Australians at War Film Archive

Albert Jordan (Bert) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th July 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2154

Tape 1

00:30 **Bert, thanks so much for your time today. We appreciate it and so does the archive. To begin with, can you share with us a brief overview of your life from when you were born to where you finished up in the military?**

I was actually born in Belfast in Northern Ireland in 1942.

01:00 We migrated as a family, my mother, father and younger brother and myself to Australia in 1952 to a little town in Victoria called Poowong. I finished primary school there. I then was bussed to high school in Korumburra which is obviously nearby. I finished high school and went to teachers' college in Bendigo. I did two years of teacher training and then I was with the Victorian Education Department for almost

01:30 four years. I taught one year in high school and two years at a one-teacher school and one year almost in a grade school. It was during the fourth year that I joined the Citizens Military Forces, the CMF, in the artillery regiment. From there I applied for a permanent commission in the education corps and was accepted.

02:00 I entered the regular army in 1965. My first posting was to 1PIR, the 1st Pacific Islands Regiment in New Guinea. That is where I met my wife and we got married up there. I came back from New Guinea and studied a long-term Vietnamese language course at Point Cook. I completed a series of courses at the School of Military Intelligence and then went to Vietnam with the civil affairs team, the 1st Australian Taskforce.

02:30 I came back to Australia for a short period and then returned to Vietnam and worked in the embassy and went to university there for a while. Then I came back to Australia and became lecturer in charge of Vietnamese in the Defence Force School of Language at Point Cook. About that time Australia finished its involvement with Vietnam so I then studied Indonesian at the same place. It was a

03:00 twelve-month course. I was then selected for continuation language training in Bandung, West Java at Padjadjaran University. I went there for fourteen months with my family. I came back to Australia and back to the Defence Force School of Languages as lecturer in charge of Indonesian for nearly three years. I then had a posting to Perth as a staff officer in the headquarters military district. Then I was

03:30 posted to Canberra and that was really my first command, I suppose. I was officer commanding the Army Audio Visual Unit which was out at Fyshwick. They used to make movies apart from other things and a lot of training aids and so on. So I was there for three years. Then I had a posting back to Indonesia, to Jakarta with the defence co-operation scheme. I was their language

04:00 training adviser with their school of languages for a bit over two years. Finally, I came back to Australia as the commanding officer of the Defence International Training Centre which is in Melbourne. Then my last posting in the army was with the Defence Intelligence Organisation here in Canberra. I resigned from the army in 1991, at the end of 1991.

04:30 After that I spent five years doing various things and then finally retired. That is it.

That is an excellent overview, well done. Now let's come back to the very beginning, with Northern Ireland what are your memories there?

My memories are fragmented. When I left there - I was nearly ten when we got to Australia. We got here in February and I turned ten in April.

05:00 I do have a number of memories. I remember, for example, where we lived and playing in the snow and going to school and doing homework. There were a couple of bad things. My younger brother died there at the age of three. I was five and I remember that. I remember silly things like movies I had seen

05:30 and stuff like that but it is fairly fragmented although when we went back to Ireland on a holiday with

my wife, I recognised where we lived. It was still there.

Just to discuss a few of those things. With your memory or where you lived what did it look like?

It was one of those tenement type houses. It had upstairs and downstairs and there was a great row of houses. It was number 5, High Grove. It is still there and it still looks the same except they've got wheelie bins now.

06:00 **Can you describe for me the inside of the house and what it looked like?**

Only vaguely. I know it had two storeys and when you entered the front door it was similar to this place, you went upstairs to the bedrooms. The area downstairs was just a living area with a kitchen and that sort of thing. It was not very large but it was large enough for us. My father as I said was in the air force, so I don't know whether the air force helped him rent the place. We

06:30 didn't own it.

Your brother dying, how did he die?

At the time I think it was called infantile paralysis, which I think is polio [poliomyelitis]. He died in an iron lung.

Do you have any memories of him?

I remember playing with young Rory, yes. He was three when he died and I was five.

Do you have memories of him being sick at the time?

No I don't. I just

07:00 remember we were tunnelling through sand and so on for some reason or another and going down to the beach and eating winkles. We had shell fish in little tins and things. We did that as kids. And sliding down hills in the snow on bits of iron and stuff like that.

How many siblings did you have?

My parents had five sons. I am the eldest but they lost two so three were left. Unfortunately, they lost the two closest to

07:30 me so there is a very large gap between me and my other two brothers.

How did the other son die?

It took me a while to be able to – we were in Australia. He was a baby when we came out. When he was nine, and I was fourteen, we were walking from our place along the road. It was a country road running through Poowong. It is a very small town of about two hundred and fifty people.

08:00 We were walking up to my uncle's place to watch TV. It was sort of just on dusk. I was walking and Jimmy was riding his bike behind me. A car ran over him and kept on going. I picked him up and carried him home and he was dead unfortunately. It had a very bad effect on me, that, for a very long time.

08:30 **Was anybody able to help you through that?**

It had just as bad an effect on my parents. It probably destroyed my father, losing a second child. My mother seemed to cope with it a bit better, but not much. With me, I went from the dreaded A grade student down to struggling to pass. It was in the middle of my high school years. There was no counselling or

09:00 anything like that.

Coming back to Northern Ireland and your schooling there, what memories do you have of school?

Mostly of doing homework. I can remember, and I was only a little kid, that they required there in Ireland when you were doing your homework to rule double lines in red ink with a nib. I remember finding it very difficult because it used to blot and splotch and stuff.

09:30 If you got it right, you got a little star. I remember the stars too. That was good. The actual work I mean it was typical primary school stuff like adding and subtracting and multiplication tables and reading. I don't remember a lot about it.

Was your family religious at all?

No. We were never religious. I was brought up in the Church of Ireland so I was confirmed and baptised. I went to Sunday school here and over

10:00 there and in Australia but I wouldn't call my family religious, no.

Can you just share with us what the process was of confirmation there?

That's going back a bit, isn't it? I had to learn the catechism and I can't remember all of the things that we did. It obviously wasn't all that important to me.

Did you have any particularly good friends from school or local

10:30 **neighbours?**

I don't have close friends from school as such. I kept in touch with just one person. I still have close contact with people I knew in teachers' college back in 1960 and 1961. I see a number of them quite regularly.

Were there any close friends while you were in Northern Island?

No. I don't know that at that age I had formed any

11:00 close friends. I remember playing with my brother as I say but I don't really remember any other kids.

While you were in Northern Ireland did you go on family holidays to places?

Yes. We went down to Donaghadee, I think it was. It is a beach place. I thought it was a million miles away but when we went back it was about a five minute drive from Belfast. Maybe it was a little bit more but not much. It was a pretty ordinary beach with a lot of

11:30 rocks and seaweed. It was a little beachside place. That is the only place we ever went to on holidays as such.

Were you taught how to swim back then?

No. I don't remember swimming or ever going in the water. We probably did. We probably paddled in the water but I don't think I could swim.

Did you notice any effects from the war once it had finished, upon Northern Ireland growing up?

12:00 I had vague memories of rationing but that was sort of after the war. I had no memories of the war. It ended when I was two and a half or something. Certainly after the war, my parents had a ration book and they'd go down and get half a pound of butter or two chops or whatever they got, three sausages or something. That is about it. Later on the parcels from Australia, because some of the family had moved to Australia first and used to

12:30 send home little food parcels and things from the colonies.

Did you have any idea of Australia before you considered going?

Not at all. We learned a bit about it because we weren't the first of the family to come out here. Others came out first a couple of years before we went so we got letters from them and had some knowledge of it.

13:00 **What did you enjoy doing as a small kid in Northern Ireland?**

Like I said, my memories are of playing in the show and playing with a broken fire hydrant and sliding down on my satchel in an open drain with water. Stealing apples, I remember doing that once and eating the apples and getting sick. That is about it and going to school. There was the occasional movie.

What happened with stealing apples?

There was an apple tree on the way up to Aldergrove. My father was stationed at

13:30 Aldergrove which is the air force base just out of Belfast. There were other kids too but I can't remember them clearly. We were going up there and just walking past this tree that was in somebody's back yard and just climbed up and grabbed some of these apples. I think they were crab apples because they were very sour. That is it.

Did you ever get punished in your household

14:00 **from your father?**

No, not then. Much later after Jimmy was killed he started to drink a lot and he had a lot of mood swings, but he was always a generous man and a good man.

Maybe if you could just describe your parents and what they were like as people?

They were good people. They were working class people with a

14:30 limited education. My mother left school I think at thirteen. Her mother had nine children, seven of whom survived infancy. She lost her husband after the First World War. He was gassed and survived for some time but was always sick. He couldn't work and died when he was forty something. My mother left school, she was the eldest daughter, to look after the other kids and

15:00 Gran went to work in a factory, the wool mill. Dad, I am told, came from a pretty unhappy sort of a family. He used to be beaten up by his mother and various other things. He joined the air force at seventeen before the war. He was stationed at Aldergrove and at some point met Mum. Once Mum's siblings got a little older she went to work in the factory as well where her mother worked. That was it.

15:30 Dad was an aircraftsman and Mum was a factory worker.

What work did your father actually do as an aircraftsman?

He wasn't actually air crew so he was on the ground. He never talked much about it so I don't know whether the experience was all that enriching for him. He talked about doing guard duties and a bit of maintenance on plant and equipment and so on and driving duties but it was that sort of thing. He also boxed

16:00 for the air force. He said he wasn't very good at it.

Growing up, did your father teach you how to box?

He didn't really. When we came out to Australia I joined a boys' club and I did some boxing in that but it was pretty low level stuff.

Were you close to your father?

Yes, pretty close. We never got estranged. It became difficult to visit because in his later

16:30 years I have to say he was probably an alcoholic. You never knew what you were going to go home to so that was difficult.

Was family important to your mum and dad?

Yes, especially after losing the two kids. They had a very large extended family. All of the family ended up in Poowong which was interesting because suddenly there were these fifteen Irish people living in a town of two hundred and fifty in the middle of Gippsland.

17:00 Family was important. My mother's mother, my gran, spent a number of years of her later life living with Mum and with Dad initially. Then he died and she lived with Mum.

You mentioned how your father reacted to Jimmy's death. With the other son who died what was your parents' reaction to that?

I can't remember.

17:30 That was a long time ago. At that time I was five. I imagine they were pretty broken up. In both cases it was interesting. At the time that Roy died, Jimmy was a baby so they had Jimmy and they had to look after Jimmy. When Jimmy was killed they had Paul who was one and a half so they had this other bloke that they had to look after which might have taken the edge off it a bit.

18:00 **How did the opportunity come up to go to Australia?**

It is an interesting story actually. One of my mother's brothers, Sam, he was in the Royal Navy. During the war his ship turned up in Melbourne. Apparently there was some scheme of 'host a sailor' or something. So he spent a weekend with a family called Buchanan who happened to own the butter factory at Poowong. He

18:30 spent a weekend with them and they liked each other and they corresponded and Mr Buchanan said, "If any of your family want to come out to Australia I will sponsor them and give them a job." So my mother's sister and her husband came out first. He went into the butter factory as a truck driver. My mother and father and us two we followed in 1952. Dad worked in the factory and Mum was a housekeeper for the Buchanans

19:00 and we went to school. We were followed by my mother's younger sister and her husband who had been in the marines. She ran the clothing shop that was attached to the factory. Her husband, Bill, managed the food and grain store which was owned by the factory and the Buchanans. Finally, my grandmother and Mum's youngest brother came out and he worked in the factory at Poowong. Finally, Sam, the guy who started it all turned up

19:30 too. He had spent his career in intelligence. He has actually transferred to Defence Intelligence. There is Signals Directorate in Melbourne. He is stationed in Melbourne so he took a direct transfer over there and lived in Melbourne. The rest of us were in Poowong.

What were you told about Australia once you knew you were coming over?

Very little. I don't remember

20:00 knowing what to expect at all. I had no idea. I thought it was going to be hot and it was. It was hot.

What was required with packing up the household and sending it over?

We didn't have a household. My parents didn't have much. We arrived and it was like a cliché, just a

suitcase and two quid or something. We were ten pound migrants. We had no furniture. When we actually arrived with lived with

20:30 Uncle Peter and Aunty Greta who was Mum's sister who came out first. We were all in the one little house together for some time until we rented a place which was also owned by the Buchanans who owned some houses as well as the butter factory. They finally bought their own place, Mum and Dad, in Poowong some years later.

There was obviously a reason to go to Australia but was there a reason to leave Ireland?

I've always suspected

21:00 although they never said as much to me that with losing Rory it changed Dad's life again. He had been in the air force twelve years and he left the air force. He joined the merchant marines and he did the Southampton/South Africa run for two years. He couldn't settle down and as I said when Peter and Greta went out to Australia he thought, "We'll go too. We will just apply and go." And that's what they did.

21:30 **How did you get to Australia?**

On the HMS Chitral which was a large ship. It was its last run so it wasn't a particularly good ship. I have only great memories of the trip because it was pretty exciting stuff. It was an ocean liner full of migrants. We all had cabins and steward service and meals. It was like a cruise. It took four weeks I think.

22:00 **Was it full of Irishmen?**

There were a lot of Irish but there were a lot of English as well because it left from Southampton. I can't remember actually going to Southampton, but I know that is where we left from.

What was the accommodation like?

It was cabins. My brother and I shared a cabin. It was just two bunks. My mother and father shared another one just nearby. We didn't have an ensuite facility; you had to go down to shower

22:30 but it was comfortable enough as I recall.

How long was the journey?

It was about four weeks I think.

So what did you do for that four weeks?

We stopped at a lot of places and we got off at most of them. I remember we landed in Algiers and I think that was the first port of call. We got off and had a wander around there. I remember being excited, buying some comics and we got back to the ship and of course they were all in French. We stopped at

23:00 Colombo and we stopped at Aden. We went through the Suez Canal which was pretty exciting and then there was the long run to Australia. Apart from that on board the ship we watched a lot of movies. I remember a couple of movies that we saw there and we played games. We stood around the deck and watched the water for hours. It was a good trip.

You have spoken a few times of movies aboard the ship?

It's just a memory that I have.

23:30 **Are there any particular movies that stand out?**

In Ireland I remember it was obviously a movie about the 7th Cavalry because at the end I remember General Custer was fighting Sitting Bull in the river bed hand to hand. That's what I remember of the movie. The movie that I remember most from the ship was a thing called No Highway in the Sky with Jimmy Stewart. It was about aircraft and they got fatigued and the tails

24:00 fell off after a period. That was a good movie.

Arriving in Australia, what was the first port of call?

I think they called into Perth briefly but I don't think we got off the ship and then we just went on to Melbourne.

Do you remember actually departing the ship?

Yes, I do, coming down the gangplank. That is all it is. It is just a memory of coming down the gangplank. Peter and Greta were waiting for us when we pulled in and we

24:30 found them and headed off to Poowong.

What were your first impressions of Australia?

I can't actually remember having an impression apart from the fact that it was hot because it was February and it was a hot day. I remember that. I don't recall thinking, "This is vastly different," or anything. Melbourne is a big city and Belfast was a smaller city than Melbourne. Getting to Poowong was a bit different.

25:00 I didn't know what it was really. You see South Gippsland in many respects is quite similar to Ireland. I don't know if you know the area, but it is dairy country and it is green and it rains a lot and it is hilly. In some parts of it without the eucalypts, you could be in Ireland so it wasn't all that dramatically different.

Just in one respect you mentioned that your family didn't have much to bring out, with clothing given that Ireland is a bit colder than Australia, what

25:30 **clothes did you have personally?**

I can't remember. I was dressed and I had shoes and socks and things so I had clothes but I don't remember clothes.

And setting up a household in Australia, do you remember that?

Initially we lived for some time with Greta and Peter so there was no setting up of a household as such. We just used their stuff. When my parents

26:00 eventually rented a house, they bought some second-hand furniture and borrowed other stuff. It was an old farm house near the butter factory.

Greta and Peter, did they have children?

They had one son. Stephen wasn't born then. He was born a little later after we moved out.

You would have started school?

I did at least a year's primary school in Poowong. That wasn't dramatically

26:30 different either. It was the same subjects and the teaching methods were similar as I recall. I suppose it was different because I sort of stood out a bit. I was a little skinny white kid with an Irish accent. I don't recall being victimised or bullied or anything. It was a small school. I don't know how many kids were in the grade, they came from farms and so on, but there were probably

27:00 fifteen or twenty kids in the grade.

Were there any other kids from other nationalities that had arrived there?

No, I can't think of any other migrants that were in that area.

The reason in a sense was the opportunity at the butter factory. Do you have any memories of that and your father working there?

Yes. I have lots of memories of the butter factory. He worked in the casein area. Don't ask me what it is, but apparently you extract it from

27:30 milk and you can make buttons from it or something. That is the area he worked in. I was down at the factory all the time. We got our milk from the factory. I would go out there. Peter was a truck driver there and it was dairy country. He would go out in his truck and people would just put out their milk cans. They were the large milk cans. He would muscle them onto the truck and take them back to the factory. I would go out with him on a regular basis at

28:00 weekends or whenever I wasn't at school. I would give him a hand. I couldn't lift the cans but they would also deliver groceries from the factory to the various farms. They would phone in orders and I would take them up to the house. The factory was a good little factory, until of course it was bought by a conglomerate and they put in tankers and then closed it.

That was many years later?

That was many years later, yes. My parents had all

28:30 gone by then and I'd gone.

Once your parents moved away from your aunt and uncle, can you describe the house that you moved into?

It was an old farm house. It was just an old weatherboard farm house with three bedrooms. There was nothing special about it. We had a telephone, I remember. It was one of those where there was an exchange at Poowong and you rang up and someone would answer and say, "What number do you want," and you'd say, "Poowong 28." We had a few

29:00 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s there and a wood heap and an open fire. It was comfortable enough.

Did you make any particular friends at school or around the area?

Yes, I did. I was a latecomer of course, so they had already formed whatever relationships they were forming. Initially I was probably a little bit of an outsider. As I said, I can't remember ever being victimised or bullied or anything like that. It was just that you

29:30 felt a little bit on the outer because the other kids had been together for some time. It didn't last that long. I was fairly good at sports and particularly cricket. When I went to High School in Korumburra I made quite a few friends. That was only a year after we arrived. I played cricket for the senior Poowong side as a thirteen and fourteen year old and for the high school team.

30:00 **With discipline just at the schools and in comparison, the one Northern Ireland school and the one at Poowong was it the same?**

The differences I can remember is that in Ireland, when you got punished, you got the cane. In Australia they were more humane and they used a strap. It was pretty similar.

Are you speaking from experience?

I think in Ireland – I hope my

30:30 memory hasn't been clouded or something but I seem to remember getting the cuts, and that was the cane, for getting spelling wrong. That is not a very good way of teaching. I don't now if that happened all the time. I probably did something else as well.

And the strap in Australia?

Yes, I got that a couple of times. I can't remember what I did now but it was probably something stupid. I used to skylark a lot. I was probably talking I class or something.

31:00 **Do you know how your parents fitted in to the community? Did they just stick with family or were they able to break in?**

No. They formed friendships. The Buchanan family were good friends. Dad made friends with people at work. Bill and Evelyn, Mum's younger sister, were very social people. They were very good ballroom dancers, for example, so they used to run classes in

31:30 Poowong. All these people would turn up and they would teach them how to dance. They were a pretty sociable bunch of people, although the family was always there so it was sort of inbuilt, wasn't it, because there were so many of the buggers.

You mentioned holiday times in Northern Ireland, but where did you go in Australia during holidays?

I'm trying to think whether we had holidays or whether we called them holidays. Obviously

32:00 my parents didn't have much money and certainly when they were starting out. I can remember from a fairly young age and certainly in the early years of high school working in the high school holidays. It was simple stuff like picking peas and cutting up potatoes for seed. When I got a little bigger I carted hay. We did all those things during the summer. With other kids we would occasionally go down to the

32:30 beach at a place called Lang Lang, but it was a pretty crappy beach. I learned how to swim there I suppose and also in Poowong itself we had a creek that had a swimming hole in it and as kids we used to go down there and jump around. Going away for any distance for holidays my parents never had a car until very late and Poowong has no, and still doesn't as far as I'm aware, bus services or train service so you were limited as to how far you could ride your bike.

33:00 That was about as far as you got on holidays.

As a young boy, did you miss Northern Ireland?

No, I don't recall every missing it. I settled in pretty well in Australia. I really liked cricket and I was doing OK at school. I liked the place straight away. It is interesting too because even though they could later on all of these people I've talked about who came from Ireland and talked all their lives about how wonderful Ireland was,

33:30 not one of them ever went back even for a visit. I have been back three times but none of the others ever went back. Even though they went overseas, they never went back to Ireland.

Was there still an attachment to Northern Ireland from the family's perspective, but did you feel like you were Australians?

I think the family quickly felt like they were Australians. The whole family moved. We had no family left at all.

34:00 There were no cousins, uncles or aunts, nothing, left in Ireland. One of my mother's brothers had moved to England and his family grew up there. He was in the Royal Navy all his career and his family lived in Torquay and still do. And Dad's family migrated to America. So we have some relatives still in America but nobody in Ireland. There is no one. No, they didn't maintain any ties at all. They had

34:30 friends that were three and they corresponded and some of these friends at different times actually came out and visited in Australia but they never went back for some reason.

Education and studying for the future did you have dreams and aspirations or did your parents have dreams and aspirations for what they wanted you to be when you left school?

No. I think it was generally accepted that

35:00 just by the nature of the place if you finished high school you probably became a teacher if you were a bloke and if you were a girl you became a nurse or a teacher. At the time if you left high school before finishing high school you generally went into the bank. That is what seemed to happen to most of the kids. Or, you went back onto the farm and took over from your old man. I didn't know that there were other jobs. I don't remember

35:30 thinking there were other jobs. I applied for a teaching bursary as it was called then which helped your parents with school books and so on if you got a certain mark which I fortunately got as early as second year high school. They supplied text books for me from then on through high school. When I went to teachers' college it is a bit different to what it is today, because you got paid to go to teachers' college. You were on the teaching bond, so you had to teach for a certain number of

36:00 years or pay back the bond.

What did you enjoy about high school when you went?

I enjoyed sport. Academically I was pretty good I have to say. I was always around the top of the class so schoolwork was never a problem. I played a lot of cricket and some football and some table tennis and athletics and high jump particularly.

36:30 Towards the end I was captain of the cricket team and a prefect and a house captain and all that sort of stuff.

Given that obviously high school was a new school for you, how was it fitting in with the other kids?

Well most of these kids came from somewhere else too. Korumburra is not a big town either. What is the population now? It is probably a bit over a thousand or fourteen hundred perhaps. A large

37:00 number of the kids were bussed in from around the district like we were, so for most of them it was a new experience and we all fitted in pretty well together. I had a couple of particular friends. It was not a problem.

You would have I presume had some sort of Irish accent back then?

I did. I continued to have an Irish accent until

37:30 certainly the end of high school. In college it had pretty much disappeared by the time I went there although the odd word would crop up. 'Buk' I used to say, 'Buk' as in book. It did go. My parents, of course, never lost their accent and nor did my uncles and aunts, they still say it. I have only got one aunty left. They are all dead now, but she still speaks with an Irish accent.

38:00 **Were the students interested in where you had come from?**

I don't think so, no, not particularly. I don't remember anyone ever asking a question.

You mentioned the death of Jimmy and that obviously shook the whole family up. Your grades dropped?

Yes.

How were you able to get back on top with the grades and get over the grief? Was there a grieving process?

There certainly was a grieving

38:30 process. I couldn't talk about it for many years and I don't think I ever got over the academic side of things. As I mentioned earlier I went from an A student to struggling to pass and just scraping by. I fortunately scrapped by but only just. I was getting ninety or ninety-five per cent in exams and I went from that to forty-eight or fifty-two per cent.

39:00 I sort of lost interest a bit.

Did the community give any support to your family at the time?

Not that I recall. I don't think the fellow that did it was even prosecuted.

So they caught up with him?

They knew who it was, but it was one of Dad's friends leaving the pub. It broke him too. He was shattered.

Were you able to identify the car?

No. I think just everyone

39:30 knew. It was a small town. He thought he did something, but he didn't know what he did.

Given your dad's grief over it all, were you ever blamed for what had happened?

No, never. I blamed myself a bit but my parents didn't. Again, Dad couldn't settle and after a while he felt he had to leave Poowong and he did. He went to Geelong and worked in the Alcoa

40:00 factory there.

So the whole family moved?

Mum stayed for some time and Dad would come back for the odd weekend here and there. Eventually she moved down to Geelong. By that time I had left home. I went back and visited obviously in Geelong. They had a place in Newcomb.

We are just going to stop the tape.

Tape 2

00:54 **Subjects that you enjoyed at high school, what did you enjoy studying?**

English and history. I did

01:00 matriculation and physics and chemistry as well. I did a bit of a mixture. I think history and English, English literature.

Do you have any distinct memories of high school with friends or teachers?

Yes, quite a few.

What would they be?

Just the usual thing of being a young person and involved in the school. We had four houses there so we had lots of athletic meetings and

01:30 sporting fixtures of cricket and football playing against each other. There are memories from all of the games and memories of some of the teachers. I particularly like the English teacher; he was a nice guy and Crowe, the chemistry teacher, and Roy who was the woodwork teacher at one time. You have a lot of memories of high school, and good memories by and large.

Did your parents encourage you to continue you on your education, rather than drop out early?

Yes. They

02:00 wanted me to continue with my education, yes. When I had taken this teaching bursary it was just expected that I would finish high school and go to teachers' college and that's what happened. I never thought I was going to do anything else.

Growing up as a teenager, were you into music or sorts?

Yes. The early rock and roll I can remember all that like Unchained Melody. That was one of the big songs when I was riding my bike around

03:00 and getting the hots for some girl in the school like you did. Pink Carnation and a White Sports Coat and Elvis Presley's Heartbreak Hotel. You had all these records and stuff, but they were mostly rock.

Did you buy yourself records at the time?

No, I seem to recall that I used to play the Buchanans' kids records because they had more money than we did and more records. Mum used to clean their house and I used to go down there and just play the records. They didn't mind. They had a tennis court and I played tennis on the court and so on.

Did you ever go to school dances with rock and roll playing?

Yes. We went to the odd dance. We had formals like we do now particularly in the later years like Year 10, 11 and 12, we used to go to dances. I was very shy. It was all a bit hard to ask a girl to dance.

03:30 **Did they play rock and roll there or other music?**

No. We didn't get a lot of rock and roll at the dances at Poowong and Korumburra it was mostly things like Evening Three Step and The Pride of Erin and the progressive barn dance. It was that sort of stuff. There was some old bloke sawing away and playing the piano.

So what were the adults' views of rock and roll and the

04:00 **music of your generation?**

Dad could never work it out. He couldn't work it out at all. His favourite singer was Mario Lanza. He played it ad nauseum. That was his taste in his music and it was all like Danny Boy and stuff like that. He would burst into song at the drop of a hat. It was usually Danny Boy and my wife hates it.

Did you have family singalongs growing up?

Yes, they did that. They sang Irish songs like When Irish Eyes Are Smiling and all of that.

04:30 **Did you pick up that like of those songs?**

Not particularly, no. I don't mind them as much as my wife does. She is not keen on some of them. They are a bit maudlin some of them, especially Danny Boy.

You mentioned girls, did yo have girlfriends at the time?

In high school, no, not as such. No, I couldn't say I had a girlfriend, no.

05:00 I had a couple of dates with different girls but there was no one particular girl.

Was anything said to you from your parents' perspective or from school in respect from girl?

No. We didn't have sex education, certainly at school. It was way before that happened. You sort of fumbled your way though it I think. I was pretty shy and I didn't do a lot of fumbling.

Television came in 1956,

05:30 **what are your memories of that?**

The Mickey Mouse Club. That was my biggest memory and Davy Crockett and stuff like that. It was the Mickey Mouse Club particularly because it had Annette Funicello and Doreen, the earlier versions of who did they have recently, Britney Spears or something. It was mostly that stuff and then later on also In Melbourne Tonight with Graham

06:00 Kennedy if I was allowed to stay up and watch it. My parents didn't have TV for some time but Uncle Peter did.

Uncle Peter's place would have been a popular place to go to?

Yes. I used to wander down there occasionally. It wasn't far away. It would be less than half a kilometre probably from our place to his.

Did television on the broader side of things have much of an impact on the social side and the way people related and did things after school?

We tended

06:30 to do – if it was summer we'd be down the swimming hole and other times we'd be out riding our bikes. Even in the early days of high school there was cricket practice or footy practice or footy training. Those were the things we did. Then later on when you got towards the end of high school it was sneaking a few beers somewhere and then going to the odd concert down in Melbourne because a couple of the older kids actually had cars. I remember seeing Johnny O'Keefe and Crash Craddock and that was the first concert I

07:00 went to. It was exciting stuff.

What are your memories of the concert?

I though Johnny O'Keefe was terrific. Crash Craddock had two hits and he sang both of those. Then there was a duo called Santo and Johnny and they had had a couple of hits so they were pretty good. JO'K [Johnny O'Keefe] did half the show and then the three Americans did the other half.

Where was the venue?

Festival Hall.

Can you describe that for the

07:30 **archive and what it looked like?**

Well, no. It was just a big hall. It was just a big empty space. There wasn't anything flash about it. It had the stage in the middle. I guess that is where the boxing ring used to be or where they put the boxing ring is where they put the stage. No, it wasn't particularly impressive. It was just a big hall. I can't tell you anything about it.

Do you remember the final exams

08:00 **at school? What were they like?**

I thought they were very difficult. Then all exams were external in the last years of high school. You had a registered number and you went to an appointed place and it all came down to one exam for the whole year. At certain times they said, “Open your papers now and begin the exam,” and then two hours later it was, “Pens down,” and they would collect the exam papers and you would find out whether you had passed or failed in the

08:30 newspapers by whether your number was in there or not. It was a year’s work down to two hours basically. Some of the questions I seem to recall were fairly difficult.

When did you receive news of whether you had passed or failed?

It was two or three weeks later and again via the newspaper. The school didn’t keep a record.

09:00 This was all done externally. The exams were all external exams.

What marks were you looking for to get into the teachers’ course?

You just had to pass. You just had to pass matriculation or leaving. That is what it was called then in Year 11 or 12. And I did. I actually passed the exams that I sat for. I failed physics. I actually passed the written exam but I failed the prep book. You also had to submit a prep book so they

09:30 scrubbed me on that one but it didn’t seem to make much difference.

Your memories of going off to teachers’ college?

It was pretty exciting. This was the first time that I was living away from home. I was seventeen going on eighteen. I arrived up in Bendigo to three hundred other great teenagers who were in the same position. We were all away from home for the first time and

10:00 we lived in a hostel. There was a boys’ hostel and a girls’ hostel. There was a fair amount of exchanging. The principal used to wander the streets at night with his flash light, so you had to be a bit careful.

What are some of the hostel stories that come out?

Not a lot. I didn’t spend a lot of time in the hostel. I started off there but

10:30 there was no requirement to live in the hostel and we did get eight pounds a week as I recall. I ended up in a house with three other blokes and we paid four pounds each for board. We shared two bedrooms and lived with this lady and her daughter and she fed us. We had a lot more freedom than most. We had a lot of freedom.

How come you hadn’t gone into the

11:00 **hostel, why the house?**

I went into the hostel initially but it was very restricted. The guy who was the principal of the teachers’ college, Sid Walters, was an ex Welsh coalminer and he was very strict. He had all these rules. You had to have lights out at a certain time and you had to be in bed at a certain time and there was no fraternisation. It was like living in a Stalag [concentration camp] or something.

11:30 It was nice to get out of it.

Do you remember some of the subjects you were studying at the time?

Yes. Because it was a primary school teachers’ college and we were training to be primary teachers, we had things like infant study methods and educational psychology and nature studies, would you believe, and physical education because you needed to learn all the

12:00 games that you could pass on to the kids that you would be teaching. There was music. You had to learn some musical instrument. The recorder was my instrument of choice because it was the easiest to play. You had to learn chalk board techniques like just actually writing on a blackboard and things like that. It was fairly extensive.

Was it difficult?

No, academically it wasn’t difficult at all. It was nowhere near as difficult as the last years of high school.

12:30 Most of it was useful. After the first year where you did a bit of the techniques of teaching you then went on teaching rounds. You would go into one of the local schools with an experienced teacher and teach his class. He would give you subjects to teach and then mark you on your performance. By the end of a couple of years you knew a bit about teaching.

13:00 **What did you do during your social time, your time off from your studies?**

We went to the pub a lot. We went to dances. I had a girlfriend in teachers’ college, well, a couple of

girlfriends. They changed over periodically. We went to dances and we still played cricket and football. We had Tuesday and Thursday night training and we played on Saturday and that took up a bit of time. There were the occasional

13:30 movies and occasionally down to a little restaurant or whatever but not often because of the money. The college used to have quite a few social activities itself in terms of dances and sporting activities and things like that. It was a pretty full on social life. It was a good life. My father bought me a car so I was one of the few with one. He didn't have a car but I had one all through my second year of teachers' college which was very handy.

14:00 **You mentioned your love and enjoyment of cricket. Do you remember international cricket like the Bradman days and the Richie days?**

I don't remember Bradman. I think he'd finished by the time we got to Australia but I can remember going to test cricket at the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] not long after I got out to Australia. There was Typhoon Tyson, Brian Statham, he cleaned up Australia and I was at that match. Tyson took seven for something

14:30 and they won the match. I remember Peter May and Neil Harvey and quite a few of them.

Who did you support in that respect?

Initially England, surprisingly. I don't know why. I very quickly went over to Australia. In the early days of high school I supported England but by the middle of high school it was Australia.

Pubs – what was the legal age of drinking growing up?

It was eighteen

15:00 but they had six o'clock closing of course, so you were in and out pretty quickly if you were doing it after work which we did. We were in college until four or five o'clock and then we'd nick down to the pub and have a couple of beers. It was the old six o'clock swill. They stopped serving at six but you had fifteen minutes to finish our beer and leave, so you would always order about three. It was terrible.

Were the pubs

15:30 **full?**

Yes. The pubs were always full at around six o'clock.

Was there much competition to get a drink?

A fair amount. You had to push in there, I can tell you. While I was at teachers' college I worked as a tram conductor in Melbourne during the holidays. I can remember one of the runs that we did was South Melbourne, St. Kilda Beach to East Preston, Bell Street. We used to get in at about five thirty.

16:00 You had to acquit the bag with money and tickets and so on so by the time that rolled around it was probably five to six. You had to make a pretty quick beeline for the pub unless you had a good driver. I had a good driver a couple of times and we didn't pick up any passengers on the last run, we just made for the depot.

He wanted to get to the pub as well did he?

Exactly, and we did.

Do you know the reason why it was a

16:30 **six o'clock close?**

I've no idea. We all talked about the wowsers and so on because when they started talking about keeping them open until ten o'clock people came out from everywhere saying it was going to destroy family life and, "My old man will never come home." It was probably true. That was the main reason. They thought, "If you finish drinking at six o'clock, you'll go home." You would go to work and you'd call into the pub and have a couple of beers and then you'd go to your family. Pubs weren't open on a Sunday either.

17:00 **What about the buying of alcohol outside the pub? Was that free and available?**

No. You couldn't buy alcohol outside of the pub hours. You could buy it during the hours of course and take it away.

If you wanted to serve alcohol at home?

You would buy it beforehand. They were pretty strict laws. They were stupid laws. You could get a drink at a pub after hours if you were what they called a bone fide traveller.

17:30 If you drove your car twenty kilometres to a pub you could drink but then you had to drive back but you couldn't drink at that pub if you lived near the pub. It was crazy. There were no breath tests or anything in those days anyway.

How stringent was the closing time?

They always closed at six. The local police would be wandering around and it wasn't worth their licence. The odd pub –

18:00 as we grew up there would be pubs where you would become a guest of the proprietor. You would move to the back to the lounge or something and if anyone came he would say, "They're not buying. They are my guests and I'm just giving them a drink."

Were you ever lucky enough to be a guest?

Yes. Another thing they used to do was in South Australia they had rules that if you were having a meal, you could be served alcohol in the

18:30 pub. So you would get cheese and biscuits or something.

And four beers?

Yes.

Once you had finished your teachers' college course, what happened then? Where did you start teaching?

I eventually went back to where I went to high school, Korumburra. That was interesting because I was still only nineteen. I turned twenty in the year I taught at Korumburra. All of the kids who were in Forms 1, 2 and 3 when I

19:00 left were now in Forms 10, 11 and 12. It was good. I actually asked to go back to Korumburra and I went and lived with my parents at Poowong. They were still there at that time. I think Dad might have left around then, but Mum was still there and still in the house so I lived there.

And you were teaching primary or high?

High school. I was trained in primary but they didn't have enough teachers to go around all the

19:30 high schools and they needed qualified people, so they were quite happy to accept me teaching there. I taught maths and English and history to Years 7, 8 and 9.

Were you on top of it, the subjects?

Yes. I knew more than they did which usually helps. I had the support of the senior kids in the school too because I was a prefect when they were junior and was the house captain and

20:00 the cricket captain. Now that they were seniors, they sort of looked after me a bit I think. I never had any discipline problems.

Did any interesting circumstances arise teaching at the school you were a student in?

There was only one and it was interesting and I think it was because the senior kids, as I said, they made sure that the kids I was teaching didn't upset me. There were some

20:30 disciplinary problems in the school and some of the young female teachers in particular had trouble controlling classes. The headmaster at the time dragged the worst offenders out of the Form 3 boys and stuck them into one group. I think there were fifteen of them. They were only there waiting to finish the year so they could leave school. They were all farmers or whatever so they had absolutely no interest in school.

21:00 I ended up with them a lot. I remember the headmaster saying, "I don't care what you do with them and I don't care whether you teach them anything or not, just keep them quiet," so that's what I did.

What did you do?

If they moved I hit them basically. Their parents really didn't care much about them. I didn't hit them too much. I imposed discipline in other ways. I would make them run around the oval or something and the other kids would make them do it.

21:30 **So after this school where did you go after that?**

It was still in the general area and it was a place called Strzeleckie. It was a one teacher school or one and a half. I had an assistant who was a trained teacher married to one of the local farmers and she used to come in in the afternoons and teach the youngest kids, Grades 1 and 2. I took the rest of them. There were twenty-five kids and six grades and I taught there for two years. I taught there for two years and it was very interesting.

22:00 **This was primary or high?**

Primary. It was just Grades 1 to 6.

What was interesting about this?

You were your own boss for a start and you did your own thing. I was twenty at the time. We had parents and citizens' meetings and you devised your own curriculum and you devised the methods you were going to use to teach the kids and the whole thing.

22:30 I don't think they've got too many of these schools any more. I know Strzeleckie folded because I had two families, the Mastertons and the Coes. It was like the Ozarks. One family had six kids in the school and the other had six. They both had six kids so half of the school were these two families. When they grew up and the kids left, well they closed the school.

Did the teacher have a sort of status in the local community?

Yes. I think you did. I think people respected the

23:00 profession, the farmers and so on . I felt that we had respect.

And after Strzeleckie?

My parents at that stage were living in Geelong, both Mum and Dad, and I asked for a transfer to Geelong and went to Geelong. They had a big primary school and I was just teaching a grade there. In one grade I was teaching all subjects.

And at that time you joined the CMF?

Yes. It was the

23:30 10th Medium Regiment Geelong. It is an artillery regiment.

Why did you join them?

Primarily to make some money, to be honest. You would do the odd weekend and one night a week and you got paid for it as you do now for the army reserves. It was just another way of making a few dollars and I found out I quite liked it so I kept doing it.

Was there an enlistment process that you had to go through?

Yes, we enlisted but it was just a matter of

24:00 turning up to the unit and applying to join. Then initially you had to do eight days straight but over four weekends as well as one night a week over that four weeks. That was their recruit training phase and when you finished that you became a gunner. Then you only had to attend one night a week and occasional weekends and I did one annual camp at

24:30 Puckapunyal, which was two weeks straight. You got time off work for that.

Can you talk me through the initial training stage like what was required and what you did?

A lot of the initial things were just drill. It was marching and coming to attention and saluting and that sort of stuff. We moved on from their to weapon handling. We didn't have any live shoots or anything. You would have a rifle and someone would teach you how to clean it and then

25:00 put it back together again. We did some practise with some artillery gun sights. You couldn't fire anything, not in Geelong, but we got to do that in Puckapunyal on the range when we went to the camp. We learned here initially the techniques involved in laying the gun and setting it up.

Did a number of fellows enlist with you at the time into the CMF, or were you by yourself?

I enlisted by myself but I met and

25:30 I think we did the same recruit training course, Jimmy Holland. He is a very good friend. We have been friends ever since. As it happened he ended up doing Vietnamese and we served in the same unit at the same time in Vietnam. I was his best man. He is still around. That goes back to then, 1965.

Once you had joined the artillery,

26:00 **what were they actually training you for? War?**

I mean it is just like they do now in the army reserve. I don't think anyone expected they were going to get called up. It was just a pool of semi-trained people. The 10th Medium Regiment was the only medium artillery in Australia. They had 5.5 inch guns, were World War vintage and they were big guns. They had a one hundred pound shell and eighteen thousand yards.

26:30 I don't think they were ever deployed. They certainly never went to Vietnam.

You mentioned the major reason of joining was to get paid. What was the pay system?

I can't remember now but you were paid for the hours that you put in. What the rate was I don't recall but it was all right. The junior teachers especially like today they didn't get a hell of a lot of money.

27:00 They were comfortable enough but a little bit extra would never hurt.

What was the pay of a teacher back then?

I can't even remember that. It is funny that I have a clear memory of teachers' college and eight pounds a week and I remember that the first year out it was probably about double that. It was about double that so about sixteen pounds a week which I suppose at the time wasn't too bad.

27:30 **The CMF training, you mentioned one night a week, what would you do on that night a week?**

The same sort of stuff. It would be the weapons drill and the gun aiming and all that sort of stuff. It was theory mostly.

The weapons that you pulled apart, what would they be?

The SLR [Self Loading Rifle]. It was the infantry weapon, the rifle. It was mostly that. I think that was about all they had in the artillery regiment.

28:00 **And the camp? You went to Puckapunyal?**

Yes. It was in winter and it was bloody cold and I remember that. We spent most of the days actually live firing. We would go out with the guns. We towed our own guns up to Puckapunyal. We would take them out on the range and deployed them and we'd be given targets and we fired the things and sometimes hit the target. I remember it was very difficult to aim the gun

28:30 because part of the procedure was you needed a gun aiming point. Puckapunyal range had been used so much there was nothing left standing. It was very hard to find something to actually line up on. The 5.5 inch gun had a crew of about ten. Each one had a specific task to perform, so we rotated through those tasks during the two weeks.

29:00 **It had a crew of ten? Can you just outline everyone's position?**

I can't really. There was a gun aimer for a start. There were ammunition numbers because those shells were pretty heavy and they had to move them around backwards and forwards to where they could be loaded into the gun. The shells themselves of course didn't have any charge so you had to pound the charge behind the gun so someone else was doing that. And someone else actually fired the gun into the lanyard. There was a lot of shifting and

29:30 carrying and a little bit of aiming and firing.

Were there any accidents that occurred?

No, we didn't have any accidents.

Were there any interesting characters amongst the CMF fellows?

It is hard for me to remember, because I only did the one camp. There was one driver who and that was his function. He was a driver. He had been

30:00 around the CMF for a lot longer than most of us. I remember he was always sneaking off a lot and he somehow managed to get away from the camp a lot. The rest of us didn't, but he managed to get away from the camp a lot. I don't have too many memories of the people actually there.

What was the discipline like?

Pretty lax. The CMF like the A-Res [Army Reserve] is totally voluntary. If you didn't like it, you just walked out of the door. If they gave you a hard time, you wouldn't hang around.

30:30 The odd person might shout at you, "Lift your feet!" or something, but that would be it.

Did the CMF draw a type of personality or character into it?

I wouldn't have thought so. I think most people were probably interested in a little extra cash and doing something that was a bit different. They came from everywhere.

31:00 Jimmy Owen, the bloke that I became friends with, had just finished agricultural college at Dookie. I can't remember what he was doing actually, I can't remember but he joined the CMF. There were a couple of other teachers in it, but not people I knew. It was just a cross section.

Just to get a few world events that were happening at this time, there was the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Kennedy assassination; do you have any memories of those?

31:30 **I clearly remember the Kennedy assassination. I hard about it in the streets of Korumburra. I have memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember it happening but now I don't know whether I remembered it, or whether I remembered the movie. It was pretty true to life I think, the movie. I remember certainly that the Kennedy assassination was big time news. It was played over and over on**

32:00 **TV, of course the footage from Dallas.**

Who told you the news?

I can't remember but I remember specifically being in the main street in Korumburra and being told by someone that Kennedy had been assassinated.

What was Australia's view of Kennedy and the United States?

I think the same as it was in America. It was sort of like Camelot. They thought that he was a very exciting person and a very exciting president.

32:30 I think the ties between Australia and America were very strong. The war had been over for quite some time but most adults had strong memories of American presence during the war and the Battle of the Coral Sea and various other things. I think there was a fair amount of respect for America.

Do you think at all Australia leant more towards America or Britain? Were there closer ties to one or the other?

At that time I think we had closer ties to

33:00 Britain. Our ties with America were cordial but that was a time when there were an awful lot of English migrants in Australia. Even then, in the '60s, they used to talk about home. Home was England, it wasn't Australia. Many, many of the migrants never became Australian citizens. They didn't have to, so they didn't bother. They were much closer to England than they were to America the population by and large, I think. I don't think that

33:30 changed until the British pulled out of Singapore and everything else. Suddenly there was no English protection any more and we joined the Americans in Vietnam.

Around this time that you were in the CMF, had Vietnam started?

No, I don't recall anything about it. It had started. We had a training team over there. I am talking now about

34:00 1965. At the time I was in the CMF I don't recall having much of a memory of what was going on in Vietnam. That came a little later. I think in early 1965 I can't remember how many people we had in Vietnam then, but it built up from that period I think. Conscription wasn't in yet. That came a little later.

When did you start to realise there was something going on in

34:30 **Vietnam?**

I knew there was something going on but I didn't know much about it. I knew that we were involved in Vietnam but I didn't know anything about it. I didn't really start to look at it. We used to talk about it in PIR. That was also in 1965 but it was to the latter part of 1965. Most of us in the battalion, because Vietnam really was going on then, were all pissed off that we were sitting in Papua New Guinea when the war was over in Vietnam.

35:00 We would discuss it fairly often there, but of course being there we missed any demonstrations or anything that might have happened. I don't know if they were happening at that time but they certainly happened later. Up in New Guinea there were no demonstrations against the war or anything. We all wanted to get there.

You mentioned earlier that with the CMF you started to enjoy it, what was it about the CMF that you were enjoying?

I think it was just the structure and the fact that if you learned to do something it was pretty

35:30 simple and you just did it. There was no great intellectual capacity required and it is nice to do simple things, I think. And it was different. Firing big guns made a lot of noise and it was different.

What led you to actually try and enlist into the army?

When I was in the CMF they just advertised I think in the newspapers that they were looking to

36:00 commission officers in the Army Education Corps, qualified teachers. I thought, "That sounds pretty good." So I applied. We had a series of interviews I suppose you would call it and some tests, physical tests and health tests, and I eventually got accepted.

Was the army a popular career choice?

36:30 No. It obviously was for a lot of people but for me, no. I didn't even know anything about the army growing up in Poowong and Korumburra. I had never heard of anyone who went into the army. The interesting thing was that two other blokes I went to Bendigo Teachers' College with joined at about the same time. We were in different parts of the state so they joined separately, but I didn't know there a career in the army.

37:00 **Given that you were a qualified teacher anyway, what were the tests that the army wanted you to do?**

I think they were mostly psych tests and IQ [Intelligence Quotient] tests that we did. They give you an officer intelligence rating or something. We had a written test and I don't know with the test whether you could put together a paper or write something, but it was pretty obvious that most of us were literate at least. I think they just had standard tests and you went through this

37:30 array of tests and a bit of running around and medical tests and stuff. There was a final board where the psychologists and a few others would fire questions at you and test your responses. They would ask you questions like, "What good are teachers? You can program teaching materials now and people can teach themselves. What do you think about that?" It was that sort of stuff.

What do you think they were looking for?

I've no idea.

38:00 I've absolutely no idea. Anyway, it didn't really matter. I got commissioned.

Upon enlisting did you go somewhere for further training?

No. I went to what was called the Southern Command Personnel Depot at the time at Watsonia and they had a School of Signals. My daughter is a major there. I was only there a short period. I just got

38:30 kitted out. I didn't do any training. I was just there for a week maybe. I got this posting to 1PIR and I had no idea what 1PIR was. I had to go and ask someone. I was sort of a bit surprised when they said it is the 1st Battalion of Pacific Islanders Regiment in New Guinea.

From the army's point of view, you were fully trained?

No. I wasn't trained at all, but they didn't care. We arrived in the

39:00 battalion and I arrived with another education corps officer. I won't mention his name because he might be embarrassed. We arrived at the battalion together and the CO [Commanding Officer] of the battalion, Bruce Hearne, was going to keep one of us and the other one of us was going to go up to 2PIR which was up at Wewak. We had an interview with Bruce together. The interviewer asked Darius, that was his name but I won't say his

39:30 surname, "What sports do you play?" He said, "Squash and tennis." He said to me, "What sports do you play?" and I said, "Cricket and football." He said, "Well, Darius, I hope you enjoy Wewak." That was the selection procedure. I really knew nothing about being an officer in the army, absolutely nothing at all, but within a week I was duty officer for the battalion and I was mounting the guard and all this sort of stuff.

While you were in the CMF, did you have a

40:00 **rank there?**

No, I was a gunner which is a private. I went from gunner to lieutenant.

To join the Army Education Corps, what was the job? Was it just to educate?

Yes it was but it was a training thing. You were involved in training. Unfortunately, well not unfortunately because I really enjoyed it after a while, you had to fulfil all the roles of a

40:30 normal officer within a battalion. My specific function there was there was an attempt to make PIR a bi-lingual regiment. The soldiers had to be taught English.

I will just pause you there because we'll pick that up on the next tape.

Tape 3

00:47 **How did you get up to New Guinea?**

On a plane. It was a standard passenger aircraft that flew the service to

01:00 Port Moresby. Of course in those days you flew first class too, but it has changed now.

Were you going in with a group of people?

No. I was on my own. I just arrived up there and I was met by a very large soldier who said, "Ugoi." I didn't understand what he was talking about because he was a PI soldier.

01:30 It was pidgin. We finally worked it out and he took up to Taurama which is where the barracks were just out of Moresby. It was probably a twenty minute drive or something.

What were your first impressions of New Guinea?

It was like my first impressions of Australia. It was hot. It is exotic. You have waving palm trees and

native people and there is a certain aroma in the air of

02:00 coconut oil that you don't smell here. The town itself was smallish and it was full of Australians. Everything up there in the old colonial times in the '60s was all run by Australians. The banks were run by Australians and the officers in the army were Australian. The police force were either South Africans or Australians. The people in the banks were Australians and the public service was full of Australians.

02:30 You settled in very quickly, although it was obviously very different.

What was the set up that the PIR had there?

Well it was a battalion. In Moresby there was a headquarters at Murray Barracks and the battalion was at Taurama Barracks, which as I say was just out of town. It was a standard infantry battalion. All the soldiers were native Papua New Guineans and all the majority of the officers, I think we had about forty officers in the battalion and we had

03:00 two Papua New Guineans, Ted Diro and Patterson Lowa. They were both second lieutenants which is the most junior you could be as an officer. The NCOs were a mixture of Australian and PIs [Pacific Islanders].

Given that you hadn't had any officer training and you didn't speak Pidgin, you really landed on your feet in the middle of the job. How did your head around it and who helped you out?

03:30 You were required to learn Pidgin. It was a requirement that every officer had to learn it but you had to learn it yourself then practice it. They would give you a book. People would help you do that. In terms of the actual regimental duties that you had to perform there was a senior subaltern in the mess, a captain, and it was his function to help the junior officers do that. You could also always fall back on the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] if you had any doubts about

04:00 drill and that sort of thing and the orders and commands you had to give. The RSM was always there to assist and in fact sometimes he wasn't happy with his warrant officer class one. He wasn't happy with officers' drill so he would take the officers out and drill them himself. There were people to help but you had to be on a pretty quick learning curve though obviously.

What were the early mistakes you made and the difficulties you had?

04:30 Obviously I must have made mistakes but I'm trying to think of one that stands out. We all made mistakes and the beauty of it was you were expected to make mistakes. When we screwed up it was generally forgiven, except you would end up doing extra duty offices. I remember probably my first mistake was I didn't get there until about

05:00 November and because I was the new cab off the rank I suppose I was the duty officer on Christmas Day of that year. As duty officer you are not allowed to drink of course. It was also customary for the officers to be entertained in the sergeants' mess by the sergeants. So we went down to the sergeants' mess and I had sand brown on, indicating that I was the duty officer.

05:30 One of the sergeants said, "Would you like a drink?" And I said, "Yes, I'll have a coke." Of course he brought me a rum and coke and I was sipping away at the rum and coke and the 2IC [Second in Command] of the battalion came up and took it and sniffed it and said, "That is seven." So I had seven extra orderly offices from that point. That can be very tiring, because as orderly officer of the battalion you mount a duty after your normal working day and you are basically

06:00 worked until certainly after midnight and then you were up before dawn. So you didn't get a lot of sleep and if you do seven straight you get pretty tired. Then you start making other mistakes and you're worried you're going to get a few extra.

So where did you fit in as an education officer into the hierarchy of things there?

We had a little education wing. There was a captain, John Lawson. There was John Holborn and another lieutenant and myself. We basically

06:30 ran between the three of us English language classes for the soldiers. That didn't last that long. I'm trying to think of the exact time. It was probably in the middle of 1966 and conscription had stated in Australia and Vietnam was going pretty strong. The army suddenly found itself with a whole heap of teachers who were obviously conscripted and won the ballot. We got forty of them. We got forty trained teachers.

07:00 They just turned them into sergeants and sent them to New Guinea. I think from memory we got about ten in the battalion and the others split between the headquarters and the other battalion and the recruit training battalion at Goldie River. They actually then did all the teaching. That released John Holborn and myself to do other things in the battalion. So I became a bit of a

07:30 dogsbody really, doing all sorts of jobs.

For those first couple of months though when you had to do the teaching, can you tell us a bit about your daily routine there?

It was standard classroom stuff. We had within the wing a couple of classrooms. The soldiers would be rotated through. I would be teaching one platoon and Holborn was probably teaching another platoon and Johnny Rawson another.

08:00 That way we would rotate through the companies and we'd just give them English lessons. I can't remember the exact book that we used but there was a course that we used. I remember there was a lot of repeating like, "What is this?" and, "That is a pencil," sort of stuff. When I was duty officer one day part of the duties of a duty officer was you had to go down to the OR's [Other Ranks] canteen for dinner to have their food to make sure that they were

08:30 getting good food. They lined up. They had to parade before they marched in for dinner so they were all lined up on parade. I marched down there and gave them the order to all march in. This voice rang out, "What is this?" and all of them said, "That is a pencil." It was good and they learned.

What were the difficulties in communication for you as an English teacher?

09:00 Well, teaching the course were no difficulties because you were directing the course. It was basic language training. You stated from the simple from the concrete to the abstracts. You started with, "What is this?" and, "That is a table," sort of stuff. Then you would move on from there. You weren't actually communicating, you were trying to teach a skill from the initial period.

All your classes were conducted in English?

09:30 Yes, in English.

How did your Pidgin come along?

Gradually. I think I have lost most of it now. After a while I could make myself understood but I wasn't a great Pidgin speaker, because I was spending my day teaching English whereas the others in the battalion were talking to troops all day and they were using Pidgin. I can make myself understood after a while.

Can you tell us a little bit about the PIR

10:00 **and the soldiers you were teaching?**

They came from all over Papua New Guinea. I think it was policy that then they were talking about independence so what they wanted to create was an army that was not ethnically based. They would recruit from all districts throughout Papua New Guinea. That caused some problems because some of the districts were very

10:30 primitive, and other districts were well developed like New Britain and around Moresby itself. People had been to school and they could read and write and what have you. Out in the western districts for example and in the more remote areas people spoke only their own language in the vernacular. They couldn't read or write. We still had to recruit from those areas

11:00 because we certainly didn't want the whole battalion to be Tolais from New Britain or whatever so that caused some problems.

What sort of problems?

The interesting thing was that even though the army had recruited from all over the place there were still ethnic groups within the battalion, obviously. We never really knew who the leaders of these groups were.

11:30 These people would go through the army and do their army training and would be promoted under the army system to corporal and then to sergeant because they were good at the army job. Then when something happened we would find out that the actual leader of that ethnic group within the battalion was some private that gave them orders. That created some problems when we had the riots and things like that. We didn't know who was running anything.

Was that the principle of wan

12:00 **Tok [a social system of family and home village obligations]?**

Yes that was wan tok.

Tell us a bit about that?

Papua New Guinea had one third of the world's languages. People were locked into little valleys and didn't communicate with anyone else so languages developed over thousands of years. Wan tok was simply someone who spoke the same language as you and was therefore one of your villagers or one of your tribe so a friend. It meant literally a person who spoke the same language as you did.

12:30 **Did you discourage communicating in their own languages within your English classes?**

As much as we could. The idea when you were in the English class was to use English.

You mentioned riots? What happened there?

I was a fairly junior officer, remember, so I wasn't privy to a lot of policy that went on.

13:00 They had what they called strikes but I don't know how you can strike in the military. It was a bit like a mutiny. It started at Murray Barracks, the headquarters. The soldiers stopped obeying orders and made some threats to the officers. It was a pay dispute largely. We of course being arrogant in the battalion said, "That's typical of headquarters. It will never happen here." Of course

13:30 it did. The reasons it happened were, when you think about it, pretty straight forward. We had within the battalion in specialist positions NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] who were Australian. It was still in the days that when you got paid in the army no matter what your rank was you marched up the front to the paying officer and saluted and then counted out your pay in

14:00 cash. You would say, "Pay correct, sir." You would sign for it and take your money away. We had Australian Army pay sheets too which were that width for your signature. A lot of these guys couldn't read or write, so they used to put their thumb print or a finger print and it was just a big smudge on the piece of paper. They were lining up with other NCOs who were doing basically the same

14:30 job as them and they had the same rank and they were getting a third of the pay. The Australian would get his pay and say, "Pay Correct, sir," and the bloke behind him would get his pay and he'd get a third of it. After a while they thought that this was a bit off. I was told at the time that the reason the pay scales were so disparate was because again heading towards independence they were trying to pay the Papua New Guinea soldier the amount they thought their government would be able to pay on independence. But of course

15:00 that didn't please the diggers too much. It was basically a pay dispute. When it happened in the battalion, a lot of the soldiers just disappeared because I think they were worried that something really bad was going to happen so they didn't want any part of it. Some continued to obey orders and the rest sat on the parade ground and told us all to get stuffed basically. Then we got lots of warnings. Father

15:30 Ray Quirk who was a padre in the battalion, and had been in New Guinea for ever, he said, "Don't let them draw blood. If they draw blood, we are all dead." We were very careful.

I can imagine that you basically are talking about a mutiny because you've got soldiers with weapons?

We were told basically and I think I've got this right that the standing orders of the day were, "Officers are not to carry any weapons or anything

16:00 resembling a weapon." We used to carry swagger sticks, ridiculously. "If struck, smile and walk slowly away." Those were the SODs [Standing Orders of the Day].

How were these disputes resolved?

Eventually they dramatically raised their pay and it fizzled out. The ringleaders were identified and discharged and things sort of went back to

16:30 normal. It was a bit of a cheat on the pay. Again, I'm not privy to policy and I don't know how they work these things out but prior to the riots or the strikes, the soldiers got free tobacco for example. They had free housing and free messing and free uniforms so they didn't pay for anything really. When they dramatically increased their pay, they started to make deductions.

17:00 They still got an increase and it settled down and the people that had run away came back.

As a young officer it must have been all a bit new to you. What did you understand about New Guinea culture and what did you learn about that?

Bugger all. We used to have officer training nights and that was the reason for them. The more experienced officers in the battalion would give lectures on various topics to do with the culture, even to the

17:30 point, although it sounds bad, of lining up different soldiers from the battalion and identifying where they came from by how they looked. Then we would be given some knowledge about what their particular tribal situation was and so on. We did a lot of that. You got to know the soldiers too, although they kept things pretty much to their chest. Everything

18:00 revolved around the battalion. We had teams in the local competition but we had a battalion cricket team and we had a battalion football team. Most of the members of those teams were the soldiers, Papua New Guineans. So I played with them a lot and got to know a lot of them fairly well. At the sage of twenty-three or whatever, I don't know that I got into the culture too much to be honest.

Did you understand

18:30 **for instance why it was so dangerous to draw blood?**

No. The implication is that they go crazy isn't it? The Indonesians call it memumuk, run amok. No, this was Father Ray's view. He had been there so long I think still back in the days when they were eating

missionaries so he wasn't too keen on anything happening.

Was there

19:00 **a riot in the real sense of the word?**

No but certainly one was expected. When this happened we were all gathered into the mess and were briefed about what to do and what not to do. The CO decided he didn't want to change anything. It was a weekend and he was going to let the soldiers still go on leave. The idea was that the battalion would supply trucks and

19:30 drive them into Port Moresby. They would parade in their civilians and we would check that they were neatly attired. They would get on the truck and it would take them into Port Moresby and they would go to the pubs and basically get drunk. Then the trucks would come back later in the night and pick them up and take them back to the battalion. There was some concern that with this going on maybe that wasn't a great idea. The CO decided, that, yes, he would operate normally. The only difference he would make was he would put on an extra

20:00 truck and an extra land rover. It just so happened that I was the town picket officer. I remember this particular evening he said, "Who is the town picket officer?" and I put my hand up. So I went in with the trucks after the pub closed and there was a regimental police person. He was a little Papua New Guinea corporal. I was a bit nervous but he went

20:30 wading into these pubs and beating people with a stick and forcing them onto the truck. They all got onto the trucks and we drove back to the battalion. It was interesting, because we picked up two civilians. They just got on the trucks too. So they ended up back in the battalion these two civilians. This was all over and they went to bed and what have you. I walked into the officers' mess and all the company commanders and the 2IC and the CO was there. All Bruce Hearne said, "Was there any

21:00 blood?" I said, "No." And he said, "Good," and they left. So obviously they were concerned but it fizzled out in the end.

As you were there longer, and you got to know some of the soldiers personally, what insight did you get about their culture and their values?

Again, it is probably arrogance, but I didn't get a great insight into the culture. We had cultural performances.

21:30 We used to have battalion sing sings so that when big events were happening, the various tribal groups within the battalion would nominate someone and they would go back to their home village and they would bring back what they called the bilas which is the material that you dress up in and the headdresses and all the other stuff. They would perform their dances or their music in the battalion so we saw a fair amount of that. Papua New Guinean culture is very different because every

22:00 tribe is just so different. They look different and they speak a different language and have different cultures and there are a lot of them. I don't know that I appreciated it as much as I should have at the time.

Why were they in the army do you think?

They wanted a job and to get paid. It is as simple as that I think. There was nothing other than that. The army recruiting teams would tour New Guinea and make it sound like it was a great job.

22:30 For many of them they thought it was pretty good. Many of them were married and living in married quarters and their children were brought up in the battalion and we had a battalion kindergarten. So for many of them it was a good life and they made a career out of it.

Was there much poverty that you saw up there at the time?

When we were out on patrol, yes, because the villages were very poor. They were subsistence farmers by and

23:00 large. You wouldn't even call them farmers. They had gardens that they grew some crops in and they ate them. They had the odd pig but it was a very simple lifestyle. There were little huts and what have you. They never had any money. Most of the population didn't know what money was, although they would occasionally get some if they did some work for a copra plantation or something like that. The plantations always had a store that they could buy a few

23:30 things from. In the battalion there was no poverty because everyone was fed and everyone was dressed and they also got some pay. There was no poverty within the battalion.

You mentioned going on patrol, what other duties did you have apart from just teaching?

I sort of stopped teaching when I wasn't half way through my time with the battalion. The battalion was stripped of a few officers

24:00 too because they were looking for experienced infantry officers to go to Vietnam. We had all these sergeants who were doing the teaching but it had left holes within the battalion if you like. The CO

didn’t trust me enough to give me a platoon obviously but the various jobs that used to be done in rotation by the officers I ended up getting more of them than was normal. I was battalion duty officer and

24:30 company duty officer and battalion paying officer and company paying officer and investigating officer and stocktaking officer. I was Australian Rules representative for the battalion and cricket representative for the battalion and president of the Pre-School Committee. The one that took the most time was bar member of the officers’ mess. There was no cash in the officers’ mess. It was all an honorary system. Every officer would have a

25:00 card and he would order what he wanted from the steward and it was up to him to mark his card as to what he had. Every morning myself and the transport platoon commander who was at the base and he was my assistant bar member we had to do a stock take. At the end of every month we had to make up all the bills for all the officers. They were always short. They didn’t match the stock take and then we would then have to charge them extra, and they always complained about that tool. That took a lot of time surprisingly.

25:30 The mess was very social and we had a lot of social events.

What sort of events?

We just had parties. We dined in every night. It was a colonial period and we all had a batman. It was a soldier but he would wake you in the morning with a cup of tea and he would polish your boots and press your uniform. He would lay out your dress for the evening which would be Red Sea rig

26:00 or if it was more formal a dinner jacket. He would do other things like clean your car from the inside with a hose in one case. We had formal dinners and we had just straight parties. In Moresby a lot of the public servants were Australian women, girls, and many of them lived at a place called Toaguba House. If we were having a function at the mess we would just ring through to the house and say,

26:30 “We’re having a party.” Twenty or thirty of them would appear. That is how I met my wife, in the mess.

What was that occasion do you recall?

It was just one of these parties. It was stupid things like, “Come to the party as you were dressed when the ship went down,” and that sort of stuff. So you’d have four blokes with a blown up baby bath sitting in water in the middle of the mess drinking. There was a lot of drinking. There was a fair amount of drinking and games of slosh.

What does a game of slosh

27:00 **involve?**

A game of slosh is a full sized billiard table with no cues, you just throw the ball. There were a lot of broken windows with slosh. And then we played mess rugby and all that sort of stuff. There were broken legs and whatever. It is pretty tough, the old mess rugby and it used to happen a lot.

Who did you play against?

It was in the mess and it was after a formal dinner when you were all full of various things. There would just be two teams.

27:30 The ball would be a beer can and the only object was to get the beer can to your end of the mess and there were no rules. I can remember the CO usually started it. We always took our shoes off because we tried not to damage people too much and we used to take our jacket off. I remember there was one particularly vicious game and I got torn to shreds my shirt and pants and everything. I

28:00 said, unfortunately, “The only thing I’ve got left intact is my shoes.” Bruce Hearne, the CO, said, “Somebody piss in his shoes.” So it was not very nice. That was Bruce.

Would it be a different culture if women were invited to the mess?

Yes, the ladies were ladies. The interesting thing was that because the mess was the home of the living in officers, if you brought a lady to the mess you had to ask their

28:30 permission. You couldn’t just walk in with her.

So how often would women from the town come in?

Pretty regularly. Then we would go into town. Moresby had a drive in for example. We would go to the drive in and there were a couple of restaurants we used to go to. There were two or three clubs that had dances and we’d go to those. It was a normal social life, but we had a lot of parties in the mess.

29:00 There were gun emplacements overlooking Port Moresby from the Second World War for example and we’d clean them out and have a party up there. We’d have a barbecue and spend the night and the ladies would come up there.

It sounds like a pretty good lifestyle for a young man?

It was a very interesting lifestyle. It was pretty exciting with the patrolling. It was very social and you were treated differently. It was very colonial and

29:30 you would get a bit arrogant. The police would salute you for example. The soldiers were expected to salute, no matter how you were dressed. You would be coming from the shower dressed in a towel and you'd have to salute. You saluted in the streets. Officers didn't carry passes. We dined in the mess with steward service and all of that.

Did any of the Australians have any problems with that colonial attitude?

I don't recall.

30:00 We should have, shouldn't we, but I don't recall that we did. We sort of expected it, which is bad.

Was there much racism?

I think so. I think by and large the PIs were mainly looked down on by many of the Australians. I think there probably was inherent racism. It didn't seem to concern us at the time and I don't know why it didn't.

30:30 There was a fair amount of crime in Moresby. There is even more now, but even then there was trouble with crime. I remember on patrol in New Britain we left behind a used battery from a radio set. One of the villagers spent three days catching up with us to return the battery. That was pretty honest. When we got to the town

31:00 there was economic pressure put on them there.

Was there a paternal attitude, too, that you were looking after these people?

Yes, very much so. That was always a problem. As I said, we only had three officers in the whole regiment. One was in 2PIR and two at 1PIR who were second lieutenants. Within a very short period of time they became very senior

31:30 people. Kenny Nago, I saw Kenny a few years ago. He was the ambassador for Papua New Guinea in Canberra for a while but he got to brigadier rank after about seven or eight years.

You mentioned patrolling a couple of times. Can you tell us what that involved in the New Guinea context?

The regular infantry officers would take out two or three

32:00 major patrols a year. I only got on two. One was a short patrol through the highlands and it lasted two weeks. The other one was a major patrol through a relatively sophisticated area in New Britain. What it was was an exercise in showing the flag and showing various parts of New Guinea that they had an army and they were part of one nation. It was also a training exercise for the soldiers and the officers. We would fly. I went out with

32:30 Charlie Company. The headquarters were set up in Talasea and we were going to patrol the island of New Britain. Talasea was about in the middle of the islands. Two platoons flew up to Rabaul and one patrolled down the west coast to Talasea and one patrolled down the east coast to Talasea. The platoon I was with we landed at a placed called Cape Gloucester, which is on the southern tip of the island. We patrolled through the villages around the

33:00 bottom of the island and then up the west coast of New Britain to Talasea. We met in Talasea. It took about four weeks of walking. We were resupplied by air once every seven days, once a week. We carried seven days of rations and just moved along. It was physically demanding in parts, and relatively easy in other parts.

Was it taken seriously as a training exercise?

It was non

33:30 tactical, so in a sense it wasn't a training exercise as such, it was more for showing the flag. In New Britain as I said there were people working in copra plantations and so on. A friend of mine took a patrol through the Star Mountains for example and he was only the second white man who had ever been there. The people who lived in the Star Mountains had no idea what Papua New Guinea was.

34:00 While it wasn't a training exercise obviously there was work involved and logistics. You had to get the company from Port Moresby out to wherever it was you were patrolling. People had to use their radio sets to make communications with the battalion to organise air drops. There were no helicopters and no parachutes, so we had to free drop from low flying aircraft. All of those things had to be done and that was all I guess good

34:30 practice.

What was the terrain like in New Britain that you were patrolling through?

It was all types of terrain. In the central part it was very hilly and very tough particularly when it was

pissing down with rain which it did. You were really climbing just hand over hand on foot tracks. With other parts I remember the Japanese had been there in numbers during the Second World War and they had put in a number of what were no longer roads, but they were wide tracks and that was easier going.

35:00 Then on some of the patrol we were near the west coast and we actually got a couple of rafts, so that was nice. It varied. It was coastal and hills and elephant grass where there was grass above your head and it was very hot.

What evidence of the war was there?

There was lots of stuff around New Britain and particularly around the coastal lines. There were old

35:30 wrecks and that sort of stuff. Even on their patrols the villagers had things like helmets but you never collected anything because you'd have to carry it. Your packs were heavy enough without looking for war relics.

Did it give you some sort of insight into what those soldiers went through?

Yes. I think by and large the soldiers enjoyed the patrolling. It wasn't all that great.

36:00 Every night we would just twitchy up and then occasionally we would spend two or three nights in one places where we would organise the air resupply and stuff like that. I met some interesting people there. There were a couple of nuns who had been there from before the war and they were interned by the Japanese. They just ran a little aid post in the middle of nowhere. They baked us some bread which was nice. We camped at one stage near a copra plantation and the

36:30 guy turned out to be a descendant of Peter Lalor [leader of the Eureka Stockade]. Interestingly, his kids couldn't speak English. They were eight and ten and they only spoke Pidgin. He had been there a fair while. There was the carve up of the missionaries too. I found that a bit odd. They had obviously - the Catholics and Seven Day Adventists had decided which souls they were going to save. They had drawn lines and these people were Catholics and these were Seven Day Adventists

37:00 and it was a bit odd.

Had that religion been taken on by most of the villages?

They did it. They went to church but I don't know that a lot of it wasn't only skin deep, I think. They certainly believed in the cargo cult and animism and that sort of stuff.

Was that lip

37:30 **service true in the army as well?**

It's hard to say. We had some very loyal soldiers. I think it went beyond lip service in the army, I really do. I think that they took some pride in the uniform a lot of them. Not all of them obviously but a lot of them did.

Were they religious as well though?

They went to church. I don't know. We went to

38:00 church. That was part of the deal. We had church parades. You paraded everywhere. You would line up and then march in. We went to church every Sunday. We had two padres in the battalion, a Catholic and a Protestant, and they ran the services. I got married in the local battalion chapel by the padre.

I'll come back to that, but on the patrolling what was the reaction you generally got when you came through?

It depended.

38:30 I remember one village we went through was totally deserted. Everyone heard we were coming and left. The word we got was they thought we might be tax collectors or something so they just shot off and we didn't see anyone there. At another village they put on a big sing sing and a big party. They roasted a pig. We were sitting there eating this half-cooked pig and it was a big event, the arrival of the army and it was terrific. It varied. In

39:00 most places we would go there and be quite welcomed and we'd buy some fruit or whatever to supplement the ration. We had a patrol allowance, and it was always coins because they didn't like paper money.

Was there a Papua New Guinea, do you think?

No I don't think at that stage there was a Papua New Guinea. I've never been back but I'd be surprised if there was one now to be honest because really they were distinct tribal

39:30 groupings and they were proud of their own cultures. They were a bit racist themselves. Everyone looked down on the Chimbus for some reason and the Orokolo was another tribe around. I think the Orokolo was the last to eat a missionary and I think they looked down on them because they ate his

shoes or something. They looked down on some of their people as well.

Was there ever any trouble with the villages or

40:00 **people who didn't accept the army?**

We never had anything like that. Well, not in my patrol anyway. As I said New Britain was relatively sophisticated. They were poor villages but most of the kids, not all, were going to mission schools and that sort of stuff in New Britain and that wasn't the case for some of the other places.

You mentioned using

40:30 **coins to give to the locals, was there a non cash economy too at the time?**

Most of theirs was the barter system. Most of their economy was the barter system so with whatever they had if they wanted something else they would change it. I believe that in the early days shells were used as a currency as well with some of the tribes.

And tobacco, did you see any of that?

Yes, tobacco. As I said the soldiers were given tobacco as an allowance. I don't remember seeing it

41:00 growing but obviously some people grew it and I guess they used that like they used other commodities for exchange and things like that.

We'll just stop there.

Tape 4

00:47 **You met and married your wife while you were still in New Guinea?**

Yes.

Can you tell us a bit about that courtship and what that was like?

We just met in the mess at a party and

01:00 it was not long after I'd arrived. We started going out on dates and hen we went steady as I supposed you called it and then we eventually got engaged. Then we got married just before I left. In fact we were married in September and I left the battalion in December. In between that, I did that patrol in New Britain so I was gone for a month not long after we were married. It set a pattern for later on too because I was

01:30 gone most of the time.

What was she doing in New Guinea at the time?

She was working for the government as a public servant and I think from memory it was water and sewerage. It was office work and putting out bills. I think the job was actually called a compositor. You had a machine that looked like an accounting machine or something but that was pretty old fashioned back in 1965.

02:00 **So it must have been a bit of a difficult decision in some ways to get married away from your home and family?**

It wasn't that difficult. Jenny's parents came up for the wedding with her sister but my parents didn't. It was a bit expensive for them I think. We had absolutely no money. We didn't have a cent. Everything that we had we had spent. We had a pretty good time but we had no money. I borrowed to get the engagement ring and then paid it off

02:30 eventually. We were married in the battalion chapel by the padre and the reception was in the officers' mess. It was catered for by the warrant officer caterer and the soldiers acted as stewards. We had the CO's car and the 2IC's car as the wedding vehicles and we had members of the band piping us all over the place, so it didn't cost a lot

03:00 and that was one of the attractions.

It had all the colonial trimmings too?

It had all the colonial trimmings, like bagpipes blowing away and all that sort of stuff.

Were you able to get any leave for a honeymoon of any type?

That is interesting actually because it is the only thing I've ever won in my life. Just before we were due to get married, there was the Red Cross Ball which was a big event in Port Moresby at the time.

03:30 The officers from the mess had a number of tables. Jenny and I were just going to go up to a local pub for a weekend after we got married. They had a raffle at the Red Cross ball and the prize was actually two return tickets to Melbourne and I won it. The adjutant, Greg Warland, was sitting at our table and when he heard that I won it he just wrote on a serviette, “Leave approved

04:00 for two weeks.” We went back to Australia for our honeymoon. We went to the football. It was in September.

Do you remember who was playing?

I can’t remember now. I remember Jenny complaining, because we could only get tickets right at the top of the Olympic stand and I don’t think we could even see who was playing. It was Australian Rules.

Where was she from?

Lismore in Northern New South Wales.

So it would have all been a bit different for her?

Yes. She went down to Sydney. She was actually

04:30 working in Sydney and left from there to go to Papua New Guinea. As far as she was concerned, it was a leg on a journey over to Europe. Her sister had married a Frenchman and was living in Paris and she was going to go there, but she never got there until much later in the end.

Were there any discussions about what your future would be at that time when you decided to get married in New Guinea?

No. We knew that I was going to stay in the army and that the end of the posting we’d be going

05:00 back – at the time we didn’t know exactly but we’d be going back to a posting in Australia. We were just going to be married and live an army type of life. We didn’t discuss it in any great detail. If we probably had discussed it and we had have known what was going to happen, we would probably never have done it. From her point of view, but from my point of view it was fine. There was an old saying in the army then and it was, “Lieutenants shouldn’t marry. Captains may marry and majors must.”

05:30 People used to say things like, “If the army wanted you to have a wife they would have issued one.” Lieutenants weren’t supposed to get married. It was silly but we did.

That is the downside of the army posting system there was also a prospect that at that time you might be going to Vietnam?

There was a strong prospect. We were all trying to get to Vietnam and some of us had left to go to Vietnam. That was the aim,

06:00 yes, sure. I remember we talked about that. I remember we talked about it and if I went to Vietnam, Jenny would just go back and live with her parents and in fact that’s what happened.

What were the conversations about at that time? Can you tell us a bit more about the feeling about the war in the army where you were?

All I can remember is we were all busting a gut to get there. It was like training for football and not getting to play.

06:30 Everybody wanted to get over there and get a couple of gongs and test it out and see what it was like and test yourself out and maybe be a hero. We were all trying to get there. One of my very good friends got there. He the very first to go and he lasted a week. He stepped on a mine and he lost his legs. We used to play a lot of football together, Brian and myself. He is the only one in the battalion that I’m aware of that actually was a serious casualty.

07:00 **Where were you when you heard about his death?**

Well he didn’t get killed, he just lost his legs. He is still alive and living in Perth, at least I hope he is. We were just in the battalion and the word came through. When we came back to Australia, we went to see him in hospital. He was undergoing a series of operations obviously to be fitted with artificial limbs.

How did that incident affect your resolve to want to get over there?

I still wanted to get

07:30 there but I didn’t want to lose any legs. I thought that it would be better to be killed, if you like. I remember thinking that. In the event nothing happened to me anyway. We still wanted to go there. That is the reason I did the Vietnamese course, because it was my best chance to go. Education corps officers weren’t thick on the ground in Vietnam. It wasn’t a posting that education officers normally went to. It was a war and it was an operational posting.

08:00 **I suppose that raises a question. You joined the army as an education officer because the opportunity came up, but what did you want out of the army at that time?**

Nothing but a good posting. I have to say, and I’m ashamed to say it maybe, that all through my army

career what I looked for was something interesting to do and an interesting posting. I had no plan. I never had a plan for promotion or a long term

08:30 view. I went from one posting to the next hopefully getting one that liked and enjoyed doing, and by and large I did, so I was quite happy with that.

Were there ever any other ideals behind you being in the army? Were you patriotic?

Surprisingly, in the battalion we used to talk a lot about honour and duty. We used to use those words and we believed in them. We believed in the flag and we were very patriotic.

09:00 It didn't last long but at the time we were. We thought we were – I don't know – back in the days of the British Empire and Zulu. We used to watch films like Zulu and we were upright and honest and did our duty. So yes, we were patriotic.

What about the Cold War that was going on at the time, how did that impact on you as an army officer?

09:30 We knew about it obviously, in fact we studied it. At the time in the military to be promoted you had to sit officer promotion exams and one of the exams was current affairs and another was military history so you had to study those. We were well aware what was happening in the Cold War and so on, but it didn't impact on us because the big news was

10:00 Vietnam and that's where we wanted to be.

The two were linked, because there was all that stuff about the Domino Theory and Communism?

Of course, the downward thrust of Asian Communism. We were going over there to stop that. I think there was a fair amount of belief of that. To a degree it was part of the times, wasn't it? Indonesia had almost had a Communist takeover in the coup in

10:30 1965. The CTs, the Communist terrorists were in Malaysia just before that and obviously there were Communist movements in Laos and Cambodia and Vietnam and China. There was a fair bit going on and I think the Americans, and some of us in Australia believed that they should be trying to stop Communist takeovers in Asia.

11:00 **What did Communism and the threat of Communism mean to you?**

It didn't mean a lot really. I think all of us were Marxists when we were going to college. We were all waving the red flag and being a communist was a good thing. I think we focused on

11:30 Australia. We just wanted to be there to do what we could for Australia. I can't remember thinking that Australia was under any threat. We wanted to be there for the excitement.

From all your reports, the posting in New Guinea was a pretty good posting, so what was the move from there?

You can't stay there for ever. The normal posting cycle was two to three years and I had been there for two and a half, or

12:00 thereabouts and it was time to be posted. I thought the best thing to do was for me to do a Vietnamese language course. I had applied for it earlier and you go through a series of aptitude tests and they select you if your aptitude is acceptable. So I was accepted and that is what I did.

In that two and a half years in New Guinea, had anything been achieved? Had things changed at all in the

12:30 **battalion over there?**

No. I think it was a bit of a disappointment. It was nothing to do with the battalion. The battalion was run very well and there were very good professional officers and experienced officers. The CO and the 2IC both won military crosses in Korea for example. There were a lot of politics outside the battalion. I think it is true to say that independence was thrust on Papua New Guinea and I don't think they were ready for it. I think a large

13:00 part of that blame has to rest with previous Australian governments. We had control of Papua New Guinea for a century, as far as I know, and we trained nobody. At the time that they were going to hand over independence, they had three second lieutenants in the army and nobody in the judicial system. University had started but they didn't really have anything of their own. We didn't do anything for them. All the public servants were Australian. We didn't even train their public service.

13:30 All of a sudden they had to be independent, so there you go.

So you applied for a course in languages. What sort of aptitude testing did they have to put you through then?

Well, they give you an IQ test. They give you a language aptitude test which had been devised by I think

the Americans. It was two tests. How do I describe it? It is a made up language

14:00 which you have to learn on the spot and then you apply the language through certain questions. They test your aptitude for quickly learning the language and quickly learning vocabulary. Then they give you a tonal test and see if you can handle tones and repeat tones. They add up all the scores and if you are acceptable, you can be acceptable for all languages, which means tonal languages and everything else, or you can be acceptable for non tonal languages or you are not acceptable and that's it.

What was your

14:30 **pass in the first test you got? Were you accepted for all languages?**

Yes. You weren't given a score.

So you were sent down to Point Cook?

Yes.

Tell us a little bit about what you found when you were down there?

It was a great come down, I can tell you. We left the battalion, as most officers did when they left the battalion, with an honour guard and marching onto the

15:00 plane as the last two passengers. I was twenty-five and my wife was twenty-three and we were piped on board. All the other passengers were sitting there thinking, "What the fuck is going on here?" So we were bagpiped on board and we sat in first class and flew down to Melbourne. We didn't have a single penny to our name and then we had to find somewhere to live and something that we could afford. What we could afford was two rooms at the back of a lady's house in Williamtown.

15:30 One was a bedroom and then there was a curtain and sort of a lounge and a bit of furniture. She had put in a little galley kitchen and a shower. Then we shared the laundry and the toilet. There I left my wife and went to Point Cook because I was required to live in the mess during this course. So she was sitting there not knowing a soul in this pretty dismal place.

16:00 It was a very hard year for her. It was much harder for her than for me. She got pregnant later on and suffered from morning sickness, so that didn't help either.

What time of year did you arrive down there?

It was summer. The course started in late January and ran through to December.

So you were suddenly back in school essentially?

Yes, I was back in school and under a fair amount of pressure. We started with thirty-six students on the course of all ranks. Well, not all ranks but from private through to

16:30 I think a major. We were told that after the first two weeks, we would be under a system of continual assessment, and at the end of each week our position in class would be listed and at the end of eight weeks, half the class would disappear. They would be put off the course. They would just complete another couple of weeks and leave and then the class would

17:00 go on and complete the course. There was a fair amount of pressure to make sure you were in the top half and everyone was trying to get in there. We worked very hard. We were in class from around eight o'clock in the morning until four o'clock. We would go and get changed and go down to the mess and have a drink and have dinner. Then it was back to your room to study for two, three or four hours and then go to bed and you would get up and do the same thing. And you'd go home on the

17:30 weekends, the married people. Even on the weekends I put in five or six or seven hours studying vocabulary. That is what Jen's memory probably is of the thing. She was testing me on vocabulary on the weekends.

Did it cause any difficulties for your married life?

Fortunately not. I don't know why it didn't.

What were you learning and how were you

18:00 **introduced to the Vietnamese language?**

For the first two or three weeks, all we did was tones. You have got to master the tone. If there is no tone, there is no language. A lot of it was just repeating tones and sitting in a language laboratory. Then you progressed to what we were doing in New Guinea, except with Vietnamese. There was a Vietnamese lecturer and they were all North Vietnamese by the way. They would say, "Kana la Kaisi?" Which is, "What is this?" And everyone would repeat, "Kaidola kai tuk." "That is a ruler."

18:30 It went on from there to the end of the year discussing politics.

The tones in the Vietnamese language are quite difficult to master?

Yes, they are. I think it is fair to say that.

Can you explain a little bit about what they were and how you got the hang of it?

You got the hang of them simply by repeating them. How do I describe this? The human voice can only make a finite number of sounds

19:00 and not enough individual sounds to make a language really. So there are only two things you can do. You can either, as most languages do, keep adding a string of sounds to make words and give them different meanings. So you get “but” and then you can have “butter” and then you can have “butterfingered” so you are just adding different sounds and you are making a new word. Tonal languages take the same sound and create six different words. In Vietnamese there are six tones and other languages have a different

19:30 number of tones. They make six different words from the same sound by adding a tone to the sound. So you get a sound like za. Za with no tone means to go out just ‘to go out the doo’r. “Do di za,” is, “I’m going outside.” Za with a low falling town is ‘to grow old’. On the mainland a za is an old person. Za is the cost of something. With a high rising tone, za

20:00 means, “How much does it cost.” Za with a low broken tone is just a response. If you are talking to someone like you say in English and you say, “Yep, yep, OK, fine, good, yep, yep.” In Vietnamese it is, “Za, za.” It doesn’t mean yes or no it just means that you’ve heard what he said. So every word is totally different depending on the tone, so it is a monosyllabic language.

Just listening to those examples it is fairly hard to hear the differences between them.

20:30 **How long did it take you before you could really get your head around them?**

It was weeks and weeks of going, “Ma, ma, ma, ma, ma”. It is, “Ma, Ma, Ma, Maha, Ma, Ma.” There are six different tones but we had a lot of practice.

What was your initial response to the course then? Did you take to it or did you find it really difficult?

I enjoyed the course. It was hard work but I

21:00 enjoyed the learning environment. It was good. It was tough but it was good.

What were the North Vietnamese teaching? Can you explain how the North Vietnamese differed?

It is funny. We should have been learning South Vietnamese. After all, we were going to South Vietnam. It created difficulties for us as interpreters and translators when we wanted to do that sort of work because we found the southerners

21:30 very much more difficult to understand. The fact is the people who were teaching us were northerners because when they petitioned Vietnam, I think, in 1954 a lot of the educated northerners moved south. It was over one million I believe and these were the people who were teaching us. The difference is in South Vietnamese they have terms which have a different meaning. It is the same tone and the same word but a slightly different meaning.

22:00 The words ‘to wade’ in South Vietnamese means ‘to swim’ in North Vietnamese for example. They only use five tones in South Vietnam. And believe me, it makes it bloody difficult when they drop that one tone. North Vietnamese in South Vietnam was like hearing English. They would pronounce some words differently.

22:30 Like I was saying, za and using that sound, they call it iya. It was a different sound. There were lots of differences. It is the same language but there are lots of differences. I suppose it would be the same sort of thing as landing in the depths of Scotland or something and you had learned English in China.

In retrospect, why did they give you North Vietnamese teachers then?

Because that is who they had I think by and large. They tried to

23:00 show us and they talked about the differences between the two languages but the fact is they were teaching us day in and day out, using their language and the way they pronounced things.

Was there a cultural education aspect of the course?

You learned that through the language. As you got into the language later your materials became Vietnamese materials. So you were studying Vietnamese history and culture while learning the language. You were studying some of that.

23:30 **What insights did that give you into the history of the war and what was going on over there at the time?**

Vietnam is a very interesting place. There are very short periods in a long history where they haven’t been at war. For many, many, many years the wars were against the Chinese. Almost all of Vietnamese culture and the

24:00 pride in their culture relates to defeating the Chinese. You always had a feeling that when the war that was currently going on in Vietnam was over there wasn't going to be this straight thrust of the Chinese through Vietnam, because they didn't like each other. The Vietnamese certainly didn't like the Chinese and they were united against a common enemy. If you recall when the war ended in Vietnam there were a lot of border disputes between the Chinese and the Vietnamese and it

24:30 flared up a couple of times. It is interesting. The Chinese occupied Vietnam from about 900 and something BC [Before Christ] to 111 AD [Anno Domini]. So it was over one thousand years. It was a vassal province. The Chinese filled all the senior positions. They imposed their culture and their religion and all the rest of it on the Vietnamese.

25:00 But at the end of the millennia the Vietnamese rose up when China was weakened in the centre and threw them out. My lecturer used to say that would be the equivalent now of the Anglo Saxons rising in Britain and tossing the Normans out. It was the same time frame. They take great pride in that, the Vietnamese. Then the Chinese again hundreds of years later in the Ming Dynasty, they took over Vietnam again for a shorter period. The Vietnamese threw them out.

25:30 The Vietnamese then moved further south, because they had settled in North Vietnam first. There was another kingdom in the middle of Vietnam and they wiped out that kingdom and occupied central Vietnam. Then they moved south which was occupied by the Khmers. The Vietnamese defeated the Khmers and pushed them into Cambodia. Once they had settled the area of Vietnam they then fought each other, the north and the south, for two hundred years before the arrival of the

26:00 French, who then divvied it up. So there was a long history of conflict.

Did that give you an opinion one way or intuitive or having a war over there at the time?

Yes, that the war was futile. I think I said before we all wanted to get there but once we all got there we all wanted to go home. The purpose had been achieved. We had actually arrived there and then everyone started counting backwards.

26:30 You've got three hundred and sixty four days to go. I didn't get over there until the middle of 1970. By that time there was a fair amount of cynicism about how the war was going and I don't think too many people were believing then that it was going to come to a successful conclusion.

The change of opinion really started in 1968

27:00 **when you were at Point Cook. What did you know about that at the time?**

Virtually nothing. We were so wrapped up in this course and we were doing sixty or seventy hours a week. There was a certain aim. You had a certain aim and that I what you were trying to achieve. You were trying to get through the next assessed exercise.

Obviously it was a fairly competitive environment?

It was very competitive certainly for the first eight weeks until they divided the

27:30 class in half. Then even after that there was just the normal competition of who is going to top the course and come second and get a distinction or a credit or a pass or whatever. It was just personal pride then. You could fail at any time. They could have thrown you off the course at any time.

How did that affect your relationships with the other blokes on the course?

We got on fine. It was good. It cemented relationships, language training.

28:00 **What kind of people were there?**

Like I said, they were all army on my particular course except for a couple of people from foreign affairs. They varied in rank from private soldier to major.

Was there a mixture of national servicemen and regular army?

No, they were all regulars. No, that is a lie – well sort of a lie. Barry

28:30 Smith was on the course. He was initially a national serviceman but he decided to sign on. If you were a national serviceman you were only in for two years and they weren't going to give you a year's language training after they'd given you recruit training. There isn't enough time. Barry signed on for a period, so he did the course, but initially he was a national serviceman.

But he had to sign on to do the course because they were all regulars?

Yes.

Did you have any social interaction at Point

29:00 **Cook? Living in the messes, was it just study all the time?**

After studying in the classroom we would all meet in the bar and we'd have a couple of beers and have

dinner. Then we'd go back and study and we'd come back down to the bar just before it closed and have a couple more beers. That is what we did. That was the social aspect.

Who was in charge?

Of the language department? It was a Mr Mutan Van Lup.

29:30 He was the lecturer in charge. The other lecturers were Nguyen and for a period some other officers who had done the course previously and had been to Vietnam like Barry Bradshaw and a couple of others.

Was there any military component to your time there, or was it just the fact that you were living in the mess?

No. There was no military component at all. There was no military training of any description.

30:00 It was just a language course.

What did you know about what you were being trained for exactly?

We didn't know because none of us had a posting. You didn't know. You were learning Vietnamese to go to Vietnam but you didn't know what that was going to entail. You didn't know what you were going to be posted to. No one did. You didn't get your posting orders until after the course. I had no idea what I was going to do.

30:30 **Were there certain areas in which interpreters were being used that you knew about?**

Yes, of course. Obviously there was interrogation that was conducted on prisoners. There was an intelligence cell in the task force and also at Saigon where they would get documents and translate the documents for intelligence gathering. There was the civil affairs team which we knew had interpreters and Vietnamese linguists working with the team.

31:00 Yes, we knew that there were certain jobs you could go to. There were other people that did the course that just ended up with the battalion. They were useful to the battalion, because they could speak some Vietnamese.

Were there any interrogation training sessions?

Yes.

Can you tell us about them?

They weren't at Point Cook. When we finished the course at Point Cook, we were all required to go over to the School of Military Intelligence.

31:30 We did a whole series of courses. We did the civil affairs and psychological operations course and an interrogation course and an officers' field intelligence course and we were then on the staff to run two code of conduct courses. We were over there for about three months or so.

Where was that held?

That was at Woodside, just out of Adelaide. It is not there any more but that's where it is.

32:00 **Can you tell us a bit more about those courses, because they would have been focusing your training?**

None of them were very long courses. The interrogation course was simply that. You would have classroom lectures on interrogation techniques like good cop and bad cop and the positioning. You would put their lights in their eyes and sit above them

32:30 and the types of questions you could ask. You would practice. They would have some people that you could practise on and do a few interrogations and so on. Civil affairs and psychological operations – psychological operations was part of the Chieu Hoi Program. They used to drop leaflets and things saying, "Give up now and you will be well treated. Bring your weapons in and we will pay you money." They had voice aircraft flying around and giving these messages and so on. Civil affairs is what we ended up doing.

33:00 We were helping the South Vietnamese government supply services to the local population. We helped in that. The course was again a short course designed on what was being done and how it was being done and that sort of thing. The field intelligence course was intelligence gathering of documents and what to do with it like the intelligence process and how it was disseminated and gathered. The code of conduct,

33:30 they had a special facility built at Woodside. With the code of conduct was to teach people how to act if they were taken prisoner of war. They had this camp that was built purposefully to resemble what they would expect a North Vietnamese prison camp to be like. It was a one week course. One course was run for officers and one for NCOs. We were on the

34:00 staff, because we spoke a foreign language and that made it more exotic so we communicated with the people on this course didn't understand what was going on. They came to Woodside not knowing what to expect, because the code of conduct course and the content of it was classified as secret. They would be arrested. They don't run the course any more, so I can talk about it. They would be arrested and there would be bags on their heads and they would be dragged off the bus. We would

34:30 throw them into this camp and we would strip them and we would give them boots that were too big with no laces and pants that were too big with no belt. We would give them a number and they would only be referred to with that number. Then we would keep them awake with sleep deprivation. They are doing this now, and it is bad stuff. It is amazing what happens to people when they haven't been to sleep for a while. We would interrogate them and

35:00 we would put them through indoctrination procedures. We would put them down a hole where they had running water. We were not training them to do this to anyone else. This was supposedly to teach them lessons about what they could expect if they themselves were captured and how best to cope with it. That was the reason behind it. We kept files on all of these people because they went from interrogation to interrogation. We made them stand up and fold their blankets.

35:30 They were never left alone for more than five minutes. We moved them around and they always had a bag on their head so they didn't see any light. Their cells were too small to lie down in or stand up in. It was pretty bad. We fed them rubbish. They could break out if they wanted to. If it got too much for them, and in some cases it did, we could remove them from the course. We would then put them back on the course just before the end. All the files that we kept, because we kept

36:00 files during the course on what we were doing to these people, were burned in front of them when they finished the course. No records were kept.

Why were you involved in this?

Simply because we were there doing these other courses I'd mentioned and because we spoke a foreign language. A lot of us acted as guards and we spoke to each other in Vietnamese. The prisoners could hear what we were saying. Then we moved on from that and we would be

36:30 doing indoctrination and that sort of thing, so it was practise for us too.

Those were the techniques they expected from the enemy, but not the techniques you used?

No.

What about the techniques that you used? How forceful did they get?

They were not forceful at all. I wasn't involved in much of that myself. I don't know if you recall it but there was a huge incident where one warrant officer in an interrogation tried to force water down a prisoner's throat. That caused a

37:00 huge stir and to the best of my knowledge that was the worst thing that ever happened and it only happened once. The trouble is though that we didn't hang on to prisoners. We handed them over to the Vietnamese, and they weren't so circumspect I don't think.

Just a couple of questions about the other things in that course, there was the psychological operation training, what were you to be doing in that?

37:30 Nothing. There was a psychological operations unit at the task force in Vietnam. It was a small unit. The course was a short course on what they did and the techniques that they used to try and win the enemy over basically.

Did they incorporate an understanding of Vietnamese culture? You mentioned, "Drop your weapons and we'll give you money"?

That was all it was. There was

38:00 no appealing to the cultural aspect.

What about civil affairs? From that training at Woodside what understanding did you come away from that with about civil affairs programs?

Well I think the basic understanding was that what we were doing there in civil affairs was to assist the South Vietnamese Government. In other words, the request had to come through them and we had to, as much as possible, involve the local population in

38:30 whatever project it was, because what they were trying to avoid was, "Here is Australia giving you a present." What we were trying to say was, "Your government has asked us to do this for you." You had to apply to them to get asked to do whatever it is. I think that was the message we got. Basically we were trying to win hearts and minds for one thing, but at the same time try and support the South Vietnamese Government.

39:00 **So the clear political element of that job was made clear to you? It wasn't just that you would be altruistically helping the Vietnamese?**

No. In fact the CO of the unit when we were there was concerned that we were doing too much and we weren't involving the local population enough and they should be doing a lot of the things themselves. We should be working ourselves out of a job and let the South Vietnamese Government do it. Some of the things we did were useful,

39:30 I think.

We'll stop there.

Tape 5

01:06 **You were sharing with me off the camera that the code of conduct course was shut down because of complaints?**

No. I think it was a general feeling that it probably wasn't the right thing to do in the end. As I understood it the camp was built on the

01:30 advice of a British colonel who had been involved in the counter terrorist business in Malaya. He had designed this thing. I know that there were some complaints received from the local population that we were torturing prisoners, Vietnamese prisoners, at this camp. It wasn't true but

02:00 that is the sort of press that came out apparently. It didn't seem to be achieving too much, so I think they just canned it.

What was the story with the fellow and the razor blades?

As I was telling you, the poor buggers, there were twenty prisoners on each course. We had twenty cells. Every morning they would line up and they would be read excerpts from the Little Red Book of Mao.

02:30 Then they would have their ablutions. It consisted of a tub of water with a toothbrush and a razor blade attached to it. All twenty of them used the same toothbrush and the same razor blade. One fellow later in the course who sort of lost it was screaming out, "I'd really like a cigarette, but I demand my own fucking toothbrush." It sort of got to him. He hadn't slept for a few days either so

03:00 he was a bit angry.

Not all the fellows thought it was a bad course?

No. In fact at the end of the course almost all of them said that they appreciated what they learned about themselves on the course and how they handled it. Some were very tough. Some gave you nothing and the others did. What we tried to teach them was that if you were captured as a prisoner you probably don't know anything that is going to last for more than twenty-four hours that is worth knowing. So just try and keep quiet for a little

03:30 while and then just tell them anything. I think it started as a 'Pueblo Incident'. An American boat crew was captured, and within a month every single member of them fronted up on camera and said that they were war criminals and that they shouldn't have been involved and all that sort of thing. I think the object of the course was that this was what was going to happen to you and don't hold back. "If you have to say it, say it.

04:00 Don't suffer."

Did you yourself learn anything in particular at Woodside outside the courses that you were doing?

No, not particularly. Woodside was Woodside. It was another army base.

What was after that for you?

After that for me, because the position that they had decided I would go to in Vietnam was already filled, I was going to have to wait a year.

04:30 I spent a month at the Army Apprentice School at Balcombe and did nothing. Then they shipped me back to Point Cook School of Languages in the Vietnamese Department and I taught. I went on the staff there teaching Vietnamese. Going back a bit, my wife had been pregnant so when we finished the Vietnamese course I took her up to her parents and then I went down to

05:00 Woodside for the three months to do those courses. My daughter was born up in Lismore in January. I got to see her when she was three months' old. So when I got back to Point Cook, we rented a little flat in Werribee and it was probably the first time we had a sort of a marriage. I was going to work nine to five and coming home. That was pretty pleasant. We had a nice social life and a little kid and all that.

Did you find your language

05:30 **improved?**

Yes. You go back and rehash the basics because that is what you were teaching. It really gave a lot of strength there and you really got a mastery of the basics of the language. I still haven't lost it. I lost a lot of the vocab [vocabulary] in the later part of the course. Yes, it did help.

Given there are differences in the South Vietnamese and the North, were you aware of that at the time of teaching and training?

Yes, but like I said, our

06:00 lecturers were North Vietnamese. They pointed out those differences to us, but they didn't use those differences in their every day language or in their teaching, because they just didn't speak that way.

When did you receive news that you could finally head across towards Vietnam?

It wasn't until the end of 1969.

06:30 By that time my wife was pregnant again so I took her back to her parents again. I did a number of courses like the battle efficiency course at Canungra for example. I was getting kitted out and getting medical checks and so on and I didn't finally take off until the beginning of June. I left for Vietnam and my twins were seven days' old, and they were still in the humidicrib when I left.

That was June,

07:00 **1970?**

1970.

The battle efficiency course, could you just talk us through what they were trying to teach you there?

Infantry tactics basically and a lot of physical exertion. The morning started at five a.m. I think it was and it was intense. It started with a run. Then you would have breakfast and then you ran the rest of the day to various places. We had live shoots and night

07:30 shoots and grenade practice and ambush drills and contact drills and harbouring drills. They were all minor infantry tactics. We had route marches and all of that. That was three weeks of hell and I didn't enjoy it at all. It was terrible.

Were you told anything about the Vietnamese tactics? Obviously you had been prepared for it, but what the North Vietnamese would do?

08:00 Included in that course was some lecture type stuff. Most of the instructors had Vietnam experience so they talked about booby traps. We had lectures on booby traps and guerrilla warfare and that sort of thing. Not too much stuck, I don't think, but we were taught something of it.

Were you called on at all to give them any idea of language?

Only at one

08:30 point, and it wasn't so much the language. You can't do anything with language. I can remember talking to the group I was with. We were all treated by the way on the course as infantry privates. That is what you were on the course no matter what your rank was. I was asked by one of the sergeants who was running it just to talk about what I knew about Vietnamese culture and history. It was just a bit on that but not a lot. It was half an hour or so.

How did you get to

09:00 **Vietnam?**

On a Qantas charter flight. We left from Sydney and flew via Singapore to Ton San Nhut, which was Saigon's airport. Everyone on board was Australian Army.

What were your first impressions when you got to Saigon?

I keep saying this but it was hot. Asia has a smell, too, and a different smell from Papua New Guinea. I don't know whether it was different spices or different

09:30 vegetation but there was a distinct aroma. I remember that and I remember it being very humid. Before we landed I remember too looking down. Coming from Gippsland where it is all dairy country and hills and little dams this was all very green and very flat. There were lots of little dams which I then realised were actually

10:00 bomb craters and shell craters filled full of water. That was the first impression. There were an awful lot of holes all over the place. Landing at Ton San Nhut we were met by a movement control officer off the plane who gave us a bit of a briefing. I think from memory we spent the night there. I don't have a great deal of memory of it. Again it was different. All these aircraft were flying around and there were all

these military people with weapons.

10:30 It was a bit nerve wracking in a sense, because you didn't know what was going on. You had no idea really and you didn't know what to expect. You didn't know whether you were going to get bombed or whether there was going to be a mortar attack. You would read all these things in the paper about what was happening in Vietnam and you would think that everyone was constantly at each other's throats which of course turned out not to be the case but you didn't know that.

11:00 **Do you remember using your language for the first time with some Vietnamese?**

That wouldn't have been at Ton San Nhut. The next day we got on board a Caribou and we flew to Nui Dat. I met the person that I was taking over from in civil affairs and we had a handover. We shared a tent for a week and he took me out on the

11:30 rounds if you like and that was when I first used my Vietnamese. We went out to the villagers and we met the province education guy and a few others and I used Vietnamese on that day. It would be about the second day I arrived in Nui Dat.

Who were you taking over from?

Mark Hitch was his name. He was doing what I ended up doing. The civil affairs team was divided up into a number of

12:00 areas and I'm sure Barry told you about that. My little portfolio, if you like, was Education and Youth and Sports Affairs. So I had a lieutenant and a sergeant and two land rovers and a Vietnamese interpreter who went with the lieutenant who didn't have any language training. We handled all the projects that we were doing in that field.

12:30 **Mark Hitch, did he share with you the difficulties of the job and the problems you might face in the future?**

Yes. We talked a lot about it over that week. I went around and I met everyone that he dealt with. We went out to all the villages in the province or a large number of them where we'd had projects in the past. We just met some of the people and the elders occasionally. It was a pretty good handover.

13:00 **What was some of the advice he gave you?**

I don't recall any specific advice. The basic advice was that every project we got involved in had to come through the Education Department, the Vietnamese Education Department, apart from those few projects that came through CORDS [Civil Operations and Rural Development Support] which was the American office in the province. They had their own program, the WHAM Program, Win Hearts and Minds. I was also on their books as the

13:30 province education advisor. They had some projects too but they tended to be, "Here's a volley ball. Give it and take a picture of it to show what we are doing." The Australian approach was a bit different. They were operating through the South Vietnamese. It worked pretty well I think. We did some good things.

Did Mark talk about the dangers?

The dangers were obvious, because although nothing

14:00 happened if the local bad guys wanted to make a point there was no easier target than us. We spent the days, all day, most days just out on the road with yourself and a driver and going from village to village and hamlet to hamlet. Nothing ever happened. In fact, talking about soft targets Rob Lovell, who is in Sydney, would have had to be the softest target in Vietnam. He was running an English Language Program at

14:30 Dat Do High School. It was just him. And Dat Do was a place you didn't want to be at at night. Nothing happened to him. We could only assume that either they thought we were doing a worthwhile thing or we were just a bunch of harmless idiots and not worth the trouble or a bit of both. There was always a feeling that it could have been dangerous, but nothing happened.

Did Mark share with you the villages that might be pro

15:00 **VC [Viet Cong]?**

I think we all knew pretty much which were and which weren't. CORDS operated what they called the HES System which was the Hamlet Evaluation Scheme. I did actually a CORDS course with the Americans in Saigon. It was only a week long course. They assessed all of the hamlets and the villages in Vietnam as A, B or C hamlets. A was where they controlled it totally day and night.

15:30 B, where control was disputed and it was ours during the day and theirs during the night. And C was where they owned it. Their program was designed as pacification to lift the Cs to Bs and the Bs to As and to pacify the country. We had a fair idea that in places like Hai Long and Dat Do they had control pretty much during the evening. But places like Binh Ba and Binh Gia which were up in the rubber plantation

16:00 they tended to be Catholic refugees from the north and they tended to be very much on our side. You had a fair idea.

When did you do this course at the beginning of your tour?

No. It was towards the end, so it was useless. There was a reason why I did it towards the end because it was sort of like a little prize. Many of us got to go there. It was like a week in Saigon. It was all American stuff that didn't really relate to what we were doing. It was how to fill out the forms, largely. The interesting thing was, I don't know if I

16:30 recognised it at the time, but CORDS was the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] organisation. The province senior advisor, the American in Phuoc Tuy Province operated out of CORDS. He was a fellow called Walkinshaw. He later became deputy director of the CIA. The guy who opened and closed, who was the head of CORDS in Vietnam and who opened and closed our little course that we did was Colby. He became

17:00 director of the CIA when he went back. So I think there was a fair bit of CIA influence in their programs.

Besides the heat when you got to Nui Dat, you had been waiting in a sense from Papua New Guinea to get there, what did you see as you walked in?

It is typically Australian isn't it? Again, you didn't know what to expect so you were a bit on edge and not quite sure.

17:30 We boarded this Caribou and there were twenty or thirty of us. The load master as we landed at dusk at Nui Dat was saying, "OK as soon as we roll to a stop I'll drop the tail. Get out quickly and keep down low and head for the trees on the side of the runway." So you pull out of this thing and you're ducking and weaving and everyone is in the trees laughing and having a beer or a soft drink or something. You don't know, do you? They just take the piss, but that was

18:00 all right. We had it pretty easy really. I don't know what it would have been like setting up the task force. That would have been difficult. We arrived there and the task force in the area we were in was at an old rubber plantation. That was shady and leafy. The tents were all constructed. We had showers and a toilet. It was all right. It wasn't too bad, but I guess the guys at the beginning had to put all that up.

Were there any other jokes played on the new fellows in the

18:30 **first few weeks?**

There is always standard stuff. There were the Dat Do dogs. No one has told you about the Dat Do dogs? It was based on the Dapto Dogs. They would tell the new fellows, "We're going to the Dat Do Dogs tonight fellows you've got to dress up." They would all dress up and go to the front gate. Dat Do was the place you never went at night. You would get shot. That was one. Then some character at Hai Long, which was another disputed village, put up a sign in front of the old rice mill.

19:00 It was, "Fifty/fifty dancing every Saturday night. Girls, gaiety and grog. Fifty piastre admission." In fact, Jim Holland, one of our liaison officers took a reporter I think from the Sydney Morning Herald past this. The reporter said, "What's that?" Jim said, "Saturday nights, we come down here and have a bit of a dance with the local girls and things." He wrote this up in the paper apparently. He did write it and he made the

19:30 comment that we should know better because at least half the admission would be going into the pockets of the VC. Nobody ever went there of course. The interesting thing was there was Hai Long, which as I said, they had quite a few sympathisers in Hai Long and they never took the sign down, they just left it there. It was there all the time I was there, the Hai Long Dance.

20:00 There were a few little things like that.

The CO, did he greet you formally as well?

Yes, Paddy Outridge. It was small unit. I am trying to think now but I guess there would have been sixty in the unit and twenty of whom would have been officers or around twenty. You knew everyone and he knew everyone. He was a nice bloke, too, Paddy Outridge.

I know we have chatted to Barry but since this is a separate

20:30 **interview. If you could just go through the structure of the civil affairs unit and how your position fitted into it?**

There were a number of teams and they operated on projects within their area of expertise if you want to call it that. We had an agricultural team and they went around the villages. They were involved in projects like helping to develop a better strain of rice. They started a piggery, a pig project.

21:00 They started a few projects involving hens, trying to get some protein into the villagers' diet and that sort of thing. They were running around doing that sort of stuff. We had a medical team who used to do MEDCAPS, which were Medical Civil Aid Projects which involved going into villages and inoculating kids for one thing. But Gedis Grudzinskas, who was the medic in our unit, a national service doctor,

took the ethos of the unit as supporting the South Vietnamese Government so he moved to giving lectures at the local hospital on hygiene and nursing training and that sort of thing, trying to train the local Vietnamese. He did a lot of that. My area was education and sports and youth affairs and I mentioned that. There was also an engineering aspect because some of the projects required building. We had engineers and a captain who was in charge of

that. They would go out and either build the projects themselves or let out tenders to local contractors and oversee the building of the project. We had a headquarters element, a CO and a second in command, an adjutant and a clerk. We had four what we called liaison officers who just went around the villages and kept their ear to the ground and asked what they could do and passed it on and that sort of thing. They were all Vietnamese linguists.

Barry was one of those.

How many fellows did speak Vietnamese, the liaison officers did?

It was just the four of them and me in the time that I was there. There were five of us.

The reason you were held back is that someone was in your position?

Yes, Mark. He had just been posted there and it was a twelve-month posting.

Your position was always going to be education and sport?

Yes. That is what he had.

I guess that was my field of expertise, apart from speaking the language of course.

What jobs or work did he have up and running upon your arrival?

The first job that I did was one of the biggest projects. They rebuilt the school. I wasn't involved in getting the project off the ground or anything, but Mark had gone before the school was opened so that was basically his project. We had actually shelled the original school so it was probably

incumbent upon us to rebuild the bloody thing. No one was hurt. It was just one of these harassment and interdiction missions they used to fire. The artillery just used to fire into a space at night but they fired into the wrong space on a particular night and hit this school so we rebuilt it. They had a big official opening and so we had the general down from Saigon to give a speech and that sort of thing. I got involved doing the interpreting.

He was giving a speech and I was interpreting and the local Vietnamese were all gathered in the front. That was basically my first job which I managed to screw up. My Vietnamese was good but it wasn't perfect. Like most languages, and certain in Vietnamese, you can't translate word for word. You've got to translate ideas and paragraphs and thoughts. This general had an aide with him and I said to the aide, "Can I get a

copy of his speech, so I can get an idea and jot down a few words and ideas on how his speech goes." So he did. I had about an hour and I did that and I marked the speech. I said, "Can you ask the General to stop at these places and I'll come in and do the translation." He said, "Yes." Of course the general didn't and I wasn't flexible enough to change what I was going to say. So about half way through the speech, I was making the speech in Vietnamese and he was translating him into

English. It amused a lot of the Vietnamese in the front row who actually spoke English. This idiot captain was giving them a speech on the opening of the school and this general was translating it. They never said anything, which was very nice of them. That was my first job.

Were there times in the early days I guess when you were translating or just communicating where because of the pressure or something, you just got it

wrong and you didn't communicate correctly?

There were some times when I just didn't understand a word that was being said. I remember on one specific occasion, I was talking to an old villager. He was an old guy and he had no teeth and he was South Vietnamese to boot and he was speaking colloquially. I had a Vietnamese kid from the village who was telling me what he was saying and then I could understand

it, but it was in Vietnamese. I had some problems initially. With the educated Vietnamese, no, they always understood what I was saying and I mostly understood what they were saying.

I think you earlier you were sharing with Chris [interviewer] that when you were doing the course at Point Cook, learning the Northern Vietnamese side, and you mentioned to him it was a bit of a shock coming in and being dropped on the South Vietnamese side?

Yes.

What were the biggest shocks there?

It was just a different dialect so it was much harder to understand. That is all. As you went on you

understood more and more and it got less and less difficult but there were a number of North Vietnamese and when you heard North Vietnamese as I said before it was like the ringing of a bell. It was like hearing English. The South Vietnamese was always a bit of a struggle. They never had a problem understanding me, because really the North is the purer of the languages I

27:00 think and that is the language they use in government now and TV and radio and so on. I had problems. You could always ask them to say it again or, “What does that mean?” We got through.

When you arrived at Nui Dat or even Saigon did you have a fear inside you that now you were inside a war zone?

Yes. It was more a fear of the unknown. I was certainly nervous.

27:30 I remember arriving at Nui Dat and within a couple of days, it wouldn’t have been any more than two days, and we had a stand-to at night. At the back of your tent is a hole in the ground and it is called a weapon pit. When the stand-to was sounded, you had to grab your rifle and some ammunition and a canteen of water and jump into this hole and peer into the blackness and wait for the hordes. Initially you never knew whether it was a drill or not. I didn’t know because it was the first one I’d done and they all turned out to be drills.

28:00 After a few of these you would leave the canteen behind and take down a couple of cans of beer and peer into the blackness until they said you could stand down. The first couple of times, it was a bit nerve wracking because you just don’t know. You are by yourself in your hole and you are looking at black. We did get mortared once, I believe, but I sort of slept through it.

What was the morale like amongst the civil affairs unit?

It was good.

28:30 I think most of us thought we were doing a useful job, and morale was good and it stayed good.

Was morale good in all of Nui Dat?

I think so. A lot of the officers that I served with in New Guinea were there with 7 Battalion and I used to go and see them quite often, and their morale was pretty good. We did have one terrible incident when I was at Nui Dat.

29:00 A national serviceman shot and killed four sergeants. His morale couldn’t have been too hot, and it was very bad. By and large people wanted to go home and people didn’t want to be there but the morale was pretty good.

Where were you when this fellow shot the sergeants?

We were at the unit. I think it was Christmas Eve. We were all sitting around a fire being maudlin and drinking beer.

29:30 We had a doctor there, Dr Gedis Grudzinskas, who is now a Professor of Obstetrics at a London hospital. And David McNicholl, was with 7 Field Ambulance, which was right next door to our unit was with us. We heard some shots that night and it turned out that a national serviceman had opened fire into the sergeants’ mess. These blokes arrived and Gedis and David swung into action but they couldn’t do anything.

30:00 The guys were gone.

Do you know the reason why this fellow had shot into the mess?

I don’t know. He was arrested obviously and came back and served some time but he was released on mental grounds I believe. It was obviously trauma or something. I’m surprised it didn’t happen more often. It is a fairly bad mix, isn’t it, when you’ve got a lot of young people around who are drunk a lot of the time. There was never any shortage of booze.

30:30 They are all armed to the teeth. That was the only incident we had in my twelve months there.

Did Nui Dat change at all after that incident?

No. I don’t recall any changes.

You mentioned going to visit occasionally your mates who were with 7 Battalion?

Yes.

What were their feelings and thoughts on the civil affairs unit?

It was interesting at time. There was an awful lot of

31:00 swapping that used to go on and we had a lot of good gear in civil affairs. We had cement and we had plywood and we had all sorts of building materials that people in the battalion wanted. Everyone wanted to create their own little space where they could have a little quiet time for their platoon or their company and have a couple of beers without having to go down to the mess or whatever. They

were

31:30 always trying to con stuff out of us so they were always nice to us. We did a few swaps with them. A mate of mine, Brian Green, he was the intelligence officer with the battalion and we built ourselves our own quiet space for the officers in civil affairs. It was quite nice too. We called it The Court. We didn't have any perspex for the windows. Brian, who wanted five ply [wood] for his place knew where we could

32:00 get some perspex. It was on the battle maps for his battle maps of his battalion. He and I stole it basically. We snuck in there and took it and then got his five ply. I would go up and they'd be out in the fire support base and they'd be sitting on some shell scrape in water or something up on Route Two. I'd drive up because we were up in the village. They had gone up there with tanks and armour and I'd call in and have a cup of tea and then leave.

32:30 They thought we were a bit of a wank, I suppose.

What about your work amongst the community, what was the feeling there?

I was never treated with anything but courtesy and kindness by the Vietnamese, and generosity.

But the soldiers such as from the 7th Battalion, what did they think about your work in the villages?

I think they thought it was fine. They were involved in a lot of civil action projects themselves. Every battalion tried to do something. They were always

33:00 asking us, "What can we do?" They would be painting schools and stuff. But that's not really what we were trying to get into. The Vietnamese could paint their own schools. We were trying to do things that they couldn't do, for lack of resources or lack of money or whatever. The battalions sponsored the local orphanage. They were all doing all this stuff themselves and trying to do as much as they could. They respected what we were doing. It is not that we had great dealings with them. I never saw these

33:30 people from one day to the next. I was talking to Vietnamese villagers or Vietnamese officials or whatever.

Now under you there was a lieutenant, a sergeant and a driver, is that right?

We had two drivers but they weren't the same people all the time. We sort of operated out of the transport section of the unit. We had two Land Rovers and we would get a driver assigned.

The drivers were Australian or Vietnamese?

34:00 We had no Vietnamese at Nui Dat except for this one Vietnamese interpreter, Trung, who was with civil affairs for the whole period. He was there for years. We had two Land Rovers. The lieutenant had one and he took Tian with him and a driver. I had the other one with a driver. Poor old Rob Lovell we would just dump him out at Dat Do High School and he would hopefully teach some English.

34:30 **Rob's rank was?**

He was a sergeant.

Did he volunteer, given how dangerous you felt it was?

I think he volunteered. He was a national serviceman trained teacher and that is why he was a sergeant. He got the guernsey to go up there. That is what we were doing. We were running this language program. We had to request it of the school to have a native speaker of English on hand.

How did the lieutenant

35:00 **operate under you?**

We overlapped a fair amount. We had some funds and CORDS gave us some funds too. We would get things like volley balls and soccer balls and badminton racquets. We would even buy some of this ourselves. Bob, he was the lieutenant, he would just take it out to the villages and give it to them. He also got involved in one larger projects of building. We

35:30 built a scout hall for example. Scouting was pretty big in the province. There was a request and he oversaw that project. He got it done and he oversaw a few other projects. We put in a lot of concrete volley ball courts that could be used as badminton courts as well. He did that sort of stuff and sometimes I helped. I went down to Saigon at one stage with him and we bought a lot of sporting equipment,

36:00 it was easy for me to use Vietnamese down there and help him out. It was a bit of an overlap.

You oversaw really what he was doing I take it?

In a sense. We just worked together. I never thought of him being junior to me. In fact he wouldn't have thought himself of being junior to me either. He was an ex infantry warrant officer who was older than

me and who did a teacher training course while in the army and transferred across to education. He was a good bloke.

36:30 **This word education, what do we mean by it? Are we just saying educating the kids to learn English or what was education?**

I was involved more in projects to help education. During my time our major project was we built one school. We put in a toilet complex at another. We built a classroom at a high school.

37:00 I was involved also in organising text books and school furniture and some maintenance. We put a well in another school and there were all these sort of projects. Basically the villagers who had a school and they would say, "We need this." They would go into the Vietnamese education authorities in the capital of the province, Baria, and say, "This is what we want for our school."

37:30 They would look at it and they would prioritise as everyone does. Some people would miss out because they didn't have enough funds or they didn't have enough expertise. This is the person I would deal with. I would say, "Are there any things that we can do?" They would say, "We would really like to get this done, but we can't do it because – " Then I would go out to the villages and talk about what they wanted done and how they were going to do it and what they could contribute because we wanted them to contribute. For the toilet block, they actually made the bricks but we built the

38:00 toilet. That is what we did. I didn't do any teaching at all. I did some work with CORDS, the Americans, because they had this WHAM Program so I got stuff from them which I delivered on their behalf and I acted as a liaison officer between CORDS and us. CORDS was very important to our engineering section because they actually supplied us with cement and roofing material and reinforcing parts through the

38:30 CORDS system. So we had to be on good terms with them.

You were also very much involved with the education department that oversaw things?

Yes. It was through them to the villages and the hamlets.

In respect to all this going on were there bribes or were you ever offered bribes to get things done or passed through?

No. The people who were offered bribes, I understand, were the

39:00 engineers. I don't think they accepted any. They used to let a lot of contracts out to tender. They would get local contractors to build the projects and then oversee them. A lot of these local contractors wanted to get the contract, so they really wanted to know what the tender price was. That was subject to a little bit of shenanigans, but I don't think we ever got involved. I wasn't bribed or offered bribes. When we built the

39:30 school that we built, that was a good project. That was just a two-room school but that was requested and built and full of kids before I left, so within that twelve month period. That was a good little project.

That school took twelve months?

No, it didn't take twelve months. I suppose the initial request came when I'd been there a couple of months. It was up and running within six. The request was there. It as a little hamlet outside of

40:00 Dat Do. It was hard for the kids to get to the main school. It wasn't far out but it was a few kilometres and of course nobody had any vehicles or anything and it was a primary school and the little kids had to walk. They had about sixty kids in this hamlet where they wanted the school. The local education service didn't have the funds to build it. When they asked us to do it, I went out initially to see where they wanted it built. That was a bit nerve wracking too.

40:30 I met up with this guy who was an elder from the village. He got in the Land Rover and we drove through the hamlet out to the end of this track. We were in the jungle and the track runs out and the vehicles can't go any further. He jumps off and he says, "Follow me." So I followed him and we kept on walking through the jungle on this foot track. I suddenly thought, "This is crazy. I don't know this guy from Adam, and I'm strolling down this bloody track with him."

41:00 As it turned out after a couple of hundred yards we came to this clearing and he said, "We're going to build the school here." I said, "Terrific." I ran back. I know the driver wasn't too enthused either. He was sitting there by himself. It was interesting because the district chief was an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] captain. We had to keep in touch with them. Whatever you were doing in his district, you had to tell them. I said, "We're going to build this school. He said, "Where are you going to build it?" I said, "I'll show you." He came out but he wouldn't go down the

41:30 track without an infantry escort. Within two months, the Australian engineers were out there and the whole place was surrounded by kids. They were handing out lollies and everyone was laughing and singing. They whacked the school up, and the Vietnamese Government supplied two teachers and away they went.

We'll just stop there because it is the end of the tape.

Tape 6

00:51 **What can you tell us about where you were set up at Nui Dat? Can you describe a bit more about your lines there and where you worked from?**

01:00 Part of Nui Dat was a disused rubber plantation and that is where our lines were, within the rubber plantation. They were not too far from task force headquarters and next to 7 Field Ambulance and close to the POW [Prisoner of War] compound. What else can I tell you?

A bit more about those things. What did you see of the POW compound?

Not much. I didn't have much to do with it.

01:30 We didn't have many prisoners. It was only on the odd occasion that there was anyone in there. As far as I know they weren't in there for long. I didn't have anything to do with it at all.

You talked a little bit about it before but maybe you could just give us a description of the tents you lived in in this rubber plantation?

It was a fairly large tent. It was about twelve foot by twelve foot. We had wooden floor boards and I think they were pallets, wooden pallets.

02:00 The walls were sandbags. I think they were three sandbags thick and about one metre tall around the tent. Inside the tent were two single beds with mosquito netting. Between the two beds, you had a small table and chair and behind the table and chair a steel locker. Then around the sandbags and on top of them, we had empty ammunition boxes for cupboards if you like.

02:30 We had fluorescent light. It wasn't too bad. Out the back was the weapon pit I mentioned, the hole in the grand, and there was a little stand with water and a mirror and you could wash there and have a shave and so on.

Where were most of your washing and ablutions done?

We had an ablutions block in the unit. It was a deep trench latrine and cold water showers that the Vietnamese had put in. It was a gravity fed tank that they filled up daily from a water point.

03:00 **Where did the water come from?**

We had a water point and it was just a big tap. I don't know who put it in. It was someone in the early days of the task force, but we had running water.

Was it safe to drink?

No. You wouldn't drink the water. You would boil it if you were going to drink it but, no, we didn't drink it.

In that locker in your tent, what personal possessions did you have?

Not much really. For correspondence I had a

03:30 camera obviously and I took a lot of slides. I had a little reel to reel tape recorder which I would send messages home with. I had the usual things to use for ablutions like shaving gear and personal gear. And I had a radio. I had a little transistor radio and I used to listen to the American Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. We also had a television in that room that we built eventually which we got from the Americans.

What sort of thing would be broadcast on the American Armed Services

04:00 **Radio?**

You saw Good Morning Vietnam. It was all rock and roll and Creedance Clearwater Revival and Neil Diamond and Glen Campbell and Peter, Paul and Mary. There were lots of popular songs like The Animals' We've got to get out of this Place and Peter, Paul and Mary's, Leaving on a Jet Plane and The Age of Aquarius from Hair. There was that sort of stuff.

Do you still

04:30 **hear certain songs that remind you of Vietnam?**

Yes. Those types of songs do, yes. Then in Saigon there was, Bridge over Troubled Water, because I liked that LP. It was good.

What about the television, what would be on that?

The only thing I can remember watching on television was gridiron, because that is when I learned to like American football. They played a lot of that and obviously it was popular with their troops so there were a lot of replays of football and I remember watching that. I don't remember watching much

05:00 else.

Did that broadcasting service carry normal news about the war?

Yes, it did. We had a newspaper called The Stars and Stripes too, that the Americans printed. It was always upbeat. In fact we were told to keep everything upbeat even writing home. Why worry your family? Everything was going well and things were good and not dangerous.

How often did you receive letters from home?

05:30 Pretty regularly. There were letters and parcels and we'd get cake and stuff like that. It was probably on a weekly basis. There was a period when the posties went on strike, that caused a bit of anger. That wouldn't have lasted all that long. It was maybe a month. It was pretty regular, the postal service.

How important was that mail?

Very important. You got very disappointed when the letters arrived if you didn't get

06:00 one, so it was very important. It was the only contact we had. There were no telephones and obviously no internet or anything like that. Post was important.

You mentioned off camera before about sending tapes home, can you tell us a bit more about that?

Yes. We could buy and we did the tiny reel to reel tape recorders. The reels were about that big and would hold half an hour of conversation. For a way of communicating, I would take a film of

06:30 slides and get them developed and give a commentary on a slide show if you liked as well as personal messages. I would send them home and my wife would make one up and send it back. You had a voice. We got letters too of course, we wrote letters, but it was good to hear someone's voice.

When you say you were encouraged to keep it upbeat and positive, was there censorship on those kind of things?

07:00 Not that I'm aware of. I don't ever recall anyone sort of reading your mail or censoring it in any way. It was basically, and I think it was fair enough, and why worry your family at home about what's going on? They probably thought we were having a wonderful time and were down the mess every night of the week.

What were the main forms of recreation, when you weren't out doing your job?

We drank a lot and we played

07:30 cards like poker and five hundred and we'd watch movies. Every unit had a movie screen and these movies used to do the circuit. The movies were on most night of the week. Otherwise, you just sat around and talked.

Was there gambling?

Yes, there was gambling. Most of the card games we played for money but we didn't play for huge sums of money. I guess some people did. We played for

08:00 money that it would be nice to win but not terribly awful if you lost. Mind you, beer was ten cents per can so I suppose if you lost ten cents it was significant.

Your mess was the task force headquarters, can you tell us a bit about that?

It was a relatively substantial building. It had an outdoor area with a movie screen and comfortable arm chairs. It had a well stocked bar.

08:30 The mess itself where we ate was just tables and chairs. The food was pretty ordinary because they had to work with stuff they could get. It was stuff like powdered eggs and reconstituted milk and that sort of stuff. It was more formal than you wanted it to be. You would come in at the end of the day pretty sweaty. You were always wet in Vietnam if it was in the wet season because the Land Rovers didn't have any cover. You got soaked. If it was the dry

09:00 season, you got covered in dust and sweat. You couldn't go to the mess like that. You had to go back and have a shower and put on a clean uniform and then go down to the mess. Where we could, we tended to just eat in the lines either ration packs or where we could get them some steaks or seafood and light up a barbecue. Then of course we got our own little place and we stayed in there even more often.

How did that place come about, can you tell us a bit about it?

09:30 We wanted a place of our own. The diggers had one, the Goldfinger Club, but of course officers weren't invited to the Goldfinger Club. They had their own place in the unit and we put it to the CO that we would like a little place of our own. He sought permission and as I understand it he didn't get it. They didn't want any more semi permanent buildings at Nui Dat, because the war was probably going to wind down or whatever. We

10:00 had all the materials and we had the expertise. We had the engineering section and we had the building material. We laid down a concrete slab about the size of a volleyball court (that's why we called it the Court) and prefabbed most of the other stuff and basically put it up in one day. So suddenly it was there, and they just left it.

What was the reaction of the higher command?

Nothing. They just ignored it after that.

10:30 It was a fait accompli, and it was just there.

Tell us a bit more about these barbecues? Would there be celebrations for different events while you were there?

No. It was just what you could get. The Americans were always a good source of steaks. It was all a barter system. They liked Australian beer and we liked steaks. We couldn't get that many steaks. They used to get boxes of steaks imported and every now and then we'd manage to do a swap. With the seafood within Phuoc Tuy province were two or three fishing villages and

11:00 because we were out and around we were often down there so we could buy prawns and fish and bring it back. It wasn't for a celebration. When people went home, as they did quite often to Australia on R&R [Rest and Recreation], it was expected that they would bring back something that all of us could eat.

What other things did you barter?

Everything.

11:30 The American supplementary ration packs were popular as well. Apart from the ration packs where you had food, they had what they called supplementary ration packs which contained chewing gum and cigarettes and writing materials and that sort of stuff so they were popular. Again, slouch hats and Australian beer and Australian boots were popular with the Americans.

12:00 You always had something to trade and there was a bit of that that went on.

You liked to relax in flight suits as that photo shows, how did that come about?

Well, they are tropical weight flying suits so they are very comfortable and they are loose and they are light. Obviously pilots wore them but also armoured corps personnel in Vietnam wore them. We wanted some and they wanted some cement.

12:30 They got their cement and we got the flying suits.

The civil affairs unit would have been in a fairly good position to barter, in that respect, because you often had materials on hand?

It wasn't like we were running it out of the door or anything and handing over tons of materials. We are probably talking in that instance of maybe a bag of cement that the Americans supplied in the first place. It wasn't a big deal or anything. It was the odd piece of plywood or something that someone wanted.

13:00 **You mentioned that part of your job was to liaise with the Americans?**

Yes.

What contact did you have with them outside of that and where did your meetings with them take place?

It was mostly around CORDS. They occasionally came out to the unit. We might have had a little bit of a function like a barbecue where we'd invite them out and occasionally we went in there. It wasn't often but occasionally. There were a couple of young American captains that worked for CORDS. I got to know them a bit.

13:30 We didn't have huge contact. There weren't a lot of Americans around. There was an American unit at Nui Dat, an artillery unit, so there was some contact there obviously. They had heavy artillery and the Australian Army didn't possess any, so Charlie Battery – I think they were called – they were actually at Nui Dat and they were a small American unit. Obviously they got all the stuff in that Americans get. Just down the road there was a huge American supply base at Long Binh and it was sixty four square miles full of stuff.

14:00 It was eight miles by eight miles. The American system seemed to be fairly loose. It seemed to be that when stuff came into Vietnam, they never expected to get it back. We sort of often went down there and got stuff.

Without asking?

We'd ask, but they usually gave it to us. I remember one time a couple of us went down there and we were looking for poncho lines. That was another popular item and sneakers.

14:30 We saw the sergeant in the warehouse that contained these items and he said, "Have you got any

paperwork?" We said, "No." He said, "Jesus!" and he just pointed us in the right direction to get the stuff. Then he came around and said, "Hide, here comes the captain." We were captains too and we were hiding in the corner while his captain went past. One of our officers came back from Long Binh with a jeep, but the CO made him take it back.

How was this stuff arranged? Was it just

15:00 **a massive warehouse?**

It just went forever. All damaged vehicles and so on ended up there, so they were cannibalised for spare parts. Other vehicles that they thought were near their end would be just lying there. There were generators that were stripped for parts and there were all sorts of clothing materials. There were a lot of warehouses. It was a huge base that many Americans were posted to and never left. They had a bowling alley and ice cream parlours. It was the whole

15:30 nine yards. There were actual movies there, not just a screen.

Apart from having a reputation for being free with their supplies, what was thought of about the Americans?

The few that I met I thought were all right, but it would be two or three that I had any real dealings with. They were very friendly and seemed to be competent and I had no problems with them. I really didn't get to know them that well.

16:00 **Can you tell us a little bit more about the liaison work you did with CORDS and what they were doing?**

It was more of letting them know what we were doing, because it was a courtesy if you like. We were doing these projects and they would mark them up on their board that these particular projects were taking place within the province and Australian Civil Affairs was doing it. So it was passing information on that side. Then it was seeking their assistance when we had projects going in terms of

16:30 materials like asking for cement and corrugated iron and reinforcing bars. We would tell them what we were going to use it for. At other times they were actually supplying funds and buying stuff. Like I said, they would buy sporting equipment and I would distribute it to schools. That was the nature of the liaison. It was fairly loose. It was just a loose arrangement. It was just a common courtesy of keeping each other informed of what we were doing. The province senior advisor was an

17:00 American and living at CORDS. The security of the province was in the hands of the Australians.

I'm not sure if you have already said it, but for the archive can you explain what CORDS was and what it stood for?

It stood for Civil Operations and Revolutionary [Rural] Development Scheme. They ran a series of programs on of which was the one I mentioned, the WHAM Program, which was Win Hearts and Minds which is the business of giving stuff out and, "Look what we're doing for you."

17:30 They also administered the HES, which was the Hamlet Evaluation System. They taught people how to run that. I am not and this is after the event, I didn't know it at the time, but they also organised the Phoenix Program.

Was there a difference in the way they operated their civil aid work?

They tended I think by and large to look upon it as a PR [Public Relations] exercise. Take a photograph and put it in The Stars and Stripes.

18:00 The 'American hands over the water' stuff. I suppose it was a different approach.

You weren't involved in the Phoenix Program, but was there any intelligence component to your work?

Not at all.

Was it ever implied that if you found something out you should tell it?

Obviously if you came across any information, you would tell someone.

18:30 I don't recall ever finding anything out to be honest. Yes, that was understood. They had linguists in the intelligence section and they did all the translating of material and stuff that was captured or taken from bodies or whatever. I didn't do any of that.

So did Nui Dat have a curfew system? Did you have to be in the compound by a certain time?

No, but we always

19:00 tried to get back before dark for obvious reasons I think. There was no curfew placed on you. No one kept a time clock or anything you came and went as you pleased. We were pretty much back behind the wire by nightfall.

Was the province a dangerous place after dark?

Yes it certainly was. The whole war, and I wasn't involved in this either, but the war was being fought on ambush and counter ambush. So

19:30 there were free fire zones. If you happened to wander into one of those at night, you got shot. There were H&I [Harassment and Interdiction] missions and the artillery was firing all the times just into spaces. That was fairly dangerous too. One of the incidents while I was there was there was an ambush. Hai Long was the closest village to Nui Dat base. A particular platoon were setting up an

20:00 ambush there when they saw what was obviously a supply party of about sixty or seventy going into Hai Long. They were obviously Vietcong. They hadn't set up the ambush in time. They established the ambush site in case they came out on the same path which they obviously shouldn't have done but they did. They poured all the fire into the killing ground. When the sun came up they had

20:30 seventeen bodies killed and a fair few blood trails going back into Hai Long village. It was very close to the task force, so they surrounded the village with armour and they put in a battalion to do a sweep through the village and they found no one which would indicate to me where the sympathies of the villagers lay. We had these seventeen bodies and quite a number of them were young

21:00 females, which I understand were taken to the marketplace in Hai Long and laid out after they had been photographed and so on. The villagers were told that if anyone wanted to collect them they were available for collection, but no one did. Maybe they were afraid of being identified or something. They basically dug a big hole and put them in it. There was nothing else you could do. There was nowhere to keep bodies and it was stinking hot. There was no morgue or anything and there was no identification. The bodies had no identification.

21:30 You see the bodies – we thought we were doing a pretty good job in civil affairs. We were dicking around the province winning the hearts and minds of the villagers while handing out volleyballs and chickens and other people in the task force were killing their kids. I know which would have had more effect on me. It is interesting, because when we went back to Vietnam as a group, we went to

22:00 Hai Long in 1977. They showed us this tunnel system they had there. I don't think the task force ever knew there were any tunnels in Hai Long. It was quite extensive.

Did that kind of incident make your job more difficult when you were going into villages?

You would think it should, wouldn't you? You really would. I never had a problem and was always as I said earlier was treated with courtesy and kindness and generosity. I was always offered something to eat or drink.

22:30 It was often stuff that you didn't want to eat or drink, I have to say, but you were always offered something.

I have heard that the Americans had a reparation system or some kind of way of making reparation?

The Australians did too, but that was handled by our liaison officers. There were set payments. If you ran over a chicken or you killed an ox, there was a series of

23:00 payments which were considered to be applicable for various events. They paid the fellow who lost his ox or lost his chicken or whatever.

That stretched to killing people as well?

One would assume so, if you killed them accidentally. I don't think you got compensation for shooting a VC or anything or if the family fronted up and said, "You've shot my son," or something.

23:30 **You came into the compound at dark generally?**

Yes.

Where there any civil aid programs that went on after dark?

They did in the early days. They would actually take a platoon of infantry out with them and do medical inoculations and that sort of thing, but they weren't doing that while I was there. That had stopped.

So can you take us through a day then, when would you start in the morning and what would you do?

You would start early in the morning. You would have a

24:00 briefing in the unit at about seven a.m. Basically that briefing would be a repeat of what the task force headquarters had briefed one of our officers the night before on what was going on in the province and what activities were taking place and what roads were 'red roads'. If there were various incidents they would say, "You shouldn't travel down that road." We would be told to avoid these roads if you are going somewhere and to stay away from a particular place.

24:30 So you had the briefing and then you went about your day. You knew what you were doing and you knew what projects you had. You knew if you were going to contact CORDS or you were going to contact the Education Authority or if you were going to go out to your project. During the briefing or after the briefing you might indicate that to the CO or the 2IC. You were in radio contact and basically you just went out and did your thing. You went out most days, but not every day. Some days you

25:00 remained back. Some of the projects had to be written up. You had to make a case for some of the projects and submit them to the headquarters. Most days you would be out on the road to some degree.

Just on that morning briefing, what sort of information did they give you and what did a red road mean?

The red road indicated that maybe there was action the previous night, and that the bad guys were there and there might have been the possibility of mines laid on the road. At the base of the Long Hais [Long Hai Hills],

25:30 there was an American Special Forces unit called the Mine Strike Force. They occasionally did sweeps along particular areas and if they were doing that we were told to avoid that area and stay away from there. It was that sort of stuff.

So if you went out, did you have a routine that you sort of followed informally, if you didn't have set tasks to do?

26:00 Well there was always projects. There was something going on or I had something to deliver. We used to get all sorts of stuff. God bless them, the kids from Australia would send up all their text books and so on which were of limited value, being all in English. Other stuff used to come up and I don't know where it came from. I at one stage had to distribute one hundred German amyloid barometers. They were in walnut. They were very

26:30 attractive things and they were that big. The villagers didn't really know what they were. I remember them saying, "What does it do?" I said, "It will tell you if it is going to rain or being dry." And their response was, "Well, it is dry in the dry, and wet in the wet." I managed to give them all away because they looked good. They got clothes and things, and occasionally they had overcoats sent up and size

27:00 twelve shoes that we distributed. There was always something you were doing if you weren't going out to look at a project.

You mentioned a couple of schools as the main projects that you worked on?

Yes.

Firstly that school at the end of – just before we had lunch, you were telling us about one particular school that was out in the jungle a bit?

Yes. It was outside the hamlet and it was just surrounded by a few trees. It was a bit of

27:30 jungle and then there was a clearing. That is where the school went in for that hamlet.

You got to the point where you told us how dangerous the track was?

I thought it looked dangerous, but obviously it wasn't because nothing happened. It was just a feeling of walking through fairly dense scrub on a very narrow path with a stranger. It probably wasn't any more than a few yards but it just seemed a long way.

What happened after that? How did the

28:00 **process take hold after that?**

I went back to the district chief as I think I mentioned who was an ARVN captain. I told him what we planned on doing. I went back to the Vietnamese Education boss in Baria and asked him if we actually built the school and it was at their request would they be able to staff it and would they be able to furnish it. He said yes, they would do that. I would then go into

28:30 CORDS and say, "We're thinking of building this school, can you supply the materials for the actual building or some of the materials?" I would get their written permission to do that. I would then go back to my unit and write it up for the CO's approval. He would hand it to the engineers' captain and they would draw up the plans and either build it themselves or contract it out to a tenderer and oversee the project and build it.

29:00 **You mentioned before that it was very important that the village owned the project or took it as their own? How did that work in something like that?**

It was difficult, because they really didn't have any resources. You have to remember that at the time there were very few young men in the village. They were all conscripted so there were only old guys and women. The women had to do all of the work of the young blokes that weren't there any more, so they didn't have much spare time and of course they had no cash. What the village contributed in this

29:30 case was the land. It was communal property. They did some work at landscaping but that was about their only commitment to that project, although they were the ones that requested it through their

education system and then it came to us.

Once you had done all that for the project and the battalion or group of engineers started building it, what was your role in overseeing it from there on?

30:00 Nothing. I had no role in overseeing the actual building. Once the project was approved all I would do is go and have a look at it and say, “Isn’t that nice.” I would go back when the thing started. Once a project was underway, it was the engineers who were doing it.

Would you have any role in staffing it or finding staff amongst them?

No. The Vietnamese Education Department did all that.

What were your interactions with them like?

30:30 Pretty good. I dealt by and large with one person in the department whose name unfortunately I forget. He was a pretty good sort of bloke, and he knew his job. Basically I only dealt with him.

At this time the South Vietnamese Government wasn’t in particularly good shape, is that fair to say?

I think that is fair to say, yes.

How did that affect the structures that you were working with?

31:00 I don’t know that it did. Down at the province level it seemed to function quite well, away from the political things. The political things were happening in Saigon and the changes of government and changes of presidents and all this sort of stuff. The actual bureaucracy and the administration at provincial level just seemed to work the way it had always worked. It wasn’t particularly well. The Vietnamese bureaucracy wasn’t all that great, but it happened and it worked. Their teachers got paid as far as I know and

31:30 the hospital was staffed with people who were at least partially trained and the system worked.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that village level bureaucracy? You mentioned that there was a village chief?

Generally there was a group of elders. They were sort of like a council. I don’t know if there was any real formal structure but they were just respected people within the village at village level. I don’t know that there were elections for chief or anything.

32:00 **Would you have to go through those people?**

Yes. Basically if the education service received a request from one of the villages, there would be a person within the village acting on behalf of the village and making the request. If the Vietnamese authorities wanted the project to go ahead, they would give me the name of this person and that would be the person I would

32:30 contact when I got to the village.

Were they always easy to find?

Yes. The villages weren’t huge by any means and the person who was making this request would have been a senior within the village, an elder type of person.

How were their villages laid out?

They varied. Some of them were very, very simple. There was a lot of poverty. There was the odd substantial house but there were

33:00 places just built out of banana fronds and flattened beer cans and pieces of cardboard and dirt floors. It wasn’t particularly salubrious. Some villages were obviously better than others and more substantial. You wouldn’t call them great towns or anything. Even Baria, the capital, was a pretty ordinary place. It had a couple of stone-walled and brick buildings, a few but not many.

Those civilians that were living

33:30 **there, what were they engaged in and how were they living their lives?**

They were subsistence farmers or rice farmers or fishermen. The province had two or three fishing villages and there were also other things. There were the charcoal makers. They would burn and make charcoal. And there were salt collectors. They would just go into salt pans which were dried by the sun and shovel up the salt. Some people did that but that was about it.

34:00 **In a society where the men are often away, children are very important for the labour and the subsistence. Was it difficult to get them to go to school?**

No. I think the Vietnamese liked having their kids at school. Most kids went to school, at least certainly primary school.

So there was a primary education or how far did the schooling go?

There was primary and secondary. There were

34:30 primary schools scattered right through the province. I don't know how many but there were dozens. There were only two high schools at the two major towns which were Baria, the provincial capital, and Dat Do which was the next biggest village. There were just the two high schools so obviously a lot of kids dropped out after primary school. They were big schools and they had thousands of students.

Was the Dat Do High School where

35:00 **Rob Lovell was working?**

Yes it was.

You've mentioned it a couple of times, but how did you know how dangerous that was?

I didn't know it was dangerous but it just seemed dangerous. If you can imagine it was still a war zone and people were getting killed. They weren't getting killed in huge numbers but Australians were still dying in the odd ambush in ones and twos, and certainly the Vietnamese were dying. Here was this bloke with one rifle in a village that everyone thought

35:30 was pretty dangerous. He was all by himself all day and everybody knew he was going to be there by himself all day every day. He didn't vary the thing at all. You wouldn't want to do it in Iraq, would you, when they are taking hostages. It just seemed dangerous to me, but nothing happened to Rob.

You said that you yourself were an easy target?

I think we all were, because we were just driving around the roads. There was only ever

36:00 two of us at a time.

Were there precedents that you heard of from Vietnam or times before you of coming under attack?

An officer who briefed us and had been there in the early days claimed that he was shot at several times, but I don't know whether it was true or not. It probably was. We had one team that was putting in a windmill that somebody threw a grenade amongst at one stage. I got shot at, but it wasn't by the

36:30 enemy. I just happened to drive past a regional force post while they were having target practice at a rock across the road. There weren't too many incidents, no. There were very few.

What happened on that occasion, can you just talk us through it?

I just kept going.

Where were you going?

We were leaving the task force base and we were heading out along the road beyond Hai Long. There was a little French fort there that was built during the

37:00 French time. It was just a little stone structure and there were a few of these guys in it. They were the regional force or popular force. They were like Dad's Army or the CMF. They were just taking some pot shots at some rocks. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

What was your immediate reaction?

To go away fast and that was it. We just kept driving.

Did you realise at the time that that is what it was?

Yes, we

37:30 heard the shots and you can hear the bullets when they come fairly close. You can hear them pass by. They didn't hit the vehicle and they didn't hit us. It was a minor incident.

Were you on a constant state of alert, especially after a surprise like that?

You were, in a sense, because every now and then something would happen. You got used to it and you got a bit blasé about the whole thing. We used to call into cafes and get our lunch there. They were very good with bread. They made nice bread. They got it from the French, I suppose. We'd buy

38:00 what we used to call the hepatitis roll. It would be a bit of bread with some salad stuff in it and that was for lunch. We would go basically anywhere. But every now and then like at one stage obviously I didn't pay enough attention at the briefing and I ran into one of these sweeps of the Mine Strike Force. I shouldn't have been there. Nothing happened again, but it was that sort of thing that kept you on our toes. Initially for the first

38:30 month or two of the posting because you didn't know what to expect and you were going to new places most of the time you were a bit on edge because of the fear of the unknown. But nothing ever

happened, so you got like, “Nothing has ever happened, so nothing is going to happen.” Nothing did.

In the first couple of months, though, did that stress impact on you physically or mentally?

No I don’t think so. I don’t recall that it did.

39:00 Anyway, we were back every night drinking a lot of beer.

Was that something you had to do, was that part of the winding down process?

Possibly. There wasn’t a hell of a lot else to do. I think most of us drank a bit too much. It was a false sort of living, wasn’t it? You are a bunch of blokes with no wives and no kids and a bit lonely.

39:30 You made up for it and compensated with the grog I suppose.

All right. We’ll stop there.

Tape 7

00:41 **We were discussing off camera the stories that you hear your mates tell and you were telling one where your mate told a story that was yours?**

Yes. It came back to me that it happened to someone else. It was a funny sequence of events. We all had Land Rovers.

01:00 I mentioned that we drove around in them. One of my fellow officers – and I hope I don’t blurt out his name because he might be a bit embarrassed – I was working at the unit that particular day and his vehicle was in for repairs. He said, “I’ve got to go and do a job, can I borrow your Land Rover?” I said, “Yes, sure, of course.” So off he went. Then later in the day I discovered that what had happened exactly, was he went down to one of the fishing

01:30 villages to buy some prawns. He decided that the best way to cook these prawns was in sea water. Rather than go down to the beach and get a bucket of sea water, he told the driver to back the Land Rover into the ocean and he leaned over and filled the bucket. The Land Rover got bogged. At that point, the tide was completely out. The tide started to come in. He made frantic efforts to get the Land Rover out but it wouldn’t move

02:00 so the tide kept coming in. Another Land Rover came past going somewhere else and being an officer, he held it up, and ordered the driver to put the winch onto this other Land Rover and hook it out. The second Land rover got bogged. By the time they had finished, an an aid detachment came down to rescue them, they were both sunk in the South China Sea. They were under water for some considerable time. They were taken back to the

02:30 task force. I went down to find out how long it was going to take to get my Land Rover repaired and the sergeant there just laughed. He pulled out the dipstick and a big spurt of sea water came out. It was rooted. In the meantime, the officer who was doing this, sinking the Land Rovers, lost his pistol and his pistol belt in the process. The 2IC of the unit came up to me, our second in command, he was a major and he said, “We have to

03:00 have an investigation into this incident.” I don’t know why he did this, but he appointed me the investigating officer because it was my Land Rover but I shouldn’t have done it. He then went on to say, “I don’t want to influence your investigation at all, but I should point out that the particular officer in question was doing a favour for the task force commander”. He was entertaining some heavy and had asked him to go and buy these prawns.

03:30 I did the investigation, and the officer got a kick up the arse and had to pay for his pistol. He had to pay forty dollars for the pistol, and one dollar for his pistol belt. That was the end of that. I didn’t have a vehicle then for a few weeks, so it made it difficult.

What did you think of the fellow telling this story to you?

I thought it was interesting. I told him, “That is a good story.”

Had he just heard it on the grapevine, or had you told him?

I don’t know. I hadn’t told

04:00 him. He probably heard it on the grapevine.

Coming back to Vietnam and your service there, you were awarded or received or nominated for an Education Medal?

It is an interesting medal isn’t it? Who would make up an Education Medal? I have lost it unfortunately. I have still got the citation. As far as I am aware, they only issued three. One was to the

04:30 CO of the unit, Paddy Outridge, one was to the engineering captain and one to me. I suppose it is an indication that they thought you did a reasonable job. I was quite proud of it. It is quite a big thing.

This is the Vietnamese?

Yes, the Vietnamese Government. For some reason they had a medal for education. Don't ask me why, but it is actually in that book of foreign awards.

05:00 **There is also another story, if I understand correctly, that you felt insecure around the Regional Education Headquarters at Baria?**

No, not at all. I didn't. I don't know how I managed to screw that up. I never felt insecure around there.

Duty officer, you were duty officer I take it at Nui Dat?

Yes.

What was your role there?

05:30 The task force had a command post and a huge battle map of the area which had on it marked the location of all units that operated in the area. They had two professional captains who basically ran that CP [Command Post]. It was operated twenty-four hours a day, so they between them taking shifts couldn't do it twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. There was a period of

06:00 probably five o'clock to midnight or something like that that they were both off. Some other officer from the task force area would do that shift. Basically you were checking the map markers. Various units or ambush sites, or people going into harbour or fire support bases, would send in the location statistics and their grid references and they'd all be marked on the map.

06:30 Your duty was to check that they were marked on the map correctly, so that if anyone called for fire support you wouldn't authorise it and land it on top of your own people. That was basically the duty. You finished that at midnight and went for a couple of hours' sleep and you got up just before first light and went back to the headquarters and picked up the intelligence summaries for the previous twenty-four hour period, which listed all of the

07:00 activities and where they occurred and so on. Then you went down to the helipad and a little Bell Sioux helicopter. It was a little two-seater, a glass bubble. You would take off in that and go to all the fire support bases and all the land clearing teams and hand over the intelligence summary. I only did that three times in twelve months. You just got a turn to give someone a break.

Was anything particular going on at that time?

07:30 No, not really. In the time I was in there I don't recall anything. In any case had there been contacts you being the duty officer all you did was go and tell SO1 ops [Staff Officer Operations] who would then run in and take over. You didn't actually have the authority to do anything in there, you were just checking things to make sure that they were done correctly. There were no incidents when I was in there.

08:00 **The helicopter, did you often fly in helicopters?**

We flew out in helicopters quite often. There were a couple of places within the province where we had projects where it was either dangerous to go by road or difficult. Xuan Loc was one village that was out in the extremes of the province so it was generally if we went out there. I went out there a couple of times. I went by helicopter.

08:30 Buisson Island was an island and we built a latrine there for the school and when we went there we went by helicopter. When we were going down to Vung Tau we often went by chopper as well so we flew around a bit.

Did you ever attract any ground fire?

No, but there was always a feeling that you could and it wasn't unknown. I know at least one lieutenant colonel who got a bullet in the bum while we were there flying over something.

09:00 You were flying pretty low in a little bit of glass really. Again, I was pretty lucky I think and I didn't have too many incidents.

In the village what weapons would you actually have on you when you were going in and talking with them?

A Browning 9 millimetre pistol and an M16 is what I carried.

Your CO, what was your relationship like with him?

Good. He is a very good man, Paddy

09:30 Outridge. He became a brigadier in the end and he lives in Gympie now. I think he is still alive. It was a good relationship and he was quite close with all of the officers. He loved playing deck quoits so we played a lot of deck quoits, for some reason. He is a nice fellow and a good CO.

Who would set the direction or the policy of what you would do each week?

10:00 He would. It was largely driven by your own projects but ultimately he would make the decision as to whether or not a project would go ahead, so I guess he was the driving force.

Was there a time when the civil affairs unit would come back once a week and share what was going on in each different section?

When we had our briefings every morning, you would say what you were going to do on that particular day and what you

10:30 had on the cards. You would get a pretty fair idea of what everyone else was doing. In any case, at night you were talking about it all the time.

Was there a particularly difficult job you were working on?

No. They all went fairly well. I don't recall any task being any more difficult than another. It all went fairly smoothly. They weren't huge things. They weren't huge tasks and

11:00 I don't want to make too much of it. We really were working on the periphery. The Vietnamese Government ran the education system at Phuoc Tuy Province and we helped out on the edges where their resources and finances wouldn't stretch and they saw a need for something. We were a pretty minor part of the education system within the province, very minor.

Chris sort of touched on this about the villagers, did you really get to

11:30 **know any of the villagers particularly well?**

No, because I was going to all the villages and just speaking to one or two people at the time and not for very long. It was maybe over a few days or whatever. I didn't get to know them particularly well. I used to socialise with them a lot because in those places as I said they would say, "Sit down and have something to eat and drink and join us," so you would. There were some horrendous meals too, I can tell you.

12:00 **Is there anything particular that you ate that backed up on you?**

There were a couple of bad ones. There was no reason why it should but maybe I had a weak stomach but the fishing village I can recall the people that I was seeing there thought, and quite rightly too, that Australians liked beer. I don't know if they liked hot beer at nine o'clock in the morning with dried squid. I found that a little difficult to stomach. I think on

12:30 another occasion I was in a village and I was actually invited to a function. They had actually killed a buffalo. They had this boiling water on the table like a fondue. There was rice paper that they wrapped the spring rolls in. They would dip the sliced buffalo into the boiling water and put it on the rice paper and throw in a handful of coriander and wrap it up and eat it.

13:00 It put me off coriander for life. Also my drink on that occasion was a seven ounce glass of Johnny Walker whisky with no ice and no water. It was really good. At other times it was a cup of tea and some sticky rice so it was good.

Culturally, were all the villages the same?

The villages looked the same and the people looked the same but what

13:30 made them was what they did I suppose. The fishing villages were fishermen and the rural villages were rice farmers so they were different to that degree.

Were there any odd customs that you had to become familiar with in dealing with people?

No. They didn't like the children being patted on the head for example and little things like that. They are very pragmatic people, the Vietnamese, they don't seem to

14:00 worry too much about things. It was like the sign at the Hai Long Rice Mill nobody ever bothered to take it down. They just accepted it and shrugged their shoulders. They probably expected that we would cock up on cultural things because we didn't know any better but they never took offence to my knowledge.

Did you take a particular interest in their religious festivals and occasions?

Not when I was at Nui Dat, but later on in Saigon I did and I used to

14:30 attend quite a few of them. I would find myself discussing Vietnamese literature with all the old blokes out the back. They had again a pragmatic approach to religion. One of their great religious festivals was All Souls' Day, where they would make food and drink offerings to the poor souls who didn't have a family to look after them. The Vietnamese might be nominally Buddhist but they were all ancestor worshippers.

15:00 There were quite a few people out there who they figured didn't have anyone to look after their souls so

they had this All Souls' Day, and they put out huge pieces of food and drink and all this sort of stuff. They would leave it there for an appropriate time like twenty minutes to let the souls have a bit of a go and it and then they'd ship it all out the back and eat and drink it. So that was pretty good. Again, I used to get lots of big glasses of Johnny Walker whisky.

15:30 **Other things while you were at Saigon at these religious festivals?**

For example there was a lady at one of the temples I used to go to who had the ability to call on the soul of Tran Hung Dao who was a famous Vietnamese general who defeated the Chinese back in the Ming Dynasty.

16:00 She would be there doing her thing and then she would go into a trance and then she would just transform. She would suddenly take the stance of a man and she would speak in a man's voice in ancient Vietnamese and everyone would start making notes. Eventually she would come out of the trance. I spoke to her a number of times and she said she never remembered anything of what she said or did in the trance. She was married to a French

16:30 colonel and he had long since died. She was relatively sophisticated and educated.

The general didn't offer any advice on how the war was going at all?

No, he didn't actually. It was none of that. It was more classical stuff.

Vung Tau, you got some leave to go there?

Yes. About every

17:00 ten to twelve weeks, you would get a forty-hour stand down which was nearly two days and we would go down there as a unit. We also went down most of us for one week called R&C, rest in country, during the tour. We'd go to the Peter Badcoe Club [soldiers' club in Vietnam], by and large.

What can you tell me about Vung Tau and what you saw and the place itself?

It was a big port. It operated as a port, because that was

17:30 where our logistics base was and a lot of other stuff came in there too for the Vietnamese. It had substantial buildings. It had a mixed population. There were a number of Indians who lived there and they were tailors or money-changers or that sort of thing. It was a place where people went for holidays. Wealthy Vietnamese would go from Saigon to the beach at Vung Tau and we had our place. There were nice

18:00 beaches. They were good beaches and there were a lot of bars. There were a lot of bars catering for Australians and Americans and whoever else happened to be there, like the Koreans.

Why was the Badcoe Club of interest compared to any other bar?

The Badcoe Club was the Australian club and the accommodation was comfortable. It had a nice big swimming pool and they made an effort to get food in there, like hamburgers and hot dogs.

18:30 There was always a concert of some description. It was usually Filipino bands and dances and stuff. It was right on the beach, so you could also just go down to the beach and lie on the beach and have a swim. They had movies and it was just a pretty relaxing place. They had a couple of nice bars and you could have a cold beer and it didn't cost much. The bars in town, of course, cost a fortune.

How big was the area that the Badcoe

19:00 **Club occupied?**

It was a fair sized area. I can't remember in terms of acreage, but it was a full size swimming pool and they had a large stage where they had the performances, which a few hundred in an audience could watch. There was a pretty big mess where there was food available and beer and drinks and then there were the living quarters, so it was a fair size.

It was run by the Vietnamese?

There were some Vietnamese working there in the

19:30 bar and so on. At Nui Dat they didn't have any, but at Vung Tau they did.

Could anyone have a drink there in the Badcoe Club?

Australians could but the local population couldn't. They couldn't come on to the base. The Vietnamese that worked there had identity passes so they were the only ones allowed in.

Was there any sort of danger going and using the other pubs?

You would think there probably would be but everybody seemed to

20:00 feel that it was used by both sides. It was just this sort of neutral zone. Everybody went down there to the bars to talk to the bar girls and do other things with them too I suppose. It was just something

different. It was female company for a start.

What area the archive is interested in is the social side and what guys do in their recreational leave time, since you could speak Vietnamese and

20:30 **could form relationships and find out what was going on, did you ever speak to the girls?**

I didn't frequent the bars that much. The first couple of times I went down there for two days rest I just stayed at the Peter Badcoe Club with people from the unit and didn't venture out of there. I think about the third time we went down we also had rooms in the Grand Hotel. There were

21:00 eight beds in the Grand Hotel, which was the hotel in Vung Tau. On I think the third occasion eight of us from the unit occupied those rooms. Of course the hotel had a bar with bar girls. I went down and talked to them and I quite enjoyed it. Some of them were fairly hard, because they had been at the

21:30 game a long time, but I think by and large they were simple young women forced into a situation they didn't really want to be in, just by circumstance. The Americans had fifty thousand or something killed in Vietnam and a couple of hundred thousand casualties, but the Vietnamese lost millions. All these bread winners had gone and there was no social service as such, so how do you live? You do what you can, I guess, and they were bar

22:00 girls. I found it pleasant to talk to them. It was a good way to practise the language.

Were there any personal stories that stuck out in your mind that they shared?

No. Because we played a lot of cards we used to have a pack of cards and I would pretend to read their fortune. They were heavily into that sort of stuff. I would just make it up as I went along to practise the language. They got a laugh out of it. It was, "You will be married twice and have three children," and all that sort of stuff. When

22:30 anyone came in who wanted to spend money, they were gone fairly quickly.

Given obviously you had set the scene of how many Vietnamese died and the lack of money around and people did all sorts of things, was there a case of stealing or trying to rip the Australian or foreigner off?

I think so. I personally never experienced it, but certainly there was a lot of activity on the

23:00 black market so people were out trying to make money. Certainly when I was in Saigon I heard many stories of what they called the ling mop, the ghost soldiers. They had Vietnamese commanders who were collecting the pay for soldiers who didn't exist. They were on the pay sheets but not on the ground. The Americans were paying for the war. There was a bit of that going on. I think a lot of people made a fair amount of money out of the black market and various other things.

23:30 **Did you ever buy or know anyone who bought stuff on the black market?**

We all did. The official exchange rate for your MPC, the military payment certificate, I think was one hundred and eighteen piastre, dong, to the dollar MPC. You would get three times that amount from the Indian tailor. We went to the Indian tailor if you were going to go out in the bars. It was illegal and you weren't supposed to, but you

24:00 did do it.

Then he would sell it back?

He would use that money probably to approach the Americans and get stuff out of the PX [Post Exchange – American field canteen] which he would then flog to wealthy Vietnamese who wanted a refrigerator or a bottle of whisky or a carton of cigarettes. Or he would maybe supply the bars with booze or sell it to Vietnamese entrepreneurs. They would use the money then to buy stuff.

24:30 **Given that Vung Tau was sort of there for both sides, but also the Americans and the Australians to let their hair down and there was alcohol, would there be any fights or tensions or anything?**

When we went down for these stand downs we would be briefed by the Australian Military Police. The beach itself was sectioned off with barbed wire so we had our section of the beach and the Koreans had their section and the Americans had another section. By and large the bars worked that way as well. There were

25:00 bars that were mostly Australian and bars that were mostly American and so on. We would be briefed on which bars were out of bounds at the start of each stand down.

Was anything said to the men from a doctor's point of view in respect to VD [venereal disease]?

Yes. We had all this stuff about, "Don't get VD. Don't do it. Use a condom, it is rife," and all that sort of thing. That didn't matter too much to all the boys that weren't married.

25:30 **Did you know fellows that did get VD?**

Yes.

Do you know what was done for them at all?

Yes. They got a shot of penicillin usually. It cleared it up as far as I know.

Was there anywhere else to go besides Vung Tau for that R&C, rest in country?

No. That was the only option we had on the task force.

You also got a

26:00 **break, R&R, to return home, what happened there?**

You got a week at home. You had a week and married people went home, but the single people went somewhere else like to Hong Kong or to Bangkok. I went home to Sydney and then up to northern New South Wales.

The fact that you had been in Vietnam in a war zone and come home to Australia, did that have any impact on you during this rest period?

It did.

26:30 It was very hard initially. I even purposefully left the R&R until late in the tour. I didn't want to go home and then have to go back for a long period. My kids didn't know me and I hadn't seen my wife for nine months. It was a bit stand offish initially. We met up and spent the night up in Casino where the plane landed. Then

27:00 Jen's parents, I hardly saw them, they had organised the loan of a house down at Lennox Head which is near Ballina and we went to stay there just as a family for five days and it was really good. Then I went back. At least I went back knowing I had just over three months to go.

What did you take back for the mess?

That was a disaster too. I took back oysters.

27:30 I went down to the co-op in Ballina and I bought one dozen jars of oysters. I wrapped them up in my kit so they wouldn't get broken. I had a bit kit bag and I put it on the plane. I don't know how they did it. They must have thrown it from a great height but they were all smashed and all through my clothes and I had one jar left intact, so I wasn't too popular. I had one jar of oysters and it didn't go very far. I lost all my clothes too.

28:00 **Do you mean they were destroyed because of the oysters?**

Yes. You couldn't do much with them after that. I had to get some more.

When you returned back, you found an opportunity to go to Saigon and to study and go to the university, how did that arise?

I got a message from my education corps director. At the time language training within the

28:30 army was handled by the intelligence corps and I suppose it was a bit of empire building. Our corps decided that should best rest with education. Language training should be education and not intelligence. They decided they wanted me initially trained up to a level where I would take over the Vietnamese department at the school of languages. The guy who was doing it before me was signals corps and then he transferred to intelligence when he did the language course at Point Cook.

29:00 That is what they wanted me to do with a view of taking over the department. I contacted them by message and said, "It is a bit difficult." With three kids under the age of two and we'd been separated for twelve months I wasn't going to just turn around and go home for a month and come back and do another twelve months. The guy who I was doing it that I was going to replace was married but he was there

29:30 unaccompanied and living in Saigon in a flat. Surprisingly the message back said, "Take your family with you," so I didn't really have an option then.

You weren't concerned about bringing your family over?

I was a little concerned, but I think I mentioned earlier I did this CORDS course late in my tour. That gave me an opportunity to go down to Saigon for a week and I met up with the person I would be replacing,

30:00 Ernie Chamberlain. I also met up with a couple of people who were military staff at the embassy. A number of them had their families with them. It was the one posting you could take your families with you, if you were posted to the embassy. So that is what they decided to do with me. They didn't post me to this language training thing, but they posted me to the embassy so I could bring my family. But then I would work part time at the embassy but also go to university.

What were your views on the war at this

30:30 **time, did you think they were going to win Vietnam?**

No. I think most people were starting to have second thoughts big time. I can remember in that time that we were in Saigon we attended what I think was called the 'Fourth Annual Light at the End of the Tunnel Party'. Some American general, I think Westmoreland, had talked about this 'Light at the End of the Tunnel' some four years previously, so they ran a party to celebrate the event every year.

31:00 Even in April 1972, the Communist offensive in 1972, they came within an inch of knocking it over then. That was when the Americans were leaving, so when they left.

At this particular party, what happened there?

It was just a party. It was just a pun. Here we are in the fourth year after the light at the end of the tunnel and here we go.

31:30 **Who did you hand over the education side of things to, with the CAU [Civil Affairs Unit]?**

I don't know that I did. We were winding down then too and then in the last part of my posting there I left the education portfolio so Bob Wilson would have handed it over. I got tied up in a thing called Project 399 towards the end of my tour. That was building accommodation for

32:00 regional force and popular force soldiers and it was a big project so I was involved in that.

Building what for them?

Accommodation. They were little units, little flats, throughout the province at four or five sites. A major was sent with a group of warrant officer engineers specifically to run that project. I don't know who authorised it, or where the money came from, but it was the biggest single project that the unit had ever been involved in. It was a special team that came to do it. The

32:30 major was John Baker who later became Chief of the Defence Force. My only role was to drum up business throughout the villages, and to try and find people to lay the bricks and then I acted as a paymaster. I used to go around to the sites and actually pay the local labourers. I got wrapped up in that so the education side of it, in the last couple of months, Bob handled. He would have handed it over and I can't remember who it was to now.

This particular project,

33:00 **399 is it, that wasn't for the benefit of villagers, it was just for the benefit of their protection forces?**

Well, all these people were villagers. They were living in shanties and so on. This was the Dad's Army element. This wasn't the ARVN. It wasn't the regular Vietnamese army, it was the local militia and they just gave them better living quarters. That is why there were four or five sites so we knew where they actually lived. It was a big project.

33:30 It wasn't finished when I left, either, it was still ongoing.

Did the enemy or the VC ever attack some of these projects you worked on?

Yes. They occasionally did and particularly on Long San Island, they kept blowing up the things that we put there. I think one project we rebuilt three or four times. The odd windmill would get blown away. They did do some but by and large they left it alone really. Long San was a problem but the other parts were OK.

What was said to you about

34:00 **winding down the work of the civil affairs unit?**

Nothing, I have to say. By this time it was late 1971 and I think the Australians had gone from three battalions to two battalions and it was pretty obvious that we were going to be going in the relatively near future. I think by late

34:30 1972, there was no one left. I think they had all gone by then. Nothing was said to me personally about what was happening to the unit.

OK. When you spoke to your wife about this opportunity to go to Saigon, what was her response?

I don't think she was too happy about it, but she wanted to get back together as a family. She had been living with her parents for a year, God bless them. That was nice of them to do that.

35:00 We wanted to get together again as a family. I told her that there were other families out there and that it was pretty safe. Saigon was generally safe, as long as you were careful, and that was true.

The media and some of her understanding of Vietnam would have been through the media. Did she have any fears?

She had second thoughts obviously, because the papers were full of all the bad things that happened. I don't know what it is like in Baghdad, but

35:30 Saigon was a big city and every explosion gets written up. If ten people get killed, that is ten people out of millions but you only hear of this incident. There was a curfew in Saigon and if you obeyed the curfew, it was OK and daylight was fairly safe.

You sort of shared that you had a realisation that things were winding down and you had this opportunity to go and study

36:00 **Vietnamese further in the university, what was the point and where was it going to take you?**

Well, it wasn't going to take me anywhere, it was just another good posting. Honestly, it was pretty obvious that I was learning a language that the Australian Army wasn't going to be too interested in, not much further down the track. That is what turned out to be the case too. I went back as lecturer in charge for one year with three students. There were two army privates and a fellow from

36:30 [the Department of] Foreign Affairs. And the next year I got no students. I was a teacher without a portfolio. But it was an exciting thing to do. I had talked to the people in the embassy. Ken Byron was the warrant officer there and they were really nice people. They were enjoying the posting. I thought, "That's pretty good."

So just so I understand the story correctly, after you

37:00 **finished with the civil affairs unit you came back home?**

I came back home basically to have leave for about a month. Then the plan was that I would get my family together and move down to Sydney and catch a charter flight back to Vietnam, back to Ton San Nhut. We packed up all our stuff and what we owned was in storage and we went down to spend the night, before we left with my wife's sister who lived in Sydney. Literally that afternoon, I got a phone call from

37:30 my corps director who said, "The embassy have not got accommodation for your family and you can't go. We are going to send you to the School of Military Intelligence at Woodside to evaluate their Vietnamese Language Course." I said, "What am I supposed to do with my family?" He said, "Why don't you send them back where they came from." That is what I did. They went back to Jenny's parents and I went over to

38:00 Woodside for about six weeks. Then it all happened again. We gathered in Sydney and we caught the charter flight. They were still sending Australians over there. It was full of soldiers, this Qantas charter flight. It was a plane full of soldiers and me and my wife and three kids.

Did you get a feeling of how Australians and how the Australian society was feeling about the war?

38:30 I didn't, because I didn't really see any of it. All I did was spend some time with my family up in Lismore which was not at the time a huge city by any means. Then we went back to an army unit so it was only what was in the papers. I knew there were demonstrations and that sort of thing and I knew that certain things were happening, but I don't remember being concerned about it. It was a shock, though, getting into

39:00 Ton San Nhut with the family. A few things went wrong.

We are just at the end of this tape, so we will pause there and pick it up after that.

Tape 8

00:41 **Michael [interviewer] just asked you off camera and I will ask you again on tape, there was a lot of black humour?**

There was some black humour, like I said, like that business with wearing arm patches that talked about the South East Asian

01:00 War Games participant including the peace symbol. There were other things like that but I'm just trying to remember some of them. The old army teachers that people used to wear, 'Join the Army and Travel to Foreign Lands and Meet Exotic People and Kill Them', that sort of stuff that people used to wear. The POW camp at Nui Dat was called the Playboy Club and had a bit sign on it with

01:30 rabbits' ears. It had rest and recreation centre for the VC and NVA and that sort of stuff.

During your time in Vietnam, did you lose anybody that you knew?

No. We were very fortunate because nobody in our unit died and they were the people I mixed with obviously all the time.

Were there any accidents?

There were

02:00 accidents. I can't recall anyone again in our unit having an accident but I came across a fairly severe accident at one stage with a soldier badly hurt. I called in a medivac [medical evacuation] chopper for him. He simply went around a corner too fast in a truck and he rolled the truck and fell out of the side because there were no doors in the truck. He landed in some rocks and he fractured his skull. I think he survived.

You saw that happen?

I didn't see it

02:30 happen, but the wheels of the truck were still spinning when we came across it, so it had obviously just happened.

What did you do?

I got on the radio and told it where it was, and they got a chopper out there with medical people on it. It was only just down the road from the task force by a few kilometres.

The doctor that you mentioned before when there was a shooting before in the sergeants' mess that your doctor was called in. Was he on call for

03:00 **that kind of thing within the army itself?**

I think he was a doctor that was there. He just happened to be on the spot and everyone knew he was there and I assume that is why he was called in.

He was a fairly interesting personality himself?

Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit more about him?

I don't know if I want to embarrass Gedis. He is a very successful doctor and I believe he is world renowned in his field of

03:30 obstetrics and gynaecology. He is a Professor of Obstetrics at a London hospital and I've stayed with him there. He has got a house and the backyard runs down to the Thames. It is a very large backyard and a very large house. He takes private patients in Harley Street. He married an Australian nurse, but his two kids are very English. He is good at what he does.

Was he a bit of a character?

Very much so. He was a very good doctor and very conscientious, but he also

04:00 liked to play around a bit and he did. As I said, he was a very good with a needle. When we got some fresh oranges, he would inject them with vodka. It was very tasty and he would cool them down. He injected the steaks with red wine. He used to practise on one of the other doctors, they would take turns because one was always on duty, for hangover cures. One would have to get drunk first, before he could actually see what sort of cure would work

04:30 best with a bit of oxygen or something. He was good value.

Did you ever come across any drug use in Vietnam?

No. I think we knew that marijuana was certainly available, but I think for Australians by and large at the time, the drugs of choice were cigarettes and beer and they were in plentiful supply.

05:00 No, I didn't see much drug use.

Are there any other characters that stand out from your time there?

Yes, but again I don't want to talk about people. I don't want to embarrass anyone. Without mentioning names, for example, there was one officer that was so good at getting things from the Americans that he wanted to send it home. He didn't have anything big enough to send it home in. So he actually got an aluminium coffin from the Americans and painted it green and filled it with

05:30 all this stuff that he had acquired and took it down to air movements to send it home but they wouldn't take it. So, for the rest of the tour we had to walk past this coffin every day, a green coffin. The same fellow started building a brick tent. It was a hobby I suppose. Every day he would lay a few more bricks. There were a few characters.

Did you ever see anyone who couldn't take it?

06:00 No, I didn't. I think that by and large and I can only speak for our unit, but everyone who was there wanted to be there, even the odd national serviceman. I think there were probably ways that you could

get out if you really didn't want to go. No, I didn't see anybody that fell apart.

You mentioned that when you arrived, you started counting the days backwards?

Yes. Everyone did that.

What happened when you were coming to the end of that counting?

You used to

06:30 boast about it. "How long have you got?" You would ask someone else and they would say, "Ninety-three days and a wakey." That was the day that you don't have to go to sleep. The response would be, "Nobody has got ninety-three days left." If you were shorter than that, you talked about being short.

Were the last few days difficult?

I don't remember them being any more difficult. I remember the growing

07:00 excitement, I suppose, that you were going to be leaving. Some people didn't want to leave, mind you. There was the odd one or two that liked it there. We had a couple of officers who did tours straight after each other and did a couple of years rather than one year. By and large most people wanted to go home.

I have heard people say that there was a certain amount of trepidation that when you were getting to the end of your tour something might happen. Did you feel that?

Obviously that's the last thing you would want to happen, isn't it, but

07:30 I suppose there was some feeling of that, but I don't remember it being too bad.

When you came back for that month's leave, was it difficult to adjust to not being in Vietnam?

Yes, it was. It made me feel so sorry for particularly national service diggers who were overwhelmingly infantry. These poor buggers were literally in the jungle one day and on a plane the next and

08:00 then back in Dee Why or somewhere where people were abusing them. I felt really sorry for them. In my case, I felt disoriented because all the rules were different. You hadn't used the phone for twelve months. You hadn't driven a car for twelve months and you hadn't had to handle the road rules or the rules where you go into a restaurant for twelve months or you hadn't had to handle the currency for twelve months.

08:30 Everything was a little off centre. For me it wasn't too bad. I just went back to my family and then back to my military unit, so the people in the military knew what was happening. For those other poor fellows, I'm not surprised a lot of them had problems.

Can you think of any examples of your disorientation at the time?

It was just those things that I felt nervous crossing the road for some reason. I can remember that.

09:00 I felt even nervous using a telephone and I wasn't quite sure how it worked. Going in to order a drink at a bar wasn't quite the same. I was also trying to get to know my kids who didn't know who I was. It didn't take long in my case. It was just a few days.

You have mentioned a couple of times how strange it was to have no women or children around, so was it difficult to suddenly be in that environment?

Yes, it was. That again put you a bit off centre, but it didn't take

09:30 long and you soon got back into it because it's the best way to be. It didn't take long.

What was the thing you were looking forward to most when you came back to Australia?

Just getting back with the family and being with the kids and being in a family again was important.

How much contact had you had with those kids at that point?

Well, I saw them during R&R for those few days. It would be four or five days. The twins were

10:00 born seven days before I left to go to Vietnam, so when I got back for R&R they were five months' old.

What was their reaction to you?

They used to cry a lot when I picked them up, but they got used to me too, eventually, until we headed off again to Saigon but they did all right over there.

So the posting at Woodside only lasted for about six weeks?

It wasn't even a posting. They used to run a colloquial language

10:30 course there in Vietnamese which only ran for four weeks. I think it was just a stop gap measure. It was my corps saying, "We've got something for you to do while we try to sort out accommodation for you in

Saigon." I had a look at the course and wrote a report on what I thought it was worth, which wasn't much. You couldn't learn much Vietnamese in four weeks.

Who was still being sent to the colloquial language course at that time in Australia's involvement?

Well a lot of people were still being posted to Vietnam. There were still people being

11:00 posted to Vietnam. The charter plane we went up in in 1971, it would have been September 1971, was full. They were all Australian soldiers going to Vietnam, but just what positions they filled I'm not sure.

The fact that it was winding down was not an official thing?

It was winding down in the sense that there weren't quite as many

11:30 Australians there as there had been in the past. When it was at its full strength, we had three battalions there in the task force. By that stage we had two battalions so a third of the infantry had left. We still had two battalions up there and they were being replaced and changed over. The full impacts of the Australians leaving didn't happen until later with the Whitlam Government and then they all came out. There were still people going up there.

Were you on

12:00 **that plane with your wife and kids?**

Yes.

What was it like with them the arrival in Saigon?

It was a nightmare actually, because everything sort of went wrong. I never knew this. I had never had an Australian passport, because going to New Guinea, it was an Australian colony and going to Vietnam you didn't need a passport, because you were just going to Vietnam. But going to the embassy in Vietnam you had to have a passport and you had to have a visa.

12:30 Now, I had not too much knowledge of passports and visas but it was then I discovered I wasn't an Australian citizen. The Australian passports at the time had Australian Citizen and British Subject. In my case they had crossed out the Australian citizen. I then realised I had never become an Australian and I actually became an Australian in Saigon at the embassy. I got my Certificate of Citizenship there. We landed at Ton San Nhut and

13:00 we were met at the foot of the aircraft by Ken Byron, who was a warrant officer from the embassy, and he had some experience in these matters. I had a visa and the army had fixed that up, but they hadn't got a visa for my family. So they had actually landed. They had actually landed in the country illegally. I went through Vietnamese customs and immigration and and Byron smuggled my wife and three kids into the country out through the back gate. He then fixed up the visa after we got

13:30 to the embassy. Then we got to the embassy and they still didn't have any accommodation. So we ended up with two rooms in the Caravelle Hotel, and we were there for eight weeks.

Can you describe a bit about Saigon and what it was like at that time?

It was a teeming city. There were people everywhere and people were doing trades everywhere and the black market was rampant. There were taxis and motor bikes and it was just all go. There was a lot of

14:00 pollution. It was very busy until curfew, and then it was very quiet.

So there was a curfew every night?

Yes.

What time did that come in?

From memory I think it was about ten p.m. until around six a.m. They were the eight hours that you didn't want to be out on the street.

What were the dangers after curfew?

You would probably get shot. The South Vietnamese Police were notoriously bad at shooting people.

14:30 One poor fellow was shot in front of our apartment and I think he probably ran a red light or something. They didn't muck around really.

Are they 'the white mice' [South Vietnamese police, who had white helmets and gloves]?

Yes, the white mice.

Did you have any run-ins with them yourself?

We had a very, very social life in Saigon, but the way it worked was we would have dinner parties and go home before curfew or if we were

15:00 doing well and the party was going well, we just didn't go home until six a.m. We would spend the night at the party.

Just going back to your description of Saigon, how did you know there was a war on, apart from the curfew?

Well, it is interesting. The first night we were there the Caravelle Hotel has a roof garden and it probably still does have a roof garden. The Australian Embassy was on the seventh floor,

15:30 they owned the seventh floor. I took my wife up for some fresh air up on this garden. And she was looking out onto the city and she said, "Is it a religious festival or something?" I said, "No." She thought they were all fireworks but there was some fire fight going on at the edge of the city so there were a lot of flares and traces, so that was one indication. All this stuff happened in the first eight weeks while I was staying at the Caravelle Hotel. Not long after that,

16:00 the twins were asleep in their cots. And they slept for about an hour and a half so we took our other daughter, our eldest daughter, and we thought we would go out down the street just to stretch the legs and get a bit of fresh air down Dong Khoi Street, which was near the hotel. We walked down the street and it was just a nice busy street with nothing really happening. Suddenly it filled with ARVN soldiers. This street is near the houses of parliament,

16:30 which is now the Opera House of Saigon. They had heard tell that some riot or demonstration was going to take place so they came pouring into the street. There was no sign of a demonstration that I could see but that didn't stop them. They just filled the whole street with tear gas. As soon as that happened all the shutters came down on the shops. So Jenny and the baby and myself, all we could do was run through the tear gas back to the

17:00 hotel and it is pretty blinding that stuff and it sort of hurts. So that happened. Not long after that, one of the people at the embassy said, "You and Jenny should go out and get a big of a break." There was a night club down at Du Zor Street. It had a good band and a bit of dancing and food and drink and it was popular with the Americans. The band used to do Creedence Clearwater covers.

17:30 This friend at the embassy organised a babysitter for us and Jen and I went down there and had a very pleasant evening. And we came back and the next night someone through a satchel charge through the window and killed the band and nineteen audience members, so we probably picked the right night. Those three things in the first three weeks sort of put us on edge a bit. Nothing else happened after that, except for the one fellow getting shot

18:00 outside our apartment.

Did you think you might have made the wrong decision during that time to bring your wife and children?

Well, we felt on the edge but when we got into our own apartment, things settled down very quickly and we started to enjoy things then. We really had a very comfortable lifestyle. We had two maids who lived in, Tio and Tiba who looked after and fed the kids, and they were really good.

And your wife didn't want to go home at any

18:30 **point during that first initial time?**

No, she didn't. I think when the thirteen or fourteen months were up, we were happy to go home but we enjoyed the time in Saigon. We had a lot of social activity and the kids handled it pretty well. We had a lot of fun.

Tell us about this apartment, after two months in a hotel they moved you or you found somewhere on our own?

19:00 No, they found a place. It was actually the top floor of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank which was a major bank building. It would be a major bank building in Australia, so this place was bloody huge. You couldn't find the kids half the time in this place. Fortunately we were only in that for eight weeks too. The counsellor for the embassy, the second in charge at the embassy, one level below the ambassador arrived, a new one, and the

19:30 embassy decided that this huge place at the top of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank was far too opulent for an army captain, so they tossed us out and put him in. They did find us another apartment which was much, much better for us. It was in an apartment building. It was still very large but it was on one level and had three bedrooms and three bathrooms with servants' quarters out the back and a huge living area with a

20:00 gated thing. It was quite secure so it was good.

So what sort of society did you fit into there in Saigon?

I spent a lot of time with the Vietnamese and socialised with the Australians and the Americans and the Brits. At night we would go to the British Embassy and watch movies. We had a dart competition between the sergeants' mess and the embassy and the British Embassy. That was the social side of

things, but during the

20:30 day I took some classes at university but by and large I had private tutors who would come to the apartment and tutor me in aspects of the Vietnamese literature and culture and language. I had three, Bun, Bulibi and Nguyen. They set me assignments and that sort of thing and I would do them pretty well. With them I would get invitations to go to these religious ceremonies I was talking about.

21:00 I would go to those too and just be a spectator mostly, but also be out the back with the old fellow discussing occasionally literature when I found something I could understand. I spent a lot of time with the Vietnamese.

Your desire to go to those occasions was about learning about the culture? Was it part of your education?

Yes. My lecturer suggested it but I was also interested in it. I was particular interested in the animism approach and the

21:30 calling upon of souls and spirits and ancestor worship. It was just something that I found interesting.

Did your knowledge of the language help you get outside the expat [expatriate] community much in other ways?

I had no problems whereas a lot of the expats who were living in the embassy never left the embassy compound, because they felt so ill at ease and they couldn't communicate with people. I would just go down the markets and

22:00 stuff and shop. I was out and about, whereas many of the other Australians weren't.

Were you in uniform?

No. I only wore civvies. I never wore uniform.

Were you identifiable as an army officer in other ways?

I wouldn't think so, but being a foreigner in Vietnam – I wasn't identifiable as an army officer, I was just a young bloke wandering around.

Were people suspicious of a big white bloke speaking Vietnamese?

22:30 They probably were, but they never indicated their suspicions. The Vietnamese, another thing about them, is they are pretty open and frank and if you ask them a question they will probably answer it and usually honestly and truthfully if they had the information. I know Van who is the many I respected a lot. He was the visiting Professor of Economics at Hue and he was a Professor of Economics at Saigon University and he was the head academic at

23:00 the Vietnamese College of Administration for their bureaucracy. He had a PhD [Doctor of Philosophy degree] from France. He used to give me a lot of good information and then I would take it back and tell the defence attaché.

What kind of information were you getting off him?

With the defence attaché, part of the deal was to keep your ear to the ground and find out what was going on. I didn't get much but I got some good stuff from Van and that kept him off my

23:30 back I suppose. Some of the things he told me, for example, was in the April offensive of 1972, the North Vietnamese overran ICOR [First Corps Area] and overran Hue and overran the Central Highlands. They were fighting up from Route 1 and it was very serious. We were waiting to be evacuated. He passed on information like, "General so and so at ICOR has been sacked. He has been replaced by General Trung or is going to be

24:00 replaced by General Trung. The government has great confidence in Trung and he is very respected as a general and they expect that the situation at ICOR will rapidly improve. They didn't think that would be the case in the central highlands because the general there was corrupt and a lot of the old ghost soldiers around related to the president so they was some pessimism there." He passed that on. The government had decided to close the universities. The students had been

24:30 rioting so they were going to be closed. The students were demonstrating. I remember also that the government had decided to lower the conscription age by one year and I passed that on before it was announced. I don't know that any of it was of any value because by the time that it got to someone who could do anything with it the thing had happened. At least it looked like I was doing something.

Did you ever ask Van where this information was coming from?

It all came from his work at the

25:00 bureaucracy and then in the college of administration. Senior bureaucrats were there doing courses like they do here and they were privy to certain information and that is where he got it from. He actually got out of Vietnam in the end. He came out on a boat with his family and spent two years in an Indonesian

refugee camp before he got to Australia. He ended up in Footscray as a teacher's aide, would you believe. He didn't speak much English. He has since passed away,

25:30 but his family are all professionals here in Australia.

Would you count him as a close friend? What was your relationship like?

I wouldn't call him a close friend. I would call him a friend, but it was a relationship where he was older than me, considerably older. It was more a position of respect rather than anything else. I respected him a lot. He was good.

Did you make other friends in that time in Saigon?

Yes, one of my other

26:00 lecturers, Nguyen, was a friend and he is still a friend although I haven't seen him and his wife for a year. I had dinner with them down in Melbourne last time I was down. They got out as well and their kids are all doctors and lawyers and stuff. Nguyen was a friend and we beetled around in his little Volkswagen in Saigon.

Did you get a sense of what they thought about the war?

The sense I got from

26:30 Nguyen was was that it was all over and all he wanted to do was get out. He, cleverly, had managed to get over to Australia with his wife but he had to go back. He left his wife over there and he managed to get himself out later. He had given it up a long time before it actually fell or it was liberated depending on your point of view. The interesting thing was all my lecturers were again North Vietnamese.

27:00 They were people who had emigrated or migrated and were refugees in 1954. They had moved into the south.

Was that cynicism or realism or whatever you want to call it - had that spread almost everywhere by that stage?

I think most Vietnamese thought it was a lost cause by that stage. In 1972 they came within a whisker. We had

27:30 instructions from the embassy and pack one suitcase. We had a radio and we were in radio contact with the embassy. We were to stand by the radio and wait for the call to evacuate in 1972. But the offensive fizzled out. No one ever thought that was the end and that they would now go home and never try again. I think from that point on it was pretty pessimistic.

That was the April offensive?

28:00 Yes.

What was the scariest time during that year for you and your family?

I think that was probably it, because we weren't sure how it was going to pan out initially. It did fade away. There was very heavy fighting south of Saigon on Route 1 and a lot of people killed. It didn't affect us. There were no rockets or mortars or anything coming into Saigon. It was all happening.

28:30 It was full scale conventional warfare, there wasn't any of this guerrilla stuff running around and shooting pistols at each other or dropping bombs or throwing satchel charges. They were in there with tanks and all sorts of stuff.

You mentioned one other occasion when somebody got shot, can you tell us about that?

I don't know how it happened. It was just some poor civilian who was shot by the South Vietnamese police and just happened to be outside our apartment.

29:00 He probably did nothing wrong at all, except he didn't stop when he was supposed to. He was a bit notorious for that. I don't know the reasons. I don't know any more about it.

How was your wife's life during that year? What did she do during her time?

As I said we were pretty social. Although she wasn't a qualified teacher she did some teaching at a school that the

29:30 Vietnamese ran but for expat kids. She was a part-time teacher during the day and we were doing other things at night.

Where were the places to go out in Saigon at that time?

Socially it was each other's houses or apartments. There were a lot of dinner parties. The Australian Consulate, like all the other places, had a bar area.

30:00 The British Embassy did too. They had a sort of a roof garden with a cinema screen and a mess bar. The Americans who lived in the Continental Hotel had an area. The Australian officers still in Saigon had a

mess and the Australian sergeants had a mess, so we had functions with them. There were sporting type functions and darts. The Saigon International Darts League it was called. And there was movies and there was the

30:30 odd night club that we would go to and the odd restaurant. There were still some French restaurants in Saigon run by Frenchmen who were left over from the past. There was that sort of thing and it was quite a normal social life really. In fact it was abnormal, because there was so much of it.

Did the Whitlam Government come into power when you were in Saigon?

Yes in 1972.

What happened at the embassy when that change of government in Australia occurred?

31:00 Well nothing much happened at the embassy. What became obvious was that the Australians were leaving very quickly. In a very short period of time, there were virtually no Australians left outside of the embassy. Nui Dat had closed down. We actually went out and had a look at Vung Tau. All the Australians had gone. The Peter Badcoe Club was there but there was no one in it. We went down to the beach there as a group. We all went down in a convoy with a lot of sub machine guns and it was crazy. We took all the kids down to the beach.

31:30 **It must have been an eerie sight for you having been there when it was bustling?**

Yes. It was still pretty much intact, because it hadn't been empty that long and I believe the South Vietnamese Army for a while took it over for a while as a rest and recreation centre but then it went down hill a bit after that. There was no sign of Nui Dat. Nui Dat had disappeared almost over night. It is not that there was much that there was permanent there really. There were some

32:00 permanent buildings, but they had all been knocked down and the material taken away.

Did you go through Nui Dat on your way down to Vung Tau?

Yes. We just went to have a quick look.

Were you interested in seeing if any of the civil aid projects were up?

We passed a couple, but we didn't specifically go out of our way. We didn't know what the situation was. It was just that the Nui Dat area was sort of on the road to Vung Tau. We didn't go to the villages or anything; we just went straight to Vung Tau.

32:30 We only did that maybe twice during the tour.

How much longer were you in Saigon for, after the rest of the Australians pulled out?

There was always a few left doing whatever they were doing but I think the bulk of them had gone by the middle of the 1972. We were there until October 1972, so it was just a few months really.

33:00 **Did you live within the embassy circles at that time? Did they want to go home themselves?**

It was a funny thing. It was called a 'hardship posting' so the allowances were good and that was a good thing. The social life was good and we all felt relatively safe, so actually most people quite enjoyed the posting. I think with any place like that after a while you

33:30 feel like it is time to go home, and nice to go home, so most did. I know that the warrant officer there had previously served in Cambodia with the embassy and he had been in Saigon.

Were you at all concerned about what would happen when everybody pulled out?

34:00 I had concern for the Vietnamese that I knew, because I think they all expected that when the war was over there would be some retribution from the north. Those Vietnamese I was friendly with I was glad to see them get out and most of them did. Biliban, unfortunately I don't know what happened to him. He was one of my lecturers. I don't know what happened to our two

34:30 maids but I suspect they would have been all right. It would have been the academics and the intellectuals that would have been targeted when the north took over.

Were the Australians or anyone helping such people to arrange ways to get out at that stage or did that come later on?

I think that came later on. I don't recall them doing what the Americans did, when the Americans eventually pulled out and there were all these people flying over the helicopters and all sorts of stuff. I wasn't there when it happened. I was long gone,

35:00 so this is only hearsay. There were maybe one dozen drivers who had worked for the Australian Embassy for many years. When they heard that Saigon had fallen, they just went back to the consulate and handed in the car keys and went home. Nobody knows what happened to them after that.

35:30 **In the two and a half or three years before the end of the war and when you left, did you keep**

in contact with any of them?

Yes. I was in contact with Nguyen and Van. They would be the only ones I kept in contact with. When we got back to Australia, Van had got his family out to Galang Island in Indonesia and Nguyen had already got out. We sent some money over to

36:00 him and tried to keep in contact and made some representations on his behalf. After two years he got accepted as a refugee.

Just a couple more questions about Saigon, the defence attaché – you reported to him in some respects?

In every respect. All he required of me really was to find out some information and to pass it on and to write a report every month on what I had

36:30 done that month. That was my requirement. I had an office space in the embassy itself and I used to turn up there three afternoons a week. I would do occasional translations for them or I would get some briefings or I would pass on some information that I had found out. It was pretty loose.

What sort of bloke was he?

You see, I don't want to embarrass anyone again but his nickname was

37:00 'Angry'. He was Angry Arthur Rofe. I got on all right with him. He had a bad habit of ringing up at three o'clock in the morning and asking what the cricket score was.

How would you help him with that?

He was usually listening to the cricket. He figured I'd know but I don't know why. We got on all right.

Was he often angry at you?

I think he was occasionally. I think he thought initially that I wasn't

37:30 certainly initially supplying him with enough information. He thought I should know more than I did but you can't make it up, can you, or I suppose you can. I also had one other good contact who was useful so I could pass stuff on. He was a Vietnamese major in the Ministry of Defence and one of his jobs was to brief the Americans on Vietnamese troop disposition on a weekly basis. I can't remember how I met him,

38:00 but he liked me to check his English before he gave the briefing. I would just note down anything of interest and pass it on to the embassy before the Americans got it. It was probably lies anyway, or sort of fiction.

Did Rofe go home when the government changed and the rest of the Australians pulled out?

We maintained

38:30 embassy personnel there. It wouldn't have been Rofe, but it would have been another defence attaché and they would just do the tour there until we severed diplomatic relations and that would have been in 1975. As I say, I wasn't there in 1975 and I don't know what happened.

One of the things I have heard that the Whitlam Government did is open up diplomatic relations with the north?

That is where the Australian Embassy is now. In my time it was in the

39:00 south. I think it took them a little while to actually establish the embassy but, yes, they had dialogue there through a British Trade Commission, I think initially. But then they built the embassy up there and it is now flourishing and has been for some time. As far as I know now we have Vietnamese officers coming down and doing training in Australia under the defence co-operation, so we are all good friends now.

In some ways can that be seen as a

39:30 **legacy of some of the work that civil affairs did during the Vietnam War, the relationships with the Vietnamese now?**

I don't think so. I don't think we were that important. I don't think we did anybody any harm and that was a good thing, but I don't think we influenced too much in the war or the aftermath.

Did you give Australians a good image though?

Yes, within the local area. Phuoc Tuy Province was a very small province with a relatively small population

40:00 but within that area, yes. Certainly when we went back we were welcomed with open arms by some people who remembered the Australians there during the time. I went back in 1997. As I said, we didn't do any harm and I think we helped some people's quality of life. That was all right.

Tape 9

00:41 **Memories of coming back home after Saigon, what do you have there?**

Not a lot. We were glad to be home I think and it was good to catch up with people but then it was going back to another job and settling into another house.

01:00 We bought our first house then, so that was the biggest event that happened to us. It was finding it and settling into it and then finding work. It was a fairly normal sort of routine then of course being a lecturer in charge of Vietnamese at the school, and just going there in the morning and coming home at night. I hadn't done that for a while.

Had Australia changed?

Not that I noticed. You are talking about a two and a half year period, I suppose, and I'd been

01:30 back a number of times in between postings and for R&R so if there were any changes they were fairly gradual. I didn't notice any particular change. Point Cook looked exactly the same to me, because that is where I went back to. The school was exactly the same and the mess was exactly the same.

You mentioned when you came back for that short break between the two postings there were some difficulties settling in?

Yes there was readjusting and again the same thing happened, but it didn't take very

02:00 long. Everything was a bit different and that's all. When we were in Saigon, you ordered your food in three month lots and it would come from Singapore. I had to import baby food for example and powdered milk. That is how you did your shopping or a large bit of it. You made up these great lists and sent them off and then had them arrive at port and you'd go down and collect them. This part about going to the supermarket was all new and stuff, but it

02:30 came back to you pretty quickly.

Did you miss anything from your time in Vietnam?

No, not really. I don't think I missed anything. I enjoyed the time and the people that I met there I continued to see afterwards. That is the military people, I mean, because they came back and we kept in touch with a number of them. I didn't miss too much.

03:00 **Upon reflection, did you feel that the civil affairs unit played an important part towards the end of the war?**

No. I don't think it was an important unit in terms of the war, but I think it did some good things for individual Vietnamese so that was handy. Put it this way, the outcome of the war wasn't affected in any way by the existence of

03:30 civil affairs or their non existence. Nothing would have changed but we did some good things.

Did you try joining the RSL [Returned and Services League] club?

Yes but for some reason we weren't too popular in the RSL club at the time. The general feeling I got was that they didn't want Vietnam veterans in the RSL club, so I ended up not joining.

Did you have an experience there?

I don't specifically

04:00 remember an experience. I don't remember applying and being knocked back. It was just something I heard that this wasn't a club for Vietnam veterans and we'd better get our own. I never tried until later. I joined the RSL some years later, but only briefly. I have got nothing against the RSL but I'm just a member of the Vietnam Veterans' Federation.

04:30 **Given that you had served in a war in Vietnam, did you have any views or thoughts on Anzac Day itself at the time?**

At the time I don't remember having thoughts about it. We were always involved in Anzac Day ceremonies because as a serving member you were and you just were. It just happened. I found it an emotional and moving service, the dawn service and the actual Anzac service, it was probably affected by my time in Vietnam. We now march

05:00 in our little group, all five of us, here in Canberra on Anzac Day. We meet at the local club and have a few beers. Yes, it has been important.

Obviously your return home in respect to your service with civil affairs was broken up by Saigon and your time there with training, but did you think it was important or were you disappointed in the fact that there wasn't any sort of welcome home parade back then?

05:30 Again, it didn't affect me that much, because I went back into a military environment. The people I feel sorry for were the people who didn't because they didn't have any support and there was no counselling. It was just a dead set change for them. I was back at Point Cook in the Vietnamese department with other military people who'd had the Vietnam experience, and everybody knew what it was all about. It was just back to normality. Everyone understood the

06:00 deal and it wasn't a problem, so it was worthwhile being in the military really.

Again, I have asked you this question earlier but when the war was coming to an end did you have any idea or your direction given your expertise in Vietnamese?

In what way?

What was next for you?

I always knew I was going back to be lecturer in charge of Vietnamese but I didn't know how long that was going to last. I knew it wasn't going to last

06:30 very long, because by the time I got back as I said most Australians had pulled out and the next year the course had three students. We operated that course for the full twelve months with the three students. Only one of them went to Vietnam, and it was the embassy guy. The other two private soldiers never did. One of them did. In fact he went over there and married a Vietnamese, but I don't think he was actually posted there.

07:00 He just had an interested in the language and the culture by the time he finished the course.

What changes did you make to the course, given that when you did it, the language was very much focussed on North Vietnamese?

I made no changes. The reason I didn't make any changes was Mr Mutan Van Lup as still there. It was his course. You didn't upset Mr Lup, so I was quite happy to teach his course. He did a lot of the teaching still. There were only three

07:30 students and you had to divvy them up. We didn't change the course. We did some peripheral stuff. We wrote new exercises and we tried to make the interpreting experience a little bit more realistic based on the experiences I had and so on. The basic tenets of the course were left unchanged. It worked pretty well. I couldn't speak South Vietnamese either. My South Vietnamese was no good. I spoke North Vietnamese, so it didn't make any

08:00 difference for Mr Lup and myself.

In your time in Vietnam, did you find that your language grew and changed?

My language there by the time I had finished, the second thing was good. Attending classes at the university, my only difficulty was in the concepts of what I was studying and never in the language. I could operate at university level in the language there without any difficulty.

08:30 **After this, you started learning Indonesian? How did this offer materialise?**

I was sitting at Point Cook waiting for the next lot of Vietnamese students to arrive and they never did. I said to the CO who was a friend actually, Graham Lang, "I might as well do something while I'm sitting here finding out what is going to happen, can I do the Indonesian course? He said, "Yes, sit in. It's no problem." So I sat in on the

09:00 Indonesian course and I just became another student for about five or six weeks. My corps finally found out that I had nothing to do and made noises about posting me somewhere else. Graham Lang said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I would like to stay and do the course, but I don't think they are going to let me." He said, "I'll tell them I need you for refresher courses." At the time qualified linguists got an

09:30 allowance, but could only maintain the allowance if he requalified every two years. It was a two years refresher qualifying course and the Vietnamese department ran two of them a year. Graham contacted my corps and said, "I'd like him to stay and do the next refresher course." Of course I didn't. I just stayed and studying Indonesian. Mutan Van Lup took the refresher course. By the time that was

10:00 over, I had been doing the Indonesian for four months and I was actually topping the course. There were twenty-four students and I was topping the course. So when they came to move me again, Graham said, "It would be a pity to move him now since he is topping the course. You might as well let him finish it." So they did. Because I topped the course I was selected for continuation language training in Indonesia.

Was there a reason why you actually chose

10:30 **Indonesian when the opportunity arose?**

I always considered that Indonesia was probably going to be the most important country in Australia's future. There was this huge country with a huge population and it was our nearest neighbour basically. I

just thought it was always going to be important to Australia. So rather than learning something else Indonesian seemed to be the obvious choice.

Just in respect to languages, Indonesian and Vietnamese, are there any similarities or are they completely different?

They are completely

11:00 different, because as I said Vietnamese is mono syllabic tonal and Indonesian is poly syllabic and non tonal. Interestingly there are some aspects which seem to be the same and some concepts which are the same. People have speculated that some time in the dim dark past there was some influence between the two language groups. There is some vocabulary that is very

11:30 similar and some concepts. In both languages, their verbs don't contain tenses but in both languages they have tense indicators which is a word you place before the verb. It appears in the same position for both languages although the words are different. It is the same concept so it seems to be that at some time in the past there was some connection, but you wouldn't know it.

The reason the other fellows on the course were learning the language?

12:00 It was for a variety of reasons. We had a defence co-operation program going with Indonesia and we had quite a large staff, military staff, in the embassy at Indonesia. The army also had a policy of just creating a pool of linguists. It wasn't just the army. We had some air force people and some navy people on this course. They had the idea to create a pool of linguists who were there that if we required them at short notice they would only

12:30 need a couple of weeks' retraining or brushing up. So probably half the course ended up in Indonesia in some form or another and the other half just went back to normal duties.

You were sent to Indonesia, Jakarta when?

I went to Bandung, first to the university in 1975.

Was that just to further your understanding of Indonesian?

It was almost exactly the same as when I was in Saigon. I attended university on a part time basis and

13:00 I had private lecturers at home. We had a big, old Dutch colonial house back to the days of 'bwana' [Swahili for master or boss] land like New Guinea. We had five servants and three lived in.

What were your impressions of Indonesia?

I found it remarkably similar to Vietnam. A lot of the architecture was the same when you went out into the villages, the type of houses. What the

13:30 people did was the same. They were either fishermen folk or rice farmers. The old religions were the same. Although they were nominally Muslim in Indonesia, there really was a lot of animism involved and a lot of ancestor worship and that sort of thing. There were a lot of similarities. The Indonesians particularly believed in the occult. They believed in these spirits that would arrive out of nowhere and do various things. There were good ones and bad

14:00 ones.

Indonesia you are saying has a heavy Islamic influence, did you pick up that as well?

There is a heavy Islamic influence because it is an Islamic country, but it is only in pockets that it is strictly Muslim. Aceh is a place which is very Islamic and Minangkabau which are two places in Sumatra, but a lot of

14:30 Indonesians are about as Muslim as I'm Church of England. They will do their bit but many of them in the fasting month of Ramadan, they don't even see out the month. They start of with all good intentions and they go for two or three days because it is too hard. There are a not of very good Muslims and there are a few who are obviously a bit radical. Again, they are fairly pragmatic. Certainly when we were living there

15:00 the women wore normal western clothes and did normal jobs. There wasn't anyone trying to force them to dress a certain way or anything.

Jumping forward a bit now just because we are coming to the end of the day, you went back to Jakarta in 1985?

Yes, in 1985/1986.

What were you doing there?

The Indonesian Defence Force has its own school of languages and I was language training advisor there.

15:30 **Again, training in English?**

In this case it was English, but I wasn't actually doing the teaching as such. I had a group of Indonesian military people who were staff. We were using an English language course called the Australian English Language Course, which was written in Australia by the military to train foreign members of the armed forces in

16:00 Australian type English with a view to them going to do training in Australia under the defence co-operation program. Every course that was available in Australia under defence co-operation was rated in terms of what level of English was required to successfully complete the course. One of my tasks was to train the people up there to apply these tests and procedures. If someone had

16:30 applied to do defence co-operation training in Australia and didn't meet the English criteria, then they would use the Australian English Language Course to teach them English to get them up to the level they required before they came over. That was the theory anyway. It didn't work in practice but the theory was good.

What difficulties were there in practice?

Well the Indonesians would select the person they wanted to go and do the training. Whether that person had enough

17:00 English or not was not their problem. They didn't care. We ended up getting a lot of people who really found it difficult to get any value from the course they were attending. The Australian organisation handling the Strategic International Policy Division didn't really care about that either, because they saw it as a contact and good will between the two and the training was secondary to it. We were on the one hand at the lower level trying to make the training relevant and everyone else

17:30 couldn't care a less about it.

Was that frustrating?

A bit. We had some successes. There was one fellow I remember who I failed three times and he just kept fronting up to do another test. Eventually I gave in and I thought, "Bugger it!"

You gave in, or he improved?

Well he may have improved a fraction, but not enough.

What was the relationship between Australia and Indonesia, Jakarta, at that time?

It was good. Of

18:00 course it all fell in a heap in 1986. There was some article, somebody called Jenkins wrote an article about the corruption of the Suharto regime. From that point the Indonesians dropped all contact with Australia. They pulled out of the defence co-operation program. On Australia Day, which is a big event at the embassy they sent one lone major, which is really an insult to represent their government. They didn't

18:30 talk to us. Our embassy and the defence attaché staff had no contact. They just wouldn't talk to us.

So you were over there at the time this was written?

I was serving in an Indonesian military unit, but at that level they didn't care. We just went on as normal. They didn't care. My boss was an Indonesian colonel and he was fine. In fact they said to me, "We've been told that you won't be replaced, but they haven't said that you have to go, so you can stay as long as you like."

19:00 I just finished my normal posting and when I left, I wasn't replaced. It has been replaced since. Things are back on an even keel now, and as far as I know that position is still filled.

What were you doing yourself then at that time with the Indonesian military?

We were training them in languages. That was it.

What are your views of the media, given Mr Jenkins article and the

19:30 **way the media also portrayed Vietnam?**

I think they've got to try and be honest and if they're honest it is fine. I didn't see anything wrong with the Jenkins article either, because what he said was true. The Indonesian presidency was a bit thin-skinned about it. Let's face it, the Indonesian government was totally corrupt. The president and his kids had their fingers in everything and that is what he pointed out that upset him. He also had a fair amount of power too.

20:00 **The way the media portrayed Vietnam?**

I was a bit disappointed in some of it, because I think some of it was just made up as they went along to meet a deadline or whatever. I know that happened sometimes. The reporters wouldn't venture out of the Continental Hotel. They would write their stories from there and sort of post them off. Again, what

do you do? If you are in the media and you've got to write a

20:30 story, you write a story. I don't know if that had that much affect on the war. I supposed it did. It certainly had an effect back home, didn't it?

After Jakarta, what happened there?

What did I do? I was posted as the commanding officer of the Defence International Training Centre which was the centre all these people came to to do their defence co-operation training. It is in Melbourne. We had about six hundred students for a

21:00 year of all ranks, private to brigadier, from fourteen countries. A lot of them were in the Pacific like Western Samoa and Fiji and Papua New Guinea of course and Malaysia and Indonesia and the Philippines and even Pakistan. I was commanding officer there. After that I was posted to Canberra to the Defence Intelligence Organisation.

Were you able to use your languages at this point or further on in your career?

In the

21:30 International Training Centre while we had Indonesian students and Malay students, I conversed with them at least but they weren't there to be speaking Indonesian and Malay. We were supposed to be getting them on track to study in English so I didn't use it a lot. Obviously when I went to DIO [Defence Intelligence Organisation] I was on the Indonesian desk in the analysis branch.

22:00 I guess that is the reason I ended up there, because I spoke Indonesian.

Did anything else of particular interest happen there?

It did, but I don't want to talk about it. I don't think I changed anything or did anything of great value, but I wouldn't want to discuss what they do or how they do it. It is secret.

You would have to kill me if you told me?

No, I wouldn't have to kill you, but I might get into trouble myself. Once you sign an Official Secrets Act,

22:30 it is still signed isn't it.

I guess now just reflecting and asking some general questions, 1987 was the welcome home parade, did you have anything to do with that, or were you involved in that in any way?

I went to it with a group of friends. We had a great time. We really enjoyed it.

Was that important to you?

Yes. I felt it was important.

23:00 Most people who went in that parade thought it was great, really great. For some people it settled a lot of problems. I didn't have, because of what we talked about before, the same level of anxiety over Vietnam that a lot of others had for the reason that I remained in the military and I came back to the family. Even for me it was a good thing.

23:30 Al of us enjoyed it and we had a great weekend down there.

Do you have any lasting images that you are constantly reminded of from Vietnam?

No. I don't have the bad dreams or any of that stuff. I really don't. Maybe I'm not sensitive enough, but no.

Anzac Day – I have asked you this earlier, but what does it mean to you today?

I think of it as not a celebration but a

24:00 commemoration of what people have done in the past and suffered. I look upon it as a time – I think it is an anti war sort of movement as well as being just an opportunity to get back and see blokes that you haven't seen for a while and spend a day with them and talk about old times. I think Anzac Day is fairly important to Australians. I think it is becoming more

24:30 important too, surprisingly.

Given this is for an archive and people in fifty or one hundred years time might watch this. What would you like to say to them about war itself?

I would say, "Don't go, Wally." It is all very well to say it at the time and it is not hard to get young men to go to war is it? That is the easiest thing in the world. You can get young blokes stirred up to do anything. It is only when you get to be a bit

25:00 older that I think you realise the futility of it all, and what a waste it is. That would be my message: that it is a waste.

How do you feel about the war in Iraq?

Again, this is a political thing, but I don't think we should ever have gone there or anywhere near the place to be honest. I would like to see them get out of there. I've got a daughter in the military and she did a tour in the

25:30 Sinai for six months.

Do you see a role for the civil affairs unit there?

That would be a good one. If you were going to do the Latham thing of helping to rebuild and move away from the military side of things, that is a role that something like civil affairs could do. That is the role that he is talking about, isn't he, developing the health system or something. That would probably work a bit. I reckon it was a war fought for the wrong reasons, but

26:00 then again, I suppose Vietnam was too.

Did you think that Vietnam was worth fighting?

Initially. Even now if you go back to Vietnam now Saigon hasn't changed. Saigon is still bustling and there is trade going on all over the place and the shops are full of goods. I don't know what it is like in the North, but there is no sign of Communism.

26:30 People are drinking Coca Cola and driving Fords. We went out on part of our trip to a place in the Mekong Delta which was an old Viet Cong base and they have sort of fixed it up a bit. It was deep in the mangroves. They have fixed it up a bit and it is a tourist attraction. They take you out there in a boat and they have a guide to say that, "General so and so of the VC, this is where he planned his operations and they did this and they did that." We got to this

27:00 place and they have a café there, a little tiny restaurant. We were sitting there and waiting for our guide to turn up, but he was a bit late. The reason he was late is he was watching the Australian Open live on TV. At the hotel in Saigon I turned on the TV set and it was the news from Darwin, the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation]. It was just a waste of a lot of people to end up where they are. It would have happened anyway.

27:30 **Was it important, going back to Vietnam for you?**

I wanted to go back just to have a look at the place. Whether it was important, I don't know. Some of the people who were originally going to go back in this group and were all from the unit actually paid their money and then pulled out at the last minute. They felt that they couldn't face it. Obviously it was pretty traumatic for them, but I didn't have that feeling. My wife came too, of course, because she had been there and it was good to get back.

28:00 **Are there any last thoughts or comments you would like to add to the archive before we finish?**

No thanks. I have said enough, and I'm sure you have too.

Thank you for your time, we greatly appreciate it.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS