

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Wayne Brown - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 22nd July 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2178>

### Tape 1

00:30 **A summary of your life up until now?**

I was born in Adelaide in 1945 towards the end of the war. My parents were both in the services, my Dad had come from the Middle East and New Guinea and met my mother along the way, she was in the women's army and the Red Cross

01:00 and they married must have been a lot earlier than '45 and I came along April '45. I was raised in Adelaide, my parents had another child, my brother eighteen months after I was born and then they separated, and um raised us in Adelaide right through until

01:30 lets see, until I got the call up I guess. And then I moved to Victoria with the army, Puckapunyal recruit training, medical corps training at Healesville, asked for a move to Keswick in Adelaide to be close to my wife who I was married to at the time and I was sent to Wacol in

02:00 Brisbane which was the opposite end of the country. From there I had plans to continue my, I should back track a little if that's okay.

**Sure.**

Back when I was eighteen I started psychiatric nursing, there were no jobs around in fields I was interested in and I went for an aptitude test and

02:30 the results of that test were that I was suitable for a job in the medical field. And I asked, "Well what does a bloke like me about to turn eighteen do in the medical field?" And I was told that there were jobs in the mental hospital in Adelaide and I could start when I was eighteen and go through a probationary period there and see if I was suitable. Well it turned out

03:00 I did the first year exams and topped the state and so I seemed to be fairly suitable and I liked the work. Ended up doing second year nursing there and relaxed a bit and didn't top the state, came in the middle of the pack because I had met some young ladies there by that stage and married one of them. I was twenty, she was twenty and then the first episode of national service came into being in 1965, I was twenty,

03:30 I think I was in the first half dozen marbles that were drawn out of the barrel and I thought, "Well I am going to beat this, I am not interested in going in the army." I tried to join the navy at seventeen and was rejected because I wore glasses being short sighted and I thought, "Well I am not going to go in the army now, I am married, two mortgages." and I think we had a child on the way at that stage.

04:00 And I went into the recruiting office and said, "I am married and not interested in going, what is the go?" And they said, "Well if you're married by such and such a date you're okay so go home and forget about it basically." So I did. Until I got the notice saying report in for a medical, so I went in to do the medical and I said to them,

04:30 "Look I was told I didn't have to go because I was married by this date." and they said, "Oh well we changed the dates; weren't you notified?" "No I wasn't." "Sorry you still have to do the medical and there is a chance you will be called up." I thought, "I will still beat this." and I had had a haemorrhoid popped out shortly before that and I thought, "Gee that'll get me out, they don't take blokes with flat feet, haemorrhoids and glasses surely?"

05:00 Anyhow I went in for the medical and the doctor doing the medical said, "Look mate we are very short of medical staff, you're semi-qualified and everything else is fine. They will take you with glasses and there are no signs of the haemorrhoid at the moment." I said, "Oh damn." So I went home and had another interview that's right and I said,

05:30 "Look what can I do? I am married I have got two mortgages, a child on the way, I have finished second year nursing and I would like to finish the course." "By all means finish the course." And I thought,

"How can I extend this? I can do psychiatry, that's third year, that qualifies me as a psychiatric nurse and there is mental deficiency I can do so I will drag it on a bit. And they said, "Yeah you can have eighteen months and do your courses

- 06:00 then come and see us and I thought by then this place called Vietnam, the bit of a stir over there would be all over. Of course it wasn't and I still thought in the back of my mind that I wouldn't be in the army, had no interest. But when I finished my courses, went in, that's right our son was two months old then, born in
- 06:30 February, he came a little bit later on which is good for all of those watching the calendars. So I was destined to go into the army in the eighth intake. I had been due to go in in the first intake in '65, I delayed it until the eighth which was April '67. Went down to the depot, flew to Puckapunyal in Victoria, did the ten weeks basic training,
- 07:00 running, jumping, shooting, all of the rest of it. Had four days leave in the middle of it to come home and it was like coming home to strangers, the army was insidiously getting a grip on me I suppose, as they try to do. So at the recruit training we had a priorities list that we could pursue;
- 07:30 my first priority was medical corps, my second was catering, I thought, "That would be a good safe job," and I thought, just for a laugh, "I will put down infantry". And as it was I ended up becoming a medic in the infantry and doing most of my own cooking with ration packs later on. So they gave me medical because I was a trained nurse it seemed obvious, even though some blokes who were qualified engineers were getting artillery
- 08:00 and infantry and blokes who were suitable for infantry were getting engineers and artillery, they weren't very bright men at recruit training, they were full of rejects down there. So I got medical and was posted to Healesville which is a freezing cold hill top canvas city looking across at the snow fields for ten weeks. So for ten weeks I was
- 08:30 relearning medical, anatomy physiology, banging techniques, stuff that I had just qualified in as a nursing sister. And I said to them, "Look this is no good for me, I want to start getting some money as a qualified medic; please send me to another unit." And they said, "No you have got to finish the course." And so I finished the ten weeks getting ninety nine percent for some things and seventy percent for things I wasn't really interested in, like making stretchers
- 09:00 and jogging and things like that. Finished the course, got posted to Wacol, was there a short period of time and seeing I was twenty-two years old and most of the nashos were only twenty, they made more a corporal overnight. After I had been in the army eight months with no training, they just said, "Sew these two stipes on and tomorrow you're a corporal." It was good because it meant more pay because I had lost about a third of my pay from my
- 09:30 nursing job at the hospital going into the army, I had lost about a third and things were a bit tight at home. So from Wacol most of the medics there having gone through Healesville were destined to be sent to the hospital at Vung Tau in Vietnam. I thought, "Well that's not too bad; I work in a hospital in Adelaide, I am in the army, I am going over to Vietnam. It will be a different sort of nursing, it will be battlefield
- 10:00 casualties coming in and totally different, very little psychiatry. It will be okay I am only there for twelve months". Then I got a posting to Enoggera to 4th Battalion out of the blue. I didn't know why or how until recently when I wrote my book and my doctor wrote the Foreword in it and he was the medical doctor for 4 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]
- 10:30 and he had two staff he wanted to get rid of; they were real duds, before they went to Vietnam and he wanted to get two replacements, so my mate Darryl and I were posted from Wacol across to Enoggera. Suddenly we were infantry medics. We did our
- 11:00 exercises up at Tin Can Bay, Shoal Water Bay, I learnt how to suture people up and how to carry a medical bag and a rifle, got issued with an Armalite as opposed to the SLR [self loading rifle] that everybody had. I thought it was an imitation at first being mostly plastic and fibreglass, but I found it could do the job all right. Then we went to Canungra, I had already done a course at Greenbank with the medical people at Wacol which was just as
- 11:30 gruelling if not more so than Canungra. So Canungra to me was relatively easy. And then had pre-embarkation leave in Adelaide and realised things weren't too good with my wife down there and went off to Vietnam as part of the rear party from 4 battalion. While I was on leave the battalion had
- 12:00 embarked on the aircraft carrier to go over there and I was to fly back to Enoggera, tie up a few things, hand over to the incoming regiment from Vietnam 2 RAR and then fly Qantas off to the war, which was a bit of a shock. Quite a cold Brisbane evening leaving, getting into Singapore stinking hot.
- 12:30 And then flying to Saigon, even worse, with all of the jets and helicopters and jets and the noise, diggers, air force people everywhere. Just the confusion around the whole place. Waiting at the airport with a cardboard box with a sandwich in it and I think a piece of fruit, a rifle magazine with twenty rounds in it and no rifle and

- 13:00 other way around actually, we had the rifles but not the magazines; they travelled separate. They thought we might be dangerous if we put the magazines on. Hopped on a Caribou aircraft and flew up to Nui Dat which probably took twenty minutes, half an hour. Dropped in there into a red dusty area. Got off-loaded onto some trucks
- 13:30 was taken around to the 4 Battalion RAP [Regimental Aid Post]. Suddenly I was in Vietnam and that's where my job was temporarily in the RAP until I became a medic out in one of the rifle companies after one of the medics suffered from heat exhaustion on one of the operations. He was helicoptered out and I was helicoptered in and I stayed with that company, B Company, from September through to March and had quite a few adventures.
- 14:00 In Vietnam I was an infantry medic, a company medic responsible for about a hundred and ten men in the camp and in the bush, anything from tinea to bullet wounds, blast wounds, scorpion bites, anything that happened I was the medic in charge and my decisions were
- 14:30 final as to evacuating someone by helicopter or keeping them in the bush or prescribing what I had in my medical kit, from injections to sutures to some minor surgery with a scalpel, all good fun. But enduring the conditions with the diggers [soldiers]. Having to dig a hole to sleep in every night, carrying thirty kilos [kilograms] on my back, carrying a hundred rounds of ammunition and your rifle and grenades and claymore mines.
- 15:00 So got through Vietnam and flew home again, quickly over there, quickly back, flew into Sydney with the Charlie Company medic Darryl and next morning he flew off to Rockhampton his home town and I flew off to Adelaide. And I eventually found him again thirty-four years later and we
- 15:30 had a big reunion. I flew to Adelaide to find that my wife had left, it was a big shock. The biggest shock I think was coming from Vietnam to Australia, finding that Australia was still ticking over, still grinding along doing everything that they did. The war didn't affect many people and secondary I think was coming home and finding the house empty and broke,
- 16:00 because I had been sending the majority of my money home as an allowance. Having to go straight back to work and the people I worked with wondering where the heck I had been, been working night shift, been working in another ward for a while, people hadn't seen me. Gradually settled back into that. I think three or four months later I was at
- 16:30 home one day and an officer came walking up my driveway, the Charlie Company Commanding Officer from 4 Battalion and I thought, "What the hell is he doing here? I have done my time". I was thinking very negatively and he said, "Congratulations Mr Brown, you have won the military medal. "And I had no idea what the military medal was and he didn't really explain it very well, he just said it was for bravery in the field and I thought, "Oh right, that's interesting".
- 17:00 And he said, "Can you remember on which occasion you might have won the medal?" I said, "I wouldn't have a clue." And he said, "Well there will be a report in tomorrow's paper and you will find out about it." So that was that and the next day the reporters all came flocking around as they do, journalists. And they said to me the same thing, "What did you do?" and I said, "I wouldn't have a clue." So the
- 17:30 headline in the paper was 'The Hero who Forgot'. And I copped a bit of flak at work from that, "How's your memory?" Because one bloke at work, well several people at work thought I was actually working in a psychology branch in Saigon printing pamphlets to air drop over the enemy, surrender and we will look after you sort of stuff, but I was actually out in the field as a medic. So this award that I got let everyone know just what I had been doing then. There was a short write up in the paper
- 18:00 that Corporal Brown had moved forward under the rocket fire dah, dah, dah and rescued the wounded. And I thought, "Well that sounds pretty good, not quite how it happened". And a few months after that I was actually at Government House with my mother and another medic mate of mine and got presented with the medal, even at that stage thinking they had made a bit of a blue [error] and they got the wrong bloke and I was going to say, "Sorry"
- 18:30 and just cancel the whole deal, but I got it and have still got it. Anyhow then I got back to work and things settled down a bit and I had ideas of writing a book about my experiences and I thought, "Well I had better not write the proper names and places and that; people might get upset" and I made it fiction based on fact and I wrote about half a book and it sounded a bit daggy so I left it for a while.
- 19:00 And then I picked it up later and put the real names in and the real actions and finished it about eighteen months ago. And then I met this lovely young lady nurse at the hospital and we married and then we moved to Queensland, we had been coming up each year for a holiday and we thought, "Gee it is a hell of a long way to go for a holiday and then one year we were driving back to Adelaide and we said, "Why don't we stay up there?"
- 19:30 And so we came back the next year with all of our gear and just stayed in Queensland. We moved to Mackay. We were planning on moving to somewhere that looked nice and felt nice and we drove past Brisbane and we drove past Gympie and we thought, "No, it is better up north" and we just kept on driving and we looked at Gladstone and that was a mining town, mineral deposits and so on, pretty dirty. Kept on going, Rockhampton

- 20:00 was hot and dusty when we got there and so we kept on going and we hit Mackay and the palm trees were swaying and we stayed in Mackay. And got a job straight away as a wardsman at the hospital. I went to the hospital and said, "Look I am a psychiatric male nurse; I am looking for a job." And they said, "Oh we don't employ male nurses; we only have female nurses here." They were very old fashioned. And so they said, "We can give you a job as a wardsman."
- 20:30 Mopping floors and emptying things and carrying laundry, moving bodies into the morgue and things like that and "You can do the graveyard shift from midnight until eight." And I thought, "Oh well, it is a job, got to have a job to have money". Did it for a couple of weeks and then just couldn't handle it anymore. I got a job in a supermarket stacking the shelves for twelve months then; I just switched off medically and just relaxed and stacked baked beans on the shelves and put prices on tins
- 21:00 and did home deliveries, things like that. And my mother and sister decided to come and visit us in Queensland and they decided to sell up in Adelaide and move, Mum was a widow. Then my brother and his wife decided to come up for a holiday, they liked the look of it and decided to move up and they bought a bakery. And the bakery really picked up after my brother bought it and he said to me, "Do you want to come
- 21:30 and work here?" and I said, "Oh yeah, it is a change from the supermarket; it would be good." And more money and lots of pies to eat. And we did that for about three months and then his wife got sick of Queensland, all of her friends were back in Adelaide and they decided to move back and he said, "Do you want to buy the bakery?" and I said, "Strewth. You had better teach me all of the finer points." And so he did for a couple of weeks and sold it
- 22:00 to us I think for twenty-one thousand dollars, a house and a bakery and a pie cart back in '72, '73. Suddenly we had our own business, we had a daughter at that stage and I was earning twice as much as I was in the supermarket but working twice as many hours. It was pretty hot in summer but we were our
- 22:30 own boss. And then our son was born and that made it a bit difficult having two babies and a business and so on and so we put it on the market and sold it after four years.
- Yeah.**
- So we sold the bakery and moved all the way back to Adelaide, went straight back into the...walked up the steps of the hospital I used to work at, the matron was coming down the stairs, she said, "Mr Brown."
- 23:00 I said, "Yes matron?" She said, "Are you looking for a job?" I said, "Yes matron." She said, "Can you start on Monday?" so that was the interview. My reputation was pretty good, still intact. So I started work the following Monday and I did another four years there having done eight years there before and two years away sort of all counted as service. Did another four years there, got back into the rut which you do working in a hospital
- 23:30 and decided to move back to Queensland and my parents had bought an old dairy farm at Eungella out from Mackay and they offered us a couple of acres on the corner if we would run the place, drive them into town and look after them. So we did that, my step father, he had...his father had had a museum in Mackay, years before and all of the stuff was in storage and my step father Jack said,
- 24:00 "Well if you would like to build a structure we can create a museum on your acreage in the corner and people can come and have a look and give you a few dollars." And I thought, "Well that's a good idea to make money". In the meantime I was driving bulldozers and fencing and relief milking on dairies. And then I got a good job with the Department of Primary Industries, going around to selected dairies sampling their milk, called herd testing.
- 24:30 So you would go around in the afternoon put all of the machine on the suction cups that they used and that would take out a sample which I would put in a little bottle with a sterilising pill and the next morning I would come and get another sample from cow number 235, put that in bottle number 235, pack them all up in a hundred samples, say, and send it off the to DPI [Department Primary Industries] and they would get a butter fat reading, and a volume print out
- 25:00 from my records. So I did this for fifteen dairies each month and part time dozer driving and fencing, and the museum running and odd jobs. After several years there the kids were about to finish primary school and it would have meant three buses down to the high school and three buses back each day. We thought that was a bit much, it would knock the edge off their brilliance.
- 25:30 So we decided to move and my folks were getting pretty old then and they wanted to move a bit closer to medical help. And we thought, "Right oh, we will all sell up and we will all move somewhere nice". So we drive down to, we thought, "We won't go to Brisbane that's too far, we will start at Nambour and work our way back up". We got to Nambour and they saw a place they liked, had five acres of macadamias that I could work and some avocados and
- 26:00 so they bought the place. We moved in, we eventually sold up there too, they sold in a week, we sold in eighteen months. We moved down there, they bought the place next door, we bought the place next to them, ran the macadamia farm, that was a real dud because the money wasn't there so I had to go back to psychiatric nursing. Nambour Hospital had just started a psychiatric wing. So I did relief nursing

there and then I became a day therapy nurse which was great.

- 26:30 Monday to Friday doing craft work, cooking, maintenance injections, records, outings, keeping people out of hospitals in the home or in half way houses and so on. I did that until I realised I was having problems with work and home and life in general and later found out that I was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. One of the psychiatrists I had been working with
- 27:00 went into private practice. I went to see him for a double session I filled in his questionnaire and he analysed it. He said, "You have got post traumatic stress disorder, you have chronic depression and you won't be working in the field of psychiatry for much longer, it just doesn't work." I thought, "I will prove you wrong; I am going to work until I am sixty and then I will retire and do other things". Eighteen months later I
- 27:30 was not working; I was a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] pensioner living quietly and getting things back on track. I am the vice president of the Farmwoods RSL [Returned and Services League]; I am in the Vietnam Veterans Association. I am a member of the Project Vietnam group which goes to Vietnam rebuilding and reconstructing and I am going over to teach English later this year. So that's
- 28:00 where I am at the moment.

**That's an amazing life. Would you like to get some water, we might just stop there? Can you tell us about what you remember about growing up in Adelaide?**

Yes after my parents separated we lived with my grandmother and grandfather. Grandmother was of Cornish descent

- 28:30 and Grandpa was German and he was a pretty tough man, an alcoholic and died young.. My Mum and us two boys were in the one room in the house. But there were a lot of good things that happened there; grandma was a real comfortable old lady and looked after us quite well while Mum went to work. Mum was a shorthand typist. We had a backyard to play in, we had a sort of three bedroom place and the railway line was across the road.
- 29:00 Had mates living around the block and vacant allotments we could go and play on, use our bow and arrows on, climb trees, and play marbles, blow up old ladies' letter boxes on Guy Fawkes night. Things like that. Fruit trees, she had apricots and grapes and pet kookaburras that had one wing clipped to
- 29:30 hang around the place. Outside dunny [toilet], I remember that. '42 Railway Terrace, Edwardstown. Trivia.

**How far away from the city was that?**

It is about eight kilometres out of Adelaide centre I think.

**And did you get into town much?**

Yes, grandma used to put a harness on me; not that I was a naughty boy or anything but she would put this harness on and she would have a leash or a strap and I would go with her.

- 30:00 And she would meet her other cousins for lunch and they would go to Coles Cafeteria and have lunch and I loved that; that was great. And they would sort of window shop and they all had their hats on with their pins through their hair done up in buns.

**And did your Mum talk to you much about her experiences in World War II?**

Nothing as a child but later on she told me that she

- 30:30 worked for, I think she was an AMWAR, A M W yeah [AAMWS—Australian Army Medical Women's Service]. She worked with the Red Cross and her department was "Prisoners of War". So she handled correspondence and things like that. She said it was a very emotional area to be involved in.

**Did she tell you any of the experiences she had?**

No.

- 31:00 Just one fellow that won the VC [Victoria Cross] earlier in the war, he was killed up in New Guinea and they were all very sad because they had handled his paper work, I think his name was Diver Derek.

**And what about your father, did you know much about his experiences?**

Nothing really until I got his records recently. He joined the army I think in '42 so

- 31:30 he was sort of a late starter, he had been working on the land with his brother and father at Stanthorpe, fruit orchards and so on, so I don't know if they were sort of excluded industries or not. But he became a driver in the army and went to the Middle East and I was told that he went to Crete but I can't find it on his records, but then Crete

32:00 was a disaster so it may not have been recorded, and then he went to New Guinea after that, after he came back. So a very limited history there, he was a driver the whole time, I think he had an average sort of war from what I can understand. Whereas his brother was a Beaufighter pilot, trained as a sergeant pilot as a nineteen year old in Canada and then to England and then North Africa and had lots of adventures flying

32:30 Beaufighters. Still flies today at eighty-six I think he is.

**Did you have much to do with your father when the separation happened?**

No, just I think I can recall one visit when he knocked at the back door and I answered it and I said to Mum, "There is a man at the back door wants to see you." And they had words, lots of yelling and that was it. So he didn't come any more, he apparently got on with life back in

33:00 Queensland and Mum got on with life down there. Just incompatible.

**So did you ask, how old were you when they separated?**

About two.

**So did you ask about your father?**

Not really. I understood in the back of my mind that Mum was...we didn't have a father and she didn't have a husband. She had been married but they didn't get on and we lived with grandma.

33:30 The difficult part was going to school and taking a report card in that had been, this was after Mum remarried, after she remarried a fellow called Smith. I would take a report card in signed by Jean Smith and they would say, "Who is this?" and I would say, "That's my mother." "But she has got a different name?" "Yes she remarried." It was just a new thing in those days. Most people put up with and stayed together.

**How long did you live with your grandparents?**

34:00 From age two until Mum remarried when we were, that's right she had a little shack built at Christies Beach so she could become independent and I think I was about ten then so that was eight years with my grandparents and then we moved to Christies Beach and went to Port Columbus School

34:30 which was about a forty minute walk away down in the country and Mum met this fellow down there who was the local truckie [truck driver] and they married and we moved from there to Glenelg in Adelaide a suburb and went to school there. That's right.

35:00 Then we moved to Brighton right next to the high school. I wanted to go to the agricultural college and become a farmer and the high school was four houses from us, the ordinary high school. "You're going to the high school, too expensive to go to the other one. You're not going to be a farmer, that's pie in the sky." So I went to the high school and just passed.

**How did you get on with the step father?**

Not really well, he was there

35:30 he always told his mates that we were the wife's kids, and so we thought, "Okay, we are the wife's kids, you're not claiming ownership, we'll just sit in the background". He was okay; he had been a bachelor until he was about sixty. There was a big age difference.

**How did you get on with your brother growing up?**

Good, brother Cliff, we were just well eighteen months apart,

36:00 and still eighteen months apart, just kicking a footy and cricket and so on.

**How different is he to you?**

A lot different, he is a lot shorter, and he is left handed and left footed kicking a footy. Different personality. He started in a bakery when he was fourteen and worked up until just a few years ago, just baking. Different personality,

36:30 doesn't travel a great deal, doesn't read a great deal I don't think. Very limited, well in my opinion, limited scope.

**What did you do for fun growing up in Adelaide?**

Mostly it was backyard stuff when we were young but when we moved to Glenelg and Brighton a fellow down the road said, "Do you want to come spear fishing?"

37:00 and I thought, "Spear fishing, I wonder what that is all about". So he explained it and I said, "Yeah sure." So I got a broom handle and stuck a bit of rubber on one end of it and a spike on the other and I had flippers and goggles and snorkel and we went off down to the beach and we started swimming out and out and I thought, "Bloody hell this is over my neck; here this is about thirty foot deep". And this is when I was about twelve I think. And we went out there and he speared a few fish I think and I speared

- a dead octopus,
- 37:30 it was dead already. And I carted it all of the way into shore. So that started my spear fishing even though it was terrifying being out there. No boat or anything, just swimming out from shore, it seemed like forever but it was probably about two hundred metres, back in those days I was a lot smaller. Came back in and I ended up buying a
- 38:00 proper spear gun and bigger flippers, all of the right gear. I was in the high school football team, the B grade football team. I had to wear glasses from age thirteen. I suddenly realised sitting in the back of the class being one of the good quiet lads in the class but not being able to read what was on the board I always had to ask my mate next to me, "What's that on the board?" as I squinted away. And the teacher used to ping me then for talking in class
- 38:30 and he said, "Come sit up the front." And I thought, "Well, I can see whole lot better now" and the teacher said, "I think you need to go and see the optician." So I went to the optician, got glasses and a whole new world out there. Played a bit of cricket, then basketball. The church I was going to, Somerton Baptist, I must have been about thirteen had a basketball team and I was
- 39:00 about five foot ten then, about the same as I am now, a bit less. "Why don't you come out and play basketball?" "Yeah all right I will give it a go." And I got the gear and the sneakers and the purple singlet with the numbers on it and started playing basketball and I played basketball right up until I was forty-nine until I wrecked my knee. That was great, loved it. Still got a hoop out the front.
- 39:30 **Was basketball different back then?**
- A lot slower. All zones, now it is all fancy moves.
- Was it influenced by the Americans much at that stage?**
- Oh yeah for sure. Sure. I remember watching an American team play South Australian state team and they were dunking the ball back in those days, it was good. I can't even touch the ring.
- When did the dunking come in what year would that have been?**
- 40:00 Oh seriously probably the '70s. Yeah.
- I will stop you there, that's the end of our tape.**
- 40:11 **End of tape**

## Tape 2

- 00:30 **So what was high school like then?**
- That was four days away from the house, I used to make apricot sandwiches every morning to take to school because Mum would go to work and my step father would be out driving a truck and I would eat my sandwiches before first class started, kicking a football around eating jam sandwiches. So recess time which was little lunch I would come home make some more apricot jam sandwiches
- 01:00 go back eat them and lunch time I would come home and make some more jam sandwiches and eat them. I didn't put on any weight I was pretty skinny back then. To start high school I was pretty good in primary school, I got really high marks because I was interested in geography and history and arithmetic and English was just a breeze and I did pretty well and so I got
- 01:30 allocated into the top few percent of high school grading. So I got to Brighton High School and there is all of these first year kids standing there, hundreds of them. And they called out the D class first, they were all the bozos. And they all went off to their class 1C and 1D and I thought, "Strewth they have forgotten me, all of
- 02:00 my mates are going there". And 1B and 1A and I thought, "There has been a stuff up here for sure". But I didn't say anything, I was really shy then. Anyway about six of us left there and finally my name came up and I was in 1A and I thought, "Strewth, I didn't even know what I was meant to be studying". But it turned out I was in French, Latin,
- 02:30 Maths 1, Maths 2, English and Chemistry and Physics and these were all new apart from English. And I really struggled, I just couldn't get algebra, it just didn't click with me, logarithms and all of that sort of stuff. Latin I could chant the bits of that, French I was interested in.
- 03:00 So anyway I passed first year. Got my glasses then which helped a bit. Went into second year and we had a choice then, subjects we could drop and carry on with. So I dropped Latin, and kept French; I went into 2B and instead of Latin I took up Modern History and I did woodwork as well; I really loved woodwork.

03:30 I passed second year and then third year came along. And I was struggling a bit more. I kept on with the French even though I wasn't passing it, maths was getting more difficult and I should have dropped them or one of them. My teacher's report for third year which was Intermediate just prior to most of us going out to work at age fifteen. My teacher's report says, "Wayne concentrates too much on sport and is unlikely to pass."

04:00 This is good. Anyway I did. So I passed with English, Maths 1, Woodwork, History and Chemistry I think. I got five out of the eight, five is a pass. So high school was pretty good. I had a few mates who I used to go fishing with and being in the cricket team and the footy team,

04:30 one was called Bob Nicholson and Peter Edwards; haven't seen them since.

**Was your Mum really strict about your high school studies?**

Not really. TV came in about then too. Which was a real blur to me until I got glasses and she would just say, "Do your homework." And she would try and get the step father to help us with our homework and he had been to about grade three out in the country he didn't know much. He gave up in disgust,

05:00 but I did a bit of homework and a bit more at school in the morning, I got through.

**And what was your Mum like?**

Mum was, wouldn't say scatty, but she was occupied with her work and being a wife and a mother and the cook and the laundress and so on; she kept pretty busy. She really cared for us and we didn't want for anything.

05:30 We had gone from second hand clothes up to some new clothes by this stage, having a man around the house with another income. And we had holidays.

**So what happened after high school? What did you want to be while you were at high school?**

I still wanted to be a farmer. But I realised that was impossible so most of us young fellows

06:00 when we were approaching the end of third year which is Year 10, we started looking in the paper and casting around for jobs. And I had part time jobs for pocket money in the holidays but in the paper was a job for a boat builder's assistant. And I rode my bike around and applied for the job and a bloke handed me a piece of wood and he said, "Can you show me which way this piece of wood is twisted and warped and so on?"

06:30 and it was really warped and I did and he said, "Okay you can start on Monday we will put you on probation for awhile and see if you are any good and we will talk about an apprenticeship later on." I said, "That sounds good." Anyway it was seven pounds a week, back then, fourteen dollars today's money and it was just him, he was a young boss only in his thirties and his mate and they were building everything from water skis out of plywood

07:00 to yachts, to small yachts to speed boats. And it was quite interesting. My main job was to sweep up, lug stuff around, lay on my back on the concrete with a bag under me holding a big lump of steel against the hull of the boat, against the copper rivet, it was a copper nail while a bloke sat inside the boat

07:30 knocking the little washer thing on them tapping to hold the planks together, so I spent many years laying on my back with my hands above my head and the blood running out of my arms getting pretty tired and sore for seven pound a week including Saturday mornings. But I had some benefits, one of the reject hulls they had for a small moth yacht, about ten feet long

08:00 three feet wide, twisted a bit on the mould and they were going to burn it and I said, "Well can I take it home and make a boat out of it and use it for spear fishing." They said, "You can do that." So I bought the timber and stainless steel nails and waterproof glue and all of the gear from them and went home and after a few months I built this reasonable looking boat and took photographs of it and showed them and they were quite impressed. But after

08:30 about twelve months or so there I realised the money wasn't getting any better, no apprenticeship offers and I was getting pretty slack, I wasn't that interested because they weren't encouraging me in many ways, I was just labourer there so I decided to go back to school and try and get my leaving certificate which would get me a better job.

09:00 So we were sort of half way through the school year at that stage, the year after the year I left, so I signed up at a college in Adelaide, Ma Messent, she was called Miss Messent and they called her Ma Messent. She was a dotty old lady who ran this private school with very small classes and pretty average sort of tutors.

09:30 But I did English, Maths 1, Modern History and Physiology, you needed four subjects to pass so I only took on four, big mistake because I only passed three. Missed out on maths, so I had three leaving subjects up my sleeve then including physiology which got me interested in medical things. And then I went for the interview at the

10:00 unemployment centre and did the aptitude test where they found I was suitable for something in the

medical field and it all sort of came together with a job at the mental hospital; Parkside Mental Hospital which is now the Glenside Hospital, the psychiatric part and mental part have all been changed, upgraded.

**So at what point did you try and join the navy?**

10:30 At seventeen just after I finished the boat building and got out, must have been just before I decided to go back to school I applied for the navy thinking, "I do spear fishing, I have got my little boat, I love the sea, I will go and join the navy", because another uncle was in the navy during the war. And it had a romance attached to it. And I bowled up to the recruiting office with my glasses on and before they even asked my name they said, "Take your glasses off and read the chart." And I read down a couple of lines and said, "I am having a bit of trouble there."

11:00 And they said, "Sorry mate, don't want you." I was very deflated there. That's when I went back to school.

**What happened when you first started in nursing?**

The first job was to...I walked into this, I was picked up by the chief male nurse and he said, "I will show you around," and he showed me around a couple of wards. He said,

11:30 "You're working in O ward today, this is the boss, he will look after you." And off he went. Eighteen, knew nothing, I was green. He said, "Right oh, see all of those blokes sitting around in the seat on the wall?" and there was about thirty or forty of them, all of these blokes in grey overcoats, it was winter time all rugged up, sitting there smoking and looking at each other

12:00 and some of them were muttering to themselves and I thought, "Here we go". And he said, "Take these nail clippers and cut all of the fingernails." Right oh, good." I had never cut anyone else's nails; I never even cut my own, I used to chew them. And so I started cutting fingernails. "Well," I thought. I did. I went over to this first bloke and said, "Excuse me sir can I cut your fingernails?" and he told me to go and get further away or something like that.

12:30 **You can swear.**

Anyway the boss saw my dilemma and he came over and said, "Look this is what you do. Just grab their hand and go chunk, chunk, chunk like that. Grab the other hand, be firm." "Oh okay." "You don't pussy foot around." And so I got them and I thought, "That's not too bad, that took me a few hours", and then smoko [cigarette break] and drink a very strong cup of tea that was like cold tar.

13:00 A handful of tea for each person and one for the pot and a big hospital teapot and it had been there for an hour I think and I think the teaspoon nearly dissolved in it. Anyway then it was bath day and O ward is three floors up and you climb all of the stairs up there and each of the patients has got their set bed each side of the hallway. And it was one side's turn to have the bath and showers,

13:30 this was the next morning and I was still in O ward. "Right oh, this side down to the bathroom." And there was about thirty or forty of them, all of these naked blokes running into the bathroom, "Get into the shower," some were in the bath. And we had to shave some of them so I learnt how to shave someone else apart from myself. And there is steam and froth and bubble and sweaty bodies. And I thought, "This is psychiatric nursing, okay it is a job". But it was eighteen

14:00 pounds a week as opposed to seven from a couple of months before. Plus I had had a couple of months on unemployment benefits which I think was seven and six a week, seventy-five cents. Just enough to pay my train fare in and out to the unemployment office. Gradually I got changed to different wards and when I got to the surgery ward I actually watched a couple of operations,

14:30 and I think I was still doing first year, which started doing some lectures in the hospital and I was sent up to theatre for a couple of days, which was a big stone building, no air conditioning, middle of summer. And this intellectually retarded fellow was going to have a hip operation to take some bone out and they opened him up from the knee to above the hip and two or three other students in the room flaked out and they had to drag them out,

15:00 luckily I didn't quite swoon. Anyhow standing there watching in a white mask and gown and the doctor who was on the squeeze bag, the oxygen bag, he beckoned me over and he said, "Can you take over for awhile?" and I said, "Yeah sure." And so I sat down on the stool and I gave the bag a squeeze every now and then. And he came back and he said, "Thank you doctor." And I said, "I am not a doctor, I am a student nurse" and he said, "Oh bloody hell!" And grabbed the bag and checked the vital statistics.

15:30 Everything was still ticking over nicely and I went back to my place, shouldn't have asked me shouldn't he?

**What was the big thing in psychiatry at that time do you remember?**

We had a lot of shock treatment. ECT [Electroconvulsive therapy], when I graduated around to the admissions ward with all of the depressive patients we used to do up to twenty a day, two or three times a week sort of production line.

**What was involved in shock treatment?**

16:00 The patient is sedated, some gel, conductive gel is placed on the top of the head and side of the temple and an electric charge is passed through a hand held set with wet chamois on the tips, I remember soaking them in saline quite often. And I think it was about forty volts, anyway a charge is sent through those two points and the brain is shocked into different behaviour and it works for some people.

16:30 But then it was used as punishment; it was used for all sorts of things unfortunately. We were doing one one day, we put the injection in the back of the hand, put the anaesthetic in and the bloke was out he had the mouth piece in and he was snoring away there and we put the gel on and zapped him as we used to say and all of his hair went phht and flew off, he was wearing a wig that we were unaware of. So we had some light moments there.

17:00 **Did you see evidence of World War II veterans that would come in for psychiatric treatment?**

No they would have gone to Dawes Road which was an army hospital but we had a lot of World War II staff there including a Changi prisoner who I worked with quite a bit.

**Did he talk to you much about his experiences?**

17:30 Yeah a fair bit especially after he heard I won the medal. He was the first to congratulate me there because he knew a bit about what war was about. The other treatment going on there at the time was something called largactil which was either liquid or a tablet which just used to sedate them quite heavily but also used to rot their liver. So they found out later. We used to put mugs full of this stuff, I used to go on night shift and it was summer and I was having trouble sleeping,

18:00 and the male nurse senior to me said, "Why don't you try a small largactil tablet, it will help you sleep during the day." So I took one and I didn't wake up for about a day and a half. They were shocking but that was all they had in those days, it has improved a lot since. That hospital had thirteen hundred and fifty patients, six hundred nurses, three hundred male, three hundred female and it occupied about eighty acres I think. Quite a big hospital,

18:30 big old fashioned stone buildings; a prison ward for the rapists and murderers. Unfortunately a lot of aboriginals being there for tribal killing. Improved a lot since.

**Did it take a while for you to adjust to those conditions?**

It probably took a few months, once I got out of O ward and saw it was not just cutting fingernails and shaving people, I learnt to cut hair there too,

19:00 something I can still do. But once I got to the other wards with a different class of people .these were mainly chronic schizophrenics in that ward and you get to other wards and they were people with depression and neurosis and bipolar and Huntington's disease and then we had a whole block of mental

19:30 deficiency people, down syndrome, severely mentally retarded. People with big heads like watermelons and other defects.

**What was your particular interest across that spectrum?**

Just looking after people I think. The money was the first bait eighteen pound a week, yeah beaut, but then I got to like the work and I enjoyed going to work.

**What was it you enjoyed?**

20:00 Meeting people and the staff were generally pretty good. We used to go away shooting and fishing together on our days off, we had a real network going.

**And what about the study did you find that difficult?**

No I found it pretty easy, I topped the state in first year and then cruised through second and third and then I realised that trying to stay out of the army doing mental deficiency and I topped the state again there, and I enjoyed it, I got my teeth into it.

20:30 I loved the anatomy and physiology and psychiatry and psychology that was still a bit wishy washy to me, I couldn't understand it. The way a schizophrenic's brain works, it is not concrete, it is hard to describe and understand but I passed.

21:00 **So when did you first get a call from the army and how did that come?**

I was doing second year, just finished second year I was just turning twenty as per the requirement for the first intake and I got a notice. I didn't watch the draw on TV or anything like that or look at the numbers. I just got a notice saying, "You have been selected please come and meet the board." Or come and present yourself, whatever it was. That's all a bit vague.

21:30 I know it was a bit of a shock.

**It must have felt completely unfair too that you had to completely turn around your life?**

Didn't think of it that way, a part of me was thinking, "Gee this is going to be awkward, just got married at that time too, twenty, two mortgages, yeah we can handle two mortgages no problem, both getting

wages”.

**Why did you have two mortgages?**

Well I was twenty,

22:00 no money in the bank and the house I think might have been eight thousand pounds and one mortgage might have been for six and the other for two and the owner of the house was holding the mortgages. So it was really a great deal. Everything was happening at once then, getting married and the house and getting the house done up and

22:30 furnishing it and then the notice coming in, “What do we do now?” “Oh it will be a breeze, we will get out of it.” But then I didn’t and it really threw a spanner in the works and I thought, “Gee, two years, that’s a long time and even going into the army, going to Puckapunyal I was rebellious for the first two days until I was put into my place”. Then I realised I had two years to get in and cope with it, try and make the best of it,

23:00 try and get as much salary as you can which is pretty limiting. At recruit training I was probably two thirds of the way through it and they were casting around for officer material, and they put my name in and had the interview and they said, “Right are you interested in becoming an officer?” and I thought, “Well, officers get a lot more money than privates”. “Yeah I am interested, yeah, sure.”

23:30 And they said, “It is a six month course, you go away to Scheyville and come out a Second Lieutenant.” And I thought, “That’s all right, but we would have to be in the medical corps.” And they said, “No you would come out infantry.” So I said, “No, that’s no good. Not interested.” “Oh okay.”

**What had you heard about the Vietnam War leading up to them calling you up?**

Virtually nothing, I don’t remember I don’t recall remembering anything at that time. I probably heard it on the news

24:00 and read it in the paper but it didn’t affect me. No one I knew was there; I had no plans of going there. Had I been in the navy at that stage I would have been three years into a navy career I probably would have thought a lot about going there, popping into Vung Tau or whatever, I had no thoughts whatsoever, I didn’t know where it was.

**What did you think of war generally?**

24:30 I suppose the adventure still appealed, my great grandfather had been in the Boer War as an Englishman, grandfather had been at Gallipoli on day two, had tried to go away to World War II with his two sons but was posted to Darwin and kept there. My uncle flew Beaufighters, and another uncle in the navy, another

25:00 uncle through Borneo and Malaya and so on. A part of me wanted to go and see if I could go and cope, but the other part of me wanted to stay and be at home. I had basketball, spear fishing, a good job. A son,

**Newly married.**

Newly married, yeah, everything was great. And then two years away

25:30 just the other side of the country.

**Were there other men in the initial call up that were trying to do the same as you?**

There was only one other married in the sixty-four I knew of in our platoon .we had a platoon of sixty-four I think four huts of sixteen, I think there were only two of us who were married.

26:00 **So the first time you got called up did you do initial training at that point?**

No when I got called up, when my marble got picked, no I had to wait about eighteen months.

**So when the marble first got picked and you went into the office, what was the feeling in that office?**

I didn’t get to see any other fellows, just me, the interviewer and home again so I had no idea. I first met people going into the army at

26:30 Keswick barracks getting into a bus to go to the airport to fly to Puckapunyal. And the fellow sitting next to me was John Ackland who ended up in my battalion but I didn’t know at the time.

**So when they finally called you up the last time and you couldn’t get out of it anymore do you remember how you responded or how you dealt with it with your wife?**

She was very teary saying, “You promised you would never leave me.”

27:00 And all of this sort of thing. I said, “Well it is sort of out of my hands dear. That’s the way it is; we have got two years of this, we had better make the most of it. I will send money home, I will do haircuts and make some money and we will just make the most of it.” Her Dad had been in the war, my Dad had been

in the war, these things happen. "You have got the house and the car and

27:30 we will see how we go." But it was traumatic.

**So what happened from the airport into Puckapunyal can you tell us about that trip?**

Yes she saw me off at Keswick barracks all with our suitcase and civvies clothes and some with long hair. I had already had a crew cut thinking they are not going to give me an army haircut straight away.

28:00 Got down to the airport; I think we got into a DC3 or something, flew to a place called Mangalore, just outside Puckapunyal. This is all brand new; I had only ever flown once before as a twelve year old coming back from a holiday in Port Lincoln. Flew to Mangalore; I think we had sandwiches and a cup of tea on the plane, jumped in an army truck and drive to Puckapunyal, got out, all lined up on the road way and there was a sergeant and three or

28:30 four corporals there. And they weren't too bad to start with, but then they started yelling and carrying on and they said, "You can get limited amount of items out of your suitcase and then they will go into storage and you will see them again in ten weeks." So we could get our toothbrush and comb and shaving gear, stuff like that and not much else. Sports shorts and things we could get out, that was it all of the stuff that we thought we were going to use.

29:00 Then we were paraded at the store to get great coats and shorts and pants, all second hand stuff and boots and a housewife, which is a sewing and repair kit. Housewife? Yeah a whole bag full of stuff and you had to learn how to clean brass and spit polish boots and be on parade on time and I

29:30 thought, "Whoa, this is a bit rugged".

**You said you were a bit rebellious at first, how did you display that?**

I was walking around the parade ground, I don't know where I was going or what I was doing, I was walking around with my hands flopping at my side and this officer came up and he beckoned me over and I said, "Yeah what do you want?" He said, "Call me sir." And I said, "Sir."

30:00 It must have been my tone I think and he said, "Pick up two handfuls of gravel." It was a gravel parade ground. And I said, "What for?" He said, "Don't ask what for, just pick them up, you're in the army now and do what I tell you." Okay who is this mongrel, so I picked up two handfuls of gravel and he said, "That's how you march with your hands clenched like you have got two handfuls of gravel. I want you to march around this parade ground until I come out of the office and tell you to stop. "And I was just seething I was almost ready to punch him out and

30:30 I thought, "Well that's not going to go down too well". And as I was going around the parade ground I started thinking about things and I thought I will toe the line and play the game. A couple of days later I was in the dining room, in the mess which catered for about a thousand men and there were all of these dirty plates stacked up and they were stacked up about twenty

31:00 or thirty high and they were starting to wobble, and I was walking past and I grabbed them to stop them falling on the floor but the top ten or twelve slid off and broke on the floor and this corporal came over and said, "Better clean them up aye?" and I said, "I was just trying to stop them falling I am not cleaning the bloody things up." "Clean them up." "I am not cleaning them up." "Clean them up or I will put you on a charge" and I thought, "Here

31:30 we go again". "Right give us the broom, give us the shovel." So I just knuckled down from then and went carefully and quietly. And I just enjoyed the running and the jumping and the push ups and the shooting. In fact my shooting, I was in the top five or ten percent at the range. They had a bit of a competition then and luckily I missed out on the final of that otherwise I might have been just

32:00 infantry.

**Did the spear fishing help?**

Not really no.

**Had you fired a gun before?**

Yeah I had a 22, it was just a natural eye co-ordination thing.

**Did it occur to you early on that you might have to kill people or even the possibility that you might be killed yourself?**

Not early in training because I didn't even think about going to Vietnam I thought "We are in the army, we are just here to boost the

32:30 numbers in the army". There is only thirty thousand normally and with the war on and Malaya was still on I think and there was also the possibility of Israel and Palestine and Egypt, another flare up over there and we were talking about getting issued with camels and khakis rather than jungle greens so we sort of had a bit of an idea that we might go to the Middle East.

33:00 So we thought, "Oh well we are in the army now". Maybe when we were on the bayonet range and they

filled a big bag with straw and you put the rifle in and you pulled it out and en guard and yelled your head off, you thought, "Struth I hope I never have to stick one of these into a bloke". Probably be a very hard thing to do, but you probably thought about it then, the targets were sort of man shaped,

33:30 but they were just targets. It was probably later on at Canungra and places like that where you had blokes who had been to the war and come back and they were telling you that the Viet Cong have got better mines because they are bigger than ours and they have got glass and concrete and nails in them and they will kill you and maim you and so forth so you have got to be careful and you're thinking, "Well they are trying to kill us, and they are the enemy",

34:00 and you sort of develop a latent hatred of them because they were killing our blokes. One of our corporals there had been wounded, he didn't tell us how or why but we had heard that he had been wounded and that's why he was a bit grumpy all of the time.

#### **How would a day unfold at Puckapunyal?**

I think about half an hour before dawn, it was a cold place too in winter; either

34:30 a bugle blows or someone bangs on the side of your hut, "Everyone out of bed, wakey, wakey, hands off snakey." Things like that, the old army sayings, you start to learn and you start to use them yourself. No sweat, pretty cool and it gets into you. You get out of bed and you have got to take the bottom sheet off your bed and get dressed and go out on parade. You have got to number off and they count you, you go back to your hut make your bed and have a shave,

35:00 and then you're on parade again I think .Go to the mess hall come back, clean up have an inspection and then you might do a five mile run. Come back, have a cup of tea, go to the shooting range, run out there, run back. Have lunch; eat as much as you can. You chock yourself, how much you can eat, there is bread and jam there after your main meal, it is average sort of food but to keep your fuel up you do.

35:30 And everyone puts on weight and muscle and grows in height and expands their chest and things you wouldn't think, you think you're pretty fit when you go in but your not. And the crew cut I got, about day two or three the sergeant was walking up and down the lines as we were on parade with a pad and he would be behind you and he would tap you on the shoulder, "Haircut, haircut." And he got to me and I thought, "Well he won't get me." and he got to me and he said, "Am I hurting you soldier?" and I said, "No sir." And he said, "Am I hurting you now?" And I said, "No sir."

36:00 "Am I hurting you now?" And I said, "No sir." And he said, "Well I should I am standing on your hair, get a haircut it is too long." And I thought, "Bloody hell another one". And it was about that long, so down for a haircut. Then he said, "Some of you blokes didn't get a hair cut yesterday, why not?" and we said, "The barber was too busy." And he said, "Anyone here cut hair?" and I said, "I do." And so he said, "You can charge them and a

36:30 certain amount has got to go into platoon funds and you can do them in the platoon office or your barracks." And I thought, "I am not going there, that's where the officer and the sergeant hang out". So I did three or four every night and I bought some electric clippers two bob, twenty cents a haircut. So it supplemented my income. So we would come back for lunch and in the afternoon there might be lectures on different things

37:00 or a range thing. Lots of marching up and down, and drills and then after the evening meal there would be more lectures until about nine o'clock at night and then get back to your barracks, clean your brass, clean your gear and get into bed and be asleep in ten seconds.

#### **What sort of lectures did you have?**

All army stuff.

37:30 Parts of the rifle, stoppages, how a grenade works, all pretty vague really, I didn't pay much attention.

#### **Did many of the blokes because that was the national service call up....?**

All nashos [national servicemen] there, how to use a compass, read maps.

#### **Did you notice anyone not coping with the army environment?**

38:00 There was a bloke in another hut; we had sixteen in each hut. One bloke in another hut they nicknamed him Granny I think and he wasn't coping, he was having a hard time and they gave him a hard time but he passed. We only had one bloke fail the course and that's because he broke both of his arms. A lot of our exercises were going up ropes and across and down and he got half way across and he was about three metres off the ground and he fell and landed on his hands and broke both of his wrists and so he got

38:30 delayed into the next call up. He eventually got through but I think everybody passed physically and psychologically.

#### **And did you find it easy to make friends?**

I had a group of friends there, none of whom I kept on with afterwards because we all went to different units. A block of them would have went to infantry and I think I was the only one from that platoon

- 39:00 that I remember going to medical. Others went to catering and artillery and signals and so on. I did bump into them from time to time, three or four of them were killed from the sixty-four in Vietnam but out of that sixty-four probably only twenty went to Vietnam, the rest would have stayed in Australia and made up the numbers.
- Some of the officers seemed to be a bit frustrating in the beginning the way they treated you and made you do stuff, what about some of the blokes were they annoying as well?**
- 39:30 Yes the officer we had was called Kent and he said, "My name is Kent spelt with an E." So we promptly gave him another nickname, he was just a mongrel, he had a personality problem. The sergeant was quite nice, a couple of the corporals were quite good, a couple of them were mongrels, but the blokes generally were pretty good. We were in it for the two years and we all helped each other
- 40:00 pretty well. My hut, I had a cubicle with four in it, there was four in each cubicle. There was a little fat bloke in the next one, Johnny Ainsworth and Neville During and another bloke over there, I think I was the only one out of those that went to Vietnam. We used to help each other clean the gear and get the hut tidy and all of that and have a few beers together, some of them used to hit the beer pretty hard but I wasn't a heavy drinker,
- 40:30 I had a few beers and I would be.
- 40:35 End of tape

## Tape 3

- 00:30 **Can you tell us that story you were going to tell us about the first camp?**
- Oh Puckapunyal? Our first overnight camp out at Puckapunyal, having learnt how to put a tent up and so on, we marched a couple of kilometres out of camp and it was just this barren area full of small shrubs and so on. It was raining and sleeting and cold and miserable, muddy. We put our tents
- 01:00 up after a fashion and dug little trenches around them which didn't really work and most of the tents filled up with water. And when we did dig we found that we had camped on some foul ground, which we didn't realise. That's where the previous camp or some camp back had buried all of their rubbish and shit pit and urinal and so on; we camped smack bang on top of that. Our leader decided we weren't going
- 01:30 to stop there, So he said, "Pack up the gear we will go back to camp." And we thought, "Gee this is all right". So we went back to camp and did almost the same thing a couple of months later at Healesville, medical corps training, training for Vietnam, usually fairly hot. They decided to do a camp out to test how we could put a tent up and what have you. So they took us up into the foothills of Mount Buffalo or Mount Buller, somewhere down that way, and it started to snow.
- 02:00 So we were camping in the snow preparing for Vietnam. The meal came out in the jeep and it was a hot box with stew and stuff and it was quite nice and ice cream and fruit salad from memory. And we were freezing cold and it was just a mongrel thing we thought, we marched back to camp next day and thought, "Gee this is great training".
- That camp out at Puckapunyal was there anything you could do when you realised where you were?**
- 02:30 Only move to non foul ground which is probably hard to find in the middle of the night when we didn't have torches and so on. We were just placed on a bit of ground and told, "Dig in."
- It must have been awful?**
- Mmm. Back to the relative comfort of the hut and then you got back on leave from the hut and it is a palace, back into your own bed with a soft mattress and sheets
- 03:00 and fluffy blankets and so on, soft pillows. You don't realise it until you have experienced it. Although camping out in Vietnam was another thing all together.
- You hadn't been eager to get into the army,**
- No.
- And when you first started at Puckapunyal you said you were a bit rebellious, was there a point where you started enjoying it and thinking this is okay?**
- There were lots of times; I enjoyed the physical side, getting fit, playing basketball,
- 03:30 shooting, camping out. I enjoyed camping out when it was not on foul ground, when it is done properly. Getting rations, there was a bit of excitement, what can you do with a ration pack, can you make it

edible that sort of thing.

**How would you go about making it edible?**

Different mixtures, putting the beef and stuff with

04:00 I forget what you got. There was a little tin of cheese, little tin of vegemite, a toothpaste tube with jam in it, dry biscuits which were very hard, cereal block which you were meant to soak to have for breakfast, but I used to nibble on mainly, I found that quite pleasant. Packet of rice, packet of curry powder, I wasn't into curry back in those days I didn't use it. But you used to mix a bit of vegemite in with the beef

04:30 and boost it up a bit. Or stuff you could buy separately.

**And were you communicating with your wife while you were there, were you writing?**

This is Puckapunyal?

**Yes.**

The army canteen used to have like an aerogram, with comical tick sheets on it, yesterday I did

05:00 a run and tonight I am doing this and that on the range, sort of a humorous thing to send with a bit of the bottom to write a letter on it so I used to keep regular contact.

**And how was she coping with you being away?**

Pretty hard, she had the young baby and a lot less money than we had before, she wasn't working, and she still had to run the house and the car and two mortgages. She didn't say it was too tough,

05:30 just that it was difficult and she was getting by, just. And her family were good.

**How did you find being away from her and your young child?**

The only time I could think about them was when I was in bed at night, during the day you had to concentrate on your drills. I remember one day we were doing this special marching technique, "Left right left right, about turn on the march and this manoeuvre." And I was daydreaming and I went the wrong way, and the other

06:00 sixty-three blokes went the other way. And the corporal bawled me out, "What do you think you're doing dickhead?" All of that, "Yes corporal." He said, "What were you doing?" I said, "I was daydreaming, I lost track of where I was." And he said, "Well you can keep your daydreaming for later on. Run over to the sergeant over there" he was a couple of hundred yards away "and tell him what's going on and then you can come back and get back into it again." Right. So you have stay switched on when you're doing all of

06:30 this stuff and leave your daydreaming for other times.

**I wanted to ask you a little bit more about, when you were first called up from the ballot and you actually deferred being called up how did you go about doing that?**

I went into the recruiting office...

**Yeah you mentioned that. Was it easy to defer?**

Apparently I didn't have to force them or anything. I just said, "I am doing psychiatric nursing,

07:00 I have got third year to go and I want to do mental deficiency." And they said, "How long is that going to take?" and I said, "Well it should be finished by April '67." And they said, "Okay."

**Were you hoping that you would be able to get out of it all together?**

Ninety-nine percent of me was hoping to get out but a small part of me was saying, "Gee it would be an adventure, this is the navy you missed out on. You can travel,

07:30 be with the blokes." Not go to war necessarily but be in the forces. Part of my growing up maturing, making me complete I suppose.

**So at Puckapunyal was there a point where you would select where you were going from there or was there a choice about what would be happening to you?**

You put your three preferences in

08:00 and a lot of people said, "We are all going to get infantry." And I thought, "Strewth". But I put medical, catering and infantry and got medical, got my first choice.

**And from there you went to Healesville, can you tell us about what happened there?**

Actually my wife drove over with her mother and baby who was by then about four and a half months old and one of her cousins,

08:30 she wanted to come on the trip; all in a Volkswagen. They drove over and I was standing at the gate of Puckapunyal with my duffle bag waiting to go to Healesville and I am waiting and waiting and they weren't showing up and everyone else is leaving. I thought, "This is good, finally they turned up". They got lost and then we didn't know the way to Healesville, got a bit lost going down there, and I said, "Look sergeant" or, "Look sir." Whoever was there, "My wife has driven over from Adelaide and I

09:00 would like a few days to spend with them if that's all right?" and he said, "No, Healesville; we start tomorrow morning. But what you can do, you can billet out of camp so long as you're here for parade at eight o'clock in the morning.," Or whatever time it was. And I said, "Strewth, I was hoping for a few days off." And he said, "No, but what you can do, you can get leave each evening and be back unless you're on duty." So I said, "Right oh". So we had to get a cheap boarding house

09:30 in Healesville town and it was wonderful, having a night there with her and the others in another room. Got back to camp in the morning and they tootled around and looked around the place during the day and I did my running and jumping and my medical stuff.

**Can you describe the set up at Healesville for us?**

Healesville had a big brick building that had been there for some time; that was the admin

10:00 area and at the back was the mess, and at the front I think they called it the fairway was all of these rows of tents. That's where we used to live, quite cool in the mountains and a lot of bush around. The town was probably five minutes away.

**How did the training change for you from Puckapunyal to Healesville?**

10:30 Did very little shooting and I think the shooting we did was with Owen machine guns which were pretty pathetic; they spit bullets out really slowly. A reasonable amount of running and fitness things but no where near as much as Puckapunyal. But mostly lectures and practical demonstrations on anatomy and physiology, making stretchers,

11:00 how to carry, getting over obstacles with stretchers. How to bandage and a fair bit of that. We expected to be dealing with casualties. For me it was pretty boring because I just finished my nursing, four years of it and so the anat [anatomy] and phys [physiology] was pretty tedious, and I wanted to get on and

11:30 start to earn some more money.

**At this point did you have the expectation that you would go to Vietnam?**

It was starting to sink in about there because I think the instructors then were saying, "A certain amount of you will be going." Especially medical people, because when they signed me on they said, "We are very short of medics and it really wouldn't matter if you had one leg and one arm you would probably still go in."

12:00 **And what were your thoughts of that?**

I think at that stage I was beginning to think I would work at the hospital, that won't be too bad, it won't be in the action and it won't be dangerous.

**Were you keen to go? Keen to participate in that?**

I guess I was; adventure I think. Travel overseas and see different sights and people and go over with mates. We were developing

12:30 a really good group of mates there.

**So were they mates you had known in Puckapunyal?**

No met there.

**Okay can you tell us about that?**

Best mate is Johnny Hector nicknames Hairy Legs, I talked to him on the phone the other night; he came to Vietnam with our group a couple of months ago.

13:00 I met him there, he left Healesville after ten weeks and went to Puckapunyal to become a medic there in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], I went up to Wacol in Queensland and in about August September maybe, '68, I had been in Vietnam a couple of months and I was down visiting the hospital in Vung Tau from Nui Dat

13:30 and I bumped into him coming around the corner of a building. I had written a couple of letters to him and he had written back but it had sort of died out and we met each other again and boom it flowered again, our friendship. We went and had a few beers that evening. And he would write to me when I was in the bush about any of my casualties, how they were progressing. And I would visit him whenever I could get down there, about three or four times in nine months,

14:00 but we would get on the grog [alcohol] together. I remember a funny thing happened at Healesville, he

had false teeth, he still has actually and he used them in Vietnam recently to frighten some kids. We had four man tents at Healesville and out the front was a big steel bucket with water in it in case your tent caught fire, you could get the bucket of water and go wooshka

14:30 and put the fire out. Well John used to go and clean his teeth in the fire bucket each night and he had been doing this for some time and a bloke saw him there and said, "What are you doing there?" and he said, "I am cleaning my teeth." And he said, "That's the bucket I piss in" So there was a bit of a fight then, I remember that one.

**How did you two first become friends?**

At Healesville.

**But how did you?**

I think he was either in the same tent or

15:00 nearby, we both wore glasses and probably said, "Gday mate how are you going? Where are you from?" And he was from Jamestown in South Australia and I was from Adelaide, South Australia. "Yeah right oh." And we were probably on picket a couple of times together, we used to do these duties at night roaming around the camp seeing that the camp didn't catch fire and pinching [stealing] tucker [food] out of the kitchen, things like that.

**How did he earn his nickname?**

15:30 He was very skinny and he did have hairy legs.

**Did you have a nickname?**

Sam. My mother-in-law used to call me Sam I don't know why but her nickname was Daisy, she gave me this nickname and at Puckapunyal when I met this little fat guy in the bed next to me he said, "Hello I am Johnny Ainsworth." And I said, "Hello I am Wayne,

16:00 Sam Brown." I thought, "This sounds a bit more masculine, I never liked the name Wayne". So Sam stuck from then, I told him about it and everyone started to call me Sam and in the army the officers have a Sam Brown belt and everyone now thinks that's where it relates, and I just say, "Yeah right oh."

**So how long were in Healesville?**

I think it was another ten weeks.

16:30 Ten weeks at Puckapunyal and ten weeks at Healesville and with Johnny Hector we came back for a couple of weekend leaves and we drove home. He had a car and we drove home. Actually we had the Volkswagen and it broke a crank shaft while my wife and the others were there and that was a big drama, we had no money and it was going to cost two or three hundred dollars, big dramas and we had to pay it off and they caught the train home and

17:00 so I didn't see much of them, and I was stuck back there and finally the car was fixed, paid it off and I drove it home, I think I drove Johnny home and then came back in his car and did a couple of trips. Puckapunyal to Adelaide on Friday night which is about nine hundred kilometres I think and then you would have Saturday and Sunday at home and drive back Sunday night to be there for parade Monday morning and be like a bit of chewed string, a bit frazzled.

17:30 Yeah so we got to know each other on those excursions. And he ended up being best man at our wedding when I remarried and has been in contact ever since.

**How were the officers in Healesville?**

In the main pretty old fashioned, the medical information was pretty stale, World War II stuff as were the dressings and the equipment. Pretty antiquated, but they were pretty friendly,

18:00 they were pretty soft on us. Medical was a lot different from recruit training and from infantry I think.

**In what sense was it antiquated?**

Just old fashioned, they were teaching us to sponge bath on these stretchers that looked like they came out of the arc. Having just done what I thought was reasonably modern nursing they were still way back in their techniques.

**Can you think of**

18:30 **any other examples of things that were a bit old fashioned?**

No I can't.

**What about the equipment they were using?**

Well all of the shell dressing we were doing was World War II dressing and before. And that continued with supplies we got in Vietnam we would get a shell dressing with 1942 marked on it. And you would open it up and it would have a

19:00 rusty safety pin in it and you would think what's going on here? And that went right through, and the Owen guns we were using they were from New Guinea the campaign there and a couple of times when they did use them in Vietnam, early in the piece, apparently a couple of times they were shooting at the enemy and they were almost bouncing off the enemy they were that underpowered. And they were using stale ammunition and the gun powder had lost its oomph.

19:30 Hit this bloke with lots of shots and he shook himself and kept on running. Then we got the SLR and Armalite and modern equipment.

**So at Healesville having done your nursing and that, was there anything you really feel you learn there that was significant?**

How to make a stretcher and how to carry people and how to bandage wounds.

20:00 I think it was at Healesville where they had a technique where they made up mock wounds out of plastic and tomato sauce to look like blood and special technique that I can't, muselage I think might be the name for it. They would have these mock wounds and if they didn't have that they would have a piece of paper there saying, "This bloke has got a head wound, a sucking chest wound and a through and through wound of the left femur." And you would get that and think, "Right what have I got to do; what's the priority?" And

20:30 that was good training in prioritising wound treatments and that helped.

**Who were the patients at Healesville?**

We were.

**So you all played patients and medic?**

And the training staff.

**How did that work?**

Good. A bit of fun and a bit of serious side too. You actually did pick up the techniques and you filed them away until you needed them in a battle situation.

21:00 **So from Healesville you were posted to Wacol?**

You had another request list there and you could put down where you wanted to go, so I put Keswick which was only about three kilometres from my home. I thought, "That will be nice, I will be able to go home every night". And I got it through and the result was Wacol just out of Brisbane, that's a long way away. And so we hopped on a train, I think we took

21:30 two days to get up there, a day in Sydney hopped on the train again overnight, all sit up seats of course, no sleepers or anything like that so blokes were sleeping in the luggage racks and on the floor. Having a few beers, peeing in them and throwing them out the window.

**What were your thoughts about being sent to Wacol?**

I thought, "I am getting sent further away from home here, this is not good but I will wait and see until I get there what I can do about it".

22:00 See if my wife can come up and billet out or something, because at that stage I was a qualified medic and going to a unit, so I was improving my status.

**So when you finished at Healesville you qualified as a medic?**

Yeah.

**Were the other medics, were they also persons who had trained in medicine?**

Some were, Johnny Hector he was a first aid officer in St Johns so that's why he got into medical corps and he wore glasses. A lot of

22:30 them were in that area, others of them were misfits and people that other units didn't want. Yeah if you didn't fit any of the criteria for artillery, sigs [signals], if you were a little bit brain dead too they would put you in meds [medics], so we had some real drop kicks.

**So medics was the place they sent those people?**

The rejects.

**And how did they cope?**

23:00 Well they got through but they probably didn't get to Vietnam. They probably got a job in an RAP somewhere, or in a store field ambulance just making up the numbers. Painting the rocks white or raking up the leaves.

**So in some ways medics was the place to put people they didn't want?**

It used to be.

**How did the other blokes feel about that?**

We thought, "Gee, we're here because we're medically trained and they're here because nobody wants

23:30 them"; we coped with it okay.

**Did you all get along okay?**

Yeah. They sort of developed their group and we developed ours and you would only intermingle at times.

**So there was some division between those people?**

Yeah and that's where we came across our first regulars there too and some of them were real dropkicks.

**What do you mean?**

Some were on the wrong side of the

24:00 law and they were given a choice, go to gaol or go into the army and of low intellect, wouldn't work in an iron lung. If they put them in the medical corps someone will find work for them.

**So having such a mixture of people in the medics how did that work in the training system?**

It didn't bother us, we just did our training and they were along for the ride

24:30 and I guess they were sorted by the administration as being suitable or not suitable for different roles. They would have sorted a whole bunch of us out to go to Wacol to be replacements to go to Vung Tau hospital.

**Was there conflicts between the different groups of people?**

Only ever one fight the last night there we had a few drinks, and one bloke got a bit punchy and they ended up throwing him in a big...there was a big water tank, and it was freezing, almost ice on top.

25:00 They threw him in there and he didn't like it very much and he came out even punchier knocking a few people around and we ended up having to wrestle him to the ground and just sit on him, several of us. He went to Vietnam. He just lost the plot, a few drinks, thrown in the tank and whoa agro [aggression].

**What did you do for fun during that time in Healesville?**

It is only a little town there and when

25:30 we knocked off a few of us would drive into town and get toasted cheese and tomato sandwiches at the café, and milkshakes. That was a fun night out; there was nothing to do there really. One weekend we went to Adelaide and I bought an electric jug and took it back to camp, you're not supposed to eat or drink in the lines, but we had this electric jug and we would pull out the light socket, plug in the electric jug heat it up, get some

26:00 Bovril cubes and cake and biscuits and bread and jam or something and have a real feed up. And we were doing this every night to supplement the army food and sergeant did the patrol one night. "Get rid of it, you are not allowed to have it in the lines, you attract vermin." So that was the end of that. Really there was nothing to do., we probably had night lectures from time to time.

26:30 You just made your own fun. People would play cards or write home, clean their gear, get into bed. At night you would roll the flaps of the tent down and in the morning you had to roll them up and tie them with these little ropes that were always too short and it was freezing and your hands would freeze on the things and you would have to do it a few times before you could finally get it. That was the worst part about Puckapunyal and you would go on parade of a morning and there would be frost everywhere and people would faint on parade from

27:00 the cold, blood circulation. Like people on a hot day faint, on a really cold day they crash and they would smash their face on the ground and they would trot out with a stretcher, roll them on and take them back to the tent. Sometimes I used to feel myself getting a bit swimmy and I would start wriggling my toes and moving around and getting the blood going a bit. And then they would say, "Right oh, about turn quick march". And you would just make it and think, "God now I know what those

27:30 blokes are going through". But the discipline of just not saying, "I feel crook [sick] I have got to go and lie down." They would bong.

**That was at Puckapunyal?**

No Healesville.

**Sorry you said Puckapunyal, Healesville as well?**

Yeah.

**And the army just allowed that to happen?**

Yeah there's another one, cart them off.

**And how long would it take for them to recover from that?**

28:00 Not long, once they were lying down the blood would even out and put a couple of blankets on them, wake them up and give them a cup of tea and they would be right apart from their smashed in face or bruised shoulder whatever they landed on.

**In terms of the medical training you received there, what were you expecting if you did go to Vietnam in terms of what were you expecting to treat?**

I was expecting I think at that

28:30 stage to go to the hospital and treat bullet wounds and so forth, not really having seen any of them and just do more medical work and take it as it comes.

**What about other diseases, were you taught at that stage about malaria and VD [Venereal Disease]?**

We probably were, but that's gone off the screen.

**That's okay so you were sent to Wacol can you tell us what happened when you arrived at Wacol?**

29:00 From the freezing cold at Healesville at Wacol and unseasonably cyclone was around and there were floods all around and it was humid and wet and hot. And we were raking leaves, painting the rocks white, basically wasting time marching, running, doing nothing that I can recall was constructive.

29:30 No more training that I can recall until some of us were choofed off [sent to] to 1 Mill Hospital at Yeronga to work in the army hospital there. And did that for a little while and they must have found me unsuitable or something because then I was sent back to Wacol and made into a...might have been made into a corporal before that. Got to Wacol was there a couple of months

30:00 and I was called into the office and the captain said, "Come in Corporal Brown." And I said, "I am Private Brown sir." "Come in Corporal Brown take a seat." "I am Private Brown Sir." And he said, "No you're Corporal Brown as from tomorrow; when you have sewn your stripes on you will be Corporal Brown." And I said, "Well, what does all of this mean?" And he said, "Well it means you have to be a bit more responsible around the place; you're twenty-two,

30:30 you're older than the others, you're medically trained, you seem mature". "Thank you." "You are going to have to do night duties and so on and pickets, NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] duties." I thought, "Strewth that means I am going to have to do [tell on] my mates in, I am not going to enjoy this very much". And I thought, "I won't do them in; anyway, I will just go through the motions". And he said, "It means

31:00 a small pay increase." Oh that's nice. So I was temporary corporal at eight months and remained so until the end of the two years with never any training in the job. Which was a shame because I flew by the seat of my pants as a corporal.

**So you mean no training as a NCO, no specific training?**

How to drill people, how to charge people, nothing; whereas it is quite an involved course

31:30 apparently on how to conduct yourself.

**Did you ever speak to anyone in the army about getting any training?**

No. I should have but I didn't think of it at the time, I thought later they should have trained me, but it was too late then I was already doing the job. So I was made a corporal and then I went to the hospital for a while and then I was posted for a brief time to an artillery unit to run their regimental aid post while their

32:00 sergeant was away. That was interesting being my own boss. There were only injections to do there and a few maintenance things.

**Where was that?**

Somewhere in Brisbane I don't remember where, might have even been Enoggera, and just after that I went back to Wacol and they said, "Pack your bags you're going to 4 Battalion." And this is when I was starting to look at the list every day to see who was next to go to Vung Tau

32:30 in Vietnam. We were all expecting to trickle feed that system. The medical orderlies or medical assistants. I was a medical assistant which was a slightly higher qualification. Orderlies did the ordinary work and the assistants did the more involved procedures. And they said, "Right oh you're going off to 4

RAR." And I thought, "Oh yeah this will be for a couple of

33:00 weeks or whatever, as it has been with these other units". And I got there and found they were gearing up for Vietnam .and the doctor there said to me, "We are gearing up for Vietnam and I have got to teach you. What don't you know?" And I said, "Well I have been to Healesville, I am a psyche nurse and what have you." And I think a few weeks later when we were on one of our exercises out at Tin Can Bay he said, "Do you know how to suture?" and I said, "No." And we had a patient there with a big cut on his wrist and he said, "Right I am going to teach you now." And I thought, "He is going to show me now". He said,

33:30 "No you're going to do it and I am going to talk you through it." Didn't know how the bloke felt about it but so I started sticking needles into the margins of the wound to anaesthetise it, the needle already had the black thread on it so it was a needle attached and black silk. Stitched him up and he showed me how to do the knots with the forceps and pull the wound together without pulling them too tight and ripping it apart.

34:00 That's a bit of fun. So suddenly I was at 4 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] training for Vietnam.

**Where was 4 RAR based?**

In Enoggera.

**Had your family been able to come to Brisbane?**

Yes just after I arrived at Wacol I asked for permission to live out and it was given and my wife and son flew up to Brisbane and I met them.

34:30 We stayed with her cousin in Brisbane for a couple of nights and then got a flat in Highgate Hill. I used to commute every day out to Wacol. Things were getting a bit strained between us then and she decided after a couple of weeks I think it was, not long, she decided to go back to Adelaide and so I went back to Wacol.

**How much of the strain do you think was due to you being in the army?**

35:00 Oh most of it. The pressure of me being away, loneliness, lack of money, lack of support with a child and she probably thought I was having a good time, but I would rather have been at home.

**So your being in the army in your opinion broke up that family?**

Mmm.

**And at the time what were your**

35:30 **thoughts on that that your relationship with your wife was breaking down because of your army experience?**

Yeah. I guess I was in a daze and just went from day to day hoping it would improve and that she might come back again. She might get home and think, "Well that's not right, I should be up there". But things were happening up here too and I was choofed out to 4 RAR and ready for Vietnam and so there

36:00 was really no point her coming back again only for a short time only to go back to Adelaide. Airfares and things we couldn't afford. I think I was getting about forty-four dollars a week in the army and I had been getting over sixty dollars as a nurse so there was a fair gap there and a child and she wasn't working.

**How did it affect you as a father?**

36:30 Well I didn't feel like a father. The only time I was on leave it was brilliant, holding his hand and carrying him around and changing a nappy and wheeling the pram and feeling ten feet tall, feeling great. He was a great little boy Stuart, but then to be away. I used to write regularly and phone up but that's not the same as

37:00 being there. Sharing the growing up. That's probably why to this day I have only seen him once for a couple of days when I rediscovered him again in about 1996; he has preferred to stay with the mother and that side of the family.

**One thing I didn't ask you, what was the set up at Wacol?**

37:30 Wacol was wooden huts, wooden and fibro I think, pretty basic. The only good thing was we had a big drying room with fans and heaters to dry them after you had washed them. A big mess hall, admin block, just a cluster of little buildings and a bitumen parade ground. And

38:00 when I was made corporal I had my own room, sort of my own room I had a wall about five feet high separating it from the next bloke.

**So how did you enjoy that when you were made corporal?**

Oh that was a bonus, a bit of your own space. And two hooks, Corporal Brown it is a bit of an ego boost.

**You had celebrated your twenty-first birthday somewhere along the line?**

38:30 That's prior to going into the army and I was on night shift in the hospital. Birthdays don't mean a great deal to me and twenty-first was just another dot, there was no key to the door or anything. I was married and on night shift. We probably had a party and a cake or something I don't remember.

**So it was before you went in the army?**

Yes I went in the army aged twenty-two.

39:00 **So when you got to 4 RAR what did you observe about what they were doing in terms of preparing to go to Vietnam?**

Yes well firstly they had acquired us two new medics, Daryl Farry, to replace the two duds they had got rid of. Apparently one guy was out on exercise and an officer had broken his ankle and this fellow examined him and said, "No its not broken you can keep walking on it sir." And so they got rid of him, I don't know what the other fellow did.

39:30 Doc Lewis was only a new young doctor but he was teaching us about malaria and bandaging and suturing and getting equipment together and boxing it up to go over on the ship. And I think about sixty-five percent of the unit were nashos, so we had a fair filling of nashos and the regulars mostly had come back from Malaya and so

40:00 they were veterans. I think a lot of them were under the impression that Vietnam was going to be like Malaya, I think they had one bloke killed from a tree falling on him, not a lot of action, couple of minor contacts. But it took a while to get in there being the new medic, all of these blokes had trained together right from recruit training,

40:30 infantry training and then to 4 RAR; that was their third move where as it was about my fifth or sixth move. I got there.

**I will pause there.**

40:47 **End of tape**

## **Tape 4**

00:30 **Can you tell us that story?**

Arriving at Enoggera with my suitcase I guess, my army bag, whatever we had. Arrived at the RAP, introduced to the doctor, Doc Lewis and the other RAP staff, and all of the other RAP staff except for Daryl Farry who apparently arrived there with me but I can't recall that. Darryl and I were the only two nashos, the rest of the medics were regs [regular army] and they looked like regs,

01:00 pretty dodgy looking lot. But one of the said to me, "Where are you from?" and I said, "I have just come over from Wacol." "Oh yeah are you nasho or regular?" I said, "Nasho." he said, "How long have you been in the army?" And I said, whatever it was, and he said, "How long have you had those?" and I said, "I got there at eight months." And I said, "I took nine bloody years to get mine."

01:30 And I said, "That sort of figures." Anyway met the blokes and the bloke I was eventually to replace, Don Leccie and Sludge Swails the driver a guy who had narrow shoulders, big hips and a big jelly belly and he said, "My nickname is Sludge. "And he had three or four teeth missing and I thought, "Well that's a really suitable nickname, Sludge". I never did find out what his real name was,

02:00 and I haven't seen him since Vietnam. Anyway we had our bags there and they said, "You're in the block over there third room from the end there is a spare bed under the window and you're in there with a driver and a couple of cooks". I was in with the odds and sods, so I was in a room with three other blokes and I get up there and I open the door and there is this soldier, an

02:30 infantier, having sex with an aboriginal lady on the bed that I was allocated, and it was just the rubber mattress, no pillows or anything. And he said, "Won't be long mate." "Oh right oh." So I just backed out and waited outside and those two wandered off and I thought, "Bloody hell, it is slack in this camp", so I got organised there.

**Who was that soldier? I don't mean by name but his position?**

He ended up in a company I took over later on,

03:00 just an infantier. A private.

**Was that standard behaviour there at Enoggera?**

Pretty well if you could get away with it. I mean they used to sneak grog into the lines and people into the lines and so on. But that was in the days where Brisbane had hotels where they used to have the

raffle on the Friday night and whoever won the raffle won the

- 03:30 aboriginal lady to go away with. It was pretty rough and pretty bad. I heard about this all later, but I had a first hand experience there that day. So I am in 4 RAR and me head is spinning, I am in the RAP, the camp is pretty big, there is probably eight hundred blokes there all training to go to Vietnam, and they're all infantry and they're tough. Infantry is pretty
- 04:00 macho and I am in with two cooks and a mechanic. Anyway I made friends with this mechanic and we went out and had a few drinks a few times. The cooks were quite nice and I would go to the RAP and do my work and do a few duties and the worst part of having no training being a corporal, I was duty corporal for the whole camp on a Sunday, might have been for a whole weekend.
- 04:30 I was duty corporal and I had to go around and check all of the lines, walk through all of the lines, there was a bloke lying on his bed drinking beer out of tallies and he had three or four empties on his locker next to him and I said, "You had better get rid of them mate, I am coming around again in an hour, they had better be gone." I wasn't going to charge him or anything, I was pretty soft. Anyway I come around again in an hour and there is three or four more empties there and he is still going, so I said, "Right oh." And I went back to the guard house and I said, "Right oh, you blokes we have got to
- 05:00 go back and lock this fellow up." And I thought, "Am I doing the right thing?" I didn't know who to go to or anything, I was it. So I got the blokes up there, they got him off the bed and took him downstairs into the guard house, locked him up. And come Monday morning this other corporal came up and said, "Did you lock that bloke up?" and I said, "Yeah." And he said, "You have got to charge him now." And I said, "How do I charge him? I am a corporal I have had no training whatsoever.
- 05:30 Someone is going to have to tell me and show me what to do." "Oh bloody hell." I said, "I am a medic, medic corporal and you put me in charge of the whole camp for the weekend, this bloke has been on the grog up there," and so on, so he showed me what to do and I filled out the paperwork and put it in and apparently this bloke had a lot of charges pending and he just wanted to get out of the army, he just didn't want to be there. He was a regular.
- 06:00 So they dishonourably discharged him and I didn't have to get up and give evidence or anything; they just read through it and said, "Get rid of him." And I thought, "Blimey Charlie". So that was a bit of a drama which I have only just recalled.

**Was it a bit stressful to be in a position like that and not know?**

Very. Gradually I settled into the RAP there and we had our morning sick parades.

**What was a morning sick parade?**

- 06:30 Oh probably six or seven in the morning you get all of these blokes lined up with coughs and colds and different ailments and even social diseases. I don't remember any at Enoggera but there probably were all sorts.

**So at six o'clock in the morning you had a parade?**

Yeah and all of the medics would be there and the doctor would see them and say, "Right oh give this bloke two aspirin and some gargle." or "Treat this blokes rash with this."

- 07:00 and we get a treatment card and get them out there and do it and come back tomorrow, and a lot of it would be maintenance, come back day after day. Tinea and stuff like that.

**What were your other duties there at Enoggera?**

That was it.

**Only in the morning?**

Well you were there all day, probably A lot of blank spaces. Getting gear ready, cleaning up, sterilising stuff, unpacking syringes and stocking cupboards,

- 07:30 chit chat with the doctor about different things.

**Did you have any more infantry training?**

Oh yeah and that too, that would have taken some time. While we were there we had a camp for a couple of weeks I think at Tin Can Bay so we had to prepare for that, get all of the medical stuff ready, do the camp, learn how to suture up there, come back, unpack, clean all of the gear. And we did a camp at Shoalwater Bay; a couple of weeks. We

- 08:00 tested different treatments for sandfly bites over there, none of them worked. We had experimental groups A B C and D and we documented them all, being medical staging, and I think they were all about the same.

**What were the camps like?**

Oh you were in tents, you had your own tents and you dug your own slip, like army battle conditions, you dug your own sleeping pit about

08:30 two metres long, half a metre deep, half a metre wide, put your little tent shelter over the top your hootchie. Someone would dig toilet pits, rubbish pits and headquarters would have their signals areas and so on. Set it up like a mock camp. They would do drills and ambushes and mock camp. And they would do drills and ambushes and demonstrations. The regular people there would fire off rounds and artillery so we got used to the sounds of them.

09:00 And at night the flares would go up and make it into bright daylight and they would show you a patrol out a couple of hundred metres away and you would see them moving in the light and then they would show you them stationary, and you would have difficulty seeing them, or laying on the ground where you couldn't see them at all. So things that you needed to know to preserve your life.

09:30 And a camp at Canungra. All of this took slabs of time and in between you would go out to the range or at the RAP we would have injection parades, six hundred blokes lined up to give injections to, two in that arm and one in that arm and take blood, this is all at the one time. We had blokes flaking out, multiple inoculations.

**What were the inoculations for?**

Tetanus, plague one and two,

10:00 and a few others that escape me at the moment.

**And you did a camp at Canungra as well; what was that like?**

I found it pretty easy, relatively easy, I mean it was still tough, you were under combat conditions, digging a pit every night and running around and getting fired on and sleep deprivation and things like that. Living on ration packs and jumping off towers into

10:30 muddy water and things like this. But I had already done a camp with the medical people at Wacol, in an area called Greenbank and while we were doing that camp the area was plagued with bushfires, and so when we weren't out running around shooting and being ambushed and digging holes and that we were out fighting bushfires after hours and we were knackered [tired] ninety percent of the time, So much so that we had this rocky outcrop that

11:00 we were supposed to be defending, ten or twelve of us in there, we were supposed to be there all night defending it. In the morning the sergeants came up to see what was going on and we were all sound asleep, blokes standing up leaning on rocks with rifles in their hands asleep, we were just exhausted. And so Canungra after that was relatively easy.

**So as a medic on one of those mock up battle situations what would your role be?**

11:30 I was spare medic. Each company had their own medic and they had been with them for quite some time, they were part of the unit. Whereas there was another medic and myself and the staff sergeant and the doctor and the driver, Sludge, in the RAP. We manned the RAP and we handled things that the company medics couldn't handle or things that happened in the headquarters

12:00 and visiting staff, I mean there was a Filipino, I think, officer came to visit and he jumped out of the helicopter into barrel of the bloke in front of him and punched a big washer type piece out of his forehead and so we had to patch him up and choof him off to hospital. So a bit of international work.

**What other accidents did you observe in those training exercises?**

12:30 A good one at Canungra, I was attached to B Company, the company I was eventually to take over. And I got a call, you're in the bush doing a patrol through the jungle, it is pretty thick there and got a call, "Medic up the front." What's going on? Didn't hear any shots or anything. And the whisper came back snake bite and I thought, "Oh shit, what do you do for snake bite?" You slash and suck back in those days.

13:00 Hmm and I think Condis Crystals and I get up to this bloke and I said, "Where did it bite you mate?" and he said, "Here." "Give us a look." and there was two little red dots and I thought, "All right". And I looked around and I could see these ants on the ground. And I said, "What were you doing?" and he said, "We were laying here." Doing a bit of an ambush or something. I said, "Did you see the snake?" and he said, "No I didn't actually."

13:30 And I said, "All right. Well it was probably one of these ants, so I will put some antihistamine on them and I will stick with you for a while and see how you go. I don't think a snake would be able to bite you on the belly." "Right oh." "And I am certainly not going to slash and suck." So anyway we patrolled on a bit more and he was fine, that's good. We had real snake bites later on in Vietnam.

14:00 **In all of the time from recruit training were there any significant accident that's you remember involved ammunition or artillery or anything?**

Not when I was in training, we did have one when I got out of the army and I was in the CMF [Citizens Military Force] for a while, up on a shooting range and a bullet had ricocheted onto the back of the range off a metal structure and shot a bloke through the leg, nasty wound because the bullet had flattened out and flared.

14:30 **When was that?**

That was probably in about 1972,

**So after Vietnam?**

Up in Mackay. CMF; you could get cheap beer in the CMF barracks and I thought, "I will join the CMF and go around Tuesday nights on parade and not tell them about my experiences, just be a private soldier for a while and just be there". And that was a bit of fun for a while but then they found out I was a corporal and decorated and they wanted to make me into a rank and boss these kids around and I said, "I don't want to do that; I'll get out."

**So in your training prior to going to Vietnam there were no**

15:00 **significant accidents?**

Not really no. I can't recall any. Lots of rashes and tinea and stuff like that and the bloke I had to stitch up with the wrists cut which I wonder about, whether he was trying to get out of the army, or whether he was depressed or he actually accidentally cut it on something, one will never know.

**When you joined 4 RAR did you observe anyone who was not really**

15:30 **dealing with the training or concerned about going to Vietnam who were showing or expressing any fear?**

Only the bloke that I charged, he wanted to get out of the army I think he had a premonition that it was going to be a big shooting war on over there and decided he was going to get out one way or another.

**And what sort of preparation were you given prior to going to Vietnam about what you would face in Vietnam itself?**

16:00 We were given a little green book which described the enemy as wearing black pyjamas and having conical hats and having a range of weapons which were described and if we caught them, captured them how we were to treat them. A little bit of the basic language, how to tell them, "Halt or I will shoot." Very basic things, very

16:30 little of which was useful, nothing practical.

**What about cultural things?**

Nothing, we were told none of the history that the war was the naughty communists against us, upstanding free world forces. And that they were really bad people and had to be destroyed and that the government we were fighting for over there was very worthy.

17:00 We swallowed it hook line and sinker. Nothing about the culture of the people, their ancestry which was really important we found out late. Nothing about Nui Dat, I was with the rear party at 4 RAR at Enoggera and I saw the first people come in from 2 RAR

17:30 at Nui Dat, the advance party, they had come from Vietnam and I said to one of them, "What's it like at Nui Dat? What does it look like?" and he said, "Oh rubber trees and the RAP is an aluminium building." "Oh okay." I just couldn't imagine it, had he shown me a picture or something I would have, so when I got there I thought, "This is it".

**So no specifics about what you were going to be facing?**

18:00 Nothing, going into the unknown.

**What about in terms of what was happening in the war and how it was progressing?**

Didn't have much of an idea; probably read it in the paper, saw it on the news, Long Tan had been and gone, didn't recall it. Just the day to day happenings, the training, meeting the blokes, mostly RAP, cooks and mechanics and aboriginal ladies.

18:30 **The blokes that came back from Vietnam that you spoke to what did they say about their experiences over there?**

They just didn't elaborate or if they did it didn't sink in. I got nothing from them to go on, I was still a blank. They might as well have told me nothing because they didn't have the capacity or the wherewithal to describe it adequately or I

19:00 didn't ask the right questions.

**During those training exercises as a medic were you also having to learn how to fire a gin and be fired upon and that whole ambush situation or were you sort of dealing with a medical situation?**

We did that at Canungra, we got fired upon and so on so we got used to that. Then I got issued with an Armalite which I thought

19:30 was a fake weapon, I thought it was a plastic toy because it is mostly fibreglass and plastic and it looks like a fake. We had had a shortage of weapons in 4 RAR, we were patrolling the camp with pick handles because there was possible student unrest and demonstrations going on at that time and had we needed to kick them out of camp we had pick handles instead of rifles.

20:00 so there was a shortage. And then these other things came in, the Armalites and I was issued with one of them and I thought, "Well we can pretend we have rifles", but it was the real thing. And about a week or two before I was due to fly out I was at a parade and somebody got up at the front and said, "Everybody has fired their weapons haven't they? You are all familiar with the Armalite?" and I said, "I haven't." So they had neglected to

20:30 train me in the Armalite which was going to be my personal weapon for the whole tour. So they said, "Right oh Joe Blow take him out to the range put a couple of mags through, make him familiar with the weapon and so that was my training with the Armalite.

#### **Two weeks flying out?**

About that, I had about half an hour on the range. How to cock it, how to put the magazine on, how to check it, great little weapon.

#### **Half an hour training?**

About that, but then we had more training over there

21:00 once I got out to my company we got more training because after each operation we would fire off all of the stale ammunition and get fresh ammunition. We would go outside the wire and shoot into the bush at targets fire off a couple of hundred rounds.

#### **You mentioned the potential for protestors, what was happening with protests?**

Moratoriums and that were starting to happen and they were probably making more headlines than the actual action in Vietnam.

21:30 But most of them I didn't take any notice of. I thought, "Well that's them and this is us, I am in the army now doing my thing". I probably thought they were rat bags, although my mother was involved with them too, she was a marcher. She had insight into the crookedness that was the background to Vietnam getting started and continuing.

#### **And did you know she was marching?**

I had an idea yeah.

#### **And what did you think of that?**

22:00 I thought, "Well that's Mum doing her thing", she was always an agitator and a protestor and an innovator, still is.

#### **So what did she think of you going to Vietnam?**

I think I said to her, "Look Mum I will sort it out in my mind when I get over there. I don't know what to believe at the moment. The army and the government are telling me that we are going to fight the communists and they are pretty bad. The domino theory you know, going to

22:30 spread if we don't go over and stop them. What I will do is get over there and see for myself what it is like and work it out." And I think I found within a month or two that it is crooked and our company commander told us, "This is not worth losing a single life over, just do your thing. Be careful

23:00 and we will all go home together. Its pretty rotten but there is nothing we can do about it." Virtually saying the place is corrupt.

#### **Your company commander told you that?**

A really switched on bloke.

#### **We will talk more about him later I am sure.**

Blinky Bill.

#### **The doctor who was attached to 4 RAR, what was his training. What**

23:30 **did you observe of how prepared he was to go to Vietnam?**

Well Doc Lewis was a young fellow. I was twenty-two, he would have been twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight maybe. I believe that he had been bonded to the army because they had helped him get his medical degree, financed it or whatever they do. So he was bonded for a certain term and he used to whinge and moan to us about how he

24:00 couldn't wait to get out. We thought he was a bit of a larrikin, bit of a cowboy, used to play the guitar, take his top plate out with his two teeth on it and sit them on the bench and make funny faces at us,

recite ditties. Really nice fellow, but didn't seem like an army type at all and he was a captain at

24:30 that stage. He used to slouch around and put his feet up on the desk, really relaxed and seemed to be switched off but his medical stuff was really good, all of the new techniques and so forth and he ended up staying in the army a very long time, achieving a very high rank and accompanying Les Hiddens [Australian explorer] out on bush tucker expeditions. Went to the

25:00 Gulf War, went back to Vietnam a second time, went to Namibia I think and lots of other places. He's an orthopaedic specialist because the army sent him overseas to train.

**You mentioned earlier that when you arrived there at Enoggera these guys were tough, they were infantry. How did they accept people like yourself?**

25:30 They used to shiak [tease] us a bit, "All medics are poofters [gay]." Or all of the different sayings about medics and we used to say different things back to them. "Can't do without us." And the regs would say to the nashos, "Dragged away from your mothers at an early age." And we would say to them, "We came into the army to do a job, not just to get a job." Just general things, general shiaking. But generally you have a beer

26:00 with them and you're all good mates, I mean each year at Christmas time now I send out about fifty Christmas cards and probably forty-five of them are infantry mates that I worked with and around.

**So there wasn't any serious distinction?**

No we were all diggers.

**What about...did you observe any distinction between the nashos and the regulars in terms of their preparation for the war?**

26:30 I didn't really pick anything but I was under the impression thinking back on it later that a lot of the regs being back from Malaya and Borneo thought Vietnam was going to be another show like that. They couldn't wait to be in it and once some of them were in it they jumped at the chance to get base jobs and not be out on patrol where it is dangerous, but others went out and did that and thrived on it

27:00 and went back for second tours, so it was a mixture.

**You say you had the impression, what gave you the impression that they thought it was going to be like Malaya?**

Just listening and observing and seeing the end result, people looking for base jobs and going home early where as most of the nashos saw their time out because their two years weren't up.

**You said that most of these guys had trained probably**

27:30 **from the word go together and you were moving around, how hard was it for you because you were moving around?**

I was like a replacement; they call them 'reos' and the hardest thing for a section of ten men who have trained together since corps training ,even recruit training; they know everyone's moves and just about know what everyone is thinking and you get a replacement in and it is very hard for them to assimilate and hard for the group they are going into.

28:00 Often it was the reos that used to get killed over there because they didn't know the set moves when you were in combat or ambush or flank movement, whatever was happening. Unless they had been in it several times and relaxed and keyed into it, it was difficult. And it was a bit like that being a medic linking into an established unit with a staff sergeant who had been there forever,

28:30 the doc had been there some time, the other medics had been through Malaya and Borneo. All experienced with casualties and accidents whatever, and there was Daryl Farry and myself these two green medics knowing virtually nothing, being the same rank as the other medics, trying to join in.

**How many medics were there in the one battalion?**

Each

29:00 company had one, so just counting the Australians there was B C and D Company. Admin Company had one, support company had one and there was one or two at the RAP so about seven. Then we had two Kiwi [New Zealand] companies that joined us in Vietnam so there was two Kiwi medics. And a staff sergeant he was our boss, and he was not liked by anybody, he was an angry old man we thought and didn't want to be there

29:30 and was pretty tough on us most of the time.

**What was his background?**

No idea.

**So you don't know where he had been before?**

No. He had a lot of service though.

**When you say an angry old man?**

Well to be a staff sergeant he would have had to have been in the army about fifteen years at that stage and probably if not in his late thirties early forties and us being in our early twenties he was an old man. He was not fit. He fiddled and farted around a lot and

30:00 if we wanted equipment for our companies we would have to go to the RAP and get it and he would hold the purse strings, the equipment string and we would have to go and pinch it while he wasn't there. So not a way to run a place practically.

**How well prepared did you feel you were before you went to Vietnam?**

I thought I was prepared I thought, "I have done this training and that training, I am a psychiatric nurse",

30:30 I was twenty-three by then had a few runs on the board, yeah see what happens, I was confident.

**As a soldier and a medic?**

Less confident as a soldier I think until I had been out in the bush a few times and went through the camping routines and the patrols and did my picket duty and relaxed a bit into Vietnam mode. But pretty confident.

31:00 **Were the medics as well trained as other soldiers as a soldier?**

No not really, did less drills and ambush techniques and so on. But that wasn't their role, each company with a medic, the medic could stay back in the headquarters with the major and the 2IC [Second in Command] and the signallers and intelligence bloke, mortar rep and so on. You are a different group doing a different operation, you're the brains trust, the organiser and you send the platoons out to

31:30 do their patrols and there you have to be switched on in the infantry. And that's where the stretcher bearers, who are actually infantry but trained in bandaging and so on.

**So at what point were you posted to B Company?**

I had been in Vietnam.

**So that was after you got to Vietnam sorry I got the impression, you mentioned something about B Company?**

I went with B Company at Canungra and went with them and did that exercise and found them to be a great bunch of fellows, the major and even the CSM [Company Sergeant Major].

32:00 The CMS is always the tough guy. He came up to me on a march at Canungra, he was a Scotsman, "Corporal Brown you seem to be handling it fairly easily?" or words to that effect. And I said, "Well I have just done Greenbank with the medical mob at 8 Field Ambulance Sir." "Oh well that explains it then aye." Because he thought, "Medics, they will be finding it tough going", but I was keeping up with them.

**Just going back to that Greenbank thing**

32:30 **when you were fighting the fires, during the day you were, or was it night time you were doing the camps?**

It was mixed and matched. Yeah sometimes during the day, in the morning you might do ambushes and patrols, really heavy stuff, hot dry conditions and then in the evening you might be fighting the fire and then go and have tea and then another exercise. It was just really full on, living on rations, very little water, sweating a lot.

33:00 Just go, go, go and the fires as well. Beating out a fire with a wet bag or a switch is pretty hard work.

**How bad were those fires?**

Just mild but they could have got bad.

**And that was the role of the army to be assisting?**

We were just doing our bit in that area I think.

**Was that the first time you had ever?**

Fought a fire yeah.

**Were you comfortable in that situation?**

Yeah. I can handle this yeah.

33:30 **So can you tell us about when you were finally told you were going to Vietnam?**

I guess you gradually got used to it at Enoggera with 4 RAR, the unit is going and therefore I am going. I think they had, I think I tried to get life insurance too and they refused me because I was going to Vietnam. That didn't make me feel too good, "Strewth what's going to happen to the

34:00 family if I get bowled over [killed] over there?"

**Who did you try and get life insurance with?**

I think it was MLC. One of the big companies back in those days.

**And they said no?**

Because every American soldier that went over there was insured, if they were deceased. I think twenty or fifty thousand dollars their next of kin got. That would have been a big payout.

**So if you died in Vietnam your family was going to get what?**

Nothing.

34:30 They would get the final leave pay that I was due and it wouldn't have been much, a couple of hundred dollars probably.

**So when you made the decision to try and get life insurance you were thinking about the possibility?**

Yeah I must have been.

**Do you remember what your thoughts were about the potential to be killed?**

No. I thought people were getting killed over there and it was a possibility not a probability. So just

35:00 thought I had better do the right thing. I think people were getting insurance those days; it was a new thing to be doing, before that you just took what came along. I don't believe in it these days but in that era you covered yourself, now I consider it a waste of money.

**So what was your reaction when they said, "No"?**

Okay just another

35:30 hurdle to jump when the time comes. I was getting used to hurdles in those days.

**So after that?**

I did hear that Vietnam was going to be tax free too so there would be a bit more money coming in to send home or to be allocated home and I could do haircuts over there and I wouldn't be spending much over there, I think the beer was ten cents, and the cigarettes were ten cents a pack,

36:00 I was a smoker then. Looking forward in some ways of getting on with it and into it and see what happened.

**So can you tell us about the trip over there?**

Bussed or trucked and somehow we go from Enoggera to Brisbane airport and it was freezing cold and windy and we were in our polyesters which are artificial material,

36:30 our uniform. Sitting in the plane shivering at about nine or ten o'clock at night and I think we flew straight to Singapore, had bit of a doze on the plane, got to Singapore at daybreak, got out of the plane walked to the terminal, had a 7up [soft drink]. Which was my first experience of 7up lemonade, had a bit of a break there, got back on the plane and flew into Saigon and we had to join a queue there

37:00 in the sky flying in spirals to stay out of rocket range. And we were in a queue there for some time and we zoomed in on our Qantas 727 or 707 and got out and I think we had the rifles issued to us but no magazines, no ammo [ammunition] and a sandwich in a cardboard box. Waited in the airport for awhile and were

37:30 directed into a Caribou, sat in the webbing seats in a Caribou which is a short take off aircraft. Half hour, forty minutes later we were at Nui Dat and we got out at Luscombe Field and got into trucks to deliver us to our units. I was dropped off at 4 RAR RAP with my bags feeling jet lagged and hot and dusty and all of that. Went into the RAP and met

38:00 the crew, the doctor and the couple of medics who were there and the staff sergeant and the staff sergeant said, "Right oh you have had a bit of a bludge, you can be on night duty tonight." "Okay." No training whatsoever in the new RAP "You're on night duty tonight". "Thank you very much.

**Just going back a bit had you had any farewell with your family before you left Australia?**

I had a week's pre-embarkation leave in Adelaide

38:30 but things were very strained. My wife and mother did come to West Beach airport to see me off, and

then my mother and brother and sister drove up to see me the day before I was due to fly out, that's right they made a special effort to drive an old Holden all of the way from Adelaide to Brisbane and I was lucky enough to get a day off and

39:00 we went down to the coast and took a boat out to Stradbroke Island and had a day trip, that was really good. And I think we came up to Maroochydore and camped out on the Cotton Tree under a sheet of plastic, got mosquito bitten and so on. And then they dropped me back off at camp and away I went.

**What do you remember about saying goodbye to your family, like your wife and child and your mother and father?**

A little bit emotional

39:30 but it is hard to recall it was not a real significant thing., one of the things that did stand out was when we only had a couple of days to go I rang mum from, I was walking past a phone box at Enoggera and I thought, "I will give Mum a ring", I had two bob in my pocket and so I put the two bob in, ring, ring, ring, just about to

40:00 hang up and Mum said, "Hello? Hello?" and I said, "Its Wayne here." And she said, "Oh we're just getting in the car to drive to Queensland." And I nearly missed them and it was a bit of ESP [Extra Sensory Perception] that I contacted them and I said, "Well I won't be where you think I was; I am at this new area and you will have to come around there" and so on so that was good.

40:22 End of tape

## Tape 5

00:30 **What were your first impressions of Nui Dat?**

Flying in we could see through the porthole of the Caribou that it was a big square area of rubber trees and a small nobby hill. Nui Dat sort of means small mountain or little hill. You couldn't see very much at all of the establishment there, because there was five thousand troops, infantry

01:00 camps, infantiers, artillery and so on, you couldn't see much but you could see two airstrips. One that the Caribous land on and one for the helicopters on the other side. So it was a bit of an impression, but it didn't really settle things what it was really going to be live on the ground.

**So what happened after you settled in, what was the first work you did?**

Well I was on night duty the first night there, luckily not much

01:30 happened. My tent was just out the back of the RAP. I was in the tent with another medic, the hygiene bloke and another fellow, can't remember. But the RAP was a big aluminium building about twenty or thirty metres long, ten or fifteen metres wide with a cement floor and inside was a couple of offices

02:00 and a treatment area with benches and cupboards. The bench was actually a couple of boards with a green army sheet over it on a trestle. Very basic. So my first night I don't remember treating anybody, but I was there and looking around, looking through all of the gear and familiarising myself with what was available. Looking through the treatment books.

02:30 The battalion had only been there a couple of weeks at that stage, the advance party and the main party had arrived and settled in and being the rear party I was the late comer.

**Looking through the treatment books what did you see at that stage?**

I think a lot of it was heat rash. We just weren't acclimatised; we had come from Brisbane winter to the middle of the

03:00 wet season in Vietnam, which is pretty bad. Lots of blokes had heat rash. It was irritated by soaps and the dirt. After a short time there we were experimenting with Vitamin C intravenously but that didn't do anything either. The main treatment was rest and cold water which is pretty hard to get over there when you're supposed to be out fighting.

03:30 I can't recall much of what was in the books. We used to rotate every third or fourth night I would be on duty there and every day, you don't get weekends off or anything, you are there every day and you're on call twenty-four hours a day if anything happens. But at night I got involved with a couple of card games in the next tent with the drivers

04:00 and go down to the boozier and have a couple of beers so you gradually got used to camp life and going down to the mess tent which was actually a hut and eating either eggs for breakfast which tasted bitter and preserved food, instant mashed potatoes, powdered milk and all of the little things.

**What was happening in the conflict at that stage?**

- 04:30 We didn't know much of what was going on, we had lobbed in there; 2 RAR had gone home they had finished their tour. I had no idea how many had been killed or wounded or what the situation was. I think I had only been there a couple of days and we went out on a one day operation, just to get us used to getting into a whole group of helicopters,
- 05:00 flying out somewhere, dropping in, digging in, doing a few short patrols, back into the helicopters and back to Nui Dat all in one day. That was in the Binh Ba rubber which was only five or ten kilometres away. I was involved in that, the doctor and I went up on that one. We helicoptered in, and the first thing I saw was a rubber tree with this, it looked like an upturned dish at the base of it
- 05:30 and I thought, "There is a mine there". I was a little bit taken aback and I said to one of the other diggers there, one of the Malayan vets, "Is that a mine there?" And he said, "No that's a rubber tappers bowl. Good oh". And a few minutes after that I saw a snake come slithering past, and it was red and yellow and white, a multi-coloured snake. And I thought, "Dear oh dear, this is a bit dangerous", but the rest of the day after that nothing happened. No shots were fired, nobody found anything
- 06:00 no one attacked us and we got back in the helicopters and went back to Nui Dat. And I thought, "Well that's one, this is going to be pretty quiet, this will be all right, fine". And then a couple of weeks later back at Nui Dat doing different things. I think a Kiwi cook had gotten badly burnt one day and so he was one of our first major treatment things and I went out with the ambulance which is just a jeep with a tray on the back
- 06:30 to the Kiwi lines which is probably five hundred metres away, picked up this big Maori Kiwi with big blisters sticking out of his body, like water balloons hanging off him. A petrol stove had blown up. So we got him in there and filled him up with morphine and got him off to hospital. Just after that there was an operation for about a week and the doctor
- 07:00 and I were on this one. What happened there? I am trying to focus too, we helicoptered in that's right, chapter one in my book, first contact and then it all changed a bit. We helicoptered it, and we dug a
- 07:30 pit for the doctor and ourselves to jump into in case we got shot at, shell scrapes. We set up the medical gear and we set up a bit of a tent, and we were only going to be there a couple of days in this one spot so we didn't set it up too well and the rifle companies would fly in through our area and B Company would go off there and do a patrol, C Company would go off there, D Company off here Whiskey Company over there and Victor Company
- 08:00 might be the company that looks after battalion headquarters, the safety area. And we dug in there and Delta Company had a bloke shot within about an hour or two of us being there and we thought, "This will be a casualty for us and we will patch him up" and we got all of the gear ready and by the time they were able to actually go in and get him out of the firing line they were able to get a helicopter in and take him straight to hospital. And we thought, "Oh well that's it, but someone has been shot, struth what's going on?"
- 08:30 And the companies had their different minor actions, and then it went all quiet for a couple of days and they said, "Right we are going to move a couple of kilometres away." And so we got back on the helicopter again, moved again, dug in again and the Kiwis had found a bunker system and attacked them and one of their scouts had got almost up to the bunkers and the commanding officer had called artillery in
- 09:00 over the top of them into the bunker system and one of them had hit the tree and sprayed shrapnel and wounded this bloke and wounded him in both thighs. And he had big holes through both thighs with one piece of shrapnel that went whack, whack, whack, whack, and come out the other side.
- How big would shrapnel be to do that?**
- That piece of shrapnel would be about that big. Probably a jagged piece of metal that hit from the side
- 09:30 went right through the muscle there out this side through this one. And it was just like mince meat in both legs. The doctor and I were both in the RAP area and the Kiwi patrol, because they had pulled out and left him in there, and a patrol was going to go in and rescue him and they said, "Does anyone want to come and give us a hand?" And I said, "Yeah I will come with you." Not thinking, but there was no shooting
- 10:00 going on at this stage. So I went off with this patrol and we went probably fifty or a hundred yards through the bush and they opened up on us with machine guns and whatever they had, and luckily we had a depression and we all dived into that flattened out and nobody else got hit. And they continued firing at us for several minutes, we just lay there and I had a smoke I remember to settle down, first time I had ever been shot at.
- 10:30 And there was probably thousands of rounds zipping over our heads, probably shreds of twigs and leaves and then it stopped and I was laying there still and a couple of the Kiwis had gone forward and grabbed this bloke and dragged him back into our position, because the enemy had gone, they had decided to clear off.

**Could you see them from where you were?**

No all you could hear was the shots; I didn't get up and look. I just got down as low as I could and had my smoke.

11:00 **What were the Kiwis saying to you or each other?**

I think they were just hand signals, I think they had been there six months, the Kiwi units overlapped every twelve months but six months either side of us sort of thing, so they had been there six months and were very experienced. So they got the bloke back, we bandaged him up and got him

11:30 back to where the doctor was and bandaged him up some more and put an intravenous drip in and I was squeezing on the plastic bag with the drip trying to really get his blood volume back up because he had lost a lot. His name was Private Dil. D I L and I thought, "This is a crazy war and they have got crazy names, even the soldiers, imagine being called Dil?" Anyway I am squeezing on the bag and I am kneeling over him and

12:00 there was a helicopter hovering above and they were going to winch him up. But they said, "Well we can't winch him up on a jungle penetrator." That's like an anchor, "Because he has got smashed thighs. We are going to have to get a stretcher or some other means of getting him in. "And there are all of these tall trees around. So the helicopter threw out a canvas and leather and metal harness to strop around him and I was leaning over him and it hit me on the back of the neck from about sixty feet up.

12:30 And knocked me out and so they peeled me off and put me to one side and put the harness on him and winched him into the chopper [helicopter] and I came to and I am watching him spiralling up to the chopper and then the winch jammed and they couldn't get him in and so there he was swinging under the chopper. And we didn't see it but apparently the chopper went away towards a clearing and cut the wire and dropped him to the ground from not very high up and B Company happened to be

13:00 patrolling in that area and they came in and rescued him and loaded him in the chopper and off he went to hospital and I had a sore neck .and then somehow or other that Kiwi patrol of about six blokes and the doctor and I were trying to get back to battalion headquarters and we must have taken a wrong turn, or we got lost, somewhere near the bunker system. And it was getting dark. So we spent the night out in the bush on our own with no radio

13:30 and completely bushed. We decided to camp in a reed bed so if the enemy decided to try and attacks us in the night we would hear them coming across these dry reeds, crunch, crunch. It was like a mattress we were lying down on these dry reeds and during the night these reeds sort of collapsed into the water, and I woke up wet down one side.

14:00 and I went to urinate just away from the others a bit and I found that I had a big tiger leech on my penis. About as big as my thumb, almost as big as my penis too, so I got rid of that and it kept bleeding then too. And you can't put a tight bandage on your old fellow, it will cut the circulation. So I bandaged it up lightly and I had this blood patch here and I had a crook back and

14:30 the pack had been digging in, I had this pack with the steel frame and so everything was going wrong. And I thought, "If this is Vietnam, I am not going to last long". Shot at yesterday, a harness dropped on me yesterday, lost yesterday, this morning and we were still lost. Anyway they found us and we got back to the unit.

15:00 The very next day they decided to do an attack against this bunker system and they got two or three companies and the Kiwis and another unit and they were all lining up, they were going to do this big charge down the hill and clean them out. And we got all of the medical gear ready, intravenous drips and stretchers, we thought, "There is going to be a lot of casualties". The artillery is firing over the top and the jets are dropping bombs, all happening a couple of hundred yards in front of us and the shells were coming over the

15:30 top. And I was sitting under a tree having a smoke, a tree about a foot through I suppose and the tree is dead just a dead tree and probably twenty or thirty feet high, and one of the shells hit the top of it and snapped it off at the base and the tree started to fall and I crawled away and the tree fell right alongside of me and nearly cleaned me up. And I thought, "I am really not having a good time now, only in country

16:00 a couple of weeks and only on this operation three or four days. It's not real good". But I survived that and put my glasses back on. And the attack went in and the enemy weren't there so we didn't have the casualties and we went back to Nui Dat.

**That's an amazing first forty-eight hours.**

That's the first chapter in my book I call it first contact. My first actual getting shot at.

16:30 **That night you were there with the Kiwis did you actually sleep and if not what happened?**

I must have slept. Well they were they are here looking after us, they're taking care of us, I am just a medic that was my thoughts, I am just a medic I will curl up here and have something to eat, go to sleep and get up early and hope that they didn't find us through the night.

**And did you relay that you had only been there a few days?**

No that seemed like at that stage

17:00 it probably seemed like months already, each day was a week long.

**And did you tell them about the leech?**

Oh they saw it some of them, "We're not touching that; you look after yourself!"

**Did that affect you in any other way?**

No.

**Just lost a lot of blood?**

And dignity. It makes interesting reading.

**So what happened after that?**

17:30 Went back to Nui Dat probably had a week maybe ten days at Nui Dat then the province that we were in Phuoc Tuy province was the province that Australia was supposed to be pacifying and keeping quiet. That was pretty quiet and so they said, "Right oh we will send 4 Battalion up to Bien Hoa province and you can camp on this little hill, fire support base Concord and we will send little patrols out from there

18:00 because the VC [Viet Cong] are going to launch these massive rocket attacks against the airfields and base camps and we estimate that there are thirty thousand VC coming down." I thought, "Strewth, okay, so nothing much is happening here, apart from trees and harnesses happening, so they are going to send up where it is really happening, okay". So they helicoptered us into this

18:30 little bare hill and we were going to stay there ten or twelve fourteen days something like that, so we had to get an RAP dug out of the hard rock and soil and so they helicoptered a bulldozer in, or drove it in. They got it in there and it dug this big pit for us and we had to roof it and sandbag it and kept us busy getting sun tans and blisters and different sort of stuff. Our first casualty

19:00 happened the first or second day. Delta Company once again out on patrol found some VC on a creek bank, shot them up a bit and one bloke stood up to get a better look and got shot through the chest and killed. So that was our first death. And another bloke in the contact got shot in the knee. And the knee shot bloke got helicoptered into where we were and we didn't

19:30 know what was happening, helicopter landed, "Medics out to the chopper." So another medic and myself ran out to the chopper kept our heads down, took our hats off and this bloke is sitting on the edge of the helicopter and I said, "What's going on?" and he said, "I have been shot through the knee." "Oh right oh". So we gave him a chair lift all of the wayback to the, nearly broke our backs getting him back to the RAP.

20:00 and it was just very neat, a neat hole in and a neat hole out through the front of the knee and out of the back. So we just put another bandage on him and put him back in the helicopter and off to hospital, so that was easy.

**How is it possible to have a neat bullet hole isn't it ripping through?**

Well it is spinning and it must have been fired from very close quarters, probably from here to the door away and the knee bone

20:30 is fairly soft I think and it just remained stable all of the way through. Just like someone got a drill and went zzzt through it, it was just leaking joint fluid, no real fluid.

**So not even any blood?**

No blood.

**Because it didn't hit any veins?**

No just synovial fluid, yellowy stuff oozing out.

**How did your respond to that situation?**

I said, "Oh you poor bugger, you have been shot through the knee." And he said, "My mate's been killed, oh my mate Stewie has been killed."

21:00 "Your knee, how do you feel?" "Oh my mate." We only had him for a half an hour or so, patched him up and then on his way.

**Do you think he was shocked?**

He was probably shocked, seeing someone killed, probably right next to him.

**Was he talking about the situation that had happened there?**

He said they were throwing grenades in a creek and he thought the VC must have dived in under water and got through a trap

21:30 door or something, they used to have them and they had no result. One killed and one wounded and no bodies to count to sort of balance it.

**The VC had taken the bodies out?**

Well they had gone, or they hadn't been killed even, they just escaped.

**And what happened to that body?**

That body would have been taken to the

22:00 hospital and then in the morgue and then cleaned up and sent home.

**Did the bodies come through to you at all?**

No we handled them later on when I was in contacts, we wrapped them up and put them into choppers and put them on winches and so on.

**And so how did you deal with the growing conflicts you were starting to see?**

I was pretty worried there at Concord because I had heard there was thirty thousand NVA [North Vietnamese Army] coming down and so many from this direction, and I thought, "Well there is only a

22:30 hundred of us on this little hill and with American artillery there", they were pretty hopeless, "and patrols a couple of kilometres out, what happens if we get attacked? They are not going to be able to get here". But luckily that didn't eventuate.

**So with all of that buzzing around what were the effects did you not sleep, how did you deal with it?**

I slept, because you're tired.

23:00 You don't sleep well; you're always stale when you get up. You never wake up fresh and of course then you have your first cigarette, shave, have your second cigarette then you go and have some breakfast and another cigarette.

**Could you hear the conflict from where you were?**

We could hear a bit of the action yeah, and we had American guns with us. They were big tanks with guns mounted on them, big artillery pieces and

23:30 every now and then they would fire off into the distance and think, "Oh someone is copping it out there". And you would hear the odd machine gun, dit, dit, dit and boom from a couple of kilometres away, but nothing much around where we were. We were pretty safe. Although through binoculars one night or some special scope the Yanks [Americans] had they could see this group of people with what looked like a rocket

24:00 heading off somewhere, luckily it wasn't coming into us.

**And did you think when you first patched up the guy with the knee did you think he should have been taken out of the conflict because he was sent back wasn't he?**

Oh he was sent back to the hospital I don't know what happened after that, maybe home or maybe, that's the thing you never got follow up, feedback. I remember a snake bite... a fellow was bitten.

24:30 Where was he bitten? I forget now. This bloke was bitten by a snake at night and his mates brought him down to the RAP, "Oh strewth snake bite all right." And the day before this American cook on the tank battery had come in and he had cut his hand from fingertip to wrist he slashed it open on a big fruit tin

25:00 lid and I put sixteen stitches in, Festus Macatier was his name and he had a really sing song accent from Georgia. And good practice but every day he used to bring a bag full of green apples and a bottle of moonshine [alcohol] that his folks used to send him in the mail, and he would give that to the doctor. So anyhow we had this snake bite and we said to the Doc, "Snake bite doc what do we do?"

25:30 and he was half stonkered on moonshine so he was useless. And he said, "He's gonna die." So anyway we wrapped this bloke up and put him on the chopper and off to hospital which was only ten minutes away. So rather than us do the slashing and sucking and Condis crystals trick. He was okay he was quite cool calm and collected, he had the dead snake in a plastic bag in one hand and yeah.

26:00 It was a pit viper and I thought they were called pit vipers because they lived in bunkers and pits, but it is because of the pits behind their eyes which are their sensory organs. They can be deadly. All of these were old bunkers from previous occupations and they were full of rats and snakes and things.

**From that little hill can you describe what you could see and what the set up was around you?**

Nearby say half a kilometre away was another little hill

26:30 with trees on it, ours was barren and the rest was just foliage. Kilometres of foliage, probably light

jungle and nothing else.

**And what was your immediate camp set up?**

We had our RAP pit which we used to live in and we made beds out of ammunition boxes. And the roof used to creak because we had all of these sand bags on top about a metre thick to

27:00 stop mortar blasts and we didn't know if it was going to cave in or not. You could hear it creaking and groaning.

**So you lived and worked down there?**

Lived and worked down there yeah. And nearby was the signals area, the command post where they had their maps and plotting boards and radio sets and they co-ordinated everything from down there, all of the brass was down there. Funny thing, around the camp you have

27:30 toilet blocks and you have a pisser phone which is a pit with rocks or sand in it and oil and a tube coming out which you pee into and then it sort of gets down there and disappears and stinks after a couple of weeks. But the command post had air vents which were made out of the same shell casing and so some blokes used to go and use them, and so the officers down below got the odd golden shower.

28:00 **That's a great story.**

And then there was the cookhouse and other things, just these little buildings and the Yanks, right around the perimeter the company, I think it was Charlie Company that were our security party at that stage.

**So if you were under the impression that there were thirty thousand VC or NVA**

28:30 **around you what was the point of you being there? What was the tactic?**

We were out there to harass and interdict them. Our companies would be out on company or platoon patrols or ambushes spread right out so that if a whole mob of them came through they would be observed and then artillery and jets or whatever could be put in on them and eliminate them. Sort of early warning

29:00 and protection for the air fields. So if we weren't there they could just sneak in and do their stuff and go home again.

**Was there any briefing prior to going to that on how it would all come together?**

You knew the day before the operation, "You will be flying up to Concord, the companies will be patrolling and we believe..."

29:30 actually we didn't find out a lot of detail until we got there, and maintained a diary at that stage because I was the RAP representative at the orders groups, O group, so I had to go to the O group and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] would run the O group and give all of this information to the sigs, the medics, the hygiene bloke and drivers and so on and they would take it back to their units and so I kept a diary for that so I would get it right. And so I kept a diary for that couple of weeks and took it back.

30:00 And you would hear all of these fantastic figures you know. "One of our companies had an attack with these results. There was a sampan ambushed in the river, six killed and no friendlies killed. The rubbish dump, the locals are raiding the rubbish dump and that is not to be encouraged. There are prostitutes working down there at the rubbish dump and they are not to be made available".

30:30 And so on all of this housekeeping, "You will be able to have showers tonight for this group of people. You're not allowed to use that water in that water bladder because it has got diesel contamination. Picket tonight will be the sigs and tomorrow night will be the RAP. If anyone wants to order soft drinks or cigarettes please let so and so know." Housekeeping stuff but then there are all of these enemy out there and you think, we're ordering soft drinks and smokes and there is a knock shop down there at the dump

31:00 you know.

**Were there any villages or locals around where you were?**

Probably a kilometre or two away but we couldn't see it from where we were, but they would obviously come in and scrounge. My mate has got a whole chapter in the book about scrounging at the dump and how he had to stop a Yank from shooting at them to get them off the back of the truck from getting the slops to take home. Desperate people.

31:30 **So after the viper what happened while you were there?**

Not much, pretty quiet after that. I stitched up Festus we had the bloke shot through the knee, snake bite, lots of minor stuff, sunburn, rashes. We played volley ball against the Yanks and got beaten because they were a team we were a rabble. I tried to find the medic attached to the Yank artillery and

- 32:00 he was a Negro, a very downcast, down trodden Negro, "Yes sir, No sir." I thought, "Not much point in getting your experience out of you" and I left it at that, very submissive. But the Yanks were in the same camp and at sundown we would all get our webbing and our rifles on and do stand to, look out
- 32:30 and observe and put the sentries out, quietly, no lights pitch dark. Their end of the camp, fluoro lights, radios going, juke box going and they were coming around taking photos of us with their camera flashes. You know different technique. They were saying, "We're here, come and get us." And we were saying, "You come and find us and we will fix you up."
- 33:00 **So what happened after that?**
- Oh there was another little episode there, the Doc and I and another medic took time off to go to the city there, Bien Hoa city to visit the hospital where an Australian medical team were working. And we met Australian doctors and nurses and that was just a great day. We went for a swim in a pool in a sports club somewhere and I had my wallet pinched and we bought fresh bread rolls and came back to there and came back.
- 33:30 But it was a day out of thinking there is a war going on. Having a swim in a sports club and oh.
- What was the city of Bien Hoa like?**
- Big city; it is the satellite city to Saigon. Bien Hoa and Long Binh were twin overlapping cities next to the airfield which was at that time the busiest airfield in the war, just comings and going all of the time. I was actually sitting on that hill one evening and in the distance you could see the
- 34:00 jets take off, you could see the afterburners and this afterburner just looked different one night, there was silver flecks in it and the flame just seemed to get bigger and bigger and it went up and up and the plane blew up, but we heard that the pilot had ejected just before that. So yeah it had a problem.
- How did you react watching that? Were you watching it with other people?**
- Yeah what's? Ohh,
- 34:30 mm okay.
- How long would it take to drive to the city?**
- Five or ten minutes.
- From the hill?**
- Yeah to the city.
- So there is this whole war happening,**
- Yeah and there were patches of jungle and paddy fields that we couldn't see from there and we were part of the perimeter defence for that city and airfield.
- 35:00 And there were Yank units and probably Thais and Koreans and soon all with their allocated area along that, probably fifty or a hundred thousand Yanks.
- And what was the city like to go into; what would you see as you would go into the city?**
- It looked pretty primitive. The hospital was a brick building; I think it was two storeys, in the French design
- 35:30 and there were French buildings through out the city with louvre doors and so on. Lots of mini business'; you will see in photos later on when we go through the albums. My memories of the city are very vague, it was a place of confusion, lots of locals, lots of troops milling about, military police, hot and dusty,
- 36:00 But great to get into the hospital and sit down and have a cup of tea or whatever it was with the nurses and doctors from Australia and to go to a swimming pool and actually swim in your undies [underwear] with everybody looking on. Mostly American troops one of whom obviously pinched my wallet with sixteen dollars in it. But then getting back to the reality of the hill and thinking did that really happen? Those people are
- 36:30 just over there and we're out here.
- That must have been really confusing?**
- I saw two people in one bed in the hospital and one person sleeping under the bed, a relative who actually cooks the meals for the person in the bed.
- Were there soldiers in the hospital?**
- They were mostly civilians, in fact probably all civilians.
- 37:00 **You said when you first landed in Saigon there was a lot of confusion about who people were there a was a lot of people in black jumpsuits, when you got to that city were you still feeling**

### **that confusion?**

No the confusion died down after you talked to people and observed by driving from Nui Dat to Vung Tau thirty kilometres, you could see farmers in black pyjamas and people walking down the street in black pyjamas, the black pyjamas was something that grew out of the local VC just wearing their ordinary clothes

37:30 into battle, where as the NVA and the regulars wore green or blue or grey and had pith helmets and proper uniforms, badges of rank and decent weapons. Whereas the local bloke who was in the militia was just in his every day black clothes. Which has gradually changed over time, nowadays they wear all sorts of colours.

### **Driving from the hill to the**

38:00 **city wasn't there a deal of concern because you're assuming that there was a whole lot of...?**

Oh you go in a convoy; you have several jeeps and blokes and you have your weapons loaded and there might be a machine gun loaded on the top of the truck, so you go carefully.

### **So how did you come to leave the hill and why did they leave?**

The action they thought was going to happen, the troop movements didn't happen,

38:30 false or incorrect information .and so they just said, "Right oh tomorrow we're packing up all of the gear" I think it was fourteen days we were there. "Pack up all of the gear the helicopters will pick us up at zero nine hundred we are going back to Nui Dat." Right oh pack the gear up, back to the Dat [Nui Dat], a few more days off and...

### **What would you do on days off in Nui Dat?**

Well first thing when

39:00 you get back from an operation you clean your rifle, well you clean it twice a day but a thorough rifle cleaning. Wash your clothes, empty your pack out, wash your pack, just refresh all of your gear and go and have a couple of beers and make the head spin with two beers after none for a couple of days.

### **Did your ability to consume alcohol change while you were there?**

Not for me.

39:30 Most people did, I still had two beers and I was you know, wobbly feet. Because ninety percent of the time out in the bush on no beer and back in camp probably a maximum of seven days you would have two beers a night, maybe three or four and I would really suffer, where some blokes could have a dozen, but they would be wiped out next day. I had to function I still had the whole camp,

40:00 B Company, to look after, so I felt fairly responsible. And if I was half shickered [drunk] I wouldn't be able to stitch them up. Which I did on one occasion after twenty-three cans of beer at Vung Tau on a hot day meeting my mate John Hector I think we counted twenty-three cans each and were still functioning. I got to bed and one of my blokes came in with a cut above his eye from a fight he had been in and he insisted I stitch him up, his medic, he wasn't going to the hospital.

40:30 So I sobered up enough to stitch him up with Johnny Hairy Legs assisting me with no anaesthetic and went back to bed. So depending on the mood and the day and the company, and on leave for two days, twenty-three cans from ten in the morning, probably ten hour, twelve hour period. Just steady.

40:59 End of tape

## **Tape 6**

00:30 **Okay as a medic in the front line in Vietnam what were you carrying?**

About thirty kilos plus of equipment and packs. I had an Armalite rifle and a hundred rounds. I was supposed to have two grenades in a basic pouch but I carried a camera instead figuring if things got that

01:00 crook two grenades would be useless. Sometimes I carried a claymore mine, a shovel, five water bottles each with one litre in them. A couple of steel mugs, one for shaving and one for drinking and cooking in., a small stove, a rope a machete, five days rations, small tent, ground sheet to sleep on

01:30 which is just a sheet of plastic basically. A silk which is like a sleeping bag liner to curl up in, a medical kit of course packed with enough equipment to look after about a hundred men in the field before resupplies came in. Sweat rag, hat, camouflage cream to put on each morning

02:00 after shaving, green and black and put on properly. Spare pair of socks, sometimes a spare shirt.

Mosquito net, some twine to tie things to trees. And that's about it, it was a big pack on my bag and a bum pack sitting underneath and a web belt with a couple of water bottles and a couple of

02:30 pouches on it. So that's basically what I carried, fair weight.

**Can you tell us what was in the medical equipment?**

It had syrettes of morphine, several of those. Each person on their rifle had taped a shell dressing or in their top left pocket, tubes of fungal cream, vials of antibiotic powders which you could mix sterile water with which were

03:00 in other vials. Syringes, needles, scalpels, scissors, probes and forceps. Just about everything I could think of that I would need in the field and I probably carried far too much; the bag was chock a block but the only thing I ever ran out of was shell dressings and my hoochie [bed] mate Willy the Turd Burglar, hygiene man, he used to carry an extra

03:30 satchel of shell dressings after our first big action when we ran out and had to get them thrown into our position from diggers on the perimeter. So shell dressings are fairly bulky.

**Can you tell us about teaming up with your hoochie mate how did that work?**

Everybody in the company teamed up with somebody else. The officer had the batman who dug their pit and cooked their meals and looked after and protected them and everybody worked in tandem

04:00 with somebody for safety I suppose. Our sleeping pits were about two metres apart so if there was an action happening we could talk to each other and see what was going on, mutual protection.

**And how was it decided who would team up with who?**

I guess mates in section used to organise themselves, but at my level I was instructed,

04:30 "You will go there, he is your hoochie mate." So Willy copped me and I copped Willy. I haven't seen Willy since, must have been something I said.

**And his nickname was the?**

Turd Burglar.

**And how did he get that?**

Because he dug the toilet pit anywhere we stopped for a period of time, he would dig a little trench, get a forked stick, stick a toilet roll on it with a plastic cover over it and leave his shovel over there and that was his

05:00 job, apart from picket duties and carrying out extra field duties. Pretty laid back sort of a lad Willy.

**And how did you two get on?**

Good no problem at all.

**And were there times that you really had to give support to one another that it was really crucial?**

Thew only real time was when Willy had the bag of field dressings and I was in a bit action and I walked past him and he gave them to me and said, "See you later." And gave me that

05:30 look that said, "Rather you than me." It was all happening up the front and he didn't have to go up and I did.

**So this was B Company you were teamed up?**

Mm.

**So it was a few months before you were actually assigned to B Company is that right?**

Yeah we had the action where the doctor and I got lost with the Kiwis back to camp and then the next operation we were helicoptered out onto a hill top once again called Nui Nai

06:00 which is not far from Nui Dat. And the RSM, the grumpy, red faced, curly moustached RSM, ex-Pommy [English] army instructed everybody as they got off the chopper, instructed everybody as to where they where to go, "You will go there, you will go there and you Corporal Brown you will dig in there. "And he pointed to a spot that was just about solid rock and instructed me to dig in. So I hopped into it with my shovel, took my shirt off

06:30 and all of the gear and dug into this spot which had a big boulder in the middle and I rolled the boulder out to one side so I didn't kill anyone down below me and I just finished digging the pit and was having a smoke and the word passed down to me, "Corporal Brown pack up your gear, you're going to B Company." I thought someone was having a lend of me but they weren't, I had to pack me gear up, climb to the top of the hill, climb into a little two seater chopper and

07:00 buzz off out to the jungle and link up with B Company. Apparently their medic had suffered from heat exhaustion and had been choppered out previously and I was his replacement and I thought, "Oh well, he will come back in a few days and I will go back to the RAP with the doctor, back to square one". But I spent the next six months with B Company.

07:30 **Up until that time you were posted to the RAP?**

I was spare medic at the RAP. Not a bad job.

**And while you were doing that what was the daily routine like?**

Oh sick parade at the RAP was pretty big; all of the odds and ends from the companies would all sit outside in the waiting room. The doctor would see the new patients, what he used to do was stick his head out through the louvre window and yell out, "Next one with the clap [venereal disease]."

08:00 It was his little joke and someone would come in and say, "I haven't got the clap sir, I have got a crook leg." And he would check them out and refer them onto the medics who were loitering out there and we would do the treatment or we would be doing the treatments on regular maintenance people that didn't have to go and see him again. So anything and everything, rashes, burns, cuts and bruises, hangovers,

08:30 flu, malaria, VD. We had a fair bit of VD there we had a scoreboard, it was like a whiteboard in the office and we had casualties and a column for VD and I think out of about a thousand men we had three hundred and fifty cases, but one particular fellow I was led to believe had it thirty-two times. So that sort of cut the number of fellows who had it right down.

09:00 His statistics blew it out somewhat, he was reputed to have been a driver and took the laundry into Baria each day and stopped off for other things than laundry. Other pressing engagements.

**Did you know him?**

No just of him, reputation.

**Were there many people who had it repeatedly?**

Yes I think some did not take any precautions

09:30 and therefore were more susceptible, they would get drunk and go to town, not shower not do the procedures, not wear the condom all of that sort of thing, and they were more likely to re-offend.

**And when they came in with VD what sort of treatment were they given and what sort of advice about how to avoid getting it again?**

They were given advice on using a prophylactic sheaf.

10:00 And the usual treatment I think was procaine penicillin for three, four five days, usually that cleaned it up.

**And obviously some of those people just didn't take the advice?**

Oh no. Get a few beers under the belt and she'll be right mate. Won't happen to me.

**Did you know anyone who you were friendly with who got VD?**

None of my immediate friends but other blokes around the company and battalion yeah.

10:30 Those that had more access to go into town, whereas most of us were limited to three or four occasions of two days each in the twelve months which is not a lot.

**So you only got into town a couple of days in the whole period?**

Yeah about four days I think. One to two days at a time.

**Did you visit the brothels?**

No well I visited yeah.

11:00 They sort of masquerade as massage parlours too, and I would go in for a haircut, massage, steam and soon down to the pub then, down to the bar.

**Do you remember what they were like can you describe them?**

Pretty seedy. Little cubicles really with a curtain between each couch, I think they had showers and a steam room up one end and a waiting room and

11:30 you would pay your fee and all of your valuables and your watch would go into a plastic bag that you could hold onto so it didn't get pinched, very quaint.

**And do you remember how much it was?**

A couple of dollars I think.

**And were the girls local Vietnamese girls?**

Yeah most with beehive haircuts and lots of make up and falsies and.

**And they were basically set up to cater to the Australian and American Army?**

12:00 Yes and Korean, the Koreans were in town too. Vung Tau was a base, they had an airfield there, they had two hospitals there, Australian and American hospital and possibly a Korean hospital. Lots of administration down there. Wharf, some naval people there, divers, lots of people and it was reputed that the VC used to use Vung Tau as their rest centre as well.

12:30 **So when you talk about going into town you're talking about going into Vung Tau?**

Basically going into the [Peter] Badcoe Club which is at the back of the hospital, and when the company would go down as a company we would drive down in trucks, pull up at the Badcoe Club hand in our rifles to be locked up, go and get changed into our civvies [civilian clothing] hang around the Badcoe Club until five o'clock in the afternoon and then a truck would go into town or two and then you

13:00 had to be back by nine. So you had four hours to go to town, do a bit of shopping, go to the bars, get a haircut, all of that sort of thing. So most of the time was spent at the Badcoe Club, the Harold Holt swimming pool had a bar there which was good, chips and snacks and lots of Australian cold beer. You could go down the beach and have a surf; I think they had a boat there some people would water ski behind. Sit around with your mates and try to switch off. No weapons,

13:30 no responsibilities, take your malaria pills and have a good feed, visit your mates in hospital, visit Johnny Hector, yeah.

**Can you describe the Badcoe Club for us?**

It was like a big bar and small eatery, that was the sort of day area and it had all of these steel stacker chairs outside, and then a pool,

14:00 and the accommodation I think was two storey basic rectangular building with stairs and showers and toilet blocks. And the mess hut I think was next door, just a basic big open area with tables and chairs, but it was secure and there used to be cleaning ladies come in and make your bed and sweep the floor and all of that sort of thing and they would come in

14:30 first thing in the morning and there would be naked blokes and drunk fellows, they didn't take any notice and we were told not to molest them and to behave ourselves.

**So that was where you stayed on leave? Was that purely Australian?**

Yeah, usually a company at a time used to go down there to freshen up a bit, but far from freshening up blokes used to hit the grog. As I said before I had twenty-three cans in one day there and when I got back to Nui Dat I wasn't very fresh.

15:00 **So what sort of role do you think alcohol in that situation? Why were people drinking so much?**

It was something to do and it was a release, it disinhibited people and they could talk and do whatever they liked. It just released them from the horror I think that some of them had seen. And a lot of them it became normal

15:30 to get sloshed [drunk] regularly. And some of them would even fill their water bottles to take neat alcohol out into the bush instead of water, and that probably didn't have a very good effect on their performance.

**They took alcohol out on patrols?**

Yeah I found out a lot later, I didn't know at the time I was green as grass [naïve] then didn't know a thing. It used to make them fight amongst themselves a lot too. We didn't need the

16:00 enemy, just fill the boys with grog and they could throw their steel beer cans at each other, open up nasty heads gashes and get me to stitch them up without anaesthetic.

**Where were those fights happening?**

Usually at Nui Dat but occasionally at Vung Tau, rival platoons and sections, just people rub each up the wrong way.

**So large fights you're talking about?**

Oh fist fights.

**But large groups of people?**

Oh no.

16:30 Usually just a few. Up in Nui Dat after I came home I believe there was a shoot up up there amongst out

fellows, someone said the wrong thing to another bloke and he disputed it and went and got his rifle and shot the camp up.

**While you were there though at the RAP how frequently would you have to treat somebody who had been injured in a fight?**

Usually I would do this at my aid post when I became B Company medic later on,

17:00 they might wake me up at one or two in the morning, they were still boozing up behind the lines somewhere and they had decided to throw a few cans around and they would come and wake me up. "Hey Sam can you stitch this bloke up?" Only four or five times all together but it seemed like a lot when you're woken up in the middle of the night.

**And what sort of repercussions would happen after a fight like that were people ever charged?**

No. Not really, except if a private threatened a corporal or actually hit a corporal they were charged

17:30 and locked in a container to sweat it out and come back down to earth. But the bloke I recall doing it, he and the other bloke are good mates these days so it was only temporary.

**And what were the officers doing in response to these fights?**

I think the officers had their mess and they used to have their spirits down there which we weren't allowed, we were

18:00 only allowed beer being the diggers. The officers had their spirits and their steaks and their music and TV and whatever, we had beer chips and a dart board and not much else really. So they probably got fairly full over where they were, most of them were good blokes in our company, but the diggers got a bit stropky every now and again.

**18:30 And before you joined B Company you were talking about the various types of things you were treating and we were talking about VD before, what about malaria?**

Yeah we had a big malaria blitz I think about September, just about everyone was coming down with it and a fair percentage of the battalion suffered with it at the one time. It depended on which areas of operation we were in and the enemy were basically giving the mosquitoes the malaria to give to us,

19:00 we were operating in the enemy area and the mosquitoes didn't care who they bit. And the safeguards we were taking weren't really working. The aeroguard type stuff and they weren't supposed to bite through the Australian cotton shorts, but they did. You would be sitting on picket at night and you would be feeling the zing, zing in your back and hundreds of them just feeding on you, the whole thing was just buzzing. So malaria was pretty

19:30 bad. We had blokes all over the RAP floor on stretchers, the hospitals were full and that's when they decided to bring in extra preventative medication called Dapsone which is actually for leprosy and we were fed that as well as Paladrine the regular anti-malarial. And found out later that lots of blokes got crook from the Dapsone, there is a

20:00 syndrome you can get from the Dapsone. A blood disorder which should have been tested for and wasn't.

**And what were the symptoms; how did that manifest itself?**

Another fever, I used to see these blokes in the bush and they would have this massive fever and you couldn't really work out what it was without a blood test or anything so I would put pyrexia of unknown origin, PUO, on their medical slip. Put them in a helicopter and get them off to hospital and they would probably be treated for a fever

20:30 without the doctors knowing what it was. Only later when you read books and research and secret information released after thirty years that you find out these things, what it could have been, and I think I probably had it myself.

**So the Paladrine up until then wasn't sufficient to stop the malaria?**

It works against one type of malaria but there are two main types, falciparum and vivax and it was treating one and not the other and our leaders

21:00 were saying, "Our blokes aren't taking their pills, make sure they are observed taking their pills twice a day." And we would see them swallow the pill; get ticked off in a book. In the bush too, naughty boys not taking the pills but the blokes were still getting malaria and so they worked out finally that it was a different type and a resistant type.

**You actually said at one point most of the battalion came down with malaria?**

Not most, I should retract that a

21:30 fair percentage, maybe a third which is a lot.

**And you had people lying all over the place?**

Vomiting and fever and yeah. And they are just out of it for a week to ten days and then they come good again.

**Unable to function?**

Yeah.

**So how were the medical operations able to deal with that many people being sick at one time?**

It was spread out over say month but we managed but only barely. We all had to learn how to drive the ambulance,

22:00 we had to do a driver's test on the wrong side of the road with left had this and that. There wasn't much happening operationally then because of the malaria, it was a flat time but we were flat out just doing maintenance, and the enemy probably had malaria all of the time, but background situation, because we were new to it it affected us pretty badly.

22:30 **And what other serious illnesses were occurring due to the conditions that people were operating in?**

Heat exhaustion was not common but it happened and people from other battalions that died from it and one of the tracker dogs died from heat exhaustion, the only dog casualty. A lot of rashes. Tinea, all of these unusual fevers

23:00 that could be pout down to anything. I was choppered off to hospital later in the piece with possible appendicitis and I was in that much pain that the doctor actually gave me intravenous morphine and put me on cloud nine and choppered into hospital, they shaved me from nipple to knee and put the glove and put the finger where you don't like fingers being put and the doctor didn't operate he said, "We will wait until tomorrow." And it settled down

23:30 overnight and it was an inflammation of all of my lymph nodes in my gut. They had all flared up at once and looking back on it it was probably to do with the Dapsone and I had a digger the day before that I had sent to hospital with the same thing. Just sheer agony can't do a thing, rolling around in the dirt; anyway I came good and went home a week later.

**And when people came down with malaria how were they treated?**

Usually sent down to hospital.

24:00 Just bed rest, lots of liquids and medication,

**Just wait for it to pass?**

Come good and then they had a rest and convalescence centre down there where they would send a bunch of blokes who were recuperating and they would have several days there to build up again and probably drink too much grog and then come back to Nui Dat and go back to work.

24:30 **So when you were suddenly sent off to B Company, can you tell us about arriving, you were choppered into the jungle?**

Choppered into this little clearing in the jungle and all hot and sweaty from digging in on Nui Nai and there was a small group of men there and one of them came over to me, he was the captain, the second in charge and he said to me, "Where's your camouflage cream?" Thank you very much. And I said, "I don't have any sir." Having just come from there where you don't need it. And he got his out and said, "Use mine." So I put black and green on and rubbed it around a bit and

25:00 he said, "You will be travelling behind the sig." And they had apparently been waiting for me to take off and to march onto this objective next morning. They were going to do a surprise attack on a hill called Nui Nai in the morning. It was a new innovation, night movement, this was getting late in the day and I had been holding them up. So I got in the line and followed along behind the sig. We pulled up for a smoke probably an hour or two later and I said, "What's going on?"

25:30 And he said, "Leccie was choppered out with heat exhaustion and you're his replacement." I said, "Thanks very much, now I know." And I thought, "I will be here for a couple of days and he will be back and I will be gone". So we marched all night in the dark, terrible crashing and crunching making lots of noise sort of telling any enemy exactly where we were, bad move and we pulled up before this little hill in the morning and it had been raining. It was really

26:00 steep, slippery with red mud and clay and we slipped and slithered and fooled around and finally got to the top and luckily no one was there. Otherwise we would have been slaughtered. So then we got off of that.

**What was the purpose of going to Nui Nai?**

Intelligence had indicated that there was possible enemy on top of this little hill. There was nothing there at all, a little bit of broken crockery from probably fifty years ago was all that I could find.

**Were you feeling quite vulnerable in marching through the night and approaching the hill in**

**that way?**

26:30 Yeah I was tired and from the day before and this is B Company, I have been with them before but this is Vietnam now and heck what does a company medic do when he is responsible for the lot? And the gear I had, he took his gear with him and I was lost. And then I had to organise the pickets at night for company headquarters; that was my job and a few other little

27:00 things that were suddenly my responsibility and I wasn't used to.

**So you got to the top of the hill and there was nothing?**

Got to the top of the hill and there was nothing there. Two days later I was still with B Company thinking, "Oh well I will be going back soon". We were in a patch of jungle we had moved on, Charlie Company had moved on, we were over here, Delta Company had gone here, Whiskey was here and Victor was back with the battalion headquarters. And

27:30 going through the jungle looking for the enemy, not much happening and suddenly we could hear firing about four hundred metres away, lots and lots of shooting and Charlie Company had sent a patrol out and it had been going most of the day, this is about three or four o'clock in the afternoon and they had been going all day following a track and it kept on luring them further and further away because they might find something. They were sort of too far away from their base to return and

28:00 they came across a bunker complex and they walked into the bunker complex and they were empty bunkers and they thought, "This is empty" and they probably relaxed a bit and suddenly they were fired upon, well they saw a sentry sitting on one of the bunkers and the sentry saw them at the same time, so they shot at each other and everyone went to ground and a big fire fight developed but the enemy was in the bunkers so all they had was

28:30 their eyebrows showing and their rifles and these diggers were out in the open. And before too long there were two of them dead and six or seven wounded and one enemy dead because everyone was shooting at him; he died and his body was hanging out of the pit a bit. And we were four hundred yards away listening to all of this and it happened over an hour and a half and they didn't want any help, "No we're right, it is only a small enemy group,

29:00 three or four people and there is eighteen of us." Suddenly they had two dead and seven wounded and so half of them were out of action and so they had nine against two or three in bunkers, and it was starting to get dark and they said, "Yes we do need help, our radios have been shot out and we really need help. The lieutenant has got two holes in him." So then they organised a patrol of our people and me, their medic had been shot through the neck and

29:30 so they didn't have a medic and we almost galloped the four hundred metres in a semi circle to come around the side of the action and linkup with them and I remember seeing a bloke laying behind a tree there with his rifle pointing away from us and he sort of quickly looked over his shoulder and saw it was us friendly people, thinking maybe it was the enemy coming behind and I went over and said, "Where are the wounded?"

30:00 And he said, "Over there." And about fifteen, twenty metres away behind a tree I could see two blokes kneeling over another fellow and he was obviously pretty bad and there was no shooting at this stage, it had stopped about ten or fifteen minutes before. And anyway I said, "Thanks mate." And he got down and had the big wide eyed look and I could see a few other people around the place and I started sauntering over to where they were. And as I was half way across

30:30 there the shooting started again from the bunkers which were about eight metres that way, they missed me and I got behind a tree. And it went on for about another half an hour, everyone started shooting again and the officer got shot in the bum again and it was all happening and I got down behind the tree and this bloke had been shot through both arms and through the right nipple and blew out his shoulder. I had seen the Kiwi, that was pretty bad, but this fellow,

31:00 he was in a fair bit of pain and I thought, "Strewth, chest wound no morphine, head wound no morphine" but he was really out of it and so I had to give him morphine and try and patch him up while lying on the ground next to him with his two blokes there almost crying their eyes. And the shooting happening and they were shooting into the tree we were behind. Anyway it started to get dark and I think the enemy sort of went down a little tunnel and ran away and our blokes

31:30 took over and so on. And patched him up a bit more, and then I had to get the fellows to make stretchers, that was where my medical training sort of, what do we need now? Stretchers, yeah stretchers. So I yelled out, "Make some stretchers, we will need seven stretchers." And a voice came back, "How do we make stretchers?" "Chop down two saplings, get your toggle ropes and hoochies." "Oh right oh yeah." They had made them before but they had all

32:00 gone blank. So they were making stretchers and a couple of stretcher bearers had come in with me on the rescue mission and they were patching blokes up, neck wounds and cheek wounds and so on, and some minor wounds. One bloke just had a nick on his wrist where he had put his hand around the tree to shoot and they had shot through the wrist, he was going to throw a grenade that straight, put his hand around the tree and bing.

- 32:30 It was still getting dark then slowly, but we couldn't winch them out, we couldn't get a chopper in there and so we had to stretch them out back to all the way back to where we had started from four hundred metres away and by then it was pitch dark and we had to go in between the saplings with the stretchers. They were all pretty awkward and I got an ex-life saver to do mouth to mouth on this fellow because he was not breathing then and I had a little penlight torch and I would go up to each of the patients and see how they were doing,
- 33:00 move between patients on the march and about nine o'clock that night we got back to our position, this bloke was barely alive and the chopper was hovering about sixty feet up dropped a cable down and we put one on at a time the worst on first and took them up into the chopper and took two or three up and he went off to the hospital and another chopper came along and slotted in and got the next lot in and finally we strapped the dead on and got them away, but the last bloke he had been shot through the forehead and shot the back of his head out and
- 33:30 as I was lifting him onto the jungle penetrator and strapping him on I got all of his brains and stuff on my shirt and I had that for a week until I got a clean shirt brought out. And that was my introduction to B Company and I thought, "I am not going to last too long at this sort of stuff". But it did settle down a bit after that. Yeah so that was Black Friday, Friday the 13th of September 1968.
- 34:00 And then the choppers all pulled away and there was dead silence and my night vision was never good and I had glasses and I was sort of bumbling around and a bloke grabbed me by the arm and said, "I will show you where your bunk is Sam, where your shell scrape is Sam. And you don't have to do picket tonight." "Thanks very much." So he led me to my pit and I sat down with my feet in the pit and I sat on the edge, phew
- 34:30 that was some sort of action .and I was pretty hungry because I had missed out on tea and so I got into my ration pack quietly and got a tin of something out and opened it, did it all by feel. Ate it, I think it was cold pork, really solid and it sat there like a lead balloon all night and I just couldn't sleep. I just sat there propped against a tree I was bilious, I had all of these flashbacks and I was reliving the action over and over gain.
- 35:00 What else could I have done; what could I have done differently? And so on, just thinking, "Strewth" and we didn't know at that stage that the last bloke that I had patched up, he died on the chopper. He didn't make it, so they had three dead and six wounded.

#### **Tough day.**

Tough day at the office yeah.

#### **So just to go back into that story and get a little bit more**

- 35:30 **detail although you tell that story incredibly well, when you said that they said, "Their radios had been shot out, how were you communicating with them?"**

Oh they had one going most of the time, but they usually have two or three radios and I think a couple of them had been shot out or flat batteries something, but they couldn't get direct communications to where they needed them

- 36:00 and so they were relaying back through B Company and so all of the messages took longer and finally luckily they said, "We really do need help" and we were there in, we almost galloped through the bush which you don't do over there, you go carefully in case you get ambushed and shot up. But we knew the desperation, didn't realise how many casualties they had, we just knew they needed help. And until we got there we didn't know the extent. So the next day there were nine left out of eighteen.

- 36:30 **When you started hearing the firing you were about four hundred metres away?**

About four hundred metres away and you could hear it through the bush. And you think, "Gee", you wonder who is copping it and after a couple of minutes whispers came around we talked in whispers, we had a very good routine there, "Charlie Company" Oh right Charlie Company is in action and you don't know whether they are copping it or giving it. You assume they are giving it and they are okay.

- 37:00 And you wonder how the medic is coping if he has got casualties, I always used to think if that was me there how would I be doing? It sounded pretty bad. And the medic had already been shot through the neck.

#### **When you say shot through the neck, was he killed?**

No just badly wounded. Cheek and neck through here. And another bloke I think through the cheek and jaw bone, lots of blood and gore.

#### **Who was running things with you at that point was it**

- 37:30 **the commander of B Company?**

No, he stayed back at our camp and he sent the lieutenant with a platoon, thirty men and the CSM went as well. We had a fair covering of people there, the lieutenant who did actually conduct the rescue got a Mention In Dispatches for that.

**So who was the guy giving orders to you?**

38:00 Yeah well I didn't actually get any orders; I just went in. They just said, "Pack your gear up we are going in to help Charlie Company." So I put my gear on and away I went and I don't think I spoke to anybody about anything much until I ordered them to get the stretchers made and I asked around for a mouth to mouth person and then we got back and we were

38:30 winching them out and our captain wanted to know what the priority was and how many we had. At that stage I thought we only had two dead and six wounded and I said, "We have so many." And right at the last this bloke came up and said, "I have been wounded in the ankle." And he had shrapnel in his ankle and we found out later he had them in his scalp too, they all festered out. He was right in the thick of it and got the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

39:00 **At the point where they said we need help you went charging around basically as fast as you could, how many of you went around?**

Probably thirty odd, thirty-five maybe, not knowing the size of the enemy force or anything.

**And all of the time you could hear gunfire?**

Until we got about half way there and it stopped and we thought, "That's good; it is finished" and then it started again after I went across the clearing.

**And when it started again**

39:30 **were you armed?**

Yeah I had my rifle there.

**Were you ready to fire it?**

But I was behind the tree and they were on my left hand side and I am right handed. So to shoot at them I would have had to, and there was no point in me, all of these other fellows were shooting around us and over us. And I was behind the tree so I just started work.

**You talk about when you were behind the tree gunfire was going all over the place, what could you actually see?**

I could only see behind the tree,

40:00 the tree was one with a sort of flared buttress roots luckily and they were fairly thick and there was thud, thud, thud into that for a while and then I think they left us alone and were shooting at the others and throwing grenades and so on.

**So behind the tree what was happening?**

I was just working on the patient trying to patch him up and dressings kept falling off because it was awkward situation and I didn't want to restrict his breathing too much and I wanted to patch the holes, it was very awkward.

40:30 **Up until that time was he the worst casualty you had come across?**

Yeah the Kiwi was bad with the thigh wounds, he should have died to but he lived.

**We will stop there.**

40:48 **End of tape**

## Tape 7

00:30 **So what happened after that incident?**

After that we did pack up our gear, we felt that bunker system, the artillery did lob in on it during that night but it probably didn't do much damage and the enemy probably reoccupied it. We went off in different area, Charlie Company got re-enforcements. We had a creek

01:00 crossing where one of the fellows sprained his knee and badly sprained his toes and I thought they may have been fractured but due to the regular contacts we had with the enemy he was unable to get out for two or three days, so lucky it was only really badly sprained. I helped him with a claim not too long ago having remembered that incident and written it up.

**Was it hard to adjust to a new company?**

I found it was fairly

- 01:30 easy to adjust because after my first abrupt encounter with the camouflage captain he turned out to be a very nice fellow who was hoochied up close by and he was really caring, careful, he used to coordinate everything for the company and do it quite smoothly. He was a smooth operator,
- 02:00 great when casualties were around especially. And the company...everybody was friendly and helpful to me, even the CSM who was a tough little Scotsman, he probably thought he was pretty tough and I thought he was tough for a while but after a while I could see that he was just keeping us up to the mark, keeping us all doing the right thing; putting our camouflage

- 02:30 cream on every morning, shaving every day and being quiet. I remember he chipped me a couple of times because I had souvenired a Viet Cong cooking pot and put it in my pack and it was rattling a bit and he gave me a bit of a dressing down. Rightly so.

**What did that involve?**

The cooking pot?

**The dressing down?**

It was a sort of a harsh whisper because in the bush we didn't talk. A harsh whisper said, "Fix that pack or I will fix

- 03:00 you" sort of thing. "Yes sir." I tried to fix it a few times and ended up stuffing a pair of socks in it. I didn't want to just leave it there, it was a great little cooking pot and a pair of black pyjamas in a bunker that we sort of overran, souvenir.

**Can you describe the bunker that you over ran?**

Yeah it was around that time or a bit later obviously but one of the platoon patrols had come across, they

- 03:30 had heard some enemy talking or chopping wood or something and they had snuck forward to have a look and they saw a bunker system and enemy and they wanted permission to go in and take them out. And our company commander being very careful thankfully said, "No pull back; we will get the artillery in and then go in with the whole company. We don't want any gung ho heroics here." So we pulled back a couple of hundred metres and the artillery bombarded it for a while and then we went in and found it all

- 04:00 smashed up pretty well and I went down this bunker underground and explored it for a little bit and I could see all of these little wires. And I thought, "You bloody idiot, they could be trip wires for a mine". And there was a lot of them and so I thought it probably isn't anyway and so I went down and I found this pair of black pyjamas and cooking pot with a lid and a few other bits and pieces. And somebody else found some medical supplies and bananas and things and a few photos were taken and I think that was the one that there was a black brassiere

- 04:30 hanging on the washing line. And we thought, "These blokes are doing all right out here". Later on we found out that sometimes the Viet Cong women were just another one of the troops, not just entertainment corps. So they were quite at liberty to having their smalls hanging on the washing line. So we didn't have any action there, we just

- 05:00 probably marked the camp for future demolition by the engineers or a B52 strike or something and probably continued marching and patrolling quietly with hand signals.

**Do you remember the hand signals?**

I remember them very well. A couple of engineers we had didn't. With the rifle company you get attachments like medics, signallers, engineers and we had these two engineers with us one day and they are a splinter team, they are

- 05:30 supposed to blow up things that we find, unexploded bombs and bunkers and so on. And a signal came back down the line for a signal of ten and a tap on the foot and for us diggers that meant keep ten paces apart, the thickness of the bush around here indicates that we should spread out a bit more, rather than five metres make it ten metres, ten paces and so we just unravelled and the engineers who had been

- 06:00 allocated to tail end Charlie position which is right at the back and they got the signal for ten and thought, "Ten minutes for a smoke". And so they stopped lit up and had their smoke and the rest of the patrol kept going for some time and the third last bloke in the patrol kept looking back and he suddenly thought, "They're not here any more". And he quickly sent the message back up the line, the engineers are missing and so then we had to send a party back to bring them back.

- 06:30 So yeah they soon learnt the correct signals, it was sort of come to me, come to me quickly, bring a NCO or officer, enemy, obstacle rather, enemy, friendlies just basic hand signals that saved noise.

**What about living conditions out there?**

After each days patrolling say an hour before sun down we would stop

- 07:00 and form a circle a harbour and the signal would come back to form a wagon train circle and so the

CSM would allocate positions for each of our pairs and we would put our packs down and sit there with our rifles in our laps while clearing patrols went out and cleared the area outside our camp and then we would quietly, which is pretty hard to do sometimes in rocky country, dig our shell scrapes and

07:30 have something to eat, have a cup of tea, have a smoke and then just before dark we would put our webbing on, our rifle, our hat and we would sit there and gaze out into the jungle in case we were attacked, that was called stand to. The malaria pills would come around and then during the night we would have machine guns spaced around the perimeter and most people would do two and a half hours during the night sitting on the gun with a

08:00 companion who was overlapping their times. So someone was usually fairly alert and sometimes we would sneak a smoke in the bottom of the pit and hide it in our shirt or cupped hands so it didn't show any light but you could still smell the smoke. And then in the morning we would do stand to again before dawn, have our pills, shave,

08:30 clean rifles, we would do that in the evening too, clean rifles, have something to eat, pack up the gear, fill in your pit, open up any cans that you had been getting food out of so that the enemy couldn't use them as containers for bombs or anything, and do it all quietly. Put your camouflage cream on, the orders would come out for the day in quiet little O groups between sections and platoons and company headquarters.

09:00 People that needed treatment for different things would come and see me and we would put our thirty kilos on our back and pick up our rifle, have our final smoke and go out on patrol again for the day.

**And what about going to the toilet, because I imagine if you went too far out in the bush you would be very vulnerable?**

Within the camp you would have little pits for each platoon, which the turd burglars from each platoon would dig, just about two metres long and thirty centimetres wide and deep

09:30 and a pile of dirt to put on top of. Each day's rations used to have four little sheets of shiny green toilet paper which had no wipeability capabilities, no purchasing power. More for polishing than,

10:00 **So if you had run out of the terrible toilet paper what?**

Well you didn't actually need much toilet paper because you were on rations which were concentrated foods so you didn't have much by product waste of food. One litre of water a day to shave, cook in and to make a tea is not much and you sweat a lot and so everything gets concentrated and it is more like pellets when you do go.

10:30 **And what about the food you were eating out there what were you eating?**

Every five days the helicopter would come into a clearing somewhere and we would send a patrol out to get the rations for the main party and we would get five days rations each so that would be fifteen meals; and two days would be Australian packs and they were very concentrated and didn't take much room but pretty boring and the Americans, each meal would be the size of a one day Australian pack and

11:00 you had cookies and cream biscuits and chocolate coated thingos and frankfurters and lima beans, pork, tinned apples and peaches and fruit salad, four cigarettes in each meal pack including Kent with the asbestos filters. So they were quite bulky, so what you would do was put all of your

11:30 rations out on the ground, sort out what you thought you could carry and then destroy the rest. You would get a big pit and if the conditions were right we would have a fire in there and throw the rations in there to destroy them so the enemy couldn't use them. But people get a bit blasé sometimes out in the bush and there was little tins of Kraft cheese and some of them wouldn't puncture them before they threw them in the fire. They thought, "This will be good fun", and they would throw them in the fire and they would go poom, and a big dollop of molten cheese

12:00 would go flying and the noise would carry and the CSM would come around and rant and rave under his breath. But it was just the wags doing their things. And a special pack used to come in with that too, and you would have chewing gum, chewing tobacco, cigars, shaving cream in a pressure pack with a full menthol flavour, razor blades, and Hershey bars [chocolate bars].

12:30 A real special pack, and you would get that every now and then and Marlborough cigarettes and the boss used to get the Marlborough cigarettes because that's what he liked. And we used to get the odds and ends that were left over.

**What about keeping clean?**

You can't keep clean unless it is the wet season or unless you go through a creek and you have got time to get in and have a scrub, that's probably happened once or twice. Our longest operation was fifty-four days without a wash.

13:00 And we were just going rotten, crotches and armpits and everything, rashes developing and we were just bad news.

**It must have been hard for you because not only did you have to deal with it yourself but I guess you had to look at it all of the time?**

And you can smell it when you're fixing someone's tinea laden feet up or groin and you're putting purple cream on with a long stick.

**Eww.**

Yeah a lot of medic's things aren't real good.

- 13:30 A lot of people used to rubbish the medics but then when it came time for treatment, well a classic example was Big Hoss, he was a fellow about six foot two or three built like a country dunny, and he came in one day, sitting out the bush, I was sitting in my shell scrape which was great, you stay in the one place and you could read a book even, a little book you put in your pack too. And Hoss came in with a lump on his calf, big red lump with a shiny bit.
- 14:00 "Ahh right. Lay down here." And he is lying down on the side of the pit on the dirt smelling, he had probably been out for a few weeks. And I started slicing with my scalpel into this big abscess thing that he had, squeezing it and nothing is happening. And I had smashed my glasses before that too, so I had one good lens with a couple of cracks on it and one lens that just shattered and fell out so I was having a bit of fun with headaches and seeing things and not much eye protection.
- 14:30 And I am cutting a bit further into this and he is sort of gritting and sitting back and finally the thing went boom and it exploded and I got the lot, green and yellow in the eye everything. And he sort of went, "Ahh that's better." And I went, "Ah strewth." And I tipped antiseptic all over me which was pure and my eyes just went crimson. I didn't think; I just thought, "Hell this gunk is on me, I am going to
- 15:00 get brain damage and my eyes are going to fall out and everything". Anyway then I just got water and washed it all off and then they just went light red then. Cleaned him up and gave him some antibiotics and I thought, "Struth", you know every now and again we used to get clean greens, we couldn't wash but every now and then the helicopter would bring some clean greens in and you would take your old ones off and they would go back to camp and the bloke would take them down to the laundry and get another load and
- 15:30 we would get clean greens and they would be clean and smell good for half an hour or so but then your body odour would take over. Whatever you did there you sweated because of the thirty kilos you carried, the tenseness of the situation, and uphill and down dale and the closeness of the jungle. And about that time I had my most terrifying moment over there which I forgot to put in my book. People usually think it is a battle or something when you're getting shot at,
- 16:00 but I was in my shell scrape, Willy was about two metres away, it was two o'clock in the morning, I was about half a metre underground laying on my plastic sheet with my pack as my pillow, pretty hard and I had my mosquito net draped so that it hung down in there to stop the mosquitoes coming in and zapping me and it sort of just touched the ground. And so I was encased in this mosquito net
- 16:30 and suddenly I thought I was being attacked by a Viet Cong and he was on my chest and on my face and then he was running up and down my body. And then a hissing and snarling, I thought, "It can't be a Viet Cong", but my ribs were barely containing my heart; it was sort of jumping and smashing against my ribs. And I didn't utter a sound, not a peep. So Willy slept through the whole thing. And it was a big monkey that had been scrounging
- 17:00 around the camp and fallen into my pit, got under the mosquito net and was running up and down me and every time I punched it and kicked it, it would hit the mosquito net and bounce back like a trampoline. And I was just petrified, first thinking my throat was going to be cut and then thinking this thing was going to bite me and I was going to get rabies and that. So in the end I just had the presence of mind to lift up the mosquito net and lash out with both feet and kicked it up and out of the shell scrape
- 17:30 and just lay there exhausted and my heart gradually settled back to normal. And in the morning I said to Willy, "Did you hear what happened last night?" "No." So that was my worst moment over there I thought.

**That would be totally terrifying?**

We were on a slope dug in and as I kicked it I could hear it go crash bang wallop all of the way down the slope, but I hadn't seen monkeys during the day; it was just sudden,

- 18:00 from a deep sleep flat on your back to aghhh.

**Under that constant pressure, you had worked in psychiatry and studied psychology, did you see any evidence of people really starting to lose it?**

Not really; the only evidence I had of psychological problems I had that I dealt with over there were a few malingerers. Come in and you know darn well they had not been taking the

- 18:30 treatment you ordered or if they had acne on their back they were actively rolling in the dirt to encourage it rather than...just to stay out of the bush. They were getting a bit bush shy. One fellow

came in and he said, "I have got this terrible complaint and I don't think you can fix it". And I thought, "Psychology here," the Yanks had these beaut pink and grey like a headache pill, like an aspro, pink and grey capsule, really flash looking and I said,

19:00 "Mate take two of these now and two of these later on and see how you are in the morning." and he came in in the morning and he said, "Gee I am a hell of a lot better, that is good stuff." So just a little bit of psychology got him over the hump.

**Placebo, what was the initial complaint?**

I forget now but he thought it was pretty bad, I don't remember, I remember I fixed him up whatever it was.

**So out there in the bush you didn't see anybody panic or lose control?**

No, they were all...

19:30 even in a big fire fight, it was teamwork and mateship. You weren't fighting against communism or fighting for the Queen or the flag or the prime minister or anything; you were fighting for your mates and your survival. That was the general thing and just to live another day and get your three hundred and sixty-five days and a wakey up and get on the boat or plane and go home and get on with things.

20:00 **What did you miss most about home?**

Family, the food, the house, my own bed, playing basketball, spear fishing, going to the footy. Any news you got was stale and in the end you didn't worry about it, what's the point? Mum used to send cuttings over every now and then and they were interesting but you think, "Oh yeah". And the horse that I used to back at the trots won at a hundred to one while I was away.

20:30 I would have won a lot of money, "Oh well that's just the breaks, another hurdle". Just miss the little things, the general things. Go down to the shops, there were no shops, real money, coins, it was all paper money over there and it was all fake money, it was Mickey Mouse military payment certificates. The smells, the clean eucalyptus smell of Australia.

21:00 Over there it smelt of faeces and fermented fish sauce which has improved a lot over the years.

**What sort of letters were you getting?**

Mum used to write two or three times a week, my wife used to write once a week, not very often and I think I got one or two letters from mates or relatives. Very little, it just didn't concern them; they had no idea. But Mum was a writer.

21:30 **How did you deal with the concern that prior to leaving you and your wife were becoming more estranged?**

I had no control over it over there, there blokes over there that had domestic dramas and they were sent home on compassionate leave to sort it out but I didn't realise that my situation was heading that way, I thought, "When I get home things will be right. She will be right mate".

22:00 **So the letters you were getting were not giving that away at all?**

No because I was sending the majority of my pay home and had I been given a "Dear John" letter [letter to inform them that the relationship is over], that would have changed you see? So commercial interest.

**So what happened when you were out on patrol, you came across the second big conflict?**

That wasn't until...

**Christmas came before that didn't it?**

22:30 Yeah we had Christmas; that was between...October, November were fairly steady patrolling, not much around, found a few bunker systems, didn't have any major casualties. Had a bit of time back in Nui Dat and then we were out for Christmas and it was pretty hot and dry. There was a declared ceasefire which was violated eighty times in the first hour. We were listening to it on the radio I think I went over to

23:00 the doctor's hoochie and he always kept an ear on the radio listening to the shenanigans going on. But we ended up getting a Christmas lunch brought out to us in a helicopter and we had cold turkey and salad and a bun and a hot beer and a soft drink. It was different, we took pictures of each other and we got the shaving cream out of the special pack and put fake snow

23:30 on our hoochies and hung a few things around and had a few smokes. I think the officers brought around coffee and rum to serve the troops and I had never had rum before and I couldn't drink coffee, so I had a cup of tea with rum in it and it was bloody awful. Like a bloke at our meeting the other day, they said something about the dog memorial is a couple of weeks' time, we are going to have a toast of rum and coffee and he said, "Can I have them in separate cups?"

24:00 So we had Christmas in the bush and I think it was January the 7th we had a bit of an accident, one of our diggers was leading an overnight ambush patrol back into our harbour, which we used to do quite

often; we would send a platoon out overnight several hundred metres to ambush a track and we would be back in reserve and this fellow was coming back in and we had a brand new re-enforcement

- 24:30 come in recently and he was not fully aware of all of the drills that we had. And there had been a break down in communication and the only sentry that wasn't warned that there was a patrol coming in was where the patrol decided to come in on the three hundred and sixty degrees of the harbour. So this fellow saw a little fellow leading the patrol with his hat turned up on one side and hadn't been warned, bang, bang. Shot him three times and the first one shot two fingers off,
- 25:00 the second one hit a grenade on his pouch and lodged in it and didn't set it off. And the third one went through his left chest, just below his heart and down he went. And I had just made a cup of tea and had a shave and was getting ready to have a nice relaxing breakfast, cereal block, cup of tea and a smoke, look around and bang, bang, bang. Everyone hit the deck there were cups of tea and coffee getting knocked over left right and centre and blokes swearing and cursing and
- 25:30 then someone said, "Ceasefire" or "There has been an accident" or something and then, "Medic!" Oh dear, grabbed my gear and went over and he had what I thought was a sucking chest wound and I thought, "I can fix that", and I opened up his shirt and he had a neat hole at the front and a big hole at the back and it was all bubbly and pink and frothy and gurgling away there and I thought, "Not good, probably lung or something". So I ripped open a shell dressing and put one on the front and one
- 26:00 on the back and that seals it up. Bandaged him up, didn't give him morphine I don't think. Anyway I didn't notice the two fingers missing because there was no blood it just whipped them off and sealed them off and we had to get the engineers to chop down a couple of trees with their chainsaw that got winched in somehow. When you're busy with a patient you don't see what's going on behind you but anyway a chopper came in and lowered down a
- 26:30 cable and a stretcher frame, Stokes litter I think it was, sort of a wire mesh cradle. We popped him into that and I wrote a medical thing and pinned it to him and hoped he would be all right and as he was going up his hands were clenched to the side of it and then I saw the two fingers missing, take him away, there is no good bringing him back to patch two fingers. And at the hospital he died technically three times for periods
- 27:00 up to twenty three minutes and they had to open his chest up and massage his heart like squeezing a tennis ball. Got him around again patched him, it hadn't got his lung but it had got intestines and spleen and the bubbles were from the gasses the bullets had dragged in after it as it went through. It was sort of on the margin of the ribs and lungs. He survived and his wife had given birth only a week before so he was a pretty lucky man.
- 27:30 The army tried to get rid of him because he had the two fingers missing but he stayed in for twenty-five, thirty years; I think he has only just got out. He got a clerical job after that. I have met him a few times and he sent for the book recently, so a wonderful story. When he woke up in hospital, he came too after the anaesthetic and so on and the medical orderly who was looking after him was John Hector who had black horn rimmed glasses,
- 28:00 crew cut and Tony woke up and said, "What the hell are you doing here Sam?" And John said, "Oh you're with Sam's mob? He's my best mate." And so it all fitted in.

**How did the soldier that was shooting react?**

Very badly I believe, I don't think he has ever gotten over it. There had been efforts made to get the two together because Tony is willing

- 28:30 but I think the other fellow, from last report he had a wife who had been in a coma for a number of years so he had his own set of dramas and he just sort of disappeared again.

**Very sad.**

But Tony is fine and goes to all of the reunions and orders three beers.

**So it must be really gratifying to see the results of that really chaotic situation?**

- 29:00 Yeah from an accident; it would have been really shocking if he had died. A lot of us would have been, even the blokes that didn't warn the sentry, the sentry himself, the officer that commanded that section.

**So then you moved forward, is this still in the middle of the fifty-four day stretch?**

That probably is about that time, getting toward the end of my tether. It would have been close to it.

- 29:30 **There is something I want to ask you being in the medical field with that many men in a patrol like that for that long how do men relieve themselves of sexual tension because they are young guys?**

I think you're just too tired. Your food is lousy, the rations, very little fresh food coming in. The odd bit of fruit which I should have thought about earlier in my linking up;

- 30:00 I should have demanded it for the boys. Patrolling, the nervous energy being expended, the adrenalin

rushes that they are having irregularly. The fatigue. And I think being numb a lot of the time to what's happening and the sexual side becomes sort of a fantasy to be put on hold for when you get home. Like you get home

30:30 and the second bang is the door slamming yeah.

**So what happened then leading up to the second big conflict?**

Routine patrols, everything fine, went into February, the dry season. A lot of dust and heat and starting to feel pretty flat and disinterested and ready to go home, a lot of my intake had already gone home

31:00 and a lot of people were starting to say, "Eighth intake will be home by Christmas." Well Christmas had come and gone and January came and went and it was the end of February and I was a bit cheesed off. I had survived so far and I thought, "Well if they keep me here too much longer my odds are getting tight". I sat in on an O group and they said, "B Company is on patrol tomorrow and we are going to go out and

31:30 clean up a small enemy party who are guarding a weapons cache a few kilometres from here. We are going to pack up all of the gear go and clean them up. It is only a small group." And I thought "Right oh, this will be pretty easy" and next morning we saddled up all of our gear. It was pretty open country, dry season rice paddy, sparse bush and for some reason we had

32:00 three tanks with us, they were coming along for the ride, fifty-two ton centurions, a lot of noise and smoke and so on and I thought, "Gee, we're not sneaking up on anybody today" so I sort of switched off a bit and we were spaced about twenty metres apart, pretty wide and we were plodding along, gone for about an hour and the sweat was starting to come through and you started thinking lets get this over with, I am ready to go back to

32:30 Nui Dat, pack my gear and go home. And the CSM some up and he said, "Corporal Brown have you got any keeling powders?" And I didn't quite catch it. And I said, "Pardon sir?" and he said, "Keeling powders." And I said, "Oh kaolin powders." They are an anti-diarrhoeal crushed clay. "Have you got a problem?" and he said, "Oh no, for the VC we're going to give them the shits today." And I said, "Oh good sir, I hope so sir." And off he went, he was

33:00 sort of coming along just checking the patrol as he was going up .and he was always on the go and away he went and I thought, "Good oh", and time went on and it must have been about one o'clock I suppose we stopped for a bite somewhere, ready to stop again, going across a big clearing with stubble about a foot high and lots of dust and the tanks and just getting a bit cheesed off and I heard this big boom;

33:30 I heard this big boom and a big cloud of black smoke and a red flame about two hundred metres ahead. And I thought, "Strewth what's that?" And I sank down to one knee and everyone around sort of "What's going on?" And then rattatat boom crash and the just continuous firing and I thought, "Gee we have found them and we are cleaning them up already. She'll be right", little knowing that it was a VC mine that had started the contact and killed two of our blokes

34:00 and wounded a whole heap of others and that started the conflict. So I am there thinking this is fine, it is not going to be much, it will be all over shortly and it is not going to be much and we will go back and clear out. And then word came back, "Medic up the front." Oh that's me, someone's hurt and it is still going on, it is still happening. So I went forward at half crouch and

34:30 probably took me about five minutes to get there and Willy was a few metres in front of me so I grabbed the field dressings and hooked them on and my big pack and bum pack and off I went and I got up there, and it is all still happening and I am crouching even lower and I saw a body there that was all mangled up and smashed and there was a fellow behind his pack and he is not shooting but in position and I said, "Did we get one, did we mate?" "No, it is one of ours."

35:00 So then I could see this group of people up front and I could see blood and stuff and they were all pretty messy, so I went up to them and started trying to prioritise who I was going to treat first. So I picked on Bluey who had lots of holes in his legs and chest and what have you and the others were peppered with shrapnel. In fact a bloke rang me yesterday who I was involved in that and I hadn't heard from him since that day and he had seventeen holes in him

35:30 from shrapnel from that initial blast. So I picked on Blue and patched him up and the action was still happening and the tanks were about ten or fifteen metres to my left and the enemy were up there in their bunkers, turned out to be a whole battalion apart from a small party who we were supposed to hit. A whole battalion of regulars and they were putting rockets into the tanks and machine gun fire and our blokes were shooting them and then a fire started in the stubble.

36:00 So I was patching Blue up and then the CSM who had twenty-two pellet holes in him said, "We have got to move him back." So we grabbed him and we dragged him back over about ten minutes, back over a little dip into the rice paddy, a paddy bund and as we were going back I saw the commanding officer and a signaller and a few others down in a bit of a hollow and they had the radio sets and I realised that I didn't have enough equipment to work;

36:30 I didn't have any intravenous fluids. So I yelled at them as I went past, "Get onto Starlight." Which was a codeword for doctor, I was Starlight minor being a medic. "Get onto Starlight, want intravenous fluids

and Starlight.” So I need him to come and give me a hand which is not the usual done thing, you don’t usually bring the doctor forward, you usually bring the patient back. But he was at battalion headquarters a few kilometres

- 37:00 away so a helicopter brought him to the back of where the action was and he came forward to this bund and put intravenous fluids in, patching him up, and we got him in the chopper and he died on the way to hospital. The other fellow was already dead. And then we had tankies with their groin and backsides blown off and heads smashes, all sorts of wounds. And then we finally did a tactical withdrawal because we weren’t getting anywhere and we pulled back across the clearing
- 37:30 to where the Kiwis’ Whiskey Company were, our back up group and they were waiting back there to come and assist if needed, but it was no good getting them involved and having it get more complicated and so we pulled back after about two hours of fighting. And I thought, “I have had it”. My back was killing me and I had a small voice in the back of my head saying, “Just get anything, get wounded, get the hell out of here, this is not healthy”.
- 38:00 So we got the wounded into the choppers and we gradually withdrew. One of the wounded tankies gave me a forty-five pistol with a pearl handle on it that looked pretty flash. I put it into my pocket and gave it back later to one of the officers. But in the withdrawal my big pack was still up in the forward section, and I thought, “Nah I am not going back in there to get my big pack; it can stay there”. And so we went back and retreated,
- 38:30 well withdrew all of the way back to our previous camp site and re-dug our pits and settled back in again and getting ready to go in again next day and attack again with a lot more support. Because by that stage the jets were napalming and bombing and the jets were bombing, they were giving it a real pounding in there and we thought, “Next day we will go in and do it again. We don’t want to go in but we will and avenge what has happened”.
- 39:00 And that evening we got a signal through saying that tomorrow was a religious festival throughout the country and there would be a complete ceasefire and 4 Battalion will be moved from this area to another operational area. And we thought. “We have been in there and lost two killed and all of those wounded and two tanks smashed up and all of the tankies ruined for life and we are just going to leave it”. And that’s what happened. So frustration plus, plus.
- 39:30 So for that our major got the Military Cross, I got the Military Medal and there were three or four MID’s [Mentioned in Dispatches] handed out and the bloke who was in charge of the tanks, he is a hero. The middle tank of the three was hit by all of these rockets and it was only a brand new tank prior to this and the crew were all wounded severely and he jumped out of his tank with pistol in hand, shot a couple of enemy on his way over to the other tank, helped get them all out,
- 40:00 helped get it withdrawn back to his tank and I think he shot another enemy on his way back to his own tanks, and for that he only got a ‘mention in dispatches’. Which is the minor award because of the rationing system. Our major got the MC [Military Cross] and so on. But later on in another big action in Binh Ba this fellow got a Military Cross.
- 40:26 End of tape

## Tape 8

- 00:30 **Okay so can you tell us a little bit more about what you did during that fire fight that ultimately brought you the military medal?**

Yeah well I didn’t think it was for that occasion; I thought it may have been for Friday the 13th the Black Friday, but the ration of medals had already been given out there to the lieutenant who conducted the

- 01:00 assault; he got the Military Cross, his sergeant got the Distinguished Conduct Medal and our lieutenant got the MID so that was the rations. There probably should have been other medals awarded, to the diggers who tried to rescue their mates and got shot. But for Goodwood, February the 16th, the citation read that Corporal Brown moved forward from a relatively safe position, from where I was out in the paddy field
- 01:30 to where the wounded were and the area was being swept by continuous machine gun, rocket and small arms fire, he was blown to the ground by a rocket burst and continued to move forward, I don’t remember the rocket burst, but anyway moved forward to rescue the wounded. And then it said, “Blah, blah,” the usual things, “during the course of his time in Vietnam he has been a pretty good bloke and
- 02:00 done the right things”. So looking back at it, it was a combination of Black Friday Goodwood a couple of other occasions just going forward obeying orders, a medic’s job is just to patch them up when they are wounded, not to hang back. Get in and do it even though you’re pretty scared at the time, you are more scared I think of not going in

02:30 and your mates thinking you haven't got the spine to do it than actually getting up on your haunches, ducking your head down and getting in there. And being pretty skinny at the time, they missed.

**Was that something you were actually concerned about, being able to do that and not letting your mates down?**

Yeah. Whenever you hear a shot fired you think, "Who has been hit? Where have they been hit? Can I handle it?"

03:00 Will I be able to save them? Will it be too gory if it is a gut wound and all of the intestines are hanging out? Will I be able to handle it, I haven't had to yet?" And I never did luckily. But you get all of these scenarios that you semi process in attendance and luckily most of them never happen. Most of them are fairly clean and clear cut and when you get there you fly by the seat of your pants and with the equipment you have got you do the best you can and

03:30 get that chopper in as quick as you can and get that responsibility off my back. I always felt responsible. And the most beautiful sound I ever heard in Vietnam was the chopper coming in to take the wounded away or to take us back to Nui Dat. Not taking us out into the bush, that was a bit of an adrenalin adventure thing, but getting the wounded out and within twenty minutes they would have them in hospital and give them proper care from the

04:00 doctors, nurses and orderlies and assistants.

**So what's that view about the way that citation summarises what you did that day?**

There is a criteria that the person citing me has to meet certain guidelines and seeing that 4 Battalion hadn't had a military medal winner at that stage they needed one and there was one available and it is,

04:30 I bought the book of decorations for the army, seeing I was in it, just to evaluate some of the others. A lot of blokes did a hell of a lot more than I did to get a Military Medal and a few that possibly did similar amounts. So they all vary and it is in the eyes of the person that witnesses the deeds. The whole award system is pretty crook, let me tell you.

05:00 There was seven hundred and fifty odd for the whole army I think in Vietnam over ten years, and eighty-two percent went to regular soldiers and the rest went to national servicemen who made up forty-eight percent of the fighting force, mostly in the field. Facing the dangers and the tracking dogs didn't get any at all and they did multiple tours and shared the dangers and were left in the country.

**05:30 So can we go back to Goodwood it was called?**

Operation Goodwood.

**When you look back on that now in your mind what images do you see?**

I can still picture crossing the clearing and seeing that explosion and the cluster of wounded and the body lying there. I can see all of that and see the withdrawal, see the doctor arriving,

06:00 seeing Bluey there with all of the holes in him and just fading into unconsciousness luckily. Telling me it was hurting a bit, "It hurts a bit Sam." Something like that, really lovely lad, he was due to go home in a couple of weeks, brought into company headquarters for safety, as was his mate Vic Peterson and both just gone like that, the only two we lost in twelve months.

06:30 And just feeling the frustration of the waste, surrendering that position and in the end surrendering the whole country for something that was a concoction to start with.

**What do you remember thinking at the time when all of that happened? I mean how fast did it happen and how fast did you have to react?**

The initial explosion sort of

07:00 snapped me out of my reverie but then things seemed to take forever, it seemed like I was in action for hours and hours, several hours, rather than just an hour and forty minutes I think I was in there according to the signals. And I was exhausted having walked for several hours before that and being gradually fatigued over previous weeks and months and having a crook back

07:30 from the chopper dropping the winch on it. But then thinking when it was all over, goodness that was a real stuff up, you know that was supposed to be a walk in the park, just another little patrol where we mightn't have even seen anybody, they might have cleared out before we got there and we would have blown up all of the ammo and souvenired a few things and gone on our way. And here we are,

08:00 we have lost two of the best blokes you could ever hope to meet and a lot of fellows wounded, yeah. And a lot of enemy killed too I presume.

**So you went in, when you were treating the wounded you were under fire?**

Yeah.

**So what do you remember about that scene?**

When I first went in Blue was there and I was cutting his trousers and shirt off and getting to the wounds and the tank was about fifteen metres away and the

08:30 enemy were presumably twenty or thirty metres the other way, it was pretty close. But we were in a little bit of a hollow I think, must have been because they kept missing us. And they kept firing rockets over the top of us and into the tanks and the back blast from the rockets were washing back over us. Just like being in hell I suppose, lots of noise, smoke, flame, heat, blood and guts and stink.

09:00 All of the sensations and things that you don't like were all happening at once and the fatigue and the anxiety about being hit and if you are going to get hit where do you want to get hit and of course having no choice in the matter you realise the futility of it all. And wondering about what's happening in other sectors, this is happening here but the whole battle field was probably spread over a hundred metre front. But finding out later that the others weren't in as much action,

09:30 they were firing into the bunkers but weren't under direct...were under fire but spasmodic.

**And when you're treating someone in that situation, you're not able to be treating someone and defending yourself?**

No my rifle and big pack were laying down on the ground and I just had the medical kit open and was kneeling down next to Blue trying to ascertain where the wounds were.

10:00 He had a lot of bleeding around the legs but I think the fatal wounds were probably deep in his chest. When the mine went up all of these pellets and shrapnel, probably thousands of pieces blew out at a great rate of knots. Got Smithy, Billy Moormill and Jock Richardson and Blue, and Vic Peterson copped the main blast and was dead instantly.

10:30 **He was already dead; he was the body that you saw?**

Yes it was just a body with rags and bits and pieces of gear around, unrecognisable. Not that I knew Vic very well, I knew Blue very well. He used to come and visit in the company aid post quite often just for a yarn come and have a visit, have a scratch that he wanted treated, just for attention and to say, "G'day." Lovely man.

**So you knew him quite well?**

11:00 Mmm. And then the bodies got choppered back to the hospital, cleaned up and were sent back to Australia. My mate John Hector actually helped clean the bodies up and had a pretty tough time coping with that and the bodies were freighted off to Australia and they go off to their home town for a funeral and it wasn't until probably fifteen to twenty years later that several of us made contact with both sets of parents.

11:30 Well the mother of Blue, her husband had died and another son had been killed in a motorbike accident so she had had a tough time. But she really welcomed us when we went to visit and Vic's parents just treated us like family.

**And Blue was alive when you were treating him and talking?**

He was just laying there basically and then he said, "It's hurting a bit." Or something like that and then he just drifted into unconsciousness and he

12:00 didn't survive despite the doctor and the intravenous fluids and into the chopper. See in the chopper between the battlefield and the hospital there is a medic on board but there is a lot of noise and there is a lot of things happening and there is a limited amount to what they can do. So somewhere during that time, he may have already been dead and we were just filling him full of fluids. But at about that time he died.

12:30 **You mentioned there were all sorts of wounds that day; what were the other wounds you saw?**

Fellow that rang me yesterday, Ron Smith, he had seventeen shrapnel wounds and I assume most of them were face and arms and chest., Jock Richardson had twenty-two holes mostly face and shoulder. Bill Moormill I am not sure, he just would have had a scattering of pellets. See I concentrated on Blue just about the

13:00 whole time where as the other medics, stretcher bearers, and the tankie sergeant did some work too. One tankie had a rocket explode under his seat in the tank and his buttocks and genitals were severely traumatised and...but he lived. And another one had his head smashed against the steel cupola and he was very badly damaged; I believe he lived for some time.

13:30 I think maybe both of them are deceased now. Other injuries I am not aware of, they were patched up, hustled off and no feedback.

**Did you ever get any feedback?**

Only from my mate John Hector when he could but it was about that time he was due to go home and

14:00 so that all ceased.

**Was that difficult for you?**

I used to wonder what happened but not having the wherewithal to follow it up. I couldn't just phone up the hospital because you didn't have a phone which is another thing you missed. Some of our people back in Nui Dat would have obviously gone down to Vung Tau, visited them, taken them any gear they wanted and reported back to Nui Dat but we didn't get any reports until we choppered back into Nui Dat. But then it was old

14:30 news and it was time to pack up your gear, have a couple of beers, have a feed, have a game of basket ball on our court between the rubber trees and do the other things. The replacements had come in and there were other patrols to get ready for.

**So during the chaos of that operation, Operation Goodwood, when all of that is happening, how do you stay focussed and not...**

15:00 **you said that you never saw other men faltering in that situation, what happens in that situation; what goes through your mind?**

I guess I am just living from moment to moment and hoping that it is going to stay quiet, patrols are going to stay uneventful, no one is going to get wounded, any rashes and that I can handle and just each day is another day less that I have to do.

15:30 The frustrating part is that I didn't know how many days I had left. Most diggers had their start date and their finish date, their ETA [estimated time of arrival], but I didn't have that. So it was a...it wasn't up to me and so until I got choppered into hospital with me query appendix and got sent back to Nui Dat and there was already a replacement medic out there for me, Dick Schwer,

16:00 who knows how long I would have had to stay? So that sort of set the ball rolling for my discharge or my sending home. And it was actually quite a surprise when I got back to Nui Dat and they said, "Pack your gear up, you're going home in a couple of days." So it meant I had to get all of the mud off my boots and out of my treads and clean all of my gear and pack my trunk and have a blood test and get the final malaria pills started and all of that sort of stuff. Even then

16:30 I thought, "Well I am still not going to get out of the country," everything that could go wrong has gone wrong. And even on the Qantas jet flying out of Saigon I was looking out the portholes thinking they could still get rockets up here, they could still put me away and then I think when we got over Borneo about two or three hours later I thought, "I think I am going to make it". And that's when I started to feel relief; I have been to Vietnam I

17:00 have got over it, I have survived and got here and then it was probably, I had been home a few days, a week maybe; I used to lay in bed and wake up and think, "Did Vietnam happen? Perhaps it was a bad dream?" And then I thought, "How could I know all of those details if it was a dream? No it did happen". Then I would see things that I brought home with me, it did happen and then it all got jumbled,

17:30 for years and years it got jumbled until I sorted it out chronologically for the book.

**Just going back to when you were in those fire fights, Black Friday, I wanted to ask you about the choppers, in the dark,**

Pitch black, nine o'clock at night.

**How did the chopper know where to come?**

We had a torch on the ground, single torch with an angled beam and that was shone up and they were given

18:00 rough direction as to grid references on the map. Bit hard at night, but we had the torch and they knew where battalion headquarters was because that's where they had waited, they had come down there and paused while we got from A back to B and it wasn't far for them to come, compass bearing maybe and then we had the torch light on the ground shining up and then they would come down almost to tree top level then and they would turn on their landing lights to position

18:30 themselves and then turn them off again and then lower the winch cable so it didn't tangle in the trees and then just hover there and then take one up, lower it and take another one, very slow process but brilliant people. I actually met one of the people that was crewing on the winch years later. A reporter got the story and he had phoned my mother, developed he phoned Mum about something.

19:00 And she said, "Who were you with?" and he said, "I was with the helicopters 9 Squadron." And she said, "When were you there?" and he told her the dates and he told her and she said, "Well my son was there at the same time, Where were you on September the 13th?" And he said, "Oh we had a milk run then and we got diverted to winch some casualties out." And she said, "Well my son was the medic on the ground." So it all sort of linked in and we had a big reunion.

19:30 **So how hard was it to manoeuvre a helicopter into that situation and winch the casualties out?**

Pretty hard. I think conditions were pretty still which was pretty good, if there was a cross wind blowing it would have been even harder. But just to keep it at the hover there and there was so many peddles and so many factors involved, weight distribution, pretty difficult.

**And it must have been some pretty tense moments for you too on the ground?**

Well we thought too, "If the enemy is still around," and we had only shot at them four hundred metres away,

20:00 "if they had run away and come around with the hope of shooting down our rescue helicopter" which was a great tactic of theirs, "a couple of bullets into that and the whole flaming helicopter could have landed on our B Company camp with a hundred men and wiped out half of us", so pretty worrying.

**And you actually said earlier in one of those incidents, I am not sure if it was Black Friday but the chopper actually dropped one of the wounded?**

No that was actually the Kiwi bloke.

20:30 **Oh the Kiwi bloke was dropped yeah.**

Yeah the winch cable jammed and they had to cut him off and drop him on the ground.

**So they had to cut him off actually? Did that sort of thing happen very often?**

Not very often no. I was in another chopper incident. Probably before Christmas and this is a pretty important one too, I got a new replacement stretcher bearer, a fellow called Barry Rice and he was only about nineteen and green as grass and he came to join us and he had been with us

21:00 about two days out in the bush and he thought it was great. And I was showing him how to fix the tinea on the officer's toes and we heard bang, bang, bang from about fifty metres away on the perimeter, camp was in a circle and we were in the middle of it and it was on the perimeter area that the officer was in control of and so he sprinted back to his hootchie and I threw his boots after him. And

21:30 Barry sort of went, "What's going on? What's going on?" "I don't know Barry." And then the word came around that the VC patrol had come through and bumped into our sentry and our sentry had shot one of them and the other five or six had cleared off and Barry said, "Can I go and see the body?" and I said, "Are you sure you want to?" and he said, "Yeah I want to see the body." And I thought, "Well I can use this as a training tool, I can show him a dead body and we can investigate the wounds and so on".

22:00 And about this time they sent out a clearing patrol, they saw this body and the clearing patrol clears the area to make sure nobody is loitering there to shoot back and surprise them and they saw a body in the grass and the back of the head was towards the patrol and to make sure they usually put a bullet into the head to make sure that they are not going to surprise anybody. And so we heard this single shot and we thought, "Okay", and so I went to see the CSM and said, "Private Rice

22:30 would like to go out and have a look at the body sir, it would be a good experience to get him warmed up before we have the real thing." and he said, "Oh yeah right oh." So we got our webbing and rifles on and away we went and the bullet that had gone through the back of the head had blown the whole forehead off. So you could see right into the skull and Barry walked up and went and vomited a few metres away and I said, "Well that's a body Barry, that's how it is mate."

23:00 And anyway he settled down then and we stripped the bloke and he had been shot through the ribs, and I said, "Well that would have killed him, definitely shot through the heart and down he went." And we checked him over and Barry sort of appreciated the technical side of it all. But this bloke also had a medical kit on him, so it was the medic on patrol with the VC that they had shot. So then we went through all of the instruments that he had which were pretty primitive and blunt and a few ampoules and pills

23:30 and things that he had and thought, "Gee that could well have been us if the shoe had been on the other foot", and the reality of medics getting shot over there came through.

**Absolutely I mean you were in the front line and not even able to hold a gun while you were treating somebody?**

Yeah, had the situation arisen where I was just shooting along with the others and we didn't have casualties and I wasn't working I would have definitely got involved

24:00 because of self preservation. As much as you don't want to do it and not realising at the time that they shouldn't have really been our enemy, they were a country going for a united country as it has turned out. And we were there by our own invitation, everything was sort of concocted but I would have still gone ahead and had a shot at them if they were shooting at me.

**Did you ever have to shoot at the enemy?**

No.

24:30 I only had one accidental shot over there with an M60, the idiot RSM, we were in camp on our first major operation and the machine gunner in the group was crook and so he said, "Corporal Brown grab

the M60 you're going out on patrol." I stammered and stuttered and said something about, "I am the medic." And he just picked up the M60 and said, "You're on patrol." He didn't realise how little training I had had with an M60

25:00 and that the guns are faulty from time to time and as you go through the wire you cock the weapon and so I cocked the weapon and it fired a single shot as I slid the cocking lever back forward, narrowly missing the foot of the bloke in front of me, sort of 'ptchew' and over towards the villagers who were standing there briefly, until they retreated inside. Anyway the patrol didn't miss a beat. We kept marching, did our patrol did the ambush, came back and I was charged with an accidental discharge

25:30 and fined forty dollars which was a week's pay. And being a corporal I only got a severe reprimand and had I been a private I would have lost twenty-eight days pay and twenty-eight days punishment. For probably a faulty gun and I shouldn't have been put in charge of it anyway.

**Wow, how did you feel about that?**

I felt pretty bad I could have shot the bloke, if I had cocked it this way I would have shot him through the back, luckily I had it

26:00 pointing down and yeah it went harmlessly into the distance. But I felt embarrassed, I felt pretty bad. And then I was up in front of the commanding officer, the colonel to face the charge, "Have you got anything to say?" I said, "I believe the weapon was faulty sir." And he had a check with the armourer and the armourer said he can find no fault with the weapon at this time. And then the RSM marched me out and he stood

26:30 about an inch from my face and he said, "You will not let it happen again, you legless lizard!" and I said, "I will try not to sir." I thought, "You can't hit me, you can only yell at me," and this went on for about five minutes backwards and forward, "You will not." "I'll try not to sir." He just hated me.

**I want to ask you what sort of debriefing did you receive after those major incidences?**

None. Nothing at all, you just got on with it.

27:00 **So after being involved in Black Friday and then Operation Goodwood,**

The only feedback I got from Black Friday, the major in charge of Charlie Company, their group came and linked up with our company because they were decimated a bit and we travelled together for a couple of days. And he came over to my aid post and he said, "Thanks for your help yesterday; I believe you did a really good job." Or words to that effect and I said, "That's all right sir." And he asked me details about the wounded and I

27:30 told him and he is the one that came to my house in Adelaide and said, "You have won the medal." Later on. I have met him a couple of times since.

**When you told that story earlier about Black Friday, you said you couldn't sleep that night, you were in a bit of a daze, so what point did you start to recover I guess from that you were in?**

28:00 Probably the night after I got some sleep but then it kept recurring and it did for years probably fifteen, twenty years that particular episode kept going, what could I have done? What? And then finally I said to myself, "Look you did all you could with what you had; you have got it in a book now; you have written about it." And that sort of helped to settle me down.

**So that was the concern you had that you could have done something?**

28:30 Yeah that I had failed.

**Why did you think that?**

The bloke shouldn't have died. But then it was five hours plus since the wounding and it was a terribly wound, until the time we got him in the chopper, so the time factor probably killed him. There probably wasn't much more I could have done really, but I hoped I could have. Even with Blue, the wounds didn't look that bad.

29:00 And he probably died of severe internal wounds in the chest that we couldn't visualise, neat little pellet hole that may have gone into the heart, and shock.

**And after the Goodwood incident when you had made that withdrawal and the choppers had taken the bodies away, what happened then?**

Then we withdrew or retreated back across the paddy field right

29:30 back through the Kiwi position where the tanks remained and all of the way back to where we had started from that morning. And we got there about dark and I was just exhausted and in a lot of pain from bending over. My back felt like I had been snapped off in the middle, I think it was just RSI [Repetitive Strain Injury] from leaning over continually. Got back there, I got Willy to rub some liniment

30:00 into my lower back and took some codeine. Got a bit of sleep that night. Exhausted, got up in the

morning and we got helicoptered out to another area. I think that's when I got my possible appendix, a couple of days after that. It might have been the fifty-four day period where one operation led into another because we had...the enemy were on the run and intelligence were telling us where they were and we were chasing them up and having good results and light casualties ourselves.

30:30 **So in an incident like that where people had died and many people had been wounded there was no debriefing after that, no discussion?**

No.

**What had happened or why it had happened?**

No I don't recall any post mortem of the day. We were all so frustrated. The only thing we talked about officially at O groups was what's happening today and tomorrow. Or maybe 1 battalion had a big contact and cleaned up so

31:00 many enemy over in an area. And we would go, "Oh yeah that's all right, they're onto them." And you would get in a certain mode, where the past sort of retreats and you only concentrate on what's happening now and in the future.

**The Scottish officer who had spoken to you that day about how they were going to whip the VC?**

He got twenty-two holes in him

31:30 and he was taken to hospital and sent home, that was the end of his tour. And he was the one that actually put me in for the medal and I didn't know about it until about ten years ago. He came here one day and I said, "Who put me in for it?" and he said, "I did." And I said, "You shouldn't have done that; I didn't do anything special." And he said, "Yes you did, you came forward when you didn't really have to, you were in a position of safety and you actually came forward

32:00 and faced the danger." "Yeah I suppose I did."

**What do you think now about that?**

It is sort of getting into its right compartment now.

**What do you mean?**

Well I can understand why he did it. Then had I been putting one in for someone for a similar situation I would have perhaps mentioned

32:30 other dates where things were done, but maybe things happened back then and you didn't document them. Maybe he thought, "Well he has done a good job today and he was all right there and there so we will lump it all together on this day with all of the details and put on the bottom through out his whole tour he has been a good medic".

**When you met him again and he told you that, did you discuss what happened that day?**

33:00 Not really no, he wasn't one for going into detail or commenting on other people's decisions and so on. I tried to pump him for a few things for my book. I wrote to him and said, "Lou Jock can you give me some details of these different things for the book." And he wrote back and he gave me a reference and I thought, "That's not really what I was after".

**So after that event did you sort of wonder about the decision making that had gone on?**

33:30 Yeah everyone in the company did I think. From where the decision came to attack this position and the information that they had; intelligence obviously crook. But we did have an enemy agent with us, or friendly agent, whatever. An agent with us who was supposed to lead us to the spot and whether he was actually an enemy agent attracting us into the

34:00 ambush situation as it turned out to be we will never know because he cleared off before anyone could shoot him. They all reckon if they had seen him going they would have shot him but he slipped away. And we had a group of ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] people with us too, South Vietnamese army and they cleared off after it all started too, they were a bit gun shy.

**I know you said you didn't notice any people deteriorating or sort of,**

34:30 Losing the plot.

**Losing the plot, but what sort of reactions did you observe in people after they had been involved in an operation like that one and observe in yourself in terms of how people reacted mentally or emotionally?**

They were all very flat emotionally at the end of ops [operations]. Start off fresh; gradually deteriorate over time with sleep deprivation and poor food and the constant threat of

35:00 an adrenalin rush. The constant fear of a contact. From the front, back the side wherever. Treading on a mine, you never knew when it was going to happen, lucky the didn't have an air force that would have

been another worry but just gradually towards the end of an op they got flat and emotionally debilitated and back in camp I think a cold shower a good feed a couple of beers and

35:30 they just started to charge up the batteries again. And that was the cycle we kept going through, gradually the battery would lose its potency.

**And did people talk about those people who had died?**

I think only those who were in their tents, like there is an empty bed here and an empty bed in the next tent, those blokes would have been really knocked around and they obviously talked about it and drank a lot and had

36:00 trouble with the replacement people that came in, accepting them. There is always the dynamics of the reos coming and the vacancies occurring. But the rest of the people that didn't really know them; I mean I knew Bluey pretty well and I was very upset that he had gone. But then there was always the other hundred to focus on and what is going to happen next.

36:30 **Were there any ceremonies held for those people?**

No. Sorry there was one at the end of the battalion's tour prior to getting on the aircraft carrier to come home. They had a ceremony and read out the names of the eighteen killed from 4 battalion, blow the trumpet and that's it. Nothing at the lower unit levels.

37:00 **And nothing at the time?**

No.

**Were you a religious person?**

Sort of; I was a Sunday school teacher as a teenager and I used to pray over there a lot for preservation and for the family at home and the diggers and so on. Not overtly, it was always private. And I think that helped a lot.

**Were there any particular moments when you really felt the need to pray?**

37:30 No just several maybe dozen, maybe twenty times or more, just times when it got tough and the regular little maintenance ones.

**What about your own emotional condition after you had been involved in those pretty harrowing fire fights and tried to help save them**

38:00 **and saved several people no doubt, how did you notice your own condition deteriorating at all?**

Physically just a low energy level, mentally flat. And from time to time thinking about my own mortality

38:30 thinking, "Right, that's Joe Blow now, that could be me later. I am not going to be a good looking corpse and where am I going to get hit? And is it going to be painful? And how will the folks at home react?" All sorts of jumbled thoughts about what might happen but then thinking, "Well I am here, so far so good, not even a

39:00 nick", just a bit of a fever now and again and a bit of a rash, and crystalline penicil fixed that up. After the fifty-four days I got a thorough case of ring tinea all around the groin and all of the lymph nodes had swollen up and skin was breaking down and going rotten. I had been putting different creams and ointments and different pills and nothing happened and the doctor put me on

39:30 crystalline penicil and in twenty-four hours I was on the mend, but gee it hurt like hell. Crystalline penicil is like a red hot dagger being pushed into your muscle and twisted, it is agony. And I used to give them to blokes, "What are you whinging about?" "Ohhh." And then I had one, bloody hell. And they give me it in my thigh too.

**You said earlier today that before you left for Vietnam you felt confident about how well prepared you were and how well trained you were?**

40:00 Yeah well I think the people that were training us indicated that whatever they had been teaching us would be sufficient for us to cope over there, she'll be right and you will do well. Fighting communism and we're the good guys and with the Americans; we had to watch them, they caused twenty-five percent of our casualties by accidents.

**I would ask you more but...**

40:29 **End of tape**

00:30 **Was it a general view that the Americans were...**

Dangerous?

**Dangerous.**

Yes. They were helpful, they were great with their helicopter rescues; they would fly in amongst the tree tops where the Australian pilots wouldn't or weren't allowed to because they only had a limited amount of choppers. But the Yanks, they are only half a million dollars each, out of about twelve thousand I think they lost half of them over there, shot down. So they put them into dangerous situations. My mate in

01:00 Charlie Company was on patrol, and they were in an old VC bunker system that they had taken over and they were camped there and they had indicated that they wanted the American jets to strafe in an area to the west of the smoke that they had thrown. You throw coloured smoke and that indicated where you want it. Well they decided, they see these figures up on the bunkers they were going to strafe there on the other side of the smoke, so they went through, brrp and wounded

01:30 I think sixteen blokes pretty severely in one or two runs before they were called off. "You're shooting at us you fools!" "Oh sorry." Just like that; so a quarter of a company nearly wiped out. And my mate luckily wasn't in hit pit at the time, he was down at a creek filling water bottles and the bullets had stitched up his pit from top to bottom. Had a lucky escape. I think only a week later the

02:00 same company were camped out at night and a plane coming back from a mission had one bomb left; thought, "Oh well, we will drop it here," and it was right on the perimeter of where they were camped. And luckily it landed in soft muddy soil and it buried deep into the mud and it blew upwards instead of outwards and they had a few blokes with broken ribs and concussion and so on but nobody was killed.

02:30 So the Yanks can be very dangerous; they can be gung ho.

**And what did you like about Blinky Bill?**

Blinky Bill was our commanding officer, Major Bill and he was a straight shooter; he told us how it was. Early days in Vietnam he said, "The whole thing is rotten here; the war is crooked but we are here, we will do our job. Be very careful, look after your mates and I want to see everybody if possible come home."

03:00 And we camouflaged, we didn't walk on tracks, we did everything carefully to preserve the blokes and unfortunately on Goodwood we lost two, that was out of our hands, that was not his decision to go in there, it was from somewhere else. He is a really nice bloke too, sensible, caring and good to be around.

**You were saying to your Mum you would make your own decision about Vietnam when you got over there,**

03:30 **when did your views start to change?**

I sort of tried to believe the doctrine about fighting communism and we are doing the right thing, we are here for the good guys against the bad guys. But after a couple of months I thought, "That's not right, we're cleaning out bunker systems and the enemy are reoccupying, it is a bit of a game. And the boffins that are running the game aren't here. We're here taking all of the risks

04:00 and the politicians and the others, the generals and the brigadiers, most of them aren't here". And a lot of time we had to get permission to shoot and we had to relay it back to Nui Dat, onto Saigon and I think sometimes back to Australia before we were allowed to do certain things and we had free fire zones and no fire zones and sometimes you are only allowed to shoot if you got shot at first, and that's a bit risky. And it was getting pretty

04:30 silly and the local people, they didn't know which way was up. They were frightened of the VC, they were frightened of us and the Americans would move their...rub out their whole town and move them to a safe area, it was terrible.

**How did you come away thinking about the enemy?**

I still had this almost deep seated hatred for them because they had been

05:00 killing us and we should have been killing them. That was a pretty simplistic feeling I had, but then I also had the feeling that they should be admired for their tenacity fighting the big American power for so long, this was '68, '69, they had been going since '61 and they went on to '75. And they had seen the Chinese off and they had seen the French off their turf.

05:30 They were in there for the long haul and I didn't actually realise at the time that they were trying to unite the country. I didn't know the full political story about the French being there and the Americans putting President Diem in as a puppet government and how crooked he was and he was bumping off hundreds of thousands of people with prison and torture and the Americans were saying that the VC were the baddies with all of the torture and the killing. It was pretty even.

06:00 But once the war is finished, the place is united and as it turned out I am happy to go back there and see a peaceful Vietnam, although I can't see behind the scenes at everything that is going on.

### **What happened when you came home on the family front?**

Flew into Sydney with my mate Daryl, he flew to Rocky [Rockhampton], I flew to Adelaide next morning, after a couple of hours sleep because they

06:30 snuck us in in the middle of the night. About midnight, find your own accommodation unless you want to go out to the army place at Holsworthy, didn't want to do that; got a little hotel at Coogee for a couple of hours, couple of beers, couple of sandwiches. On the early plane to Adelaide, got off the plane, there is no one there to meet me. Hmm they have obviously got the wrong time, because I had rung the night before saying, "I will be home in the morning." I got to talk to my

07:00 mother-in-law; she sounded a bit vague. I can understand why now. Anyway eventually my brother-in-law rolled up and he said, "Your wife is not home; she has gone away for a while." I thought...the shock was too much; me coming home and I thought, "Oh well, she will be back in a couple of days". So I went home to our house and a lot of strange things, there was only one knife, fork and spoon there and one pillow and one set of sheets and one blanket, I had had the big clean out and I thought, "Hmm", but still the penny didn't drop

07:30 I thought, "Oh no, she will be in in a few days and everything will be right". And then I found out she had gone away with another fellow and moved interstate and I thought, "Right oh". So I had to sort of find out what was going on. So I got my mother-in-law who knew the address interstate of where she was and I was going to go there and she said, "Well don't go on your own; I am not giving you the address, you can come with me. I don't want you to do anything silly."

08:00 So we drove to Sydney and met them and I said, "Look, come home if you want to but it is up to you." She said, "I am not coming home." And I said, "Okay I will proceed with a divorce." So I got back.

### **Were you that calm?**

No. I was pretty head up really, controlled anger I suppose, frustration and a lot of confusion.

### **Absolutely.**

Got back to

08:30 Adelaide and went to get some legal aid, I thought, "Legal aid is available for returning veterans," and I went to legal aid and they said, "Yes we recommend that you see this solicitor." And I said, "Oh good, what's the aid part?" "Oh that's the aid part, we give you a name and you pay all of the fees and everything." Okay and then I went through the old fashioned divorce over eighteen months, had to prove guilt and all of the rest of the rubbish.

09:00 Went back to work probably ten days or a fortnight after I got home because there was no money. And the two mortgages were in the red and I had to live in the house and sort all of that out, go back to work and buy a car, no transport.

### **How difficult was it to adjust to civilian life again?**

I actually couldn't sleep in the bed because it was too soft, and I think I actually slept on the floor for a couple of

09:30 nights on a blanket and gradually weaned myself back into bed. Ate lots of steak and good food, local beer and chips and biscuits and stuff like that, chocolate, stuff you couldn't get over there. And mates came around and reconnected, they had left me pretty high and dry while I was away but they didn't realise what was going on. And they reconnected

10:00 and we used to go shooting and drinking and so on.

### **And what did your Mum think about the wife situation?**

She never liked my wife so she thought it was bound to happen.

### **And you didn't see your son at all?**

No. I saw him in Sydney and I saw him again ten years ago as an adult. Yeah. But I got divorced and remarried again

10:30 pretty well straight away to Geisla.

### **How did you meet Geisla?**

At the hospital where I met Margaret. The hospital was a meeting place for most couples in those days, three hundred nurses, three hundred male nurses, some single, night shift, Geisla came on night shift upstairs, I was in charge downstairs.

### **Did it take long for you to adjust?**

It did, yes. I was working at the hospital

- 11:00 and then the award came through and people heard about that and that was a bit like compensation to me. You have been through all of this rough stuff and your wife's pinged off but here is this second prize, you can have this single gong that is minted in London with the Queen's dial on it. And I thought, "That's nice", even though I didn't think I would get it, I thought they would take it away before I got it or after I got it. And
- 11:30 yeah, a couple of months later, Guy Fawkes time and they used to have fire crackers and a string of crackers was let off outside a ward I was in, probably a hundred yards away, bang, bang, bang and I hit the floor and got behind a big pot plant with a palm in it. And I thought, "Struth what's going on? I am so conditioned to hit the deck when the firing starts". And people were like, "What are you doing? It's all right." And I just went off to the toilet
- 12:00 and stood in there for a while and thought, "Phew, it really does condition you". And then we got married and were on our honeymoon driving along and a car went past and backfired and I was trying to get in under the pedals and the steering wheel and Geisla said, "Are you all right?" and then I explained to her about the conditioning, she said, "Oh blimey." And then one night I woke up and I was actually attacking her in bed, I thought, "A bit like the monkey attacking me".
- 12:30 I had this dream and I was being attacked and I was going to get him first and I had sort of stiffened up my fingers and wrists and I was going to go sort of straight in for the throat and smash her throat and I was all poised and she, "Oh whoa." And there were incidents like that over several years that gradually disappeared.
- As a couple how did you deal with that situation because that must have been scary for her?**
- Just talked about it and I sort of started writing
- 13:00 the original book and she sort of thought that would be good therapy. And yeah, but I used to go to bed early, I am an early bird and she used to come later, there was a bit of overlapping and we sort of coped. I had no idea about PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] then or anything like that, that sort of came later and you look back and think of course, that's classic.
- Even with the psychology and psychiatric studies there was no correlation for you?**
- 13:30 No. We were mostly concentrating on schizophrenics and bipolar and depression and mental deficiency. Shell shock and post war syndrome and all of that, didn't even think about it. I was the only one from the hospital that ever went to Vietnam, I was a bit of a novelty and occasionally the press would get me to do a story, Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Day would come up and they would get this digger's story.
- 14:00 **When did the children come along; how long after you were married?**
- We were married in '72 and Sue came along in '73 and Dave in '75 up in Mackay.
- And did you enjoy being a father?**
- Yeah.
- So when was the first decision to go back to Vietnam and why did you decide to do that?**
- When I was up in choppers in Vietnam on operations going out to an op and you would look at the countryside
- 14:30 and I was fascinated by it, the paddy fields and the winding rivers and the people and the buffalo, and I thought, "Gee I would love to come back when this is finished, when we had won and the place had settled down, I would come back and visit. This will be great". And then we lost and I thought, "Okay I will probably never get back to Vietnam, but I would like to". And my Mum had written a couple of books and in '94 she said, "Do you still want to go back to Vietnam?" And I said, "Oh yeah one day when I can afford it."
- 15:00 And she said, "Well I have got some money, you can pay me back later but I would like to go. Why don't we go together?" And I thought, "Oh yeah, right oh," and so Mum and I went just before Christmas in '94, we had Christmas/New Year in Vietnam. We flew into Saigon, we went to a tourist company and they had a car and a guide and a driver and they met us at the airport, took us to our hotel. The next day they picked us up and took us to Nui Dat, Long Tan, Vung Tau and all of that. Cost us a fortune that bit,
- 15:30 looking back, and then we joined a tour with Travel Indochina and we went all of the way from Saigon down to Da Lat then to Nha Trang up the coast and all of the way up to Hanoi and out to Halong Bay and we thought, "This is just fantastic. The scenery, the people, the food, everything is just great". And we had come in with real apprehension, coming into Saigon I was like...and I looked out the window and I could see bomb craters in the paddy fields still in '94.
- 16:00 And I thought, "What are those? Oh they are bomb craters", and I showed Mum and took photos of them. And got into Saigon and the airport customs people were in military uniforms and we had filled out something wrong on the form and they, "Go and do it again." "Idiot" sort of, "Fools." And Mum was getting a bit grumpy with them and she was going to tell them what for as she often does. And I said,

"Settle down, we might be on the next plane home."

16:30 And I was pretty upset by our reception, but we did the form again, put it in and they said, "Go on, through you go." "Right oh." And we got through and we met the sign saying, "Mr Brown and Mrs Williams." "Yes that's us." "Welcome to Vietnam." "Oh good are we being followed?" And we weren't and from then on it was just brilliant. Twenty-one day tour I think it was.

**And what was Nui Dat like after all of that time?**

Nui Dat that was when I first recollected the Pearly Gates. Having heard about them a lot and just didn't recall them

17:00 until I saw them. Met some kids there and mum had all of these little gifts that she had saved and little books and pencils and calendars and clothes, all sorts of stuff. We pulled up on the old airstrip and the guides got out and I think they were asking this local bloke who was hanging around how to get around the camp, drive around the perimeter,

17:30 he was pointing all over the place. Apparently he was a VC there as a young man about the time the war finished and so that was quite pertinent. And then somebody came up with a handful of dog tags and I bought them off them for ten dollars I think, obviously original. We had a dump there, the old camp, fire incinerator and so on but they had survived the fire and so I had all of these, about sixteen sets of dog tags and that was great, handing out

18:00 gifts and taking photos. And our guide was an ex-South Vietnamese and he was getting information from this ex-VC and we were not quite sure who the driver was, whether he was ARVN or VC, probably VC, he was probably there to mind the ARVN bloke. We had a good look around Nui Dat and the airstrip and found out roughly where I used to be camped, but it was unrecognisable. There was a bit of barbed wire between some pawpaws that was probably taken from

18:30 our camp. But the rest you couldn't recognise it, and the rubber trees were all knocked down for fire wood and there were new ones growing, so a totally different place.

**And you decided on that trip that you would...because you're going back now to do some real work in Vietnam, how did that come about?**

I went with Mum in '94 and then I think it was 2000 and I thought, "Well that trip I looked after Mum a fair bit and

19:00 there is a lot of things I would like to redo and do it with the same tour company, but do it the other way, down". And so in 2000 I went back on my own and I went a couple of days early and went to Hanoi. I met two Sydney girls, one of them had an uncle in Vietnam and he was killed and his name was Wayne and I thought, "This is a bit spooky". We introduced later, that's right,

19:30 "I am Australian, I am doing this tour; which tour are you doing?" and they were doing the same tour so it turned out. So we had a memorial service at Halong Bay for Uncle Wayne who was killed at Binh Ba. And that tour was just great, and I was supposed to be doing research for my book, and all of the questions I had formulated fell down but I had a whole heap of other information that came up along the way. This guy had had his Dad lose a leg at such a such a place and

20:00 this bloke's Dad was a doctor and he was serving during the war on the other side, and all of the different things that happened and the disability centres that we visited and so on. And then I went back the year after, other veterans asked me about the tour and they said, "When you go again we would like to come too." And I said, "All right." And I think eight of them put their names down on the list and away we went, a couple of wives.

20:30 We did a tour and we paid it as we went along and we got a cheap flight and all of this, great tour. Went to the disability centres once again. And then my Mum wanted to go back again and do some research for another book and she and another veteran who was pretty crook, he had had a couple of strokes, he came along with us and so the three of us did from north to south and went to the disability centres again, and hospitals, went from north to south and Mum got a lot of info. And then another tour wanted to go over with me again,

21:00 "Stick your name in here and we will all go." Did all of the paperwork and we went, a dozen of us, and a lot of them are mentioned in the book, Pove and so on. And then last year I did another tour, one of the blokes on the previous tour decided he was going to do a few tours, he was a good organiser. So we did a tour last year, did the leper colonies, the Buddhist orphanages and we donated musical instruments and money and

21:30 books and pencils and so on .And arranged for AusAid to get some money into some of these places. Then this year I joined Project Vietnam and went over a fortnight before our holiday trip, our goodwill trip, and we, fifteen of us in a work party renovated a medical centre up near Hanoi right out in a poor province. Lovely people, we paid everything ourselves and just

22:00 good warm and fuzzy sort of stuff. And a medical team did work in the town and in Hanoi and then they took medical equipment over and we have got container loads that we get organised to take over, used equipment from hospitals, and funds that we raise from raffles and so on, donations. So I did that for a

fortnight and then we had a twenty-eight day tour from the very top on the Chinese border up at Sa Pa all of the way down to the Mekong, disability centres again,

22:30 some regular, some new ones. And in the meantime I have done an English teaching course and I hope to go back and teach English on a regular basis at a place called Qui Nhon or wherever they need me and wherever I can fit it in.

**Do you think going back helped with whatever was left over from your experience?**

It defiantly helped me and I think all of the veterans that have come on these tours with me, including Johnny Hector this

23:00 last one, he said he should have definitely done it earlier and he is glad he has done it now before he is too old and decrepit. All of them have benefited from being there and most of them have either gone back or intend to go back and just visit again or meet the people again, send photos and we have got an ARVN fellow coming out tomorrow with our guide who is over there, he is coming back from a trip tomorrow and bringing the local guide with him for a month.

23:30 We have got permits and visas and so on. But a lot of veterans will say, "No, you will never get me back there, still hate the place, it stinks, hate the people." And you just can't change their mind, you just say, "Okay."

**How do you think you changed from the time you went to Vietnam to the time you came back, do you think you changed as a person?**

The first tour.

**I mean the actual war experience?**

I think I came back emotionally numbed.

24:00 I think before that I was a fairly gentle shy innocent sort of a fellow and the things I saw and experienced and possibly the chemicals that were introduced to us through all of the spraying and drinking and eating and living in the chemical conditions, which is a really big factor that I think I should have mentioned a lot earlier. I think the chemicals affected a lot of veterans and even if a veteran

24:30 has not had his life threatened which is a key factor in post traumatic stress disorder, the taking in of chemicals over long term gives a similar debilitating illness to PTSD but it is not recognised by our government as such. They still say, "Okay PTSD we will put that tag on and that will do."

25:00 But I think with the chemicals, the experiences and the family traumas it all sort of...it made me a bit less sensitive, a bit more blunt. A bit hard. But I still think I am fairly soft.

**But yeah the way that you talk about going back and seeing the country and the people is quite sensitive.**

25:30 **So at some point you have come to terms with some of that war experience do you think?**

I think going back and writing about it and writing poetry about it too, I have written poems about Long Tan and reuniting with people and Halong Bay and Nui Dat. It just, it has been inside my brain

26:00 and then released, I wrote three poems in an hour after a day trip to Nui Dat and Long Tan, we came back to Vung Tau that evening at five o'clock and by six o'clock I had written three fantastic poems. And I just can't believe that stuff, just with hardly a change of word in review later and people that were on the day trip with me said, "When did you write this?" "Just now."

26:30 **Yet it wasn't your choice to go and you tried to avoid it, were you bitter at the government after?**

Yeah. For a long time. But gradually over the years I have realised that it was programmed, if I didn't have to go somebody else would have had to go in my place, how would they have handled it? I have survived therefore it wasn't all that bad. You know, I did it and some people benefited from me being

27:00 there and I tried very hard.

**What are you most proud of your time in service?**

Helping my mates. And still being with them like the one yesterday out of the blue. He was wounded at Goodwood, seventeen holes in him and he rang me yesterday. He had heard that I had written a book on the grapevine, hadn't seen him since that day and we had a half hour chat on the

27:30 phone and will probably contact each other and I have posted off the book first thing. And he gets a mention in it, Smithy, one word.

**Almost a year of your life and yet those connections are so significant why do you think that is?**

It is all of the dramas that happen in a concentrated period. One bloke that I have written about in the

book, he was in Delta Company and his mate Joe got killed.

28:00 He said a psychiatrist or a psychologist asked him to encapsulate his period in Vietnam as an overall segment of a book and he said, "First twenty years of my life, a couple of pages, Vietnam almost a whole book, the rest of my life since Vietnam a couple of pages." So Vietnam was the thing. Most vets will say they think about Vietnam or

28:30 Vietnam crops up almost every day of their life.

**Is that true for you?**

Mmmm. Perhaps because I go back there and I write about it and talk about it and take lots of photos and have lots of contacts and emails from people over there and that sort of thing.

**Did you see other blokes really not handle life ever after that?**

Yeah one bloke

29:00 I only got his story afterwards. He came home, he had been a forward scout over there, and he had only been an average digger up until then, "Lets shoot them all, lets wipe them out." And he shot this bloke and he went and searched him and he had a photo of a wife and two kids in his pocket. And that just destroyed him. He went through the rest of the tour a shattered man and came home and I think he built a bunker down the backyard and used to live most of the time in that bunker.

29:30 And I think he is gradually coming out of it now but he wanted me to write his story in the next one I do and I said, "Well it will have to wait until the one after the next one." And he sent me photos of the copy of that photo of the woman and two children.

**Well we have found the way that you have told these events you have been so stable**

30:00 **and succinct with it, what do you think has kept you or brought you to that point?**

Having put it into perspective I think by going back and seeing that it was all for nothing, after I had been there for a couple of months, that I thought it was a bit shonky the whole deal and that I realise now that it is. Even thought some people still say, "We should be back there." And there are MIAs [Missing in Action] and all of that stuff like that.

30:30 But I just think I have relived it, dusted it off, written about it thoroughly, researched it thoroughly. I have got a whole library out there with Vietnam books, probably a hundred or so and anything on TV on Vietnam I absorb it and I guess it is all sorts out for me.

**So do you think in some ways people who completely push it away and don't want to see or talk about it anymore, do you think that's not as healthy as absorbing it?**

I think they are in denial, it happened, but it is

31:00 their method with coping with it. It is not my method. I probably didn't have much choice because I got home and I got the decoration and the whole of South Australia knew; it was in the paper several times. And so I had to sort of blurt it out, "Why were you there?" "What did you get it for?" and so I have been open about it. And a lot of them could follow that track but they haven't. And the more they have

31:30 tucked it away it has gone right back into the recesses and it is too hard to dust it off perhaps, it is simpler to keep it in the box and don't talk about it.

**What do you think of war today with Iraq?**

Sadly it is a bit like Vietnam all over again. America has invited itself into a civil mess

32:00 and there are lots of them around, but they have selected this one. We were under the impression that America was in Vietnam for a base on Asia—tungsten and oil, because Vietnam is fairly oil rich. And Iraq is oil rich and it is a base in the Middle East. America, I believe think that they are the world's self elected policemen

32:30 and they are financially go-getters, they are up front, well not upfront, wrong word. They are aggressive in chasing riches and to satisfy their ego. I have a great distrust of most Americans. Politicians and the gullible people. People followed Vietnam

33:00 about eighty percent approved of Vietnam for quite some time and gradually it turned around; the moratoriums, the bodies coming home and now the same thing is happening in Iraq. "Let's get rid of Saddam and let's sort this out." But now it is gradually coming around to, "Let's get out." And now they have got to work out an honourable withdrawal the same as Vietnam and it is pretty messy.

33:30 Even now the newly nominated president over there has possibly been shooting prisoners so who knows what's really going on. And then they will bring in the thirty year secrecy thing and we won't know anything for thirty years and then all of those pollies will be dead.

**Do you have a final comment that you would like to put on record about your war or life experience for people in the future?**

- 34:00 I think war is to be gone into only as a last resort when you are defending your country against another country's invasion. Pre-emptive strikes leaves a lot to be desired. I mean there probably are certain cases to be where it is a good option but very infrequent
- 34:30 so I think just go carefully and be aware of politicians that get you into war. They are very rarely seen at the front line and only in set ups and staged get togethers with diggers in starched uniforms, cans of beer in their hands and big smiles on their faces as if this is what the war is all about. Not at the front line where all of the bodies are and the mayhem. You don't hear anything about the wounded
- 35:00 from Iraq or Afghanistan, all very quiet. And the poor widow, the only widow that's occurred recently, her benefits are minimal and she is still fighting for justice. War is to be deplored and avoid it if possible.
- Well it has been an honour to hear your story thank you so much.**
- Thank you. It's been a pleasure.
- For us too.**
- 35:30 Long Tan Memorial.
- \n[Verse follows]\n White Christian temple cross and Buddhist urn gleam brightly through the trees,\n As pilgrims tread the red mud path 'neath Long Tan's tepid breeze.\n We come to honour all who died amid the battle roar;\n Victims now, victims all united now way up where eagles soar.\n Beyond the gates, beyond the chains, beyond all earthly pain,\n
- 36:00 They fought and died in holocaust of thunder, mud and rain.\n
- Flowers now to beautify a place that stank of death,\n And count our blessing one and all that we may still draw breath.\n To speak of those who braved the foe and rest 'neath Long Tan sod\n To each his own deliverance sought through Buddha not through God.\n Peace prevails the cross remains as soldier mates recall\n Their brothers lost so early gone, Aussie diggers standing tall.\n
- 36:30 **Was that written over there?**
- That was written as one of the three poems I wrote in an hour after a day visit to Nui Dat and Long Tan and so on, I just sort of got emotionally all revved up that day.
- 37:00 The war dog memorial down at Alexandra Headland at Maroochydore; about the tracker dogs in Vietnam.
- \n[Verse follows]\n Down jungle tracks through shot and shell,\n ears pricked high keen sense of smell\n our tracker dogs through care and poise\n alert to ambush, foreign noise.\n Never whimper, whine, nor bark\n Their service honoured with this plaque.\n No medals pinned to hairy chest,\n Left behind they were the best.\n
- That's for the tracker dogs.
- 37:30 This book Medic that I had published eighteen months, ago it took many year to write.
- Great. Thank you.**
- In my view Australia was conned into Vietnam by a concocted domino theory, an orchestrated Gulf of Tonkin incident and pressure from the CIA. The war was an horrendous quagmire supported for more than a decade by a
- 38:00 gullible public. The Vietnamese in my experience found the American war just another inconvenience along the route to reunification. They genuinely hold no bitterness towards previous foes and do not openly gloat over victory. I have read widely on the subject since coming home and now grudgingly admire the former enemy for their tenacity, and dedication to their struggle for reunification and independence. Our cause had little basis in fact.
- 38:30 I detested their brutal methods just as I detested the brutality of our allies when civilian massacres and routine torture of prisoners occurred. Our former foes were physically and mentally tougher and in for the long haul with definite goals, whereas we tended to focus on body count and three hundred and sixty five and a wakey. Had I not played my small part in the conflict, my mother may not have been drawn into her important role;
- 39:00 that of revealing the horrific aftermath of the toxic chemical exposure. Had my birth date marble not been hand drawn from the Tattersalls barrel by the Federal Member for Corangamite, Mr Ed McKinnon MP, I wouldn't have had the real life experience of war, met mates, who shared the dangers as their medic waiting for the urgent call, "Medic up the front."
- 39:30 End of tape