road to Saigon which was really out in the sticks, well, well away from the capital and this team of infantry men went in there and they were there for about four weeks I think, building a, I think it was a medical

23:30 dispensary and that was one of our most successful projects. This quite isolated area where people were pretty anti, but in these four weeks this team of young infantry guys really got close to the village and I felt that probably more and most of the other jobs we did that was successful in getting close to them

and probably influencing their thinking, but a very close bond sprang up between the people that were

24:00 doing this work and the villagers. After the job was finished, they kept it up, they kept coming back to see how they were getting on and so on. I was very pleased with that. And they were all the good elements. It was their idea, they contributed money, they contributed labour, it was really needed, the Australians were in there for a long time, long enough to get to know them and it really clicked at the end.

Was it important to keep up the relationship once you'd built whatever it was your were

24:30 **working on?**

Yes, and we try to, successfully in most cases, to do that. That was one of the problems with the whole war. That you've allied you know, we'd sweep into an area and clean out the VC and do whatever had to be done and whiz off somewhere else and as soon as you'd do that the VC would simply sort of pull their heads in while you were there just came back again and to maintain the presence and the contact was a really

25:00 important part of the job and I made quite an issue of that.

The VC winning the hearts and minds of the people, was that just purely aggression, is that how they won people over or were they also working amongst the community for the benefit of them?

Well they weren't doing the sort of things we were doing.

Just coming back to the question, the way that the Viet Cong worked or didn't work with the

25:30 **people in winning them over, what were they doing?**

The Viet Cong aim was control of the people rather than support of the people. The key factors in this were the Viet Cong infrastructure who were the political cadres who either were or infiltrated into the village over a long period of time and their job was to control the people and they were

26:00 tough and ruthless in doing this. You know, if you didn't do what you were told, you'd get killed. Pretty basic sort of stuff; and that is the basis of how the Viet Cong worked. But having said that, there was a positive side to that as well, well positive from their point of view. Their objective of an independent and united Vietnam for the first time in a thousand years was pretty heavy stuff. The option

26:30 for young boys of joining the VC and being given a rifle and you're allowed to fire at aeroplanes or shoot foreigners or do this sort of thing was pretty attractive as well. So in my own view it was predominately the tough bit of it, you know, if you don't do what we say we're going to kill you. But there was also this sort of rosy vision of the objective of the whole war and this excitement of firing

27:00 at foreigners and that sort of thing, that was there as well but they didn't have the resources or perhaps even the inclination to do the sorts of things we were doing of building infrastructure and providing medical aid and that sort of thing. They would probably have liked to have done it if they could and had the resources. There was a suggestion there was a bit of medical help from the Viet Cong cadres to the population but nothing like on the scale we were doing.

Just one quick

27:30 **side question. I did ask you about the chaplains and their involvement, were you at all disappointed that they weren't involved?**

Oh no, well it wasn't something I thought about at the time, it just didn't seem to crop up.

Sure. Handing over once your time was coming up; you handed over the role to someone else. What sort of things, I mean how did you convey the work that was being done and the direction it may go?

Well, much the same

28:00 way as it was done to me. I drove my successor around and showed all the things we were doing and the things I wanted to do and suggest he did this that and the other thing. He didn't, he had his own ideas and did it another way which is you know the way the wheel goes, that was his prerogative to do that.

When you came home was there any recognition for what you'd done over there?

Oh yeah I got an OBE [Order of the British Empire] for what I did.

28:30 I was the only unfortunately the only one of the Civil Affairs Unit commanders to get a gong [receive an award] but you know I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Or came up with good ideas, one or the other. What happened after that returning home from Vietnam?

What, you mean what did I do? Oh, I went back to army headquarters as a staff officer for a little while

and then went to the Joint Services Staff College and the next milestone I guess in my life, I was the head of the

29:00 Army Engineer Corps for three years. Then I went to our Training Command producing the doctrine. You know you might have gathered a thread right through this, tactical instruction and interest in that affair and I had the job of producing the Australian Army's first complete set of doctrine, doctrinal pamphlets, how we train and how we fight. And then probably the major milestone was going to the United States Army College for a year in '77,

29:30 '78.

Coming back to the original question, forming the doctrine, did the army not have a

30:00 **well a doctrine up to this point in time in respect to the engineering corps and...?**

It wasn't only engineer doctrine but yeah, there'd been a sort of transition. When I first joined the army we were using all British doctrine and British Army tactics and how we trained and how we fought battles and so on. This was gradually replaced by a set of Australian doctrine, particularly for counter revolutionary warfare and our experience

30:30 in Vietnam. But by the mid '70s we wanted to, we believed we'd grown up well beyond having to use the British Army doctrine, we wanted our own set and we developed a complete set of Australian doctrine, drawing on not only our Vietnam but our experience in all conflicts since the Second World War and I guess from the war itself. And we produced a whole set of

31:00 training pamphlets and manuals and I was fortunate enough to be in the job when decision to do this was taken so we determined the structure of it and got it rolling and started producing these pamphlets which we still use. We've now got a complete home grown Australian set of doctrine.

Whose decision was it to form our own doctrine at this point?

It was probably, well the Chief of the Army

31:30 at the time, he was titled the Chief of the General Staff. It was a General McDonald and it was his concept that the time had arrived you know, we'd grown up enough and we'll have our own doctrine. We were still informed by the Brits and the Americans and we looked at what they had, but it was essentially an Australian set of doctrines which we still have, we still do.

Did the character of the army at all change once you had your own doctrine and ideas?

32:00 It's an interesting thing, doctrine. In a way it's setting a new path for the future, this is what we're going to do, but in another way it's just reflecting what we've already learnt and what we've come to up until now. You know the doctrine really sets in paper our battle experience. So there was no sort of revolutionary change in direction, it was more an evolutionary change. It was where we'd got to up til then.

How had our experience in

32:30 **Vietnam affected the way the Australian Army ran or operated in the future?**

The sort of war we were fighting there, of counter revolutionary warfare, had its own set of characteristics, fire support bases, protection, use of artillery, use of air support, and we got pretty good at that and that did affect our thinking for the next 20 years.

33:00 But that sort of war that was the last sort of that war that we fought, so we were then switched back on to thinking more about conventional warfare. So while our Vietnam experience informed what we were doing, it didn't entirely shape it. Interestingly, the circles come around again in Iraq and the sort of lessons we learned then could well be applied now.

You then got to go to, what, the United States, to

33:30 **the college over there, US War College, can you just discuss a bit about your experience over there and what you were doing over there?**

Yeah I was the first Australian to go there because their Army War College it up til that point had been Americans only. You know they didn't want any foreigners at all. But then they had a very far sided commandant arrive and he had experience at the British Royal College of Defence Studies which has a lot of overseas people, and his view was that the enriching experience from having

34:00 input from all these other countries far outweighed any possible loss of security or inhibition of what they could talk about. And in my year, we were the first foreigners to go there and there were six of us, and I believe now they have about 40, 45 foreigners go there every year. The rank level was about lieutenant colonel or full colonel. It's the American, the American Army regards it as their school for generals and the people they send there are

34:30 those that they believe are going to become generals. Terrific facilities as you can imagine, as the Americans always do, you know the buildings and the training aids and all that sort of thing. Very high powered lecturers and yeah, a good experience, and I was very pleased to have gone there. One of the

spin offs of that sort of thing, you forget fairly quickly what you've learned, you know the material there, but the

35:00 relationships you build, you know the people you meet that are with you from then on.

Any particular relationships that you formed at that time?

Well there were a lot. One, General Sullivan became the head of the American Army about the same time as I was CDF here. There was a General Waller who was the deputy commander to [General] Schwarzkopf in the Gulf [War] and when I went over to visit there during the Gulf War he took me under his wing, but we'd been very good friends in the war college

35:30 and there were a number of others.

You were good friends sorry, with Schwarzkopf?

Or Schwarzkopf's deputy. He was a Lieutenant General Waller but we'd been in the same syndicate.

Okay I might jump forward here, just for the sake of time, but becoming the Chief of the Defence Force, just talk me through how that came up, the opportunity for you to progress to the

36:00 **position?**

Well, there were, at the time there were three star positions in the Australian Defence Force, or four, I think there were four. But each service, army, navy, air force, has a three star at the head of it. You know at the time they were called the Chief of the Naval Staff, the Chief of the General Staff, that's the army, and the Chief of the Air Staff. And by that time there was a Vice Chief of the Defence Force had been formed.

36:30 Well I'd followed General Sir Phillip Bennett in as head of the army, Chief of the General Staff and he went then to be Chief of the Defence Force and he did that job for three years and then when he moved on it was between the three of us or the vice chief. The vice chief at the time wasn't a particularly significant position and so it was really between one of the three heads of service, and I got the nod.

Just in respect to the three services, what's the relationship like between them?

37:00 It was quite antagonistic at times when, going back to the days when there were the three, separate services and each service had a budget, had its own budget to come out of the defence budget, so there was a lot of sort of intramural fighting to get a share of this budget, because if navy got more it meant that army and air force got less, so you fought

37:30 pretty hard for your projects. One of my main thrusts while I was Chief of Defence Force was to develop this concept of jointness and get the services working together rather than fighting as they had often done in the past. So the relationship was still, these were three pretty strong figures and it was still a pretty robust relationship, but I like to think that during my time

38:00 I bought them much more together and working as a team, getting defence force solutions rather than single force solutions.

Can you share with us an example when one particular service got extra funding or something and the other services missed out?

Yes. I'm just trying to think of one while I was there.

38:30 When the 'over the horizon' radar was being developed, that was an air force project and the the new frigates for the navy could be funded out of... the government gives you a level of defence funds and your opening pluses and minuses of that overall bag that the government's given you

39:00 and the only way that could be funded was by restrictions elsewhere and that was done by trimming down the size of the army quite considerably. So army was losing numbers of people, which were really the strength of the army, to provide the equipment for the navy and the air force. What I tried to do was to stop that being fought on parochial lines and get people thinking of what was best for Australia and the Australian Defence Force overall. And

39:30 that was the way we sort of approached things and the programs we put forward pretty well always had the tick of all three chiefs, even if one was losing a bit and someone else was gaining a bit. If you looked at the overall defence picture that was how we measured it.

From a political point of view, was one service seen as more important than the other two?

I don't know from the political point of view but

40:00 I was always emphasising that the way we were organised, no service can operate by itself. You know, the navy depends on the air force for movement and air support and so on and the air force needs the army to secure its airfields and so on. So I was pushing the line that all three are needed. I suppose ministers would have their own views about who was pre-eminent at the time.

40:30 If you were concentrating on the defence of Australia, you know, the country, maybe an air force would get a lot of priority and rightly so, but not the entire priority. And [Defence Minister] Kim Beazley was very cognisant of this. Well that was the way it ran.

What were some of the difficulties working with politicians?

I think I was very lucky, in the six years the ministers I had were really excellent and I had a very good working relationship with them. I wouldn't point to any particular difficulties. They played their part of looking after the politics and the overall direction; they left me alone pretty much to do the professional military input. They always considered very carefully and usually considered propositions we put up to them so I wouldn't point to difficulties, you know, I had a pretty good working relationship with the ministers.

Tape 9

00:40 **Maybe just go back to what you just mentioned to us off camera. There were some structural changes in the way in which the office of the Chief of Defence Force functioned in Australia, the chiefs of the defence forces I should say, can you just describe briefly what happened?**

Yeah if I go back to

01:00 say the '60s and the '70s, there was a four star position, each of the service chiefs was a three star position and there was a four star position above them, but his title then was chairman of the chiefs of staff committee, so he was just the chairman of a committee, and he couldn't give orders to any of the chiefs that they were to do anything. He could try and persuade them, by argument and so on, but he had no power of ordering them to do anything. This took a step towards the command in

01:30 the early '80s when that position, the title was changed, oh I think it might have been in the late '70s, the title was changed to Chief of Defence Force Staff but he was still just a principal or the head of the staff. He still wasn't the commander. He was senior in rank but he still didn't have any legal power of command. And then about the mid '80s, the staff bit was dropped off and he was just made the Chief of the Defence Force and his brief from the government was changed to command of the Defence Force.

02:00 And that was an enormous change. The Brits have still retained the title Chief of Defence Force Staff, but they have also their man now has command responsibilities and the Americans say that they virtually have although they still call their man Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, you know suggesting a committee chairman. But we were the leading the way of getting one single man in charge of the defence force. So his principal responsibility

02:30 is commander of the Defence Force but it is also the link between the Defence Force and the government and the principal military advisor to the government, or he's meant to be.

Is there any conflict between those two roles?

In a sense... no there's not a conflict but the weight of responsibility is and the time it take to do it is

03:00 a lot for one man. The two bits of it, one looking up to the government and the second looking down and commanding a defence force, and it was for that reason that, and the one he has to do looking up you know, he's the principal military advisor and he's the link with the government so he's got to do that looking up role and he still has this command role but for the operational forces like the group we just sent to the Gulf or

03:30 people in Bougainville or whatever ,he now has a subordinate to do that for him, to command those forces for him. You may have heard of the new headquarters that's to go up out at Bungendore, I think it's a terrible place to put it but the concept of the new headquarters is okay and the three star officer commanding that will be responsible to the CDF for this downward looking role. The CDF still has the power of command

04:00 but he's got this subordinate to help him. But there is a clash, simply a hell of a lot in doing both those roles and if one of them has to be done it's the upward one and you need someone to help you do the downward one.

Well while the downward one is an actual extension of all the other roles you played in the military, the upward one is essentially a new role. In some ways it's not necessarily one that a military career prepares you for, I mean what sort of challenges did you have adapting to that?

04:30 That is very true. I just happened to be able to do it. That sounds a very immodest thing to say, but I quite liked it and I found that I could do it to the satisfaction of the government. But it's... I found the ministers I had to work with... through whom I normally worked, I set up a very good working system and relationship with them. Reasonably often

05:00 I had to front the prime minister personally, and you know, I managed to do that fairly well. It's quite a

heavy responsibility giving military advice to the government, particularly if there's some crisis going on. And it's also a heavy responsibility being the downward funnel and if the system works properly that you should be responsible for everything that happens down there, it's quite a load to carry.

05:30 **Those defence ministers Kim Beazley and Robert Ray. Kim Beazley, as you already mentioned changed the Defence Force policy somewhat during his time as defence minister. Can you briefly explain how that effective…**

06:00 **How did the changes in defence force policy affect your job and the things that you had to do as Chief of the Defence Force?**

Well basically you had to implement that policy so if there was a change in direction that policy which I had to translate that into orders and instructions which flow down to the Defence Force to implement it.

06:30 That's basically what had to happen.

You're translating that into orders to pass down through not just the army but the navy and the air force? Given that your career has been outside of those cultures, is that a difficult thing to do, did you had staff that helped you with that?

Oh yeah I had a… the chief has a joint staff made up of army, navy and air force people. But the sort of

07:00 decisions you have to make and the orders you have to give, flowing down through the three service chiefs that are there, they don't get into the technical detail of what the air force is doing, or if you do have to get into technical detail there are plenty of people around to give you advice on it. But changing policy, you know changes in defence policy with more emphasis on the defence of Northern Australia or whatever we're talking about, it doesn't require

07:30 a detailed technical knowledge of the functioning of any of the three services. In fact it would be wrong if the chief did get into that sort of thing.

I think you might have mentioned to the researcher you talked to before, about changing culture in the navy and air force during your time as Chief of Defence Force, can you tell us a little bit about that?

It was not only the navy and air force but the army as well, all three. What I

08:00 was driving them towards was a greater sense of joint capability, of working together. The fact that none of the three services these days can operate on their own, they all rely on the others, and firing back from that we develop the capabilities that we want any or all of the three services to have, or the equipment they are going to need to get it. We develop that on a joint basis, all three of us looking at the impact on the Defence Force

08:30 as a whole. And you then get say the army chief weighing up the value of the new Anzac frigates against something that he was wanting to get and then taking priority decisions on what is best for Australia as a whole and that was the way we came to think. I also changed the command arrangements that previously, that the chief had given, had

09:00 controlled operations by going down through each of the single service chiefs. Well, I changed that to operating through, I took them out of the operational chain of command, that means the war fighting chain of command, and went straight to a joint force commander who was legally empowered to command elements of the navy, the army or the air force. This was quite a revolutionary change which Australia lead the way in, but most of our responsible allies now do the same thing.

09:30 **Were there occasions in which your advice wasn't taken by the government?**

Not often and I'm trying to think of an example. Not on any serious, not on any major matter. There may have been minor odds and ends but generally it was accepted.

Another cultural change

10:00 **that was occurring at that time was the status of women in the defence forces, what changes occurred there and what did you have to do with it at your level?**

Well I drove the change. It again was quite a revolutionary change. What we went, what we did in the broad, was to go from each service saying there are a few employments which women can fill. So each service would probably have about 200, 150, 200

10:30 different employment categories, and the previous arrangement had been saying that six, seven, eight, nine of these women could fill; like clerks and nurses and I changed it around and said there are now a very small number that women cannot fill but they can go anywhere else provided they're without any ifs and buts and special conditions, they can do the job. And that was a very major change. It was also just a little bit

11:00 ahead of its time but I felt as chief ,that the equal opportunity crowd were closing in on us unless I took some move like that we'd have a long and drawn out fight to… trying to resist the change and it's by and large gone very well. In a couple of areas we went a bit faster than I thought it was wise to do so,

but by and large it's gone very well and women now have got a huge number of places they can work... and do.

11:30 **Pushing change in any organisation you always come up against resistance, I mean I imagine in the military at that time there was resistance to those particular changes?**

Yes, yeah of course there was. Take for example the navy. Some of the old petty officers, the idea of having women on ships at sea was just anathema, you know, this has been since the time of the Romans, has been a completely male reserve but now we

12:00 not only have officers but ratings on ships at sea. I think we went a bit, or the navy went a bit quick on allowing women on submarines but that is now also proceeding, it needed a lot of preparation. The sort of people who resist change like that are those whose career has been built on the old order and suddenly something comes in like this and the system under which they've made their name and progressed up has suddenly collapsed around them and most find it very hard to adapt to that.

12:30 **You mentioned that your job was difficult at the best of times, especially at a time of crisis, what crises were there during your time as defence force chief?**

I'd barely been in the job a week or two or a few weeks when the first Fiji mutiny or revolution with then Colonel Rambuka [military head of interim government], you know when he took over the government.

13:00 and that was only a mini crisis but the Australian Government wondering what to do about it you know, how should we deal with this. So that was the first one. There was a second Fiji crisis a year or so later when because we had dealt with the first one it was a bit easier to handle. The Gulf War was probably the major one. They were about

13:30 the only ones I'd call crises I think.

Given the Fijian situation, having been in the job such a short time, how did you work on your feet in that situation, what did you do?

I was actually in Perth when it broke, but came back here fairly quickly. I got a call to... I think it was on a Sunday night, to go into the cabinet room you know, the prime minister had his key

14:00 minsters there and were seeking my advice on what we should or what we could do. So I had to be fairly quick thinking on my feet and how we should react to this, but I put the advice in and that was what we did and it worked.

Coming perhaps to the Gulf War because that's something we'll be able to talk about in a bit more detail, what were the first beginnings of that crisis for you and

14:30 **how did it come about?**

Well again, I happened to be in Washington at the time on the annual Australia/US ministerial talks which the Chief of the Defence Force and the secretary of defence department go on. So I was actually out of the country when the decision was taken to what our contribution was going to be and the guy who was deputising for me when I was away had to take the lead in doing that. He of course kept me informed

15:00 in Washington and our minister Robert Ray was there as well and he kept me and Robert Ray informed. But the first and the most critical decision from the CDF level was who or what to commit and then what status to give them with the American forces.

Australia's contribution was mainly a naval force?

Yeah it was really very mainly a naval force. The three ships.

15:30 **And why was that particular force decided that that would be the right one to send?**

It was a force, several things, a force that we could send readily, which we never, took them three weeks to work up but they could get there fairly quickly. It was a force which could make a real and realistic contribution to what was going on, by being part of the naval force in the Gulf

16:00 with the jobs of joining the Americans, the American fleet in protecting the carriers and policing the traffic going up and down the Gulf and in providing logistic support and our ships could do that admirably. The government of the day had a wish to avoid putting soldiers on the ground for whatever reason, but the catch cry at the time was 'no sand on the boots'.

16:30 We did consider quite seriously sending some F11 reconnaissance force, which we would also have provided pretty readily but having made the commitment of the three ships I think the government thought that was a sufficient Australian contribution. We sent a few people who played a role on some of the headquarters, some intelligence operators but that was by and

17:00 large our major contribution.

The major decisions about the action that would be taken in the Gulf at that time were being

taken outside Australia?

No, no, they were being taken at home, it just happens that me and the minister and the secretary were all over in Washington, but we were kept right up with what was going on and the decisions were taken with our agreement and knowledge.

What liaison did you have with the Americans or the other forces involved at that time?

17:30 **Were they asking for certain contributions or...?**

Well, they were asking for a contribution and of the various things that we offered this was seen as a useful, practical one, immediate contribution that we could make and they were very pleased to have it. As always, or the political value of our contribution probably was just, as if not more important than the actual military value, because there was a huge military force assembled and

18:00 our three ships added to that, but by no means were a deciding factor. And if we'd sent a land contribution it would have been pretty small, they would've as in the Second Gulf War they would have done well but it would have only been a drop in the bucket of the land forces that were already assembled, you know the Brits and the French and so on.

So you...

The RF111 would have been very useful.

Why do you say that?

It was a capability the Americans were

18:30 quite short of, they didn't have the F... their F11s had gone out of service by then and this was to give an ability to assess bomb damage after raids, the air strike would take place and then the F111s would go in and with their photographic mechanisms would assess whether the strikes had been successful. They found other ways of doing it, but this was one of the pretty bare areas in the coalition

19:00 ability and it would have been useful but our government decided not to do it

It didn't involve sand on anyone's boots, was it seen as too close to that?

Oh I think, well I'm not privy to what the final reason was, I know what the decision was but I think it would have been a feeling that sending the ships that we were proportionally pulling our weight.

There was a small involvement in other areas, apart from the ships themselves though

19:30 **wasn't there?**

Ah pretty small but there were a handful of people in headquarters, that was about it. What were you thinking of?

I was just wondering, I wasn't really sure about it myself, headquarters?

If you really want to know there were photo analysts, people who were skilled at analysing aerial photos and yeah, working out what... interpreting them.

But that was judged as being so small as to not be a political decision?

20:00 Yeah it was it was a small but useful contribution.

So not long afterwards you found yourself the Chief of the Defence Force at a time of war, well not a war that involved Australia in a total way, how did your job change during that period?

It didn't change at all really. The mechanisms we set in place worked. We put our ships

20:30 under what we call operational control of the Americans so that the tactical direction of what they were to do in the Gulf was up to the Americans, we put them as part of the American force responsible to the American commander. As you do in these situations we gave the commander of the Australian... there was one officer designated commander in the Gulf and he had a pretty tight directive of what he could and couldn't do. But having done that the tactical directions

21:00 of what happened to those ships was up to the Americans. We monitored very closely what was going on, we were concerned about the... we had to arrange ourselves the logistic support of the ships which we did, but how they took part in the fighting was really up to the Americans. And how did it affect me? Well, just as I said, our systems worked.

21:30 We monitored the intelligence we were getting from the Americans so we all the time knew what... although we weren't saying what they were to do, we knew what they were doing. We got some idea in advance of the American plans and what was going to happen and we just monitored what was going along.

Was there any input from you towards that, in the overall scheme of what was going on, or did you just monitor it?

Do you mean did we did the

22:00 Americans say what do you think we ought to do? No. When we made our contribution of the ships and said right, they're yours, they're under your operational control, that was really it from our point of view.

Just on that, did the Australians have the same rules of engagement, is that...?

I know in the second Iraq War the rules of engagement were quite a hot topic and ours were different to the Americans but the rules of engagement, the ships were working under

22:30 I think were the same as the Americans, it wasn't nearly as controversial a business. Whatever we had... our agreed rules of engagement but from the best of my memory they were the same as the Americans.

So were there any new pressures on you at all during that time?

Oh yes. I had to make sure that our staff system was working, that the head of the defence intelligence organisation gave the prime minister a personal brief every day, I

23:00 had to make sure that the information was flowing through to the maritime headquarters in Sydney, which was the Australian headquarters who was doing the detailed oversight of worrying about reinforcements and logistic support and so on, on my behalf. I didn't change my working hours; I didn't think I had to although the secretary did. He started turning up for work at about five thirty in the morning so that

23:30 he caught up with CNN before the minister had a chance to see it so that he wouldn't get caught short on any tricky questions but I didn't think it was necessary for me to do that. My people worked quite late at night so I would turn up for work at about eight thirty, quarter to nine as usual.

You visited the ships in the Gulf at that time. Can you tell us about that visit with what you did?

Well I flew over by civil air

24:00 and I actually met the minister there. He'd been somewhere else and we came together there. I went to Riad, I had a briefing from the Americans. I didn't see [General] Schwarzkopf 'cause he was back in the States at the time but my friend from army war college days, General Waller, was in command and it was very nice to see him and he, because of our personal friendship I got a much better briefing than I think I otherwise would have got. I then went down to

24:30 Oman where they were providing a base for our ships. You know if they had to put them in a port somewhere that's where they went and then with the minister we went out to visit the ships at sea and spent, oh, 24 hours or so with them there.

And what did you do? I mean did you inspect the troops, or was it a formal arrangement?

Yes it was a formal arrangement, it wasn't a sort of peacetime inspection business. It was

25:00 getting a first hand briefing of understanding if they had any problems on their mind that I hadn't appreciated before about the way they were operating, whether the rules they were following were okay, whether there was anything that needed amending. That was from my side, and then from their side just letting the sailors see that the chief and minister were interested in what they were doing and we were proud of what they were doing and really looking at it.

What sort of problems are you talking about that might have concerned you at your level?

25:30 The rules of engagement were a very important one. For example one of the rules was they weren't allowed to open fire without getting clearance back from Australia. I was a bit worried about that, that some opportunity might crop up where they simply didn't have time to come back and get clearance from Australia but they said no, that was okay, but that was the sort of thing I was interested in.

26:00 Minor but important stuff like their mail, were they getting their mail on time, were their logistic support arrangements we'd put in place, yes they were, how was their liaison with the Americans, very good, you know checking on those sorts of things. And then of course we saw the American commander as well.

So when you say all the systems you put in place worked, were there any problems with the Australian deployment in the Gulf that came back to you?

26:30 It was that actually, I just mentioned about whether we should allow them to open fire without first clearing back to Australia.

How was that resolved?

Well we let the rule stand. They said it was no real inconvenience because it was just as easy as picking up the phone here, that in a crisis you could get permission in a couple of minutes so we let that stand. So that was okay.

27:00 **And there were no other issues?**

Nothing really that I can think of that were... that worry us. We sent then Rear Admiral Walls across to put all these arrangements in place in the Gulf, including teeing up with the Omanis that we could go in there and it worked admirably, we were very pleased with the outcome.

Australia didn't suffer any casualties in its contingent, were there any minor crises

27:30 **within that period that you had to deal with?**

Oh, not that I had to deal with but further down the line there were the odd things. You know when we were getting the ships ready there were a few hiccups in their preparation, whether their tactical skills were up to the mark or the Chief of the Navy, Admiral Hudson was the final checker in saying yes, these ships are ready to go, they can now hoot off to the Persian Gulf.

28:00 There were odd minor hiccups in that but nothing major, worked well.

I know that as your concern was to do with the Australian Defence Force and it wasn't necessarily your area of influence, but what was your opinion on how the war was conducted in general?

From a military point of view and political point of view pretty good. When Desert Storm started

28:30 I thought the way that was done was pretty well the way I would have done it and it worked admirably, so I thought the whole command arrangement and the operational concept they used were pretty good. In fact I briefed... the Americans weren't telling anyone how they were going to do it but from the briefings that I got when I was there, I put forward and... applied in my own mind I pretty well worked out

29:00 how they were going to do it and when I came back I briefed Prime Minister Bob Hawke on what I believed was going to happen which was pretty well right on and it worked well.

What were the American aims or sorry the UN aims; just to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait or...?

Yes. When you say just, I mean that was quite a big call but you know that was just it. There was no...

29:30 there has been criticism since that they should have gone on and invaded Baghdad and deposed Sadaam Hussein but that would have destroyed the coalition at the time. The UN had put the coalition together with their own endorsement and if they'd gone beyond what particularly the Arab countries had signed on to do and said well we've changed our mind, we're going to invade Iraq as well, it would have split the coalition and it was in my view a wise decision from Bush senior not to do that. And it was also Schwarzkopf's

30:00 recommendation.

Do you have any other memories from your time from that time of your career that stick in your mind?

In what war?

The Gulf War but I guess more generally your period as the chief?

No, one of the big advantages of being there for six years is you've got time to fully understand what's happening and to see where areas of reformation were needed and to drive through those changes and get them set in position. And there were

30:30 quite a raft of these that I was able to do which are now accepted as part of the scenery but they were new concepts then. And most of our allies are now trundling along behind picking them up.

You've spoken about a couple of these already but is there anything from that period that you're particularly proud of having put through?

Well all of it I'm pretty pleased with.

31:00 The command of operations, doing that through a joint force commander and I was pretty pleased about that, and I introduced this concept of, I call him a commander of joint forces Australia, but they're now calling him something else. Anyway, he's the commander that's going into these new headquarters at Bungendore. I set up a new branch in defence headquarters to jointly consider the equipment and climates of the Defence Force. As I was

31:30 talking about earlier, considering it not from a single service perspective but the three services together putting their heads down and saying well, what's best for the whole for Australia, for the whole Defence Force. That was the development branch, that's now a three star officer; I only had a two star doing it. I set up the defence intelligence organisation from the old joint intelligence organisation and that has gone pretty well, they got into a bit of hot water the last few months about

32:00 what they were or weren't doing in regard to the Iraq War. The women I've spoken about are pretty pleased on that front. The concept of a joint commander of one service being able to command, legally

command units of the other services, I was pretty pleased about that and I set up an arrangement bringing the military side of the high headquarters into much closer cooperation

32:30 with the civilian side. I think that was the right thing to do. A lot of people were quite critical about it and saying no, you should keep the military and the civilians' sort of ways separate. In the past that had given way to endless, bitter fighting and I found it worked much better to have them working together rather than cutting each others' throat. So all those things I was pretty pleased about and I was pretty fortunate at the time to see the need for them and bring them in.

33:00 **I guess anyone who is looking at this contribution to the Archive, looking at your history in general, can find out a lot of these things from what was going on at the time, but one of these things that they probably can't find out and one of the things that would be interesting if you could share with the Archive is the personal toll such a job takes on you. I mean what was it like to be in that position and what did it mean and what toll did it take on your personal life?**

33:30 I wouldn't... I never thought of it in those terms as a toll, but if there was a toll it was probably on family life and it required you... the job required you to be away a lot so I was away from home a lot and that puts quite a deal and that puts a fair bit of stress on the family life, but I've never thought of it in terms of a toll, it was something one handled, one did. You had a great team of people to help you do it, you didn't have to do it all by yourself

34:00 you had a lot of people in there pitching with you which made it a lot easier. I had a very good secretary to work with, Mr Tony Ayers, two very good ministers, Kim Beazley and Robert Ray, so I was really pretty fortunate.

Is there any truth to the notion that it's lonely at the top? I mean even with those people around you, ultimately having to make those decisions yourself?

34:30 **Is that a difficult thing to do?**

Ah well, it's not easy, and in that sense I guess it is lonely at the top but if you accept the job that's what you've got to do. I never found it a... it never weighed heavily on me. I could always draw on very good advice from knowledgeable people; the decision was always mine but it never, it was never a big issue with me.

35:00 One of the services, the air force used to complain that I certainly sought advice often enough but I didn't always accept it, and I said yeah, well that's what this command business is all about you know, I don't have to accept the advice but I'll always listen to it. I thought I'd really made the day when the army were complaining that I was over favouring the other two services I thought oh I've really got it right you know, if my own service says I'm being too generous to the others.

35:30 **With the hindsight that you've got now, perhaps you don't have to have any answer to this question, but did you make any mistakes?**

I'm sure I made mistakes. I can't right at the moment think of one, but I'm sure I did. I don't think we did any... there's nothing that sticks in my mind like oh gee. I wish we hadn't done that or we did something and then had

36:00 immediately to undo it. There's nothing that I have sort of been carrying around hoping I hadn't or wishing I hadn't done that. I think I had a very good team of people and by and large we got things pretty right.

One interesting point that we should touch on is during your time as the chief of general staff or Chief of Defence Force your brother was Chief of Air Force?

No he was, when I was Chief of the Defence Force he was Chief of the Air Force.

And what was that working dynamic like?

36:30 Oh as it turned out it was okay. The minister of the day sort of thought long and hard about whether he really wanted this situation with two brothers doing this, but we got on very well. I told you earlier in the day we'd always been close and we still are, but we kept the relationship very professional and I had as robust arguments with him as I did with the other chiefs about various issues but

37:00 we came out of it smiling and I think it, you know it was quite satisfactory. It had the potential not to be, but in fact it worked.

Was it ever brought up, perhaps when the army was complaining you were favouring the air force?

Ah yes, people were occasionally would say things like that.

And you didn't take any notice of them or...?

No. I mean I didn't decide issues on sort of apportioning

37:30 goodies between the services but yeah. One of the... I'll give you a fair answer. The most controversial thing I did I think was when I was CGS and the question of the helicopters came up and I initiated the move to have the helicopters transferred from the air force to the army which is what happened and the air force of the day

38:00 thought this was terrible and you'll never be forgiven and this will create bad blood between the two services for the next 50 years. There was quite a bit of heart wrenching at the time but in fact it's turned out to be I think, a good move,, and accepted by both services as a sensible thing to do.

I think in hindsight that's probably true but at the time there was a lot of air force contestation about the way it was being done not just the decision that it

38:30 **was done, do you agree about that?**

I'm not sure about that. I wasn't aware of that. It was a decision taken in the chief of staffs committee. We had a naval officer did a review in later CNS, he did an independent review of all the issues and came up with a recommendation and it was discussed in the chief of staff committee and that was the way the decision went.

So why do you think it was a good idea in the long run?

39:00 It's not black and white but by and large the helicopters today are a part of the land battle and not the air battle. The helicopters are involved with sort of map of the earth operations, they needed to be and now are built into the army combat teams. The air force stick to 40,000 feet and Mac 2 and high performance

39:30 fighters and big transport aircraft and long range maritime control and all those big high performance stuff and the air force never really liked all this beavering around amongst the trees and all this sort of stuff, and it's becoming increasingly important to armies to have this sort of helicopter support and have it integral to the army team where you didn't have to go through joint procedures of one service requesting another to do this and that.

40:00 A lot of the hard feelings were the there was a feeling that this them from Vietnam where the army wasn't happy with the helicopter support they got from the air force which wasn't the case at all. You know, that simply wasn't a factor but a lot of people said this was a factor and there was some bad blood. But in answer to your question that I believe is the most controversial thing I did.

40:30 **What was it like after six years to finish that job and to retire?**

It's a big let down when you suddenly find from a sort of 14 hour day job where you've got nothing, no 14 hours to fill in tomorrow. Also one of the immediate effects is all your support systems get withdrawn, whereas with chief you have a driver and staff officers and aides and secretaries and whole chefs and a whole group of people sort of running round helping you get through the day and suddenly they're all gone, you know, there one day and the next they're all gone and you're on your own but yeah, one adopts to that fairly quickly. But it is a big sort of hundred miles an hour, it's a big change, a big change in life.

Did you immediately get into other lines of work or did you have a period where you?

I went off for a three month holiday which was pretty good and then when I came back I started getting into other things.

Tape 10

00:42 **Just to go on, I was just asking you off camera, perhaps you could repeat what you said to me. You had the experience earlier in your career where you gave your opinion in essay on the Vietnam War and ended up being the right one in the long term and it benefited your career**

01:00 **rightly in that respect. Did you think there was a culture in encouraging individual thought and opinions like that in the military even though it may not have been popular?**

Well, it hasn't always been but during my time as chief I went out of my way to encourage, to make people feel that they were not only free to express those sort of thoughts but to encourage them to do so. I was looking for original thought and people who would think laterally.

01:30 At the same time I wasn't encouraging irresponsible, abusive seniors and if people said something and it was irresponsible or silly then they had to live with it. But I wasn't expecting that sort of answer and when I was speaking to staff colleges or other groups of... middle level officers were usually the level where these bright ideas come from, I was always strong in encouraging that sort of independent thought and I was always very happy to talk to someone when I was travelling around the Defence

02:00 Force, as I did quite extensively, that had these original sorts of ideas. I hope and I'm not sure, I hope that climate is still there although one starts to wonder a bit.

What makes you wonder about it now?

Well, the public controversy about the government. The Defence Force and the government, the government only wanting to be given information which they want to hear which they

02:30 strenuously deny and on the other hand the Defence Force only putting ideas forward or information forward that they believe the government wants to hear. I hope both of those assumptions are wrong. I mean, if you get that sort of climate you get right away from the odd, brilliant idea which really shapes the way you're going forward and I really hope that climate's not being developed.

Was there ever an occasion where you were put in that position by

03:00 **a defence minister that, 'I don't want to hear what you've got to tell me'?**

No never, never. Even if you were coming forward with some pretty bad news, 'I'm pretty sure you won't be pleased to hear this,' but no, I was never put in that position.

I know you might think this is not relevant, but given your experience in that position yourself, what is your opinion on things like the 'children overboard' thing or the torture in Iraq where the defence minister can

03:30 **say that he wasn't informed? I mean do you think that that is a true statement or do you think that there's more to it than that?**

Well, I think all the facts on the 'children overboard' have now come to light and there was a bit of bad luck in that, but there was also some really deliberate prevarication and when the real facts were known, of not wanting to hear about it and using them through that election campaign which, you know, I thought was really

04:00 bad, and then even worse when that exchange in the parliament when the then CDF stood up for the prime minister. Although the acting CDF had been to brief the defence minister and said, "This is not true, these things you are saying are not true." and then [defence] minister [Peter] Reith went on about it being a bad phone line and he was only the acting chief anyway and all sorts of prevarications, so that wasn't any good. On the second point you mentioned I don't know what

04:30 the circumstances were there, I just don't know, but the appearance was not very good. They sat there for a day and a half and the committee... and it was only when the right question was put to them they came out and said well actually, what they said before is wrong, which they could have said a day and a half earlier.

From what you're saying you're obviously quite keen that the military of Australia never become a political instrument?

Yes.

What are your visions

05:00 **for a military in Australia? I mean it's a very broad question, you can answer that however you like, but what do you see, what should be happening?**

First of all, a highly professional force, which we are, committed unequivocally to serve the government of the day, whoever they may be, the elected government of the day, but without becoming involved in the political process of maintaining that government

05:30 in office, particularly by telling perhaps less than the truth about things, and certainly not by supporting an opposition. You know whatever the individual's personal political leanings are of keeping the Defence Force out of the politics of it. Highly professional, unpolitical, well equipped, well educated, up with the latest technology. My own philosophy is that the Australian Defence

06:00 Force should be primarily for defending Australia and Australia's interests and not someone else's. I am not yet convinced by the theories that the globalisation of everything including terror makes that an obsolete concept. I think primarily that's what Australian taxpayers' money and the Australian Defence Force should be doing. You'd get a lot of people who would disagree.

A lot of recent controversy surrounding

06:30 **that would suggest that Australia's interests, where do Australia's interests lie, are you suggesting that the Defence Force should base mainly on defending our country or supporting alliances is important too?**

That's what I said. It's not a straightforward issue and you could argue that global terror now requires a global response and but nevertheless, I still think the primary focus of our defence effort ought to be defending Australia and our interests,

07:00 but broadly defined.

What was your opinion of the deployment of Australian troops in Iraq in the recent war?

Well, I'm on the public record and fairly vocally that I thought it was the wrong thing to do. You know the war, I argued before the war that the business about WMD [weapons of mass destruction], about

07:30 the links between Al Qaeda and Iraq, particularly, to a lesser extent, regime change, were no grounds for starting a war; starting a war is a very serious affair, the most serious decision a government can take and there were simply just not near enough grounds to start a war. Now we know now they were pretext, they weren't the real reasons for doing it and then after the event to argue that, isn't it

08:00 nice that we've deposed this nasty dictator? Yeah, well, it is nice and the world is certainly a better place without him there, but to argue post facto that that was why we went to war also doesn't stand up. And I don't like any of that and I believe there's no way anyone could say I'm anti-American you know, I lived there and I was educated at their war college and so on, but to be a good alliance partner we don't have to agree with everything an administration says.

08:30 You know we should be our own people, we should make our own judgements about what we'll participate in and what we won't and not simply because the Americans want us to do something. This idea, either you're with us or against us is quite inappropriate for an alliance such as the ANZUS [Australian-New Zealand-United States] alliance. In fact the ANZUS treaty, which is a way of getting around about it, is quite specific on that. You know if a common threat emerges or there is action against one of the parties, the others, all they're required to do is

09:00 in accordance with their constitutional processes, decide what to do. It doesn't say that the others have to automatically come around and act.

You're free to state that opinion now and you have done on the public record? Had you been the Chief of Defence Force at the time, what would your advice have been?

It would've been just that. I wouldn't have given it in public, but in private that's what I would have said.

09:30 Not in private, I mean in the sense of within the government.

Given that we've now committed forces to Iraq, what do you feel about that commitment now and what should happen in the rebuilding of a country post that?

Well, the question is whether they should be withdrawn or not, but that's now become a highly political question beyond the reality of whether we withdraw them or not, but I think having got ourselves into this

10:00 situation that the only thing to do is to stay there as long as is needed to pull something out of the wreckage if I could put it that way. And in that sense, I don't see much value in this symbolic withdrawal of the small forces that we've got there.

The US administration went to war in Iraq as part of a new doctrine on their part, of pre-emptive

10:30 **striking and increasing their security that way, what implications did that have on Australia's security?**

Well, first of all it's a terrible doctrine in my view. It's a very destabilising doctrine. Up until now the whole system, the UN system and the requirements for going to war, have all been to deter countries from going to war. The grounds for going to war are actual action against

11:00 you or imminent threat of some action, neither of which applied in Iraq's case. And if you say it's an acceptable form of behaviour that you don't have to have someone act against you or even be imminently looking like they're going to do something, but that you think sometime in the future that they might do something and therefore it's okay to strike now, it's just inherently destabilising and you can think of how countries like India or Pakistan could use

11:30 such a doctrine or the Israelis and the Palestinians or any number of others you could think of around the world. And the idea that there is one set of rules for America because it's the most, by far away the most powerful military country, and another set of rules for everyone else, I just don't buy that either, but I think it is a very dangerous doctrine, and that was the basis for the action against Iraq.

Given that on the wider question of the

12:00 **what is now called 'the war against terror,' the security situation in the last few years has changed, how can a defence force in a country the size of Australia change to keep in touch with such a situation?**

The way we can't do it, is by joining the Americans in expeditions to knock off what they call 'rogue states' around the world. But what the 'war on terror' requires in my view is first of all very good intelligence services

12:30 and we want to both contribute and draw on the international intelligence services and secondly, the sort of forces which you actually need, which is strong police forces and the sort of marginal, military capabilities to deal with terrorism, the sort of special forces capability. And they're the sort of things in the war on terror we should be concentrating on, not acquiring a defence force which is only

conceivably useful in joining the

13:00 Americans in expeditions around the world to invade other, quote, 'rogue states' which you know, the acquisition of these Abrams tanks, the joint strike fighters, the decision to join in the missile defence, it all seems to be pointing, reshaping our defence force to be an adjunct to the United States in these sorts of adventures around the world. Not necessarily, but that's the way it's starting to look.

So what

13:30 **are the greatest threats to Australian security as you see them today?**

Well, fortunately there is no direct threat. The terror threat is there, but the ways of dealing with it are not acquiring a missile defence or super-duper high performance fighters or big heavy tanks and things. They're useful if we're going to fight alongside the Americans and invade Iran or whatever,but the

14:00 world is an unstable place. The sort of situations that have arisen in our own area like the Solomons or Bougainville and Timor are areas which we should be able to handle. I think there is very there is low probability at the moment of a direct invasion against the country. I guess there is a probability, or possibility, of missile strikes at some time in the future, but we need a defence force that can handle the sort

14:30 of things that have arisen in our region and at the same time keep an eye on anything, any sort of more major threat that's developing, and at the same time be a useful adjunct in the 'war on terror'.

What is your opinion on comparisons being made about the situation in Iraq and the situation that existed in Vietnam? I know you almost made the comparison today yourself in the type of counter insurgency?

15:00 Well, predictably, quite predictably in Iraq, the Iraqi Army didn't stand up to the… in conventional actions against the invading American forces and all be killed as some people think would have been the gentlemanly thing to do. They just got out of the way and it became transformed fairly quickly into this insurgency, which is still continuing. So in the sense that the

15:30 American forces have got a combating insurgency on their hands as there was in Vietnam, I guess that's a comparison, but there are not many others. Dealing with the insurgency, I reckon they could have a much longer and harder look at the techniques that 30 years ago came out of some pretty hard experience, but I think you can't push the comparisons too far. But the fact that I think the Americans will have to get an exit strategy fairly

16:00 soon, perhaps as a comparison. We can see similar sorts of things being done, you know I haven't heard the word, I hope I don't, the 'Iraqisation' of the security forces in Iraq and the handing over of the Iraqis of the civil administration as soon as possible to allow a sort of withdrawal with dignity, is perhaps a paradox, but I wouldn't push it too hard.

16:30 **What is the role for a Civil Affairs Unit or the kind of work that you were doing in Vietnam in that conflict from an Australian point of view?**

Well, I reckon it was a pretty good opportunity. I spoke earlier about a window of opportunity for the civic action and it was when the window comes, when the security situation is not completely restored but it's restored enough that that sort of thing can take place, and before the civil administration is back on its feet again

17:00 and there's a proper medical service and infrastructure development and so on. We're probably still in that situation in Iraq, so I think there is opportunity for that sort of work. For military to do this before the civil administration is up to speed to do it.

Is there a role for that kind of work outside of conflict zones, using the military as an aid organisation in some respect?

17:30 We've been doing that for many years in our what's called the Defence Cooperation Program, I presume they still do it but we were using, particularly army engineers, to do little infrastructure jobs in PNG and Vanuatu and the Solomons, and we've been doing that for quite a while so it's not a huge effort and it's not hugely expensive, but I think it pays quite good dividends.

18:00 **Just a couple of general questions now about some of the issues, the Archive is talking about war, it's talking about the Australian contribution to war, do you have any comments from your point of view as an officer, both the various different levels you've served at that we've talked about today, about what you've seen of the Australian soldier and the characteristics of it, you've mentioned a couple of things already today. Do you think that you could define the Australian soldier?**

18:30 Many countries would say to you what I'm about to say. But from my experience, looking at our soldiers in action both in wars and in training exercises in peace, they are a very professional lot. I think the characteristics of the Australian society make us much more suited to conflicts like in Vietnam and Iraq than certainly the Americans, and it's, I put it sort of

19:00 crudely and simply that the Australians don't seem to have tickets on themselves like the Americans do

and they can relate more easily and freely to people like the Vietnamese or the Iraqis. But on top of that we train our soldiers to be sort of generalists, if I could use the word. We train them across the board in all sorts of skills and we expect them to be able to do all sorts of things. The Americans train their soldiers to be specialists in some area and if you

19:30 get into their specialist area boy, they'll leave you for dead, they're the world's best on whatever their speciality is. But if you get them outside their specialist area they're done and they have to call for someone else to come and do it and I hope we never go to the American training system of doing that and we keep training our people as they are. Highly respected around the world, Australian warrant officers and senior NCOs, warrant officers

20:00 are a breed alone, perhaps matched by the Brits but they're really fine people. I was on a visit to America when I was CDF or on one of my visits to America and I went to the American Infantry School where there was a warrant officer there who'd served time at our school of infantry and he showed me a little demonstration of what his people were doing and he was quite apologetic about it and he took me along afterwards to introduce them and they all had stripes

20:30 all over their arms and this is super sergeant someone or other and he'd go along and introduce this guy and he'd say he's the equivalent of a lance corporal in the Australian Army and then he'd go onto someone else and he's a fairly skilled private but he's got all these badges of rank and this I thought it was quite indicative of what someone who's experienced both systems thought about them. So the Australian soldier is a great asset that we've got and we ought to look after him.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

21:00 It has come to be quite important but as a professional soldier I don't get as emotionally overcome as has now become the custom. I respect that and particularly when I was at the War Memorial we put a great deal of effort into doing it and I go to the Dawn Service each year and to the march and that sort of thing but I'm

21:30 not as emotionally gripped as the country seems to be becoming about Anzac Day. I don't think this is a bad thing at all, you know I'm quite happy to see it. I think it is a good day for a focus as our national day and I think the reasons for doing this are quite admirable. But it doesn't get me as excited as it does some.

Well ,drawing on your experience at the War Memorial as a particularly good one to answer this question, what is the role of war in

22:00 **within Australia's national identity do you think? Does it still have an important role to play?**

Yes. Historically we can't take away from what happened and it did have a major role in forming our national identity in my view. Roundabout the time of federation there was the Boer War which was the first time Australians had fought as Australians and not as state contingents. I spoke about my own

22:30 father and his experience in World War One and that whole generation you know, with the little country I think we had four million people at the time and made a totally disproportionate effort through our armed forces and I think that effort shaped the next generation and probably the one after that and it's still a major part of the Australian psyche, probably more so than even the Second World War. There were some very fine efforts in the Second World War, you mentioned, or one of you mentioned

23:00 Bomber Command before. I think there are some fantastic stories that came out of the way the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] people performed in Europe. The number of small conflicts we've been in since the Second World War haven't had the same national impact as the two world wars but I think Australians are aware that their armed forces have been in action and for good

23:30 Mostly, around the world. I was personally quite disappointed that in the present Iraq War that this was the first time our armed forces had taken part in an unprovoked aggression anywhere in the world. This was a real departure on what we'd done up till now.

Why do you think it's important for the War Memorial or indeed for the project we're doing here to

24:00 **memorialise or to collect information and stories about war?**

Well, for the reasons we've just been talking about that I think it has had a fairly big impact on Australian society and I'm very pleased you are doing this before I and others who have all these memories sort of pass on and the memories go with them. I think it will be an important national asset to have all this sort of stuff tucked away somewhere so that

24:30 in future years if someone wants to go on it and see what was actually going on it's all there, and I think it's an admirable thing to do.

Well with that in mind I'll ask questions that we ask just about everyone when we talk to them is when you talk to someone in 50 or 100 years time, is there any sort of last comment that you'd like to say, taking in mind what we've talked about today?

I just underline the

25:00 professionalism of the Australian forces. While they acquitted themselves in just about every conflict we've been involved in, the respect they carry around the world and my hope that the forces don't lose this professionalism and don't become a political tool or a political football.

Well thankyou very much for speaking to us today, anything you'd like to add, now's your chance?

25:30 I don't think I could possibly have any thought that you haven't talked about.

INTERVIEW ENDS