

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Robert Lovell (Rob) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2247>

### Tape 1

00:38 **Can you start with a summary of your life?**

Well I was born in on the 26th of April, after Anzac Day 1946 in Melbourne. A stone's throw from the Yarra River, my mother would say. And at nine months we moved to Sydney.

01:00 And my parents leased a theatre milk bar and they made their fortune before TV [television] came in, saw TV coming and got out of it and built a house at West Pennant Hills on one and a half acres. So from being a suburban boy I became a semi-country boy. Went to Castle Hill Primary School. I had been at Arncliffe until about third year.

01:30 Then went to Macquarie Boys' High School at Rydalmere. Part of the baby boom of course, new school. And went from there to the University of Sydney did a BA [Bachelor of Arts] and a DipEd [Diploma of Education]. Got a teacher's scholarship, got a commonwealth scholarship as well but I liked the idea of having some pocket money, the teacher's college scholarship allowed.

02:00 And that actually forced me to do courses that I hadn't really wanted to do. And it was at the time of a [teaching] bond so you had to teach for five years. And during that time I learnt about National Service coming in. And of course it was the only lottery I ever won. And

02:30 fortunately at the end, I was deferred for university, finished university qualification. At the end of my academic training I went to the army and I said I have got these, I have been called up, these papers, what should I do? I haven't heard anything. And they said we have made a mistake, could you come

03:00 back again next year. So I said okay, went to the Department of Education and they gave me a job close to home. So I had a year of teaching at Cumberland High School. So I had some professional experience before going into the army. At the end of that year I started my National Service. And it was '69 and '70 the two years that I had my National Service.

03:30 After National Service, the two years which involved six months in Vietnam I went back to teaching. Got very fast promotion, had almost a year at Meadowbank Boys' High School in charge of the English department. And couldn't hold the position because of seniority so I was given a posting to Junee High School so I had five years teaching in the country.

04:00 In charge of English and History. And during that time I took long service leave and did a masters' [degree] in arts at Durham University, my first trip overseas apart from Vietnam. And came back and obviously the reason for doing that was that I was losing interest in teaching, or what I was teaching.

04:30 And decided to further study here as well, got a posting at Windsor High School and started an MEd [Masters in Education] at University of Sydney. And when it came to writing the thesis, the honours level degree, I had to chose whether I should take leave without pay or resign.

05:00 And I had started a relationship at that stage and I thought I'll resign. And immediately got jobs teaching at the University of Sydney in the Faculty of Education part time, I was doing some TAFE [Technical and Further Education College] teaching and writing the thesis. And got involved through the Women's College at the University of Sydney study tours,

05:30 Americans, seniors, Americans coming to Australia to learn about Australia. And I was fascinated by their enthusiasm. And I think I had been a bit age-ist before that. And that lead to the idea of starting a study tour business. So Alumni Travel was born in 1989 and that is what I have been doing ever since.

06:00 **You were born in Melbourne, how old were you when you moved from there?**

Nine months, that was enough for me.

**There are no memories of Melbourne, certainly?**

Not really no. But went back for family holidays but it never had the impact that Sydney had had on me.

06:30 I consider myself a Sydneysider.

**Both your parents had involvement in the Second World War. Can you tell us what that was?**

Yeah both of them were bound for war experience. My father to Papua New Guinea and I think my mother was going to go on one of the nursing ships. But they were both held back to training, Dad was on the docks. And I think a handful of people were called out, he didn't know what

07:00 was happening and he became a trainer, PT [Physical Training] instructor. Various army bases around Australia. And they met at Bonegilla Army Camp where Mum was teaching in the catering corps, teaching recruits how to cook. And they both liked tennis I think, that was the thing. And magic happened.

07:30 **So they were both enlisted in the army?**

Yeah. Mum catered and Dad had been living in Shanghai that's where he had grown up for nineteen years, came to Australia, was here a year. I think there was a call up for six months originally and he was involved with that. And then that became a longer period.

**PT instructors of course being the most loved people in the army?**

08:00 Yeah.

**Neither of them had served overseas?**

No, no.

**What was behind the move to Sydney from Melbourne?**

Well Dad's parents, Mum, she was a Melbourne girl, I think I am fifth generation Australian on that side of the family; they had all come to Victoria. And Dad's, I'm the first generation on his side of course. He was English. And

08:30 his parents had moved to Sydney and I think my grandmother, my father's mother was very keen to see her boy back where she could keep an eye on him. So they had been in Melbourne of course because that's where Mum's family were. And so they moved to Sydney to be near his parents.

09:00 So I think was the main reason for it.

**What siblings did you have?**

I have two sisters. One two years younger, one four years younger. All born on months with thirty days in the correct order, April, June and September, November sorry.

**They weren't around when you moved back up to Sydney?**

No. They were both born in the little hospital on Forest Road just up from Princes Highway,

09:30 Roslyn Hospital I think it was, opposite, almost opposite the theatre and the milk bar where we lived.

**Describe where you grew up?**

Well they were the first memories I can remember my younger sister and I sitting on top of the generator in the corner of the shop. It was an old, had been an old hotel I think.

10:00 With big verandas up the street next to the theatre. Waiting for Dad to come home, because during the day he worked at various jobs, I think Otis elevators was one. And we had a new Holden [car], lovely pale blue Holden, the second model. And he would come around the corner and we would wave.

10:30 I remember standing in the room off the shop looking through the curtains at the hordes of people that came to the theatre three or four times a week to see the movie. And the clambering arms reaching across the counter. Occasionally you were given some pocket money, a threepence or something like that to buy something from the shop. But we didn't see any sign of lollies [candy] usually. And I remember one Easter

11:00 Dad or Mum must have gone crazy because there were Easter eggs all over the lounge room. Maybe old stock, I don't know. We used to play shops with the, they used to have demonstration Robertson chocolate boxes and so that we used to use playing shop. There was a spooky corridor, dark corridor beside the staircase

11:30 which I was always scared of. And I used to run up the stairs as fast as I could. Took me a long time to be able to walk, I remember, to be able to walk down the stairs, I would usually go down on my tail. But that was when I was very young of course. I remember seeing a movie at school. So this was when I would have been in third class, probably or even second class. And it was Tale of Two Cities. And I had nightmares, I had never seen, the only other film I had seen was

12:00 Bambi, even though we had lived next to the theatre. And I can still remember the peasant coming

through the big French windows and stabbing the lord of the manor with a big dagger and putting a note over it. It gave me nightmares thereafter, but it was some sort of school showing. I remember days in the school playground in winter, we were all sitting around on the low

12:30 seats and that P and C [Parents' and Citizens' Association] ladies would come with huge big enamel tea pots full of hot cocoa to make sure we got our milk quota. And pouring us out, that was a lovely experience.

**Your parents' milk bar had the concession?**

Yes.

**Was it actually inside the cinema?**

No it was next door.

**What was the location of that?**

13:00 Arncliffe, Forest Road Arncliffe, fifty-one. Oh and we used to get, my sister used to love eating the Jaffas [candy] that were swept out of the theatre. They was a big incinerator in the back yard and I would sort of catch her picking up these lovely red Jaffas to feast on, because as I said, we didn't eat very much in the way of lollies when we were young.

**So being the children of a milk bar owner didn't give you any privileges?**

No privileges, no this

13:30 was a time when they made their own iceblocks, they chocolate-coated their own ice-cream. It was a time when you could make money from a milk bar. Everything is pre-packaged now and there is not much of a margin I don't think.

**So it is true about rolling Jaffas down the aisle then?**

Must have been, yeah.

**You didn't have any secret access into the theatre?**

I don't think I was adventurous enough to have found it. There probably might have been. But I was

14:00 not, I wasn't interested in theatre at that stage. The Bambi I saw, I was taken by neighbours, it might have been when Mum was in hospital having one of the babies. And another western that I saw, with that tumbleweed, that also gave me nightmares. They were very powerful images for someone who didn't go to the theatre as much as my peers might have.

14:30 **Did living in a milk bar win you lots of friends at school?**

No I don't think I had many friends, there was one, I think I had a girlfriend from Sunday School, a neighbour. But I don't remember having any, I think maybe one friend but he lived in a different area. And being third class I

15:00 didn't have a bike or anything like that. So I didn't go roaming. It was a very close family.

**Where did you go to school?**

It was Arncliffe Public, up until third year then I moved to Castle Hill Primary when we moved to the country.

**And your parents got out of the milk bar business for what reason?**

Well they were saving up to buy their own house and

15:30 in the fifties there were, it was a matter of buying things when you could get them. So this dark corridor beside the stairs in this big old theatre milk bar suddenly started filling up with stoves and fridges and other bits and pieces that were being saved for the house, as they became available. And the house was built fresh, it was

16:00 actually appeared on the cover of an architectural magazine. It was very, very fifties with very tall angular windows in the lounge room, skillion roof and coloured square panels underneath the windows in the bedrooms and so on. So it was very quite remarkable. And it's interesting to see that my parents

16:30 having built their second house on the south coast now, they have gone very conservative. It's very useful sort of a style but very different from this pioneering that they did at West Pennant Hills. It's now been completely knocked down; it was on one and a half acres. It was bound to have been subdivided and now it is.

**Can you remember the name of the street?**

Robert Road. Before I got there.

17:00 **How would you describe that district in Sydney in those days?**

Well it was the green belt, supposedly. But when Mum and Dad bought the one and a half acres soon after a member of council, Hornsby Shire Council, bought the block opposite and divided them into sixty-foot frontages. So it was possible to take a bit of the green out of the belt.

17:30 Even at that stage. And while the house was being built the woman at the top of the street walked the cows across the garden from where they were feeding down near the creek. We had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls] and it was a very rural atmosphere. Mum and Dad never got into doing

18:00 more than a vegetables and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and so on. But there was an acre of ground at the back that was sort of allow at the time. And w used to walk up to the top of the road to catch the bus, we would sort of amble across Castle Hill Road. Now you'd be taking your life in your hands. We used to see my fifth class teacher go past me in his Zephyr car on the way to school, and he would wave.

18:30 And it was just little kids, primary kids catching the bus.

**What was your dad doing for a living out there?**

He had a series of clerical jobs but he got into sales and I think for the longest period he got involved with Swallows Biscuits. And he was a

19:00 sales supervisor, he was teaching other salesmen how to do it.

**How to sell to milk bar owners?**

Yeah, and when my youngest sister reached the age of ten, so that would have been 1960, Mum joined the teaching service again. She went out to Blacktown Girls' High School. And she had a really tough time there because those kids you know, they had all sorts of problems. And she used to cry, she told me since that she used to cry herself to sleep.

19:30 So that was, they were just keen to make some money and be comfortable and secure. And they thought that it might be paying for university fees and so on. We didn't go to private school, they had thought about that but they thought they would save the money for university. But of course when that came along the scholarship system came in so there was no problem with that.

20:00 But she had ten years of teaching.

**What sort of problems would she relate from Blacktown High?**

Well she just couldn't believe how naughty the girls were. There were some really tough kids. Life experience, they were living on the fringes of the city and it's just like what people hear about living on the outskirts in badly designed communities without

20:30 facilities. I mean Blacktown was like that at that stage. Now Blacktown is quite respectable and middle class.

**What decade are we talking about?**

Sixties. So I think she would have started in sixty and finished in maybe, yeah when I came back from Vietnam she would have finished teaching by then.

**So student misbehaviour is not a recent phenomenon?**

21:00 Oh I mean as a teacher myself, my first year of teaching I had this very protected upbringing and didn't have very much self-confidence. I was fortunate that I got some fantastic classes. Top Ancient History class. And top English class in fifth year. But I had a third year class which was the very bottom.

21:30 And I just didn't know what; I just couldn't believe the way they were behaving. And I survived it but it was a big powerful lesson for me. But when I came back from Vietnam the thing that I found that I could do best in teaching was counselling those naughty kids. Because I had, I felt that caning was not

22:00 really an answer. And I just talked them into good behaviour. They'd go, and I'd say, "Stop, stop talking."

**What about your own high school days at Castle Hill?**

Well primary at Castle Hill. That was, going there was interesting I became Robert the Fifth, I was the fifth Robert in 3A in Castle Hill when I arrived. It shows you how names change, no Joels or Joshuas then.

22:30 I fell in love with the school captain. There are a lot of names from Castle Hill that have appeared in various places subsequently, some interesting people there. And then when it came to going to high school, if you had siblings at Parramatta High School you were able to go there if you were a boy. Girls could automatically go there. No siblings it meant Macquarie Boys, which had

23:00 been Parramatta Intermediate High School right in the heart of Parramatta shopping centre, Phillip Street I think it was. It moved out to Rydalmere in new buildings. And there were the last two years of

the intermediate high school, fourth and fifth year. And then, 1A to 1H

23:30 in the new intake of baby boomers. And so went through there. Got involved with the choir and shows that we put on, school magazine and the library. And tried to stay away from sport as much as I could. Because I was a chubby little sissy school boy.

24:00 **What sort of journey was it to get to Rydalmere?**

Oh three buses. If I'd have gone to West Pennant Hills Public School in the other direction the same distance, I would have been at Normanhurst Boys', which also was a baby boomer first school. So it meant catching the bus from the top of the road, Robert Road to

24:30 Rogans Hill. Changing to the Parramatta bus line and going to Parramatta in double deckers. And then going from Parramatta out to Rydalmere. We got up pretty early, about half past six in the morning. Yeah, it's quite a journey. But as you get used to it, and my sister was two years behind me, Northmead High School had been built, so she caught two buses. And then baby sister two years later, Castle Hill High School.

25:00 So that's the way history goes.

**So as that district developed?**

Yep.

**You drew the short straw didn't you?**

Pioneer.

**You mentioned you were involved in choir and so on; you were atypical as far as the Aussie schoolboy went in that respect?**

25:30 Yeah it was, I had felt that I was different but there were other different people. One of them hanged himself which was a shame, I don't really know why but I have thoughts about it. But we, in a boys' school, I had an experience when I was teaching at Meadowbank similar to it.

26:00 There are societies and you just get accepted into a society and it's fine. So it was the library and choir group. And we were just ferocious monitors in the library and that was our place where we could show our strength and so on. And I steered away as far as possible from team sports which I found just overwhelming. And I was, I played tennis, sort of 'hit and giggle' tennis.

26:30 There was never any coaching we just went down, got our names on the roll, had a game and then went home again. I missed all that sort of physical thing, and that development. Of course my father was horrified. And I didn't have a very good relationship with my father. I think we are probably closer now than we have ever been. But at that stage I was a complete disappointment. I remember one Christmas he bought me boxing gloves.

27:00 And I couldn't think of anything worse than hitting people. It just wasn't me. So he must have been devastated that his son was such a dishonour, brought such dishonour to the family.

**You couldn't get a stronger contrast with an army PT instructor?**

He is always fit. And he is the sort of person who would pick up any sport. But by the same token he would deliberately train and

27:30 practice and practice until he could perfect it. The last one was golf. Before that it was squash. When I came back from the army I was living close by and I played squash with him and never used to win, ever. But I enjoyed it, I was enjoying sport then. And that was the only time we ever sort of played. And after he got into golf and became pretty good for his age at golf.

28:00 **You said your mum had trouble at Blacktown Girls', what was Macquarie Boys' like in that respect?**

I think there were some really top notch people at Macquarie too. I just can't think of, Arnis Sproggis[?], he is in the theatre world. There are quite a few people very good scientists that went through Macquarie. So

28:30 from A to H there was quite a lot of talent. A lot of young boys going through in that first year and following on. So it had a huge drawing area. People came from Merrylands and West Ryde and it was, from all over the place. But then as, two years later,

29:00 I mean there were other schools being built because that was the volume of people in the baby boom generation. So it wasn't a selective school but there were kids that could have been in a selective school. Maybe the top three or four classes. Could have all been in selective schools.

**What were you like as a student?**

I was very good at the humanities.

29:30 English and History, French and so on. But I had no confidence with Maths and by the time I got to the intermediate I had a very supportive Maths teacher. And my confidence built and when I went into the senior school, into fourth year, I was in the top Maths class. But at that time my eyesight started going. And the marks went down, the confidence was lost.

30:00 I just couldn't understand all this DY DX [mathematics, algebra] business. And so I actually repeated the leaving certificate. Because my eyesight had got so bad. I remember going into the French dictation, the first examination. And because of the numbering I was up the back of the room, I was always down the front. And I couldn't read the dictate on the, the first clue as to the subject of the

30:30 French dictate. I just couldn't see it, and that was a big shock. And then when we started putting things together and Mum said, "Well that's why you are leaning so close to the TV all the time." It was just a slow process of short sightedness. So I got glasses in the next year I had repeated and got on and everything was fine, and got a commonwealth scholarship, teachers' college scholarship.

31:00 **It sounds like a problem with eyesight was much slower to be picked up in those days? Or was that just your individual experience?**

Well it hadn't, I mean I hadn't done anything; I wasn't doing anything like sport where eyesight might have been more important. I was just reading close and doing those sorts of activities. Just the TV that my parents looked at but I mean you couldn't really, it was just behaviour that I was

31:30 expressing which may have just been interest. But it was just that I was unconsciously trying to focus on what was going on. Sort of thing that was a bit of a set back. And getting the glasses changed that and I became more confident and I did very well.

**What was student behaviour like there? What sort of discipline was enforced?**

It was

32:00 it varied from teacher to teacher. There were some new wave teachers that I was very impressed with. Max Stallone who became inspector of schools and continued on in the Education Department. Darry Taylor in the music department. Who is now going on my tours. And I, you know, was very impressed with them. Then there were the old school, see at that stage,

32:30 most of the teachers were retired and had come back, or were getting close to that, they were much older. I suppose it's getting like it is now again, an aging teaching force. And a lot of them couldn't cope with the vitality of the students. So it ranged. I think if we

33:00 were entertained we would behave ourselves. But at the other end of the, there were some really tough kids. But I wasn't exposed to that. So I didn't have to go through period after period of bad behaviour. There was an occasional stage where we would muck up. But generally they were fairly intelligent kids and if they were kept busy, they would put their heads down.

33:30 **You weren't exposed to the behaviour because you were streamed into high classes?**

Yeah.

**Can you tell about some of the cultural fads and fashions going on in those days?**

No. It's all, I mean I was aware, I remember

34:00 when I was back in primary school, Rumpus Room [radio show] with Howard Craven. But I don't think I was particularly, because I didn't see very much, we didn't get TV until I was in third year high school, I was fifteen. And it wasn't on all the time; there weren't morning shows or anything. So there was Bandstand [TV program].

34:30 But I never, I wasn't affected by any teen crazes or I didn't have friends that went out to anything, because I was isolated in the country. I didn't have very much social life at all. So I saw kids at school and then it was home and the family again. So I missed out on all that socialisation outside school.

35:00 And then when I went to university it was the same thing. Because if you weren't home by six you had missed the last bus from Pennant Hills station. And you would have to ring up and ask the parents to come and pick you up.

**What about when you in high school, what sort of music were you into?**

Well I was learning through being in the choir

35:30 a lot of bits and pieces of opera and serious music. And I became very interested in Mozart. I remember the highlight of our choir existence was being part of the combined school choirs performing in Sydney Town Hall and we were actually recorded for Channel Seven one year. And those, we did arias from Mozart operas and that sort of thing. So that made me

36:00 interested in serious music. And so when I was at university my group of friends there, some of whom had been at high school, and their friends, started the Baroque Society and we got into the Baroque music area and we held concerts on campus and in small theatres around the campus. And so serious

music was an interest.

36:30 **When you weren't on buses what did you do with your free time?**

Just read I think mainly, just read in my room. Did jobs around the house.

**What did you like to read?**

Everything. Read everything that was home and borrowed books from the library.

37:00 Yeah I think towards the end I got a record player, I saved up and bought a record player and started collecting things through the World Record Club. At that stage. So I was building up a collection of Mozart and, it's in there somewhere. And after I had finished, when I came back from Vietnam I had a subscription to the opera and ballet season.

37:30 Where you had to line up to get those and actually by the time I went to teach in the country I had got good seats right in the middle of the stall. But I mean driving back from Junee to go to the opera or the ballet became a bit of a problem. So that was all the link with, now I can't afford it.

**What did you do for fun?**

Tease my sisters.

38:00 **That's always a great thing?**

Yeah, yeah. We used to be able to manage quite well when there were two of us, either two it didn't really matter, but three of us together it always ended in tears.

**That's the inevitable sibling triangle?**

Having grown up now and looking back I don't think I was, I might have been given jobs to do

38:30 in the garden . But my mother was very keen on the garden. And that's something that I have picked up. I go out into this courtyard here, the oasis as you called it, and the tension drops. No matter hard or not I am working physically I just feel really at peace, thoroughly enjoy it.

**Any family holidays?**

Yeah we went down to Melbourne in the blue Holden. About three or four times

39:00 I think, to see Mum's friends. And to see our siblings who were living down there. I remember earlier going to my mothers' older sister, my aunt's, she was living, she was working for the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association], she was in charge of the Newcastle branch at that particular stage.

39:30 And she would drive down to Wyong in her Prefect car and we would drive up to Wyong in the Holden and have a little picnic lunch. And then we would be taken up, or I would be taken up there to stay with her for a week or so. That was when it took a long time to get to Wyong and Newcastle. And once Dad took me up on the train, which was quite an interesting experience. The steam-train. I think that

40:00 might have been a baby time. But I can't remember.

**Did you do any jobs or chores of pocket money?**

Yeah. Pocket money was a matter of working. It wasn't just sort of a hand out. Cleaning the car and helping in the garden I think. And those sorts of things, cleaning up.

40:30 **What did you spend your pocket money on?**

I always wanted a train set so I saved up and bought myself a train set. And I used to buy Airfix [model] kits and make little planes. Those sorts of things. Yeah that was the main source. Every time I, it came up to Christmas I might buy myself another carriage for the train or some more track or, yeah.

## Tape 2

00:33 **Tell me more about your mother?**

I always considered her to be the strongest parent. She was the disciplinarian. I think over the years, once I came to have a perspective of my parents I saw them as people rather than Mum and Dad, I saw that

01:00 she had not done a lot of things that she would have liked to have done because she didn't want to upstage my father.

**What do you think some of those things might have been?**

Well she couldn't have friends because he was intimidated a little bit I think by them. She had been to

PLC [Presbyterian Ladies' College] so she had a lot of friends who

01:30 were very comfortably off in the Melbourne scene. And she had to revise her expectations. But she committed herself to the relationship and I think to some degree she may have got some satisfaction out of being a victim. I think relationships work themselves out like this. And I mean I think they are very close now

02:00 but there were times when the tension was palpable. And there were a few times when I had blow ups, I mean as a teenager who doesn't, with my father. And it was always to support my mother. And she was the intellectual inspiration; she was the one who was pushing us to work hard at school to get good results.

02:30 **Would she bring that into the household to encourage you to read certain books, to keep up with current affairs etc?**

No no. It wasn't as obvious as that. It would mainly through asking questions and, I was completely self contained as far as the reading was concerned. It was something I was interested in doing. I was escaping obviously. I didn't understand myself and

03:00 I knew I was different from other kids at school. And so this was a way of escaping. And so that, I mean the train set, once again, it was a solitary thing. I was just dreaming about going travelling and so forth. So that was all sort of motivated by my own interests not by feeling that I should be doing it

03:30 because Mum said so.

**Do you think dad was intimidated by mum's influence?**

I think that's probably what it was, maybe the background as well. And I think he was probably relieved to take her away from her world into his world more or less by moving up to Sydney. But they were a very powerful team together

04:00 as far as providing a secure environment was concerned.

**How close were you to mum?**

Very close, very close. And I think being a first son that sort of continued. I also had a very close relationship with my father's mother.

04:30 She didn't have very much to do with my sisters. She was only interested in me; she had two sons, my father and his brother. And I spent, I didn't talk about this before, but I spent holidays with my grandparents, my father's parents. And it was mainly because of my grandmother being interested in me. So that lasted up until they both died. When I was at university they both were very sick and they both died

05:00 in '65, about three months apart from each other. And I was sort of there cleaning the house and helping. In the last few years. And it was a chance for me to get away from home and just travel from Burwood into university. So it was a bit of a good way of avoiding all the commuting at that stage. But that was interesting and I think Mum

05:30 I don't think Mum liked that very much. So there were two very strong women in my upbringing.

**Do you think you got values from both of those women?**

I think I got values from my mother but I don't think there was any positive, anything particularly positive about my grandmother. I think it was probably in a way negative. But

06:00 it was nice to feel important because she, everything revolved around me when I was there.

**What was negative about it?**

Well she was very self absorbed. She had been, both my father's parents were from peasant stock in England. And

06:30 they were thrust into the glamour of Shanghai during their formative years. And spent the whole time going to mah-jong parties and balls and with the expatriate community. Drinking, smoking have a great life. Very sort of shallow type of existence. But I suppose there wasn't very much choice. But there was no

07:00 education to make them interested in Chinese culture or anything like that. That's probably cruel making a comment like that because I mean, they were in a strange place and they weren't in quite a violent society. And they probably felt a little bit scared by it, well my grandmother would have been a bit scared by it.

07:30 **Did they talk to you much about that experience?**

They, most of it was just negative. I mean, my grandfather was in the police force so he saw the worst, prostitution, the gambling, racketeering that was going on in Shanghai. I don't think he was part of it

necessarily but he, it prejudiced his view of Chinese people. And also my father. My father

08:00 had Chinese friends but he doesn't think about them as Chinese, they are friends. But he has a negative view of Chinese people. And you know, the way Chinese people behave and live and so on.

**Was that an attitude that was shared with you when you were young? Were you encouraged to feel that way?**

No it was just picked up. I mean I was furious but I didn't have any negative feelings.

08:30 I think

**Were you having much to do with Asia?**

No, this was the time; I mean the only foreigner that came into my purview before high school was a Dutch girl. At Castle Hill High School with blonde pigtails which we used to call, she was the

09:00 only foreigner that came into the (UNCLEAR) at all. In high school there were people from the Baltic states. But only a few. And I think there was one sort of half-Chinese boy that I can remember and that was it. So it was, in the next ten years that the Greeks and the Italians started to come through.

09:30 And that was when I started teaching.

**What sort of impression do you think you had of Asians when you were in your teens?**

I don't think I had any perception really. I knew there were Chinese restaurants. And they were very different but we never went to a Chinese restaurant. I mean Mum

10:00 was forced to try to imitate Chinese cuisine in the best way she could. To Dad's satisfaction and that was it. There was no carry over from China, apart from in my grandparents' house, mantelpiece things. Cloisonné vases, there is one on the steps coming up and

10:30 somewhere around, and a few other bits and pieces like that. And some fine redwood furniture with lattice straw seats. And silver tea sets that were given as presents. But no, I know my grandfather had gone up country to Sujo because he was a pigeon fancier. And they left pigeons off and they flew back to

11:00 Shanghai to the coops and so on. And there were shooting parties. But he never had great stories about how marvellous China was or anything like this. It was just, it was just work, and they used to go to Japan every Christmas for summer holidays staying in Nagasaki. Dad sort of remembers that from his boyhood. But no, nothing. He said a few times that he

11:30 would be walking in the city, it would have been thirty or forty years ago. And he heard Shanghai-Chinese accent and suddenly it all come back to him. But I mean that is completely lost. So I don't think I had any concept one way or another. Certainly no built in prejudice about Chinese people just interested in their attitudes. And sort of saying, why are things like this.

12:00 **You indicated that dad was fairly physical, perhaps a bloke's bloke?**

No he wasn't a pub visitor; I don't think he was comfortable in that sort of social setting in Australia. He, because of his English background I think. I never learnt from him to call people mate. I think I find it very difficult to say, "Hello mate." It's just something I

12:30 never done. And he has never done it. So there is a difference there. He has had a few, he makes friends very easily at a very superficial level I think. So he can chat up somebody in a shop which I would find maybe difficult to do.

13:00 But then he doesn't have any sort of deep friendships. There is no, I think he might have had some in his later years and he hasn't played golf for a long time because his golfing partner died. But that's an interesting side, I hadn't thought about very much. But not a bloke's bloke, but very physical and very concerned about health. And maintaining his health.

13:30 **How aware were you that perhaps dad was not so happy with how his boy was?**

Well we didn't have a relationship. There was no physical touching or anything like that, we still shake hands, no hugs or anything like that. So it was just not being there. It wasn't a force, he would come home and he was there and I was the joker of the

14:00 family. But that was just the times when we had arguments that there was any sort of contact at all. Otherwise it was negative. All the emotional contact was on Mum's side.

**Did you feel compelled to try and please dad by participating in sport or to live up to his expectations?**

No, no it didn't even enter my head.

14:30 There was, I didn't feel that I should be in the game of pleasing him at all. Nothing like, I'll show you, type of thing. When I did achieve things that he was proud of I realised the impact it was having. But it

wasn't something that I was striving to do

15:00 to win his favour because I didn't really think it was a big deal. So it was a very negative relationship in that, well it was nothing, a nothingness really.

**So any values you drew from your parents was from mum?**

Oh no, no. I mean the idea of saving up and working hard and I mean, they both provided a very positive example of thrift and being careful and

15:30 working slowly towards a goal and achieving it. I think what they did for us was remarkable. And it was both of them as a team.

**Was religion part of the family life?**

No, my mother had grown up as a Presbyterian at PLC in Melbourne. Dad's background was Anglican, neither of them went to

16:00 church. But they both, well we all went to Sunday School till it became, until we were old enough to make a decision about whether we wanted to continue or not. So we weren't baptised or christened because they thought, well I don't know whose idea it was, probably Mum's, that we should make the decision for ourselves rather than having it imposed on us. So we

16:30 went to Congregational Sunday School in Arncliffe and Methodist Sunday School at Castle Hill. And then finally I had a friend who said, "hy don't you come to the Baptist one?" this was in early teens. And I was so horrified, one of these evangelists came around and he was shouting. And I was one of the older people there, one of the older kids there, thirteen or fourteen, and I was quite scared by the

17:00 way that he was going on and I never went back after that, that killed it for me. Because I through how can he behave like that with those little kids in the front. Maybe I was just too sensitive but I thought it was very inappropriate. So that was the end of that.

**Did you ever feel that compared to other kids who did have a religion, did you feel awkward that you didn't?**

17:30 No. No it, I understood what religion was about but I started seeing the negatives of organised religion. I still don't know what the answer is to it all. I've got an open mind. And I have now got perspective of Islam and Buddhism and other religions. As a form of comparison. And I just think

18:00 that probably the idea of a creator is one way but I think that various people have chosen to describe the relationship in different ways and that's how the religions have formed. But it's sort of that eclectic type of

18:30 vision of the one, rather than any particular religious faith.

**You mentioned this idea of feeling different when you were growing up when do you think that feeling began?**

Well when you get chosen last for the team. Yeah and I could see kids behaving in ways that I

19:00 felt uncomfortable, you know, the racing around hitting each other and I just thought, oh I am different, it's not me. And I think when sexuality comes; the things that were attracting me shouldn't have been things that were attracting me. And so I started looking around for the answer to that.

**Was that confronting for you at that stage?**

No, no. I mean I was satisfying, I had been satisfying my own urges quite successfully without any other, any one else's interference. And I remember having a crush on the school captain at Macquarie. And I had no concept of ever taking it ever further than that. I

20:00 was never seduced. As a teenager or anything like that. I think spending so much time at home with the family there was no opportunity, I wasn't sort of around the streets or parks or anything like that.

**Were you ever threatened at school because your orientation was different?**

20:30 No I think, in the fifties and early sixties at least at the school that I was at I don't ever remember anyone calling anyone a poofter [slang term for homosexual] or anything like that. It was sissies, that was a big thing, and I just fell into that category. So I just accepted it.

**So the concept of being a poof wasn't in currency?**

I hadn't heard the word I don't think, all through high school. But then you know, it may have been going on and I wasn't aware of it. So I was, I think I was pretty naïve, pretty sheltered.

**Did being different lead to much bullying?**

21:30 Not really, it was mainly verbal abuse from younger kids. The older ones were down on the oval playing

touch football or whatever. And there was the sanctuary of the library or the choir in lunchtime breaks. So I wasn't exposed to it, I wasn't sitting in an area, I wasn't putting myself in an area where it could happen

22:00 very much. So I was never bashed or anything like that, ever.

**The library Nazis were never victimised?**

Not really. No, I think, I can't ever remember I can't ever remember any situation where our peers treated us, I mean it was just verbal things, verbal comments really.

22:30 **Where you curious in talking to your parents about their war experience? Was that something you would discuss at home?**

No, not really. It wasn't something that I was aiming for or very conscious of. When I was called up

23:00 the only thing that kept being said was that you'll be okay. Mum was felt quite confident that I would get through it all without any problems. Mothers have this sort of intuition I think. But I thought well that's a bit of insurance policy. But we had never; it had only come up in the course of family history. And we knew about them being married at Albury

23:30 because the family coming from Sydney and coming from Melbourne and it was sort of like a half way place. And those sorts of war things, and from photo albums. So it wasn't a big story at all, it was just something that was part of their, to me it seemed as if they considered it part of their life and so Vietnam became part of my life. But it wasn't something

24:00 that was a goal or a pinnacle or an important thing, just that it brought them together.

**Did you get much information about the world wars through your education?**

I studied history yeah, studied history and then taught it.

**How much did you learn about Australia's involvement in the wars in high school?**

24:30 Well I mean, I knew the role that Australia had played supporting Britain. And then the change in direction when Singapore fell. And the need to find another international partner for protection. And the switch to the states. Those sort of general issues.

25:00 The history of Australia's involvement in international wars as part of the common, the British Empire and then the commonwealth. So that sort of background perspective.

**Did you know much of the Korean War?**

I think it had come up in classes where teachers may have had some experience there.

25:30 But it wasn't a closer impact than that because my father had one brother and he had been, gone to New Guinea at the very end of the war. And there was no other generation that would have been involved in Korea in between that and the Vietnam War. So I knew about the Korean War and I knew about the Malayan Emergency through study of history.

26:00 **You had an awareness of the development of Communism?**

Oh yes, I knew that there was an argument for the spread of Communism and how it needed to be stopped. And that motivated a lot of what was happening outside the Asian area.

**Did you (UNCLEAR) to that argument?**

26:30 At university I...

**In high school?**

In high school no. No it, it was just history. So I didn't see it in any real sense.

**But when you got to university?**

When I got to university and I saw people demonstrating and I didn't become involved in it because I had to catch the bus to get home.

27:00 or train to get home. But I carried those ideas back with me and fought with Dad about it. Because he said, "But Mr Robert Menzies [Prime Minister] knows. The Liberal Party knows what's happening and you should listen to what they say." And I said, "Dad!" you know, I began to realise that people have failings and see the wrong, and can have different points of view and

27:30 I could, I had listened to the arguments that were being thrown around about the dominos falling [domino theory] and this universal Communism idea. At that stage I don't think I was completely aware of the history of Vietnam. If I had been aware of the history of Vietnam I would have felt a lot more strongly.

28:00 But I was arguing as if I did know the history of Vietnam. And mainly not because I was anti, I wasn't pro Communist but because I was anti my father and what he, he wanted to believe the complete opposite. As it turns out I was on the right side I think. But I wasn't really aware of the power of the argument that I was espousing.

28:30 **So that position was taken because it was an opportunity to stand against dad?**

Exactly, to be honest I am sure that's what I was. I mean I wasn't inspired to do a lot of study. I was just aware of this issue affecting Australia. I could see

29:00 that it didn't hold very much water but I wasn't inspired to do a lot of research. And I suppose because I wasn't completely committed in that sense in an intellectual perspective, I had never got involved in demonstrations. And I felt a bit of a coward, partly about that. I would sort of slink off to Fisher Library and do some work on

29:30 my next assignment. And I knew that there were people outside getting really steamed up about this situation. Even though I had this lottery result having over my head as well. And being, towards the end of it anyway. And knowing that I was going to be called up and I could go to Vietnam. And be killed.

**Did you receive pressure from the people who were protesting?**

30:00 No because my group wasn't involved. We were sort of doing the Baroque society and all very airy fairy stuff.

**What sort of career aspirations were you pondering at the end of high school?**

I wanted to be an architect. Still like designing buildings, still like building design.

30:30 But when it came to vocational testing and so on and looking at my results, and knowing that architecture is driven by engineering and mathematics and so on, I gave up on that idea. My Maths results were not strong enough. I mean now, you can get into the whole idea of design from an artistic point of view and somebody

31:00 else can, you can feed the problems into the computer and come up with the right formula about stress and structure and so on. But at that stage it was really a mathematical exercise. Scientific exercise. So then I had the model of my mother who had gone back to teaching, very, very powerful, I had, that's where I was in the teaching world. And so the idea of teaching was very strong.

31:30 And when I went to university, my priority though was archaeology. Once again it's a building thing, but archaeology was the dream. Because I took a teacher's scholarship rather than a commonwealth scholarship I had to compromise on the subjects that I took. To be, to do archaeology at a professional level I needed to have, at Sydney University anyway, one ancient

32:00 language and two modern languages. I had studied French at school; I could have picked up German. But I needed to do elementary Greek or Latin. And the teachers' college scholarship people said no. We want you to be, to train to be an English history teacher in the English/History department. So you have got to do English. So I did Archaeology, Ancient History and English. And so the possibility of

32:30 taking archaeology terribly far was squashed at that point. Although when I graduated I won a scholarship to study southern Italian and Greek pottery in Italy, and Italian government scholarship. But at that stage the National Service people weren't prepared to give me any more extensions to study. So that was a change in direction. But in the mean time I was on a teacher's college scholarship and

33:00 so I went into the teaching area, probably using a model of my favourite teacher, my mother's teaching experience. As it turned out both of my sisters also went into teaching. Which may be another example of the power of mother. As a personality.

**Begin a member of the Baroque Society**

33:30 **were you engaging in the swinging sixties at all?**

Oh I was watching TV and very interested in the boy bands and the male singers. Yeah that was, the visual images were quite powerful.

34:00 **Did you get a sense of the fabric of society was being transformed?**

No because I was in it. I didn't have any perspective. I, like all teenagers, I knew we were rebelling and that it was a bit different from Johnny Ray and Frank Sinatra and so on. So we heard those sorts of records being played on the radio and people very keen on

34:30 them. But we were the generation after the bobbysox [young girl fans] and The Beatles were, I mean it was a very powerful thing. So in a sense I guess being at university and at the end of high school and university in the '60s was a very exciting time with change. Yeah I really don't know whether, I suppose there was an awareness that it was a bit different.

35:00 But I wasn't, I mean, I didn't go to the dances; I wouldn't have known what to do. I did learn dancing

when I was in high school. It was another thing my mother, ballroom dancing.

**Any twisting or rock and roll?**

No most of the moves I learnt

35:30 was when I was a teacher and I was trying to get kids up in the school dances. That was a crazy time, I liked dancing. But at the stage where you needed a partner as a teenager it was something that, I don't think we had school dances at Macquarie. Probably with Macarthur Girls', but I wouldn't have gone.

**Did you start to grow your hair and wear clothes that your parents weren't too happy about?**

36:00 I grew mine longer, I had a lot of hair then. At university. And Dad wasn't very happy with that. I took to a pipe at one stage until I burnt my tongue. It was a howling gale in the middle of winter at Redfern station and I had one of those pipes with a metal bowl, you unscrewed the bulb from the metal

36:30 whatever, the part that you put into your mouth. And saliva was starting to boil in there. The bottom of it and the bowl was starting to burn because of this howling gale. So I gave that up. But that was a bit of an aside.

**Was there just tobacco in that pipe?**

It was tobacco yes. Yes I didn't know anything about anything, the other.

**No awareness of the herbal?**

37:00 No, I was very, very naive.

**Were you drinking alcohol?**

When we had social events for the Baroque Society I think we were into the flagon era and it was moselle.

**Very classy?**

Very classy. Yes

**A cut above?**

Yes. Beer didn't figure

37:30 very prominently there was no sort of pub scene for me as a student. I missed a heck of a lot.

**Why do you think you missed a heck of a lot?**

Looking back. But I think you grow up in a particular way and there is time when you are ready to do certain things. And I'm quite happy with my life. I don't have any regrets about missing the pub scene as a student.

38:00 **Were other aspects of culture opening up at that stage? Was cinema or theatre an interest?**

Yes, mainly through the influence, because I repeated the Leaving Certificate, my peers went to university a year ahead of me so I had, I was in a very comfortable position of being shown everything. I wasn't sort of new experience. I was the first member of my family to go

38:30 to university but I had these friends who were already there and preparing the way for me, showing me what to do when I got there. And so we'd go to the movies, those sort of art house type movies. Mainly. But I think my main interest was an erotic one rather than anything else. But I remember one

39:00 fantastic time when we had gone to lunch and had a few drinks and saw The Producers. And I'd never cried so much with sheer joy. And tears streaming down my face, laughing all the way through it. Just seeing the stage version. And in Melbourne. And that was a great experience, one of the things I remember. But I used to sort of sneak off to

39:30 the smaller theatres in the city and the Rowe Street book shop with this funny man who kept showing me where certain books were. And I thought it was very, very exciting, but that was it.

**So the more erotic side of things involve things like Andy Warhol films? Or risqué European productions?**

There were mainly French films. That's getting a little bit too modern,

40:00 Warhol was, I mean that was towards the end. But yeah, later on that was, but the French films and the, I had no interest in MGM [Metro Goldwyn Mayer] musicals. Which is completely absorbing to my friend David. I've just learned about that since I have been with him. But

40:30 mainstream, a picture here or there that may have been well reviewed. But it was mainly foreign films.

**Were you finding other people at that stage who were interested in going to that part of the**

### **book shop?**

No, I didn't share that part of my life with any of my friends. I thought that they probably felt similar to me but it was never discussed, ever.

41:00 And I don't know whether they were discussing it when I wasn't there because I always had to go early to get back home. I don't know how they saw me. I remember one student party at someone's house. And there was a bit of, there were things going on but once again I was too naïve to check it out or understand what was happening.

## **Tape 3**

00:31 **As you entered into university the lottery for National Service was being implemented, what were your feelings about that?**

I was horrified. I remember seeing somebody reading the headlines of the evening paper on the train going home. So National Service introduced. And

01:00 I just saw it some horrible shadow that was in front of me not knowing whether I would be involved or not. But just that there was a possibility. I think there might have been a sense of inevitableness about it. Because I don't think I was surprised when I got the letter saying that I had been one of the lucky ones.

01:30 **Did you follow the draws?**

No I wasn't aware of the process; I just knew that that was what was happening.

### **Was your father an advocate of National Service?**

I can't remember him actually saying anything. I mean he probably would have thought well, this would make a man of him, those sorts of ideas. But it

02:00 was just, the main concern was the war itself and whether it was justified and whether we should be involved. That was, he thought that this was something that we had to do, but I wasn't so sure.

### **At the time you were picked the war in Vietnam was becoming a full blown conflict?**

02:30 **Did you have fears of being drawn into that sort of area?**

Oh yes, as soon as I was actually selected, and I knew that I would be able to finish my qualification, my study before I was sent in, I was looking at all the possible angles of avoiding Vietnam. And by the time I had finished my accidental first year of teaching

03:00 when I should have actually been in the army, I had found an answer, a perfect way of getting out of, if I was going to be, if I was, on the medical, I thought I could get out because of my glasses, my eyesight. They wouldn't want anyone who couldn't see when their glasses fell off. If it came to the worst, then

03:30 there were forty-five qualified teachers taken out of the first intake of every year who were sent to Papua New Guinea and that's what I was going to do. That was my goal to get into that forty-five and go to New Guinea.

### **Run us through the bureaucratic process once you got that initial letter saying you had been drafted? What led to the deferment and then the glitch that had you teaching for a year?**

I really

04:00 can't remember the documentation but obviously they were aware that I was finishing a basic degree and a teacher qualification. So four years. I think I probably got the call up when I was, yep, it's eighteen isn't it. So that was '66. So I had

04:30 '66 was the third year of university, so I graduated at the end of '66. '67 was the Dip Ed year and so I should have gone in, in '68. And it was because I hadn't heard anything that at the end of '67 that I actually rang. I think I rang the army and I said, there must have been a number on the form, what should I be doing because I hadn't heard anything. And

05:00 that's when I got the sort of garbled message about contact us next year. And so I went to the Department of Education to find if there was a teaching position available because they obviously had the records that I was going into National Service and that I wouldn't be able to be employed until two years. Because fortunately for me I

05:30 my pay, my army pay was made up to what my teaching salary would have been. And the service, National Service counted as service in teaching. So it was a very good position to be in. So I had a year of teaching and went in, in the beginning of '69.

**While you were finishing your education, what was it like having that wait over your head?**

06:00 It wasn't something that was constantly on my mind. I think I had enough to occupy myself. But when it came to discussions it was ways of getting out of it and what people were doing and the stories you hear about conscientious objection. But as I indicated before I didn't really have, I didn't really think, I don't think I was

06:30 brave enough to think about conscientious objection. I didn't think I had the intellectual capacity to argue the case. And I certainly hadn't done any reading about it at all.

**Were any of your university friends picked?**

I had one friend who was picked. I think he was picked, But he was much more politically savvy than I was. And

07:00 he ended up extending his study in Canberra and worked for the Department of the Army would you believe in some capacity. And I think he wangled his way some you know with political connections. I never got to the bottom of it. That was the only other example.

**07:30 Can you recall what your friends said to you when you had this coming up?**

Well they were all sort of sympathetic, and they said, oh dear, poor thing. But I really can't remember it being a big issue with tears and all the rest of it. It was just something, I mean I had really no concept of what it was going to be like, if I knew what it was going to be like, maybe I would have been a little less

08:00 I might have been a little bit more concerned about it.

**What made you ring up and ask the army when you were going to be called?**

I don't know. I think I just wanted to get it settled. Because I had no, I mean, I felt that I should have received some sort of indication of a date for going to have a medical. So I was bit concerned, I thought if I don't

08:30 contact them maybe I will get into trouble. And maybe there will be some penalty, maybe I missed the letter or something has happened. So it was that, maybe.

**Do you ever think back on that phone call and wonder if things might have gone differently if you hadn't called?**

No because I don't, from this perspective, I don't have any

09:00 regrets about the two years. It's, there were bad parts about it, definitely bad parts but I'd have to say on looking back that I learnt more about myself in that two years than I had know before. And I grew up in some ways, just as my father probably suspected I would. But maybe not in the way he expected I would.

**09:30 Once you had been told to report next year, tell us what your teaching post was?**

Yeah well I mean, I had won the scholarship so there were letters backwards and forwards to the army to see if I could have a further deferment. And I think

10:00 the local minister, member of parliament was involved with that. But that was to no avail. So I got on with the teaching. Because it was a last minute position instead of starting out with the bottom classes or younger classes I got older kids that, fifth year ancient history class and a fourth year English class

10:30 and some really good classes and a little 1D English class and a third year toughie that was real challenge. So it was very, it was close to home so there were no problems about that and I think I grew up in that little period too. That was a good experience for me because I had never been in a position like that. I had done the Dip Ed teaching practices and so on.

11:00 Yeah, it was an interesting year.

**What were your feelings about teaching as a career after that first year?**

I felt very comfortable in it. I enjoyed, I enjoyed the teaching, the teaching stuff. It was only after that I became less interested in teaching stuff. And trying to develop

11:30 little humans that were able to cope with the world.

**What advice did your father give you about entering the army?**

I don't think he gave me any particular advice. Just sort of the usual verbal pats on the back like, you'll be okay and all this sort of stuff. But I mean I don't think,

12:00 I think I was probably, I probably wouldn't have listened if he'd told me anything, I've probably forgotten what he said. It was Mum saying, you'll be okay, you'll be fine. And I went in with absolutely no concept of what was going on and I still thought, maybe because I am wearing glasses, you know,

they will knock me back for the medical.

**What did your sisters think?**

12:30 I think they were concerned. This was the first time I would be away from the family. None of us had spent away more than a few days. I'd been up to Cairns with my second sister and friend during the school holidays, and that was the biggest adventure, going by train, that we had had.

13:00 Townsville sorry, so this was going to be a big wrench for the family and I think they probably felt very strongly about that.

**I was wondering if you dad might have given you any advice about fitness and PT?**

No, no.

**How did you come to find out about the Papua New Guinea teaching draft?**

I can't remember how that came up. It must have been gossip that was floating around. And I don't really know the timing of it, you know, where

13:30 whether it actually happened in the first, once I had got in the army or whether it had just been before. I really have no idea. But I clung to that.

**Talk us through the first couple of days when you entered the army? Where did you go?**

Well

14:00 I had the medical and came through that with flying colours. Well, they accepted me. And I was posted to Singleton. I think we had to report to some barracks somewhere in Sydney and they bussed us up to Singleton. And so there was ten weeks basic training I think it is.

**14:30 The other guys on the bus, what do you recall of the thoughts, feelings and rumours that were going around?**

Well there were all sorts of personalities being exhibited. There were the cocky ones and the ones who looked shell-shocked like me and very apprehensive about the whole thing. There were people who were physically confident and looking

15:00 at it as a challenge and wanting to go to Vietnam and do all the brave things. So it was a real mixture, there were some people who really didn't understand what was happening to them, but were being very aggressive. So it was an interesting mix and that emerged as the ten weeks went on.

**15:30 What do you recall of arriving at Singleton and meeting with army life for the first time?**

Not very much, I just remember basically the routine that we got into. I can't remember arriving or anything like that. But we were obviously put into a platoon, training platoon and we had a sergeant and an officer and corporals

16:00 to be involved with the training and it was basically knocking any cockiness out of that exhibited itself and lots of shouting and forced punishments and that sort of thing. But one thing, you start to identify people who feel about the situation as you do.

16:30 I mean it's just a sense sort of thing. And I very quickly latched onto a guy who I found out later had just been appointed as council engineer on a shire council, he had just gotten married and he was suddenly reduced to a situation where unlike me, he was on basic army pay.

17:00 And not able to support his wife. And went through the whole two years like that. And he ended up in signals corps. But anyway we were both on the intellectual side rather than the physical side. And I remember one time when we were doing rifle stripping and putting together again. And I had never touched a rifle apart from a slug gun [air rifle]. But these ones where you had to pull the

17:30 bits apart and clean them and put them together again, it was like a jigsaw puzzle for me. And we were both accused of being deliberately stupid or pretending that we couldn't do it. And sent to our huts like little naughty schoolboys. And when we got in the hut we looked at each other and had a bit of a giggle about it.

18:00 But yeah, they had no concept that there could be people like us who genuinely were having difficulty doing it. I learnt how to do it eventually. But that was something that sticks in my mind. And on the positive side of things I learnt that I had a lot of endurance. When we did the forced march I was the one who

18:30 was being handed extra rifles to carry because people were collapsing left right and centre. And I was just charging on. But in the, I remember on the first break we had, half way through, I came back home. And I went to my bedroom, put on a disc of, the soundtrack of 'A Man and a Woman', you know that, and played it over and over again, and rocking

19:00 almost in a catatonic state. Trying to deal with this experience I was having. It was just so foreign to

me. And I'm sort of looking back and seeing that that's that it was like. I'd go down and have meals with my family and go back to my room and rock and try to

19:30 and listen to this music playing again and again and again. Just trying to cope with what was happening. It was a very powerful experience. But then the walking thing, I couldn't do anything fast but I could keep going. And I thought, oh I can keep going, I can do this. So gradually I started to feel more confidence about my physical capabilities. So that was something that was happening during the course. And I actually enjoyed the drill

20:00 I used to watch my father on Anzac Days, marching around the house with the Anzac march on TV. He would never go in a parade because he thought he was a bit of a fraud because he never went. I felt the same way, even though I went I still felt a bit of a fraud, I am not a soldier. But he used to march around the house to the Anzac march going on. And I enjoyed that marching discipline and

20:30 when we did the march out parade after basic training, we marched onto the parade ground to 'Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines'. Such a jaunty song and it was, I felt really good about that, so that was fun.

**In these first couple of weeks of army what words would you use to describe your emotions?**

21:00 I was scared, I didn't know what was happening, I was intimidated. I was watching what was, the thing that, the thing that made me different again was that I was older than, most of them were eighteen and I was

21:30 twenty-two. And for eighteen-year-olds, a twenty-two year old is an old man sort of thing. So I found increasingly that people were coming and asking me for advice. And that was another very powerful, you know, why are they asking me? I remember one guy had trouble with, I don't know whether this was in basic training or in infantry training in the next section of the experience

22:00 but had a de facto wife, and he was saying, "I don't know what to do." I forget the story now, but asked questions and was saying what do you think and I learnt that I was also a good listener. And this is where it helped me with my teaching later on. When people have got problems, basically they know what they need to do but they need to be able to say it to somebody. And to have it

22:30 reinforced a little bit. So that was another thing that only came to I suppose because I was a bit older.

**As you mentioned you had never been out of home before, how did you cope with that privacy and communal aspect?**

There was no choice so I just accepted it. We all had to keep the place clean and I used to

23:00 go into the showers, I would wake up early, still get up, I'm a morning person, but I used to go and have a shower before everyone was in there and it would start to become jostly. There was no sort of sexual thing about it at all it was just doing what you had to do and having your, making sure that you weren't letting the team down. Because there was always punishments if that happened. And I could do

23:30 all the ironing and the making beds up, that was something I didn't need to be taught. And once I knew how they wanted to keep the place tidy, you know, keep your gear in the lockers and so on, once I learnt that I just followed the instructions.

**When you were in high school you avoided sporting things, but you became more confident in those areas?**

24:00 Well yeah, only after a period, because I was failing in most things. I could chuck a grenade okay because that was overarm, but I am no good at throwing, something that I never learnt to do, I sort of sissy throw. And rifle practice was a problem because of my glasses.

24:30 And the other thing that emerged was that maybe through nervousness I started to get an allergy to Brasso and all the cleaning, I mean, cleaning things all the time. I had never been involved in disassembling cars or machinery of any kind. But I found that my hands were going all scaly and

25:00 breaking open and bleeding. So at various periods I was on duty and missing out on some of things that the others were doing, and of course the duty was keeping things clean which aggravated, this is army thinking I guess. But so that was an ongoing thing that I was dealing with. So I was failing, I was failing in a lot of things, it was just in the walking, long distance walking and keeping on going

25:30 that I felt, I was learning about myself but not in a sort of speedy way.

**As you got out of basic and into infantry training how did you go with that?**

Well that's when I started to be really concerned about the people who were actually going on to Vietnam because most of the infantry people were.

26:00 There were times when we, when the corporals had us out in the back blocks out of, it was Singleton where we went. Sitting down for a smoko and using up training time. And I thought the training was completely inadequate. And the attitude to training was very, very poor.

26:30 And I thought, gee if I were actually going on, if I was condemned to go with this group to a battalion and actually go to Vietnam it would be absolutely hopeless. I was really concerned about the people who were stuck there in infantry. And as it turned out one of them whose eyesight was a lot worse than mine ended up as a forward scout. And stood on a landmine.

27:00 So you know it bore out that, I mean I don't know what had happened after they had gone to the battalion, maybe things became a lot more serious there but I thought, if this is infantry training it's a joke.

**As someone who was a professional teacher what do you think the main issues were?**

It was the attitude of, badly trained instruction, it was by numbers.

27:30 I realised that there has to be a way everything is done because these people are going to go to various branches of the army and there has to be some sort of commonality in the instruction methods. But I don't think the people who were doing the instructing were the right sort of people. There were a few exceptions but a lot of them just

28:00 saw it as a job. And I didn't think that they were taking it seriously.

**So you recognised instances where training was being shelved or avoided?**

Not being considered seriously enough, yeah. Especially when people were probably going to be laying their lives on the line.

**Did you ever consider making a complaint?**

28:30 I think I might have, I think I might have actually done it. One of my times on duty because I had hand problems there weren't very many people that you could talk to. I think the first lieutenants that were in charge of the training companies were quite young anyway and I think in some ways I was treated more, quite like an equal in a way

29:00 when I was in those sort of informal situations but the contact wasn't long enough, really, and I wasn't significant enough as a person. I was just sort of with a broom close to the adjutant's office and happened to get into a conversation.

29:30 **As a university graduate, why were you not considered officer material?**

Well that's interesting. At the end of basic training you would get to the vocational area where they start deciding what you are going to be doing, where you are going to be sent in the army. And we did all the vocational tests and a few of us were selected, this guy that I was talking about before, and I were selected for the officer

30:00 training tests. I think there might have been just the two of us in our platoon. Yeah, probably, we were both, both got through with flying colours. And there was a final interview and one of the questions, I think it was probably the last question, and, "Private Lovell, why do you want to be an officer?"

30:30 And I said, "Well actually I don't want to be an officer, I would like to teach in Papua New Guinea." So that sort of killed the officer training thing. They said, "Oh okay." So I wasn't selected for an officer. I think I probably would have been if I had had a positive attitude to it. I enjoyed the exercises to find out whether you

31:00 were suitable or not, all sorts of mind games, it was really good.

**What were those?**

There was one thing were you had to take, the group had to get across the river or something, you had to construct something to get across from one side to the other. That was good fun and just working as a team to come up with a solution. So, no I had, as I said I had this idea of getting

31:30 into Papua New Guinea, begin selected as one of the forty-five. And I thought being a graduate and a lot of them would just be two year trained primary teachers. So I thought I would have had a bit of status there and maybe that would help me get through. When it came to being told what we were doing, that was, yeah I was selected, one of the forty-five to go to New Guinea.

**The dream was fulfilled?**

The dream was fulfilled, yeah. The goal was achieved. And that changed

32:00 that changed my attitude, I felt suddenly that here I was going to be able to do something interesting and useful. I had never been to Papua New Guinea the idea of teaching and being away from Vietnam was really good, yeah.

**But it was not to be?**

But it was not to be. Yes, we went, first of all

32:30 the forty-five of us had to finish off the rest of the first year. So we had ten weeks basic training and ten weeks infantry training. The reason for the infantry training was we were all given sergeant rank. And we had to be able to do parade ground stuff and have a bit more experience of infantry.

33:00 Because we were going into Papua New Guinea regiments and we would be on the teaching side of things, teaching basic Maths and English and Social Studies and so on but we needed to be able to present as a NCO [Non Commissioned Officer].

**Who would be your students in this case?**

Papua New Guinea soldiers.

**And you were teaching them academics?**

Their basic training, regular soldiers. It think the

33:30 government saw that one of the important things about Papua New Guinea being such a multicultural country was to bring soldiers from all over Papua New Guinea together to create some unification force that was, that could operate anywhere in Papua New Guinea. And they had regimental bases in Wewak and Mount Hagen and Rabaul and Port Moresby and so on. And the forty-five of us were going to

34:00 staff those for a year. That was the second year of National Service.

**So you had to do some qualification to get your sergeant stripes?**

So we did the infantry training and we were automatically given the status, once we had passed.

**How did it feel from being somebody who was reluctant to go into the army to becoming a sergeant?**

34:30 Well it was part of going to Papua New Guinea so I didn't think in terms of hierarchy really. When I went to Kapooka as one of my teaching posts in the last six months of the year before we actually went to Papua New Guinea for the second year, I had more privacy, I shared a room

35:00 with one other person rather than being in a barracks situation. We had a sergeants' mess and there were people there that I could talk to and people that I felt a little bit more comfortable with. And had a bit of status but it just made life in the army a little bit better. One of the other things I was going to say before was that I remember

35:30 being on an army truck going on some exercise from Singleton. And seeing people in cars driving by and I suddenly had this concept of two parallel worlds. And it must be very much like people in jail have. You are running a life but you don't have any contact with the outside world, in inverted commas. And here I was in this truck not being

36:00 in control of my life, I was just part of this thing. And there was life going on as if nothing was happening. Sorry for that little, it was just something that occurred to me.

**What were your duties at Kapooka?**

Just teaching basic education, Maths and Social Studies and English and...

**To Australian recruits?**

Australian yep. They were regulars there, they weren't National Servicemen.

36:30 **How would you describe the level of education of people you were teaching there?**

It was fairly basic, most of them were drop-outs from school and they saw the army as a way of getting on with life. They were in a disciplined framework so there were never any problems about behaviour in class or anything. And it was just basically going through the motions as far as I was concerned.

37:00 Didn't have any social contact with them, you just went and you taught the lesson, I don't remember any faces, no one emerged as being particular, it was just a job that I had to do.

**What do you recall of the two worlds of National Servicemen and regular army? Did it affect you in any way?**

37:30 There was a little bit of antagonism from regulars who were other sergeants. But the National Servicemen just held together. We did our own thing and I don't think, the only person, yeah I remember now, the only person that I established a long, a longer term relationship in the sense of communicating by letter and so on after

38:00 I had left was something in the Kapooka band. Who obviously didn't think, I think he might have been a National Serviceman, but he was a musician who had, we had similar interests and so on, so that was one connection with someone who didn't, who wasn't part of the group that I was with.

38:30 **I would imagine you would have encountered guys who had spent ten years clawing their way up to sergeant status and there you were an instant sergeant. Was there any conflict there?**

I don't remember, it didn't impinge on me, but there must have been some people who, I mean I'm sure there was an attitude there that we were just 'Johnny come latelies' [new to the task]. And we weren't suited for the position. But then it was education corps

39:00 what more can you expect, so there was a sort of a bit of a derogatory thing there, not really soldiers. But I think the people in the catering corps and the all the other service units had similar experiences.

**From Kapooka how did things pan out?**

39:30 I think, I think I was there for the whole time, I just can't remember. But anyway at the end of that when we were basically marking time, good army term, until we were due to be embarked to Papua New Guinea in the second year. So it was coming up to Christmas

40:00 and there was leave to be taken and so on. And then we all went to South Head to get our equipment, tropical kit and all the rest of it and just sit around waiting around for the place to come. And so it was there that just about ready to go, like my father I guess, suddenly I am pulled out of the group, there were tow of us pulled out and

40:30 taken before some authority figure and asked whether we would be interested in working in Canberra. And I said, oh yeah. They were looking for a librarian for the joint services wing of the Australian Services Staff College. So across defence training school for people of lieutenant colonel rank that had been set up on the outskirts of Canberra, and they needed a librarian, person who was okay with library stuff to develop library resource unit for this group.

## Tape 4

00:32 **Was it indicated to you why you were selected for the library role?**

Well it was the, I think it was because of my academic background. The other guy selected had had library experience; I think he was a teacher librarian and maybe my qualifications in English and History

01:00 were seen as being suitable enough. And I think the reason I got the job was because the job in Papua New Guinea would have meant more pay for anybody who wasn't getting their pay made up. And I think the other candidate who probably should have got the job bowed out because of the financial side of things; I think that was probably what it was. So I was sort of the one that was left.

01:30 So what it meant was that I was sent down to Canberra and billeted as a sergeant, was driven around in commonwealth cars. I spent most of my time sitting in the National Library in Canberra, going through serials in various defence areas, you know, purchasing of equipment and the latest planes and all this sort of thing, selecting articles that I thought would be appropriate. And going through

02:00 book lists and picking out titles that I thought would be worthwhile.

**Was this a new position?**

Yes I was taking on a position that hadn't existed before. And after three months I was told that my service was no longer required.

02:30 **Why did you decide to take the role on having been focussed on New Guinea for so long?**

Well I was, I saw New Guinea as a way out of being involved in fighting, and going to Vietnam. But then the fascination with the job that I was getting, I was interested, I mean it didn't really matter, I would have enjoyed going to Papua New Guinea but this sounded fascinating too.

03:00 So I had no hesitation in accepting. To be asked amongst all those forty-five to be doing this special job I saw it as being a positive thing rather than being a negative thing. And so I took it.

**It was proposed to you as a one year situation?**

It was proposed as the rest of National Service. At any rate.

03:30 The reason that I was replaced, I was told, and this maybe completely untrue but, they thought that it would be difficult for the students who would be all lieutenant colonel and equivalent rank dealing with a sergeant. As an advisor in the library. I was replaced by the ex-director of the education corps.

04:00 So that was quite a difference, so in that respect it seemed to make sense.

**So three months down the track you had set things up?**

They were gradually getting resources together but most of my preparation was on paper. I don't know whether I hadn't done the job properly or whether this was truly a case where they thought that someone

04:30 with higher rank would be more suitable to do the job. But I don't think the, I think he would have had to have employed people like me anyway. So I don't know whether it was, they had more financial resources to get someone more qualified or what it was. But the commander of the unit said, "Now

05:00 obviously you can go back to Papua New Guinea now, resume what you would have been doing. Or there is job in Vietnam going with the Civil Affairs Unit teaching in Vietnamese high schools." And I thought, oh, I wanted to know what was going on in Vietnam. I really

05:30 wanted to know what the story was. Whether my feelings about the war were justified as opposed to what I had been brought up to think. And I almost without hesitation said I want to go to Vietnam. Because I thought that I don't know, I was curious, I thought this would be

06:00 an interesting position of teaching in Vietnam. And I just felt that there wouldn't be any problems with it at all.

**You didn't perceive any dangers there?**

No, not at all. Completely stupid. Yeah, so I will take the Vietnam job. Basically what they wanted to do was change it from a posting, an annual posting going from

06:30 beginning of the year to the end of the year to a half year thing. So here I was getting to, in the first quarter of my final year and this job was to start in June and to go to December. And that was the end of my National Service. And then they would have someone, or sorry was changing from half year to the beginning of the year to the end of the year. So

07:00 I would go to December and then somebody would take it from January to the next December. So I am filling in the last half of the year. So it was half a post.

**Did you have much free time in Canberra when you were posted there?**

Yeah, I had nothing to do with any of the other service personnel

07:30 where I was staying, I had my own room there. So it was a little cocoon to go into. I had a trip down to Melbourne, I came back to Sydney a few times. So that, I really enjoyed being completely independent. But I didn't do anything adventurous it was just getting on with the job, being driven around in these commonwealth cars.

**Once you had made the decision to go to Vietnam what happened?**

Well there were two things that happened before departure. One was to get some training in Vietnam language. So the first three months, or first, first period was down to Point Cook Language School, air force language school to learn Vietnamese. And

08:30 oh I just, it was so good, great experience. I wasn't very, there were two courses they were offering in Vietnamese, one was a full year course, and the other one was a three month course which was, maybe it was six months, but one was a three month course which was for interpreters. And that was the course that I was being given. Completely useless of course. Because

09:00 we were taught in classical Vietnamese which is northern Vietnamese and the people in the south speak in a different way. Same words but different pronunciation of certain things. So when you go there if you had learnt a language you are listening for the sounds of the language for meaning. And suddenly the sounds are different so there is no meaning.

**Were you warned that that would be the case?**

No, well I think towards the very end they were saying,

09:30 so the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese, from north Vietnam can be understood in the south but it's very difficult, I think people who did the six month course, after about six months they could understand what was going on and they re-learnt the language. But we were taught very, extremely well. And I still remember quite a lot of it. And

10:00 the pronunciation in the north is understood in the south so when I said something in Vietnamese the kids in this classroom could understand it. But basically I was trying to use English, simple English. So every day I was there I was losing the Vietnamese. And that's now over thirty years so more is lost. But it was brilliant teaching. And actually one of the

10:30 teachers came with me as my immediate superior in the education part of the Civil Affairs Unit.

**What about the course was so good, so effective?**

Very good teaching techniques. Things would be said but the instructor and we had to pick up an understanding of the meaning, instead of

11:00 this means this, we had to work out what it meant. So it was good reinforcement in that way. And we had to respond where we could. As we got on because it was an interpreters' course, more and more of the vocabulary centred on barbed wire and prisoners and

11:30 what battalion did you belong to, and interrogation type things. And the final exercises were all interrogations. And I just lost interest in that and I didn't actually do, finish as well as I should have. But starting off I just had such a good time.

**How many people in the course?**

The photos there have about twenty-five people I think. And it was from

12:00 all ranks but people were being peppered through the various divisions, various service units in Vietnam who could speak a bit of Vietnamese just to help in various situations where they would run into Vietnamese people. But I think it's got a, there were people also there that were from the civil service, the foreign affairs people and so on were

12:30 trained there. So it was, I don't know if it still is a very good language school.

**Were you training with civilians?**

I don't think we were but there were civilians around. And we were all staying on the base.

**What was the base like?**

Interesting, it's all timber. The wind would come from the southern ocean, howling through there, freezing cold. But there were all timber construction buildings

13:00 and from the period, maybe the twenties or the thirties I think. And there was a good mess there and there was more interaction between the ranks. I think I met a few officers there socially. I can't remember but I have just got a feeling that there was a lot more, lot less concern about rank.

**What about cross services? Were people sticking to their own?**

13:30 I think in our class they were all army people, but we were on an air force base, so there were other forces there.

**Were there any attitudes shared between services? And prejudice?**

Not that I was aware of. No, the concern was to learn the language. We saw

14:00 pilots learning how to fly with those funny little yellow planes, I forget what they are called, doing circuits, circuits and bumps. But I didn't become involved I wasn't interested in that side of things. So I spent, put my head down and learnt the work basically.

**Did you get any leave?**

There must have been leave. I think I went to see Hair [rock opera] in Melbourne with a cousin on one occasion.

14:30 So yes, that figured but it was a fairly intense period.

**At that stage you were still feeling anti-war?**

I think I continued to think that the war was wrong.

**Was that an opinion you could share with anyone else you were training with?**

15:00 I don't remember, I think I kept quiet. I mean it's unfair to talk in negative terms when people are going to put their lives on the line. I mean I wasn't concerned about it, so I didn't, I don't ever remember saying anything or forcing an issue or getting into a violent discussion about it.

**15:30 How did your family react to the news that you were going to Vietnam after all?**

Well the person that I was mainly concerned about was mainly my mother. And she said, everything is fine, don't worry about it. It will be okay, so I was going on this sort of cushion. And I was looking at it as an adventure I think. That's basically how it was.

16:00 And this was there first stage of preparation for the adventure. And just learning another language, I am fascinated with languages, I'm not terribly good at languages but I am fascinated with them. To be able to play with this particular language in six tones of different sounds was really great, good experience. It was an intellectual, something that I would have never expected to come out of two years of forced military service.

**16:30 Was there any component of cultural input as far as getting orientated with the people and their life style?**

Very limited, very limited. I don't remember, we may have gone to a Vietnamese, but I don't think we did anything like that, it was mainly just learning the sounds and tones, practicing the sounds and tones, Building up a vocabulary, and putting sentences together,

17:00 making sense of the language and exercises again and again.

**Were you ever in a situation where you could talk to someone who had already been over there in a teaching role?**

I got the impression that the instructors may have been in Vietnam. But I don't know whether Bert Jordan, who was the one who was my boss in Vietnam had gone

17:30 or not. But at least at the beginning I felt that he must have to be able to speak Vietnamese. To the extent that he could teach Vietnamese. So I didn't investigate that sort of, the background of the teaching staff. There was one Vietnamese guy who was part of the teaching team who came from central Vietnam.

18:00 Where the accent is very sing-song, this tiny little sing-songy voice. But that was the only native speaker that we dealt with. The others were all Australian soldiers.

**Did you feel it was a war that was being won?**

18:30 **Did you have a sense of where the war was at?**

No, January 1968 had been the Tet Offensive, so I was after that. And there was, it was just lots and lots of Americans involved. There was no, obviously no success being, it was just stalled as far as I was concerned, an ongoing situation.

19:00 And the only thing that I saw as a redeeming thing was that there was a Civil Affairs Unit involved in the Australian team. And at least that was some sort of a positive for the Australian Army.

**How much did you know about unit at that point?**

Well I was learning more. But I've forgotten how

19:30 aware I was. And I don't know whether at any stage I was told, "Now the Civil Affairs Unit is..." And given a run down or given written material about, I think it was something that I became aware of when I actually joined the unit. I understood the concept without understanding the details. Maybe.

**When you finished the language course**

20:00 **how prepared, how ready were you feeling for what was ahead?**

Well I thought, I know a few Vietnamese words. I don't think I was conscious of being prepared, in inverted commas, I knew I was going to be teaching and I had no problems about doing anything in the teaching line. I thought,

20:30 I can teach stuff. So I will teach stuff there. And I was looking forward to doing it.

**How did things unfold after you finished the language course?**

After the language course there was a week or two at Canungra for jungle warfare training, pre embarkation experience. So we went up to Queensland to do that.

21:00 **How was that?**

I actually enjoyed it at that stage. It was difficult exertion. I had some rank so people weren't shouting at me. I don't think there was any; I can't remember any armaments training.

21:30 Maybe I was able to miss out on that because it wasn't going to be part of what I was doing. But there was certainly a lot of PT and I was coping with that. And of course I felt confident about the marching; I had been on long marches, forced marches or whatever in full kit. We did some extraordinary things like running over beams, you know

22:00 and by that stage instead of seeing it as being a massive obstacle I just got up and did it. And the momentum of running just takes you across. And I remember one other thing that we did was jump off a high tower into the creek that ran through the base. And there were people who were really worried about doing this. And it just

22:30 had no, I had no concern about it at all. I went up there and jumped and the shock of taking a long time to come back to the surface was the only thing that was something that startled me a bit. I realised how far I had gone down. But there was no problem about that. So I went through all the physical things there without any problems. I obviously felt a lot more self-confidence.

23:00 **Did you find that there were some blokes who still weren't coping with the physical stuff in general?**

I think most of them had gone through some sort of background; some of them were regular soldiers. They had come from various areas in the army. A lot of them were unfit

23:30 because they had been maybe in catering corps for a few years and suddenly they were being sent to Vietnam and had to reassess their physical status. Whereas I had come from basic and infantry training and was approximating more to what I should be going to Vietnam in a sort of a semi military capacity.

- So I was ahead of a
- 24:00 few people. So I think it was not so much their lack of ability it was just their lack of preparation for the new role the combat role.
- Were you getting specific instruction on the circumstances, the environment you were heading for?**
- Yeah, Vietnamese history, yeah, jungle warfare, Vietnamese history, why we were there and
- 24:30 that stuff. And I just said, oh yes. So it was the sort of thing, they were attempting to acclimatise us and prepare us for the Vietnamese situation.
- Were you getting that from blokes who had been over there?**
- Yes, I got a sense that they had all had experience and it was a lot more serious, much more serious than the infantry training.
- 25:00 And I was fairly, I think I came away quite impressed with that program.
- And what was next?**
- A bit of leave, then we got on the 707. And my first experience going overseas.
- How did that feel?**
- Oh it was good, a big adventure. And I remember coming into land at Tan Son Nhut airport.
- 25:30 On a steep descent, right down, really sharply landing. So that we weren't a target coming in low over VC [Viet Cong] areas. And seeing all the holes full of water where mortars had been fired around the airport.
- What was the atmosphere on the plane on the way over?**
- I can't remember. I can't remember anything.
- Do you recall how big the group was?**
- 26:00 The plane was full.
- All servicemen?**
- Yeah. I can't remember anything else at all. I don't remember saying goodbye. Must have all been just a out there via coach and checking in kits and all the rest of it. Then getting on the plane.
- 26:30 **How did you respond to the general sights greeting you at the airport?**
- Well it looked very war-y so it was all to be expected. But I didn't feel scared, or I don't remember feeling any nervousness about it at all. It was all just a big adventure.
- When you disembarked what do you recall of the sights and the sounds, the climate?**
- 27:00 Well you go out of the plane and the heat hits you. So that was a bit of a shock. So we were going there in June which was in the middle of the wet season. So quite hot and quite humid. And I mean we went quickly from Saigon up to Nui Dat
- 27:30 where the Australian forces main base was.
- What was your impression of Saigon that first time?**
- I think it fulfilled my expectations of a tropical city, but I didn't see very much of it at that stage. It was only later that I was able to explore more at leisure. And arriving at Nui Dat and
- 28:00 meeting someone that I had gone to school with, I just couldn't believe that there in the Civil Affairs Unit was someone that I had caught the bus from Rogans Hill into Parramatta and gone up to school with for six years, five year or whatever. So that was a very surprising thing. And a great thing to know someone
- 28:30 not to be a complete stranger and having to make friends and so on.
- That person was ?**
- Robert Jolly. Who had finished school and gone to into the tech [technical] school system and trained as a civil, he was involved with the health side of certification of
- 29:00 building sites and so on. So in the Civil Affairs Unit he dug latrines in villages and put in watering sewerage systems and water systems and water supplies and sewerage systems and that sort of thing. So like a health inspector, health inspector he was in the council, that's right. And he came back and spent his career in a country council on the northern, New England area. Just retired a few years ago.

29:30 We hadn't been school friends but we would be studying for the Leaving Certificate on the bus going in, so it was a nodding hello, goodbye, type of acquaintance. But we didn't have friends in common or you know. But we became quite close in that situation where we were thrown together accidentally.

30:00 And we had that thing in common, that experience in common.

**Was he a Nasho [National Service soldier]?**

Yes.

**And you spotted each other right on arriving?**

Yes.

**What was the set up there, what was the camp like?**

Well there were portable buildings for the officers, for the office, where the officers had their office.

30:30 And then we had the lines, which were tents. And the tents had been there for quite a few years, they were green with mould. Sand bag walls, very damp. And we had stretcher beds, two to a tent. Mosquito nets, green mosquito nets. There was a shower block with lovely hot water. Plenty of water. There

31:00 was a latrine where it was a four-seater I think, a four or six seater. Occasionally you had someone, a companion, reading the paper.

**Did that take a bit of getting used to?**

Ah once again I used to get up early. But there were a few times when, you can't avoid it so you just get on with it.

31:30 So to speak. And there was a sergeants' mess, that was all one sort of war-y thing that we had to do on a rotation and that was to do guard duty. So you were in charge of all the communications gear and had to make decisions whether you called up an officer, if there was an emergency.

32:00 And I kept there my fingers crossed and there was never an emergency.

**What sort of armament would you have to carry on guard duty?**

Well you had to take your rifle with you, but this was in the middle of the camp. It was just sort of like a control centre. It wasn't sort of on the perimeter or anything like that. But you were kept in communication with the perimeter. If anything happened they would come back to you and then you would get the officer, something

32:30 would be done.

**What sort of rifle did you have?**

What did we call it? SLR [Self Loading Rifle]. You know what it is? Standard issue, yeah.

**Were you able to share a tent with your friend?**

No he was a corporal. But I think he was

33:00 in the next tent anyway. And I think for most of the time I was by myself, there was plenty of space, so that was good. I don't think I shared it. But I mean there was no problem about coming and having a talk or a drink, you know, from tent to tent. It was a very,

33:30 it was, there was no concern about rank at all in the Civil Affairs Unit, or not very much. We considered ourselves as a team. And we considered ourselves as being fairly unique. I don't know what the attitude of other people was; I don't think it was terribly favourable. But we all didn't take terribly seriously the military side of what we were doing. Or the military side

34:00 of our persona. It was mainly the job that we were doing and whether we were doing it the right way.

**Did officers share that attitude?**

That's what I am saying. They had their own lines, but they would talk to anybody. You had your interpreters, Vietnamese interpreters were involved. We had people of all ranks; we had people there who had previous

34:30 service in Vietnam in a more active capacity, more combat capacity. Specialists that were fairly unique in the army that were able to provide something worthwhile to the Civil Affairs Unit and the job it was doing.

**What sort of specialists?**

Well there were engineers, people who could build schools and hospitals. There were

35:00 health inspectors like Robert Jolly. There were teachers like me. There were medical people who

supported the Vietnamese medical infrastructure in the province. So in the province we were functioning like an American force were. It was like the Americans had said; okay you can have this one. So the Australian army

35:30 goes in there, defends it and provides this back up service. Now I don't know how later in the final stages of the war, the Americans were trying to Vietnamise the whole thing. So the South Vietnamese could take over. I think to some extent when they went into a province instead of supporting the institutions of a province they tended to take them over.

36:00 Whereas we went in to bolster, this is the impression that I got, and this is what I thought we were doing, and what I thought was good. So instead of taking a doctor out, a Vietnamese doctor would be, would give him drugs and help him on his rounds and that sort of thing. And the schools, it was more of a propaganda thing but I used to go in and

36:30 take a class, a one session of an hour, or two classes in a morning and just be a native speaker of English. The English instruction was pretty poor. Most of the teachers would have had their first foreign language being French. At that stage. The English pronunciation was pretty atrocious but that's they way

37:00 they were trained. Like if I attempted to speak French.

**How many were in camp?**

In the Civil Affairs Unit? Oh gee, about fifty I would say.

**How many of that fifty would have been involved in education?**

Just

37:30 the two of us. Just the captain who was responsible to the Americans to report on education in the province. And me as an education sergeant in a teaching role. And responsible for library development. So each of the areas had a small group like that. And the ones that needed muscle in the form

38:00 of workers were a little bit larger. Like the construction team might have been a bit larger. So there were carpenters and plumbers and so on.

**Tell us about the first few days, was it challenging for you to get settled in that environment?**

No, I just felt that I was

38:30 being injected into this group with particular capacities and strengths. And that I was being looked on to provide those. So I immediately, I have no sense of getting, ill at ease or unsure of what was going on. I was just told to do things and I did them. And the first thing I found when I arrived was that

39:00 it was school holidays. So what were we going to do? Apparently there had been a tradition of holiday English classes in town, in the province capital, Ba Ria. And there was a scout hall there. So the first, my first exposure to the Vietnamese people was in this scout hall

39:30 situation. Where there were kids from babies up to university students home on leave from university, all wanting to practice their English. And I just had there greatest time. I don't remember the details but I just remember that, playing, playing English with this assorted group and you know, you are taken by various groups for

40:00 various reasons to be, well I mean there is a respect for education in Vietnam, it's a Confucian thing. So I had some status, real status there and then there was a French Vietnamese family living quite close to the scout camp and I was invited back there to have afternoon tea, after the classes and got to know the family very well. And there was a group

40:30 of university students who took me to a local, there is some sort of system of subsidised restaurants for students, maybe government officials. And they took me there to have lunch a few times. And that painting on the wall was a present from them. And so yeah, it was a good introduction to a cross section of

41:00 Vietnamese, the Vietnamese community.

**How many days had you been there?**

I can't remember. I think it may be a few days and then I was sort of thrust straight into it. But once again it was just a big adventure. I can't remember any sense of trepidation or nervousness. Apart from normal nervousness about meeting new people.

## Tape 5

00:33 **What evidence did you see of the conflict around you?**

The most immediate evidence was the theatre in Long Binh I think it's the second biggest town in the province. The theatre was just completely smashed so obviously it had happened in the Tet Offensive and nothing had been done to reinstate it.

01:00 I think that was the most obvious. And then we were in a sort of a defensive perimeter area all around the camp, it was completely open country, no vegetation because of security reasons. And that was about a kilometre outside the line. And the camp itself was in a rubber plantation so there was barbed wire defences around

01:30 it and watchtowers. The bridges throughout the province had watchtowers on them. But I think they were from French days and there were certain places that were sandbagged for protection. And guarded.

**What about the evidence in the local community of western presence and the impact on the culture?**

02:00 Kids were always playing around, always curious and asking questions and looking for lollies and things. No evidence of any antagonism. The only time we lost our appeal as a Civil Affairs Unit was after an ambush had been put into the closest village to the camp one night. About

02:30 three or four o'clock in the morning just before dawn there was a tremendous lot of fire going on, and it sounded pretty big. And there had been a group of Vietnamese returning from seeing their relatives and supplying Viet Cong coming back to village. And they were caught by a patrol and the next morning you could see the tank tracks through the paddy fields.

03:00 The rice was about two or three feet high and you would see where the tracks had gone through. And that village, it was very quiet, you would go through there, no one would wave or smile or talk to you. And that lasted for a few weeks. But that was the only negative feeling. Our vehicles all had Dan Su Vu Uc on the front which means Australian Civil Affairs Unit and it was like a passport. And there were all

03:30 sorts of stories about Viet Cong having a drink at one end of the village and groups of us down the other end of the village and nothing happened. But I mean I don't know how apocryphal that might be. But we certainly weren't targeted in obvious ways during the time that I was there.

**After your experience of teaching**

04:00 **non-school children, when the school holiday finished, tell us how you started regular classes?**

Well it was, it had all been set up for me. So I would arrive in the Land Rover at the school gates and be dropped off. And I would prop my rifle against the blackboard. And I would start

04:30 talking and the whole set up there, the Confucian style of soaking all the information in from the expert from the front on the platform it's a very French style classroom with benches and desks and then a platform with a teacher's desk and a teacher sitting down. And mostly they operated by rote methods so that there would be a head student who would have a long stick and point to the words on the board and everybody would go, dah, dah, dah dah, and recite after them and learn like that.

05:00 So when I hit the classroom and started getting, asking for responses and jumping around and coming down off the platform there was sort of horror from the students and you know a strange foreigner doing crazy things and being scary. But I think my good humour and personality came through a little bit and they got used to it after a while. And a few brave ones started the process and

05:30 they realised what I was trying to do, so it worked quite well.

**So you think your more avant-garde style of teaching made the children uneasy at first?**

Oh definitely, it was, I mean, they didn't, a lot of them didn't know how to react. Especially when I went out to, right on the fringes to a little school at Dat Do. And boys in the classroom jumped out of the window the first time I came down off the platform.

06:00 They obviously weren't as disciplined in the Vietnamese sense being schoolchildren and they thought it was hilarious, but they were scared at first, they thought it was hilarious. But they got out of that phase. But they, I kept them busy, but we all had a good time I think. And I think the

06:30 Vietnamese teaching staff thought it was all terribly inappropriate for a classroom. And I didn't really get through to very many of them at all. They just realised that they had to vacate the classroom for this foreign soldier. I don't know whether they knew that I had any teaching qualification at all but they knew that this is what they had been told to do, so they did it.

07:00 And knowing what I know now a lot of them would have been definitely anti-south Vietnamese government. But they wouldn't have said anything about it at all. But they were looking at bemusement at this attempt to get involved in the Vietnamese system.

**What do you mean that you didn't get through to them?**

Well there wasn't any

- 07:30 community in the common room. I mean basically in the situation in Vietnam as in quite a lot of Southeast Asian countries it's a two session school situation. So there is a morning shift and an afternoon shift. And the teachers come for their particular period, they talk a little bit to their colleagues about the program and where they are at. But
- 08:00 that's as much as it is. Obviously they spent time together, but I couldn't be involved in it because my Vietnamese wasn't good enough and their English wasn't good enough. And they would be too proud to take any risks in attempting to engage me in an extended conversation apart from hello and how are you and so on. So I don't remember, there might have been one or two people that, I think there was a girl in the big
- 08:30 school in Ba Ria that I talked to a few times who wasn't too bad. But generally speaking they told me where the room was, where the students were and how long it would be, and I did what I was supposed to do.

**When you say they were too proud what do you mean?**

Well it's a loss of face. In failing in a communications thing.

- 09:00 I think that's probably what it would be. Because they lose their status as being better educated than the students in front of them and the parents of the students. I don't think they knew, they didn't know my background so I couldn't go and say, you know, I am a trained teacher, blah, blah.

09:30 **Were you aware of the cultural issue of saving face at the time?**

No it's something that I am interpreting looking back. But I think there was something mentioned about it in our Point Cook stuff I think. But it's hard for me now to know if it was something I was aware of at the time or. I certainly didn't

- 10:00 I didn't take offence at the way I was treated, I felt an outsider coming into a different system, so I was polite and make as little impact as I could. In the classroom it was a different matter.

**Did the teachers ever witness your teaching style?**

I think

- 10:30 there may have been someone walking past the window. But I think they kept away. I don't ever remember everybody coming to see what I was doing, there was no curiosity like that, they just kept right away, did their own thing.

**What age of children were you teaching?**

They were high school students. So from eleven right through to the end. But I didn't get to do anything with the senior students.

- 11:00 They were preparing for examinations. So I mean I could have been quite useful to some of them. But I just did what I was told to do; it was mainly the younger kids that I was working with. Up to fifteen or sixteen.

**So they didn't want you messing with the senior students?**

Exactly yeah. I mean it's very, very competitive entry into a limited high school stream. And so there was a lot of pressure.

- 11:30 In Vietnam now it continues and it's almost as bad as in Japan. They have cram schools and the teachers make a lot of money in taking kids after school. And preparing them for exams and so on. And the Vietnamese families place so much on education. You can see how much it affects migrants to Australia. Exactly the same at home. And

- 12:00 So there would be no way that they would allow me to interrupt that training process at the end of high school.

**What sort of lessons were you teaching?**

Just basic sentence patterns. And I was concentrating on speaking and listening. Text books that I took up there were framework text books which focussed on speaking and listening and vocabulary building and putting

- 12:30 words together into sentences rather than on grammar and so on. And I don't know how that fitted into what the kids were learning. I think I saw a few textbooks but and maybe I tried to marry what I was doing to with what the kids were learning so that I wasn't going

- 13:00 too far ahead. But I thought that the best thing I could do was to give them an example of English in action. And see if they could benefit from that.

**How would you describe the level of English that the kids had?**

Oh it was I suppose similar to what I had learnt in French.

- 13:30 I had learnt French grammar and reading and writing and so on rather than speaking and listening so I guess they were as far for their age group as their peers in Australia would be. But they had limited resources and they didn't have any native speaker models. So that was the big lack. And then they had
- 14:00 exercise books and pencils and biros but very, very basic, there was no fancy equipment.

**So the pervasion of English speaking soldiers hadn't rubbed off in their language skills?**

Well the people in the community are speaking survival English. The shopkeepers know how to ask a soldier and to respond. But outside that it

- 14:30 wasn't very great. But there were lots of soldiers who were picking up useful phrases; you needed it for the bars and so on. So it was, there was a, while we were there, there was a move from predominantly French as the language of the oppressor to English as the language of the oppressor or the invader or the occupier or

- 15:00 whatever. So you need to know English, the better you know English the better you can deal with the people who have the power.

**The issue of bringing a military rifle into the classroom, did that ever seem incongruous?**

I thought it was ridiculous, got chalk down the barrels, it was hell to keep clean. And when I remembered to bring it, you know, it was something that I saw as superfluous and I

- 15:30 could just about forget. It was very dangerous but I mean, I wouldn't have forgotten it, but it's something that I found as an impediment, restricting rather than being a protective thing. Absolutely farcical to have a rifle in the classroom. It was,

- 16:00 I think I was told that I had to do it, don't be separated from your weapon sort of thing. But you know I thought it was absolutely ridiculous, incongruous and down right rude.

**What do you think that the gun symbolised for the people in the classroom?**

Well the worst things,

- 16:30 the last resort I could shoot them. I mean that's, that's what it implied. I mean it wouldn't have even entered my head. And maybe a few of them were so inured to a military presence that it didn't have any significance for them either. I mean there was no great ceremony about placing the gun very carefully, I just disposed of it in a, you know,

- 17:00 as quickly as I could to get on with what I really wanted to do.

**Did you see yourself as a soldier or a teacher?**

Teacher. Just that I had my clothes sent to the army laundry and came back stiffly starched. It was very easy but I mean I saw myself as a teacher.

**What do you think the school pupils saw you as?**

- 17:30 As a foreigner. As someone who was a bit funny. I fancied that they saw me as a good person. And what I was trying to
- 18:00 demonstrate was that I was a good person. I was able to do something positive. But I don't know whether everybody in those classes saw me as such. But certainly people who wanted to be my friend. But then you know the motives for that could be varied as well. But I mean I made some genuine friends in the classes that I taught, especially in the scout hall situation where there were

- 18:30 bigger age groups.

**What about your fellow teachers, did they see you as a soldier or teacher?**

They would have seen me as a soldier. They would have seen me as being imposed upon as system that they thought was working quite well. And they just had to put up with it. I think very much that was the way it was. I certainly wasn't seen as being

- 19:00 oh thank God we've got another member of staff. It was just something, I don't know, maybe that's being, I've got a feeling that it was, there was a perception that it was a gesture being made and maybe they might have thought it was a goodwill gesture. But they probably thought it was unnecessary. And it would have been better for us to fill up the library with books.

- 19:30 And give them money to buy equipment, because that's what they really needed.

**How do you feel about that? That choice that you were sent as a teacher rather than books?**

Well I mean, I can understand it as an educator. They have a system. It might not have been a system that we would all regard as being the most appropriate for an educational process but

- 20:00 there are very intelligent doctors and engineers and scientists that have come up through the Vietnamese system. Successfully. So people tend to learn despite the system. And I had a very unfortunate example of the other side of things, where, as I said, I was responsible for library development. But the source of
- 20:30 equipment to supply the libraries came through the American system. And I had a chance to indicate the sort of things that I thought would be appropriate. But I remember going to a school and seeing boxes of books. On the top of one of them was about six inches of really good stuff. And all the rest of it were superceded civic textbooks
- 21:00 that were designed for American high schools, completely useless. But they looked good on the shelf, so they were on the shelf. And they just sat there. And I mean there was nothing I could, I suppose I could have written back to Australia and said, this situation is, but I, you know, I wasn't into that sort of thing, I didn't think about it.

- 21:30 But looking back I could have become, I was annoyed that it was all within me. I spoke to the supplier and I indicated this. But he was doing what he was supposed to do in a way as well. He was developing the national library in Saigon so he had bigger fish to fry.

22:00 **What level of indoctrination did your presence or the attempt to educate the Vietnamese have?**

Well we were there to win hearts and minds. And as I was indicating before, the Americans later realised that that was the way they had to go to work their way out of the situation that they had created.

- 22:30 So it was PR [Public Relations] basically wasn't it? But I think we genuinely believed in a Civil Affairs Unit that the sort of work that we were doing, in small ways, with small groups of people, was, we genuinely believed that we were

- 23:00 making a contribution, a positive contribution to life in the province under war time conditions. And providing support for Vietnamese institutions rather than trying to replace them. And I think Rob Jolly with his health work thought that he was making a positive contribution and I was in a very, very small way trying to show that, you know, foreign people

- 23:30 aren't necessarily to be feared.

**Do you think you won any hearts and minds?**

I think the Australians were generally considered to be, considering they were soldiers and were there for a particularly gruesome reason, had a fairly good profile.

- 24:00 I remember when American units went through our province the drugs would come out and the whole attitude changed. It was quite palpable. Yeah, so I think that we were, if there had to be a force imposed on them, we were better than what they could have had.

- 24:30 And I think with the Civil Affairs Unit in particular there were a lot of friendships made. And there was strong efforts to bring out interpreters that had been involved with the unit and to continue the relationship.

**What contact did you have with the parents of the students you were teaching?**

Well the strongest contacts came through the scout hall one where the kids were delivered and picked up and I made friends

- 25:00 with this particular family that lived close by, and was invited back there for afternoon teas and so on. But that was really the only one.

**You alluded before that friendships might have different motives behind them? What level of paranoia did you have as far as political or military affiliations?**

- 25:30 I didn't even think about it. That is something that I would be saying now, thinking back. But the university students, I was young enough for them to feel, and I was behaving in a way that they could feel that they could open up to me and

- 26:00 talk to me as an equal. And the young kids liked me because I was an authority figure who was accessible. And would treat them well. So that was the biggest sort of difference. It think there may have been some prestige in inviting me back to a private house and seen sitting on the front veranda. Taking tea.

- 26:30 Neighbours passing by and that sort of thing.

**So you were a status symbol?**

I think maybe.

**How would you describe the level of economic prosperity of the children you were teaching?**

It ranged. In the province capital they were always very well dressed. All the students came to school obviously clean. But on the edges of civilisation they tended to be

27:00 not in uniform. Generally speaking they had to have blue shorts or long trousers for the boys, depending on their age. And a white shirt with the school name on, embroidered on the pocket. And the girls had the complete, white ao dai and pantaloons underneath.

27:30 **So were the schools co-ed [co-educational]**

I think it might have split up when they went into the senior year. That's something that I should remember but I have forgotten completely, I can't remember teaching single sex classes.

**But you do recall teaching co-ed classes?**

Yeah.

28:00 **Were there cultural differences in the way males and females behaved in the classroom?**

Girls always demure, the boys were always the first ones to break down when I started doing my thing. They were braver. Yeah. More demonstrative. But that's typical Confucian society. The males are the head of the family and so on.

28:30 **How were you moved around the schools?**

I remember teaching at three schools. The main school in the capital I started there later. In the second biggest city Long Dien and then out on the edges at Dat Do. And I only heard, from when I did the telephone interview that,

29:00 from the rest of the Civil Affairs Unit, they thought that I was terribly brave going out there. And I had no, that was the first I had ever heard any sort of comment about what I was doing and the way I was doing it. I went there, I was dropped off, maybe because I didn't know. I was right on the fringes of the

29:30 secure area with my rifle propped against the blackboard most not there at all. And I would be dropped off in the morning then picked up at lunchtime. But to me it was just something that I was doing, I don't remember ever being told that it was very dangerous or what you are doing is very brave and we salute you sort of thing. I was just doing a job and I went and did it.

30:00 **So you had no sense of fear?**

No sense of fear. It may have been because of Rob Jolly's attitude because he was very, he was careless really. But he loved being there and he loved the people he made lots and lots of friends. Very outgoing, bubbly personality. And maybe his enthusiasm affected me. But I

30:30 don't remember ever feeling scared. The only time when I was a bit anxious was when I was on these, on guard duty where I had all these walkie-talkie things and I thought I don't know whether I can remember how to do this, which one do you press to be able to communicate, and saying over, I've got to say over when I talk. That was more terrifying to me than being out on the

31:00 community.

**Was it maybe that ignorance was bliss?**

Yeah, possibly. But then the one worry thing that I did was almost throwing me into a danger situation out of which I probably couldn't have extricated myself. I mean who knows, I have never been put in a situation where I had to fight for my life. So who knows what might happen. But

31:30 that was an interesting time.

**You have heard that other members of civil unit considered you brave, but nobody ever told you at the time?**

Not that I can remember no.

**A cynic might say that they were content to let you deal with it?**

Yeah, I can understand that. I think from above, the orders would

32:00 come down that there should be a representation at this particular area and I was the bunny. But that's what happens isn't it, in an organisation.

**Maybe your innocence protected you?**

Yes, exactly. I think that through the whole exercise that would have been true.

32:30 **How did you go with the level of language you were taught at Point Cook, how did that serve you?**

Well as I was saying, in a classroom I tried not to use English, sorry I tried not to use Vietnamese. Where there was a concept that

33:00 I thought would be got over quicker by inserting Vietnamese I did so. But normally I tried just to speak English and get some meaning coming through by drawing out the student in that way. So I was rarely using it. The only time that it ever came pouring back to me and saved my skin was once in a job that I was given while I was

33:30 serving there, and once when I had a group trying to cross the border into China in 1968. And I was faced with having to pay eighty US [United States] dollars per person for about ten people. From a budget that didn't allow for that sort of money. To be handed over in the way of a bribe.

34:00 And it's surprising how in a situation like that, stuff comes back. That's why I was thinking, you know, in a life threatening situation, maybe your adrenaline starts pumping and you can do things that you would never dream you could possibly do.

**What about that differentiation between North and South Vietnamese language? What dilemmas did you have in the classroom?**

Well I mean they would have thought, the ones who could pick up the difference

34:30 would have thought that my Vietnamese was very proper, I think, that would be the conception. So I spoke pretty clearly, the Vietnamese that I could speak came across fairly easily. My sounds and tones are a bit fuzzy now but at that stage coming straight from Point Cook I was right up the top of speaking, we were taught very well. So although I couldn't put sentence after sentence together

35:00 I could put little bits and pieces together and they could understand me. It was just that there was no way I could understand the response. So where it was necessary for me to speak a bit of Vietnamese I could get away in very simple situations. But understanding what was being said to me was a little bit more difficult.

**What do you think your students knew about Australia?**

35:30 I think they had picked up a bit of a story because we had been there for a few years, three or four years. And I think there was general societal interest in knowing the background. And

36:00 I think the information would have got out one way or another. And then seeing how we operated and behaved, being so different from the way the Americans did when they came through must have had an impact. And I think I did a bit of Australian geography and history during the teaching process. And I think I remember now talking about it, questions being asked about it. So there was a little bit of passing on. But that wasn't my job

36:30 it was English practice. If that became a way of getting the lesson going, well then it was incorporated. But I wasn't there to specifically to do geography and history and so on.

**Did you use Australian topics as a communications tool?**

I mean where it fitted, yes.

**Did they know about things like kangaroos and...?**

37:00 I think we went through, I think I had some picture books and so on yeah. Boys always asked questions about Australia. About Australian animals and so on.

**Did you get them talking any Australian English?**

Not really big on all that sort of stuff. I don't think so. Some of the Japanese students ask me about it, "Why don't you talk in an Australian accent?"

37:30 So I go through the, through it there. But I don't think it ever, I don't think 'g'day mate' was the sort of thing, you do it all the time now with Japanese students, but I don't think 'g'day mate' ever impinged on anything I did.

**38:00 Did shop owners and touts use Australianisms?**

It didn't do much, there was a girl who set up a drink stall. She had a one of those blenders and she did fruit shakes and they were very popular with the troops going back out to camp. She did a roaring trade. And was very friendly and smiling face and she got to know Civil Affairs Unit people very well. But you got to remember that most people

38:30 going in and out from the camp were clutching their rifles, their hands were white, it was a really scary situation. But we were breezing around town, talking to people, going to restaurants. And so you know especially with someone like Rob who had to investigate health issues, a lot of contact with people like that. And getting to know them. But I

39:00 didn't, outside the classroom, unless I was invited somewhere I just went back to the camp with the driver when I was picked up and that was it.

**How do you rationalise that difference between the white-knuckled rifleman and you and Rob wandering out like it was a daily job?**

Well that was, we had a completely different experience. I mean you couldn't say what we were doing was

- 39:30 had anything to do with the war at all. I mean you could. You could say but it had, it was a different sort of activity altogether. We, the people who went out on the backs of the trucks were there, with backpacks on and their rifles, were possibly going to confront death. That day or that night.
- 40:00 And they saw everybody as their enemy, I mean you would. We behaved in the way we were treated. People smiled at us and waved to us and talked to us, and so we understood them as people. The perfect example of this is I remember one ordinary soldier who came as a driver into our Civil Affairs Unit.
- 40:30 And he had been, I think he had been to Vietnam twice before. In an infantry situation. In a battalion, in a fighting role. And he said, he knew the reputation of the Civil Affairs Unit. And we were regarded as nobby [Viet Cong] lovers. And he said, "You won't get me being a nobby lover." and he was being very, very anti for about three weeks.
- 41:00 And after that a complete conversion. And it was only through intimate contact, seeing the Vietnamese people face to face, talking to them, communicating, watching their body language. That's the sad thing about war; it forces people not to communicate, to stand back and distrust. And fear. And I don't blame them for feeling that way. But I mean that was the situation they were put into.
- 41:30 But that's the difference the way we saw what we were doing there and the way they were forced to be, for their own safety.

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **You mentioned the students were well behaved. Can you tell us why you think that is, and if you had to apply discipline?**

Never in a situation where I had to look at discipline. I realised that the way that I was teaching

- 01:00 they could get over excited and silly. And so I tempered my enthusiasm a little bit, to that degree. But the, I mean I had a year of teaching in Australia and I was just bowled over by the enthusiasm of these kids. They would lean forward to pick up anything, bread crumbs of information you could give them. Enthusiasm for learning, and this is as I said, part of the Confucian tradition.

- 01:30 The importance of education. So I found it really exciting situation to be in as a professional teacher. And I came back to Australia after two years away from Australian classrooms having had adult education experiences in the army and then teaching these kids in Vietnam was a completely different attitude to teaching. And much, much better equipped, I was a much more mature person as well. I could do a better job when I

- 02:00 came back here. But it was that keenness the desire to learn, the enthusiasm, the dynamism of the kids that was really great to be part of.

**Your regular approach to a class would be to take that humorous playful approach?**

- 02:30 I tried to create a situation where they were prepared to risk because I knew that I had, I was too introverted really, I wanted to make them feel that they were able to do that. And it affected the whole class and more and kids were prepared to volunteer

- 03:00 answers or to say something. So it was probably very subversive to the rest of the Vietnamese education system. But it was good fun for me.

**Created the rebels?**

Hmm.

**Are we talking hours, days, weeks before they would start to loosen up and respond to you?**

- 03:30 I've got a feeling that there weren't too many repeat classes. I think I was put into the timetable here hither and thither. So that I wouldn't infect anyone too badly. And then everybody would get some experience. There may have been a series of lessons, there probably was a series of lessons. But I wasn't

- 04:00 involved long enough to have any long term impact. I was just as I said inserted into the timetable at convenient times and for that few, two months maybe.

**Was what you were doing monitored by your unit?**

I don't know what sort of feedback

04:30 went on. Whether there was any, what sort of communication there was. I should imagine that Captain Albert Jordan would have negotiated my time in the various schools with the provincial education authority. But I wasn't part of that I just did what I was told.

**Would he ever come to a class to see how things were going?**

No. I think on the very first occasion.

05:00 he came with me and introduced me to the principal and the teachers. But I think very quickly I was left to my own devices, certainly in the scout hall situation, I just started there and more and more kids came every time to these sessions.

**How often were those sessions?**

I think it might have been twice a week or something like that during the school holidays. Maybe more, it's all too

05:30 far away.

**How big was that group?**

It started off quite small but did grow. It was quite crazy.

**Did you think you were getting a bit of a reputation?**

I guess, yeah.

**Did you have much to do with Captain Jordan outside the classroom, consulting?**

No I can't remember anything like that.

06:00 he seemed to be busy doing his things. I think outside the education portfolio he may have had other jobs being an officer that were assigned to him, technical, I mean, desk-bound type reporting jobs. I never had to make, I can't remember having to make any reports. I think I was probably under utilised. But maybe I am forgetting things that I did that had been outside the classroom.

06:30 But I mean that had the most impact, actually being in the classroom and relating to students. And so that's what I remember most. Apart from the library development. But the library development was interesting because it meant that I went to Saigon and had to report to this American. Head of library development. He was employed by the State Department

07:00 under the US aid organisation, US Aid. And very intelligent, very well spoken. An Illinois German-American. And I think he became quite impressed with me, not for my intellect necessarily. And I was invited back to his villa

07:30 beautiful villa in the French quarter of Saigon. Opens the front door and there is a harpsichord in the middle of the lounge room, I just couldn't believe it, blew me away, in Vietnam. I don't know how he kept it tuned in the humidity. But that provided a completely, completely unusual experience for an

08:00 Australian soldier. And it was quite nice to be treated like that and to be regarded well by someone like that. So we became quite good friends and I still wasn't really sure about my sexuality, or I was very

08:30 reluctant to admit my true sexuality.

**Was he the same?**

I think he read things very clearly but he wasn't going to push at all. And so that didn't happen until 1972.

**So it became a friendship?**

Friendship. I met some other American civvies [civilians] working in Vietnam working with

09:00 US Aid. In fact the only time I got sick was through them. We had a beautiful Vietnamese dinner and then they, we were walking back to the cars and there was a street stall selling iced local fruit drinks and so on. And of course ice is a no-no in Vietnam. Well I was then because there was no control over the quality of the

09:30 water that was used. And shigella is a little microbe, or bacteria or whatever it is that survives the frozen state. And I came down with very bad case of gastroenteritis and was admitted to the American hospital at the airport. Dehydrated very badly and saw a bit of how

10:00 American hospitals are run.

**What was your impression?**

I had never been in a hospital before, but very, very business like, it was a war situation hospital so they used to. It was like we were malingerers, here we were with stomach problems, brought on by our own

foolishness, where there were people losing limbs and fighting for their lives

10:30 from gunshot wounds and all this sort of stuff. But got some nasty shots in the tail from the antidote for this particular wog [bacteria] and I returned back and resumed my job. But that was one experience of going to Saigon that I could have done without.

**What were your impressions of Saigon? Was it busy on the streets?**

Oh yeah

11:00 the main street which has had three different names: it was called Rue Catinat during the French occupation; then Tu Do Street at that stage, during the American War; and now it has changed names again to Dong Khoi Street. But there were bars all the way along it and the girls flaunting themselves out on the footpath. And busy, busy, busy with business with the American servicemen and so on.

11:30 I noticed a big difference when I went back in '72. After my war service, the bars were still there but the doors were all closed and the girls were beckoning through the windows. So obviously there was very strict control over their behaviour.

**Any Australians on the street? Or mainly US?**

I was billeted in a sergeants' mess where there were Australians and I think there may have been Americans as well.

12:00 The only Australians I, there may have been one of two, but most of the Australians at Nui Dat went to Vung Tau for breaks.

**What was your impression of how Americans were carrying out their business in Saigon?**

Well I mean

12:30 it was like they were in Kings Cross I guess. They had plenty of money, they flashed it around, they got what they wanted. There was a lot of drugs and all this sort of stuff. But I wasn't involved with that. The friends that I made there were civilian Americans so I wasn't in a community with soldiers.

13:00 And following what they did.

**That friendship you established, did that mean you made more visits to Saigon?**

Yep. I tried to make, I tired to find excuses for making visits. I think I might have made three or four trips during the six months that I was there. So it wasn't ridiculous. Because you have to find space in the Caribou that was going down there.

13:30 But I had a sort of excuse to go each time that I went. And it was just that I may not have gone back to the sergeants' mess and stayed with this American friend. In a very chaste way. Where there was good food and champagne and all the rest of it. It was good.

**14:00 What was involved in setting up the library?**

Well basically they were building a national library and it was his job to stock it. And he had to negotiate with the arm sources of, ministry of education, or whoever was supplying books. He had to

14:30 find a director, a Vietnamese director of the library. Most of this I think was occurring in the time after I left Vietnam. And when I went back in '72 for my school holiday trip overseas, and I learnt more about what he was doing then. But when I was there it was basically collecting books and

15:00 trying to persuade him to buy stuff that I thought was appropriate. But I think he was locked into a process.

**Was this a central library?**

No, no it was a provincial one yeah. So there would have been people in my situation in all the other provinces of Vietnam coming to him and asking for the same things or collecting supplies in the same way.

**15:30 What was the scope of your library? What was your budget and priorities?**

Well basically I was just spreading books around the three schools that I was teaching in. And as I said there was a small number of useful stuff that I could give them, but not anywhere near enough. And then the rest of it was really garbage, just secondhand books that were being dumped.

**16:00 Was there any propaganda angle in some of the books?**

Well I don't think, I couldn't have understood the civics books, I probably could but there was such, just a text books, a civics thing, like community activities, no relevance to the Vietnamese situation at all. Like learning about life on Mars.

**16:30 Were you encouraged to bring an angle of propaganda of that you were doing in the**

**classroom?**

No, I couldn't remember

**As far as political end?**

I could, no, I was sent into the classroom to teach English. It wouldn't have occurred to me, I wouldn't have been as arrogant as to do anything like that. And I am sure that there was never any

17:00 instructions on what I should be taking about and what I shouldn't be talking about. I know in private I talked to the university students about you know life in Vietnam under the South Vietnamese Government and under the American situation. And I know I made observations about what was, what I could see was happening.

17:30 And but I certainly didn't think that I had any right, or there was any value in me trying to espouse any particular philosophy of life or political way.

**What did you learn from the university students?**

Well I learnt that many families, I mean basically human beings want to get on with life. They have their families, they want to protect their families, they want to make sure

18:00 there is food on the table they want to make sure there is a future. And in that particular situation quite a lot of them had members of the family fighting on the Viet Cong side or secretly supporting the Viet Cong. And maybe others as part of the South Vietnamese Army. And they probably paid taxes openly paid taxes to the South Vietnamese

18:30 Government and secretly paying taxes to the Viet Cong. "We just want to get on with our lives, just leave us alone, keep the war away from us, we just want to get on with our lives." And I think that would be true of a lot of families in the south. My guide, we had become good friends. And he his father

19:00 was a Viet Cong, and his mother's side of the family were very wealthy merchants and lost everything at the end of the war. And these sort of dichotomous situations were repeated again and again and again. And basically it's a survival thing, you know, what can you do. Political, strong political motivation or understanding

19:30 or espousal of philosophy I think would have been quite rare. It was just a matter of where is it safest to be. Who can I rely on to get me through this, sort of thing. And I think anyone who did have an understanding of Communist philosophy would have been quickly disillusioned

20:00 when they saw Communism in action, in its war stage, trying to fight for survival. Against the South Vietnamese Government. I mean at the very edges of any political situation there are extremes. And real problems.

**Would they volunteer their Viet Cong contacts to you?**

No

20:30 **Even alliances that...?**

This is talking about third parties and fourth parties and generalising, there was never any specifics. No one ever said, "In our family..." This is only talking to my guide, currently I know what his family situation is, or I am beginning to pick up more information about his family. But when I was there during the war it was just an inference that this was

21:00 the situation that to survive people would do anything to, as long as they were left in peace.

**Did you share your opinion with the university students?**

I think I indicated that I was very sympathetic to their situation. I didn't, I don't think I ever spent any time saying that the war was wrong and but I think they saw me as someone who

21:30 didn't see himself as a soldier and wanted to be first and foremost a friend. And to be an example of an outsider who was put in a situation where power could be wielded in any sort of way, in this case, that's wasn't what I saw as being important in our communication.

22:00 **Do you think they could perceive a difference in the US and Australian presence?**

I think so. Because I saw such a difference, I don't know whether there is a prejudice there but I mean I could see a big difference in the way the Americans operated, as a force, compared to the way that I perceived that we were operating.

22:30 So it was just observation and you know I was horrified. With little military experience I had to see the way they were behaving, I thought, this is not professional.

**What sort of things made an impact?**

Just the way they carried themselves in the, when I was involved in an R&R [Rest and Recreation]

situation and I saw Americans around I thought, you know, and just talking soldiers with more experience

23:00 Australian soldiers with more experience than I had, reporting incidents of what they had seen and the way the Americans were going through on patrol with transistor radios going and smoking pot and all this sort of stuff. It might have been apocryphal. But I mean there was a certain amount of truth to it. They were in most cases younger than most of the Australians. And they were just fodder really a lot of them, had no idea where they were

23:30 or what they were doing. So I mean I don't blame them for behaving the way they did.

**Did you talk to Australian soldiers from the frontline, did you get many tales of how sticky it could get?**

No, no. I mean I think to a large extent the Viet Cong units in the province and the Australian units in the province pussy footed around each other. To try and avoid contact. I mean maybe that was

24:00 not true but there weren't very many contacts made while I was there. Except this one that I reported earlier. There were briefings, I remember going to briefings in the Civil Affairs Unit about the current situation, what happened where in the province and so on. But nothing major, everyone played it cool.

24:30 **You mentioned it was a "warrie" experience that you ended up having?**

Yes it was towards the end of the time there. And there was a building project requiring some reinforcement bar. And the only source available was an Australian aid project in Can Tho in the delta. Mekong Delta. And

25:00 the commanding officer just assumed that it was a matter of driving there picking it up, and bringing it back. And I think I was the only NCO sergeant rank, NCO available at the time. So he asked me to do this job

25:30 and I had a driver and a had a private with a machine-gun mounted in the back of the Jeep. And a huge semitrailer. And so headed off down to Saigon. The road was in very bad condition lots of dust it was getting towards the dry season, this is towards the end of the year.

26:00 We swirled into the headquarters of the Australian Army in Saigon. In a cloud of dust and I remember this adjutant, spit and polish, the whole thing, sharp with starch, I saw them coming down a spiral staircase, there must have been one of those sort of long window things, sort of like, and a spiral staircase. I saw them coming down, flashes of this brass and all the rest of it. And

26:30 probably someone who was the commanding officer was standing there and sent this adjutant across to me and he came very prissy and said, "What on earth do you think you are doing in this condition, look at your uniforms, look at the state of these vehicles. What on earth do you think you are doing coming here like this to headquarters?" And I

27:00 said, "Sir, we are on this mission to the delta and I really want to get a map because I don't really know the way." And so eventually it all came down, but I thought that was absolutely ridiculous. I thought, oh war-y. And we were given what amounted to a tourist map, it was absolutely ridiculous. And said, well this is the way you go and there are

27:30 two ferry crossings. It can take quite a long time. And we headed off. And we got across the first ferry without a lot of trouble. And then at the next stop where there was a ferry crossing there was a huge line of Korean Army vehicles. And they were covered wagon type trucks. And so

28:00 we got onto the end of the queue and waited there and we waited there, and waited there, nothing seemed to be happening. And then there were some kids playing around the vehicles, which is normal. The trucks didn't seem to be, there didn't seem to be very many in the trucks. But there probably was but they were sleeping or whatever. And a girl came along with a glass-cased

28:30 trolley selling ice cream. And she passed us very slowly and then came back and passed us again, and she was indicating towards the front of the vehicle. And I told the driver to get out and have a look because I was a bit curious as to why she was, she didn't say anything. And we found a piece of metal like a lawn mower

29:00 rotary lawn mower blade sharpened, stuck against the tire, so that if we had rolled forward, we would have had a flat. And at this stage it was getting late in the afternoon. That put the wind up the three of us pretty much. Four of us. And I said to the driver, "I think we should get to the front of the queue." So

29:30 we roared off down to the ferry docking area. And all the Vietnamese soldiers came out with their guns pointing at us, and this is where my Vietnamese suddenly came through. And I said, "Don't worry, we are not forcing the issue, just can you let us get across we have to get across before dark?" And at this stage there were tracers going off, firing in the distance and I was

30:00 really nervous about the whole situation. Once the guy realised that we weren't trying to raise anything or we weren't doing anything too antagonistic. He said, "One more, one more." So the ferry came and

the ferry went and he came back and we got on and were delivered to the other side. And we found the base and we got in there. The rebar was loaded and we the night overnight there. And then

30:30 came back the next day without too much trouble. Just out of Saigon on the way down we went through about five or six kilometres of very bad condition roads. Burnt out vehicles on both sides, complete desolation, not a soul in sight. So when I got back to camp

31:00 everything had been done, everything that I had been asked to do was done. I think I might have reported that it was pretty hairy. And I heard by the grape vine that our commanding officer had been hauled over the coals because the road had been closed to the American forces as being too dangerous. The only way that stuff was shipped from the delta to Saigon and vice versa was by ship.

31:30 Or by air. So I had been put, we had been put in a very dangerous situation through ignorance really. Or through lack of communication or lack of knowledge. That is an example in a way of how divorced civil affairs was from the war situation. I mean the commanding officer was seeing a chance to get some building equipment to do a project. And that was his main focus to get it there in time.

32:00 And I carried out the orders, but we came into conflict with, we were in a war situation. Folks, we are soldiers here. And that was the sort of dilemma that we faced I suppose. But I had no idea just how bad it could have been, I mean we could have been ambushed, anything could have happened. But I think probably we were through there, no one expected anything to be coming through.

32:30 We went through and we came back and we probably missed completely by anyone who might have been interested in disturbing our progress.

**So quite a change of pace for you?**

Yeah. The only other time that I sense danger was coming back from Ba Ria along the road to Nui Dat and hearing a ping.

33:00 I didn't hear a shot but I heard something going really fast above my head. And the driver and I looked at each other and I said, "Fast, please." That was the only time that I felt, oh this is a war.

**What were your options as far as recreation on base?**

33:30 Well we had a, one of those above ground swimming pools. There was the club that I have forgotten the name of now. That my interviewer knew when she rang me up.

**Gold Finger Club?**

Gold Finger club yeah.

**Can you tell us about that?**

What happened

34:00 with the base is that we became scroungers. And so bits of cast iron and bits of fibro and timber and so on were being purloined from various places and added to the tents, the basic tents. So some tents had quite substantial structures attached to them to make conditions more liveable. And I think the same thing happened with the Gold Finger Club, it had been constructed

34:30 by people who had the wherewithal, carpenters and so on and it was just a place for a drink.

**It had a bar set up?**

It had a bar set up. And there was this sergeants' mess that we could go to. But I spent a good part of the time writing letters, letter writing was a big thing. I didn't drink all that much.

35:00 **Were you an exception?**

Um, I think there were a few people who didn't drink all that much, I mean, they would have a drink. But that's something that I can't remember, I did, I almost gave myself alcoholic poisoning, but that wasn't through the fact that I was drinking a lot it was just the fact that I drank a lot

35:30 one time. But generally speaking, those were the sorts of things you play darts, and cards and so on.

**Was there any organised entertainment?**

We, the only, I mean Lorrae Desmond, a friend of ours, had been up to Vietnam quite a few times. I didn't see her but I think there was one show

36:00 that was put on for the battalion that was there at the same time. And we went to have a look at that. And there was a unit attached to the South Vietnamese Army. That did shows. It was sort of propaganda shows for the South Vietnamese Government. And they came and did a performance in our camp which was, I thought was very interesting.

36:30 I can't remember there being, I think there was probably American forces TV and then there was trips to the American PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] in Vung Tau, if possible. And they had all

this, you know, you would buy your SLR [Single Lens Reflex] camera and you'd buy your this-er and that-er. Slide projector, all sorts of good, you know, goods that you could take back

37:00 duty free.

**So you got some goodies?**

Yep I got a camera and a slide projector and a record player I think, and a few other bits and pieces like that.

**You were able to personalise your tent?**

Oh these were sort of stored away. I used the camera but most of it, I didn't personalise it I just continued the way I, I had no

37:30 practical skills like that.

**Did you get to Vung Tau much?**

I think two or three times. We, there was some set up where the number of days you could have, leave and so on. And then we had one international R&R. And I know Rob Jolly went to Taiwan. And I went to Hong Kong during that period. I was only

38:00 entitled to one trip.

**What were impressions of Vung Tau?**

I thought the beaches were great. There was a great, quite a good set up there for an R&R. The big Peter Badcoe Club, it had a big swimming pool there and then there was the town with the bars and so on. But I didn't ever,

38:30 I mean it was, I tried to avoid situations where I would be put, be with a group and there would be girls on the scene, because I couldn't cope with any of that. And I just assumed that I read and had a bit of free time. I just really can't remember any

39:00 specific things that I did there.

**You couldn't cope because of your sexuality?**

Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't want to be in a situation where people were saying, "Come on I will introduce you to this girl," and you know, I just couldn't cope with what that would mean, you know. So I never socialised at all outside the perimeters of the army established

39:30 areas. Unless it was sort of touristy thing, did a bit of sight seeing and so on. Because it was a pretty little bay, it was a town bay with a fishing fleet came in, and then the ocean beach where the Australian base was and the hospital and the recreation area. So I wasn't very adventurous.

40:00 **Your R&R to Hong Kong?**

That was just being a tourist. I went as a civvy; I don't think there was any uniform involved.

**Did you go by yourself?**

I think we were probably on a flight, not necessarily with people from the unit but people going on this particular R&R exercise. So we would be

40:30 given accommodation, allocated accommodation to suit our rank. And then left to our own devices, I can't really remember anything being organised. It was just do your own thing.

**What were your impressions of Hong Kong?**

Oh it was very exciting. To see the population, the dense population and the skyscrapers even for that time. And landing at Kai Tak Airport. So close to these buildings, incredible

41:00 coming down over a range of mountains, right down beside sky scrapers with you know washing handing out. And people almost waving to you, incredible.

## Tape 7

00:32 **There must have been a family connection you felt in Hong Kong?**

Yeah I was very interested in making the connection with Dad's experience growing up for nineteen years in Shanghai. And this is the closest I had got. And I certainly from that experience felt

01:00 that it would be great to go back. But at that stage there wasn't any tourism, it wasn't until later in the '70s that that became possible and I took advantage of it very early. At that stage the only way you

could get into China still was to cross from Hong Kong. Through the new territories the border, the rail border there. So

01:30 I was able to experience that. And then that was '77 and ten years later, well eleven years later in '88 going back and seeing the changes. And I would like to go back with Dad to Shanghai now when the whole Pudong area is high rise when it used to be just farm land when he was there.

02:00 Over at the (UNCLEAR), but I think it would be hard to move them at this stage, it's a bit too late.

**What did you know about Communism in Asia at that stage? What did you think of it as a philosophy?**

Well you know, the concept of

02:30 dominos was something that we had all heard about was the reason why you were there. I didn't see, I didn't know enough about the history of Vietnam to realise how much the Vietnamese hated the Chinese. How there would be no possibility of an international Communist bloc. But I still

03:00 felt that the domino theory was a bit overblown. And that the threat wasn't as great as we were led to believe. Just by the way it was being touted, just didn't ring true. And there were intelligent people who were putting another argument. They were, there were apologists for

03:30 Communist atrocities in some cases but I had a feeling that behind the extremes of this, there were many Communists who genuinely felt, they were probably socialists, who genuinely felt that the conditions of ordinary people probably could be a lot better than they were. And that having a fairer society was a positive thing.

04:00 I had studied Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and materialism and all the rest of it and I understood the basics of it. But there were examples with Joseph Stalin's version of Communism that had no room for individual feeling and which perverted the whole concept of an equal

04:30 society. And I couldn't see a way that such a system could continue when there was always a desire for power in certain individuals. And that it would create an unequal situation again. Without any control. So totalitarianism on either end was a negative thing.

05:00 **It sounds like you had made an educated rationale to be against Communism rather than just a knee jerk opposition to it?**

I didn't, I didn't think of it in terms of, I certainly, I didn't have any positive feelings about Communism. But I could understand why we were in a losing battle trying to impose

05:30 an alternative system in the south of Vietnam and try to maintain it, when that system was creating, it was wrapped up with corruption and you know, the Americans had gone in there with Ngo Dinh Diem [Vietnamese President] who was concerned about Roman Catholic faith and had greedy relatives and abused his power. And things didn't improve.

06:00 There were some really nice people really positive people within the South Vietnamese Government. But there were a lot of crooks as well. So in both camps there were negatives. And as I said before, looking at it from the ground roots, it's people just wanted to get on with their lives. The motivation wasn't a political philosophy but a survival mode, you know, how

06:30 can we survive this and get on with our lives?

**What do you think those South Vietnamese people knew, felt was the best way for them to survive?**

Well one way was to keep defeating both camps. Another way to commit

07:00 whole heartedly to the force that was in power. And try to get adopted in some way. So that if anything went wrong there was an escape route. But that left the whole middle class in Vietnam in a very difficult situation. I mean they were the ones who probably had more of an understanding of the philosophies behind

07:30 both sides. But they had no protection. If they were working for the South Vietnamese Government they were going to be faced with re-education with the communists came. They would be seen of symbols of authority in the South Vietnamese area. But they had no way of surviving so judges and the teachers and so on where in a really difficult situation. But quite a lot of them secretly were supporting the

08:00 North Vietnamese Government.

**In retrospect do you think your relationships with South Vietnam people might have tainted them after the war?**

I don't think I had dealings with anyone important enough to have been affected by my involvement with them.

08:30 There was one student who wrote to me after 1975. One letter got through, but there was no way that I

could communicate, letters didn't get through. No I don't think, the family that I had most to do with, French Vietnamese family escaped to

09:00 Paris before, just before the North Vietnamese came through. So they were the only people, that was another group I saw, after the war, that was, it would have been '78. So I had maintained contact with them because they were in France rather than Vietnam. But no I don't think there was any great impact from involvement with me.

09:30 **A part of your military experience is how your sexuality developed and how being different in a man's army?**

I went up there with a picture of a university friend in my wallet, a girlfriend. But it was all just a mask.

10:00 I didn't know how to declare myself, I wasn't outgoing enough to put the hard word on anybody and I didn't even think about, I mean I looked at people and I found myself attracted to them. But with the situation, finding a friend there who was very outgoing and very demonstrative. I became a little bit confused about the relationship that we had.

10:30 It was the first time that I had had someone my own age who obviously very, felt very close to me and looked at me as a good friend, and someone who I could confide in. And I just lapped that up, I thought it was tremendous and I became very attracted. And so at one stage, towards the end of the time I had there,

11:00 he was having problems with his girlfriend back home. He had got a Dear John letter [letter signifying a relationship is over] and he was really, really upset. And I had never seen him so down. And he had a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label, as you do. And poured himself a stiff drink. And I said, "Well look, we've all got problems you know." I mean here was me

11:30 big listener never getting a chance to get anything off my chest. And I thought well now is the time. He seems to be understanding and friendly and all the rest of it. So I said, this is my story. And it couldn't have been any worse. He left the tent in sheer horror, ran away, couldn't cope with it at all. And left the bottle of Johnnie Walker there. So I thought to hell with it and took a few, I never tried

12:00 whiskey before. Had a few glugs out of the top and then I had a bit of a cry, went to sleep, woke up about maybe an hour later in the middle of the night. I had completely lost control of myself. Bed was a mess; all my clothes were a mess. I got up went to the shower block, had a shower.

12:30 Put all the bedding in the washing machine. Remade the bed, woke up the next morning completely sober. It had just been alcoholic poisoning, complete reaction. And he avoided me, he, we didn't have any contact right away, and I just went about my business. And I think maybe I took, there was leave coming, and it was just a fortunate thing for me to be away and

13:00 while I was away he was diagnosed with an abscess on his liver and nearly died. He was put into hospital he was in an ice bed to monitor his temperature. He was evacuated to Saigon and then back to Australia. He survived; fell in love with one of his nurses. And when I came back to Australia he asked me to be his best man.

13:30 So he had overcome the problem and that was, I was knocked out by that honour. That he picked me because I knew he had a lot of mates. And the idea that was in the back of his head was that he would introduce me to a nice girl and I would work myself of it and it would all be right in the end. And I would come around. So we still keep in touch, we send Christmas cards. He has just retired, and his wife

14:00 Maureen is a lovely person and it was just one of those things. I couldn't have come out in a more uncomfortable way. But especially in that environment there was no sort of other recourse. But when I came back to Australia I immediately came out to all my friends, university friends and so on. They all said, "Oh we knew." And then the family and so on. But

14:30 I still found it very difficult to, I mean nothing ever happened. I just had this contact with the American and so when I went back in '72 that was all consummated and that was my first really experience of physical relationship. And it was nice to be, once again, the centre of someone's attention and, it's a toy-boy experience I guess.

15:00 That was that story.

**You said at high school there wasn't really any consciousness amongst your peers about poofers and gayness? What about in the army, was it a homophobic culture?**

Oh constantly that was in the background. But

15:30 I wasn't very queeny or anything like that. I came across I think, fairly normal. And so there was nothing directed at me but there was just the way people talked.

**That's what I'm getting at.**

Oh yeah. It's a fear, the way that Rob reacted, I mean he, it was the first, maybe he thought that he had

been betrayed or tricked.

16:00 And that the affection he was showing was for a mate. And you know there was a twist there that he was frightened by. And I can understand that situation. So that's how quite a lot of men felt and they still do, if they haven't had any association with homosexual people that come across in a fairly straight way.

16:30 **In the background there was still the use of words like poofter and so on in the army?**

Yes.

**But not specifically directed at you?**

No, no I never felt that I was, and I don't think Robert wouldn't have betrayed anything that, he just kept his distance because he couldn't deal with it I think.

17:00 **In a situation in Vietnam where there was prostitution and girly entertainment, and the army was dominated by male members, how did that pressure of that environment get to you?**

Well I just tried to

17:30 put myself in a situation where I didn't have to deal with it. I mean there is a whole gay world in the army that I completely missed. No one introduced me to anything at all. But it must have been going on. And probably a sort of unit like ours would have been a place where it would have been able to thrive. But never any indication, no one ever said anything or did anything that betrayed

18:00 to me that they might have felt similarly. So I was a very late developer, very late developer.

**Your mate was the only one in the army that you came out to?**

Yep. I mean I wouldn't have talked to anyone like that, I wouldn't have been, felt that I could trust. And when that happened

18:30 I clammed up completely. But I, once I had made that step I thought, I can't keep living this life, I have got to tell people, people that mean a lot to me and just see what their reaction was. I half expected a negative reaction. But it was completely you know, completely the opposite. And so I mean

19:00 in the teaching profession obviously that was another problem. And as I got older, as I got into my thirties it became quite problematic. Because one was expected to be married and so people would look at you and say well what's going on? In June it became a bit of a problem. I isolated myself by living on a property in a house that became

19:30 superfluous, someone had bought two properties and there was a lovely old house that I lived in by myself. So I could get away and but I found that there was a gay community and they sussed me out very, very quickly. Surprisingly quickly. And there was a sort of live and let live situation, I suppose it probably happened in every country town, most country towns. As long as you

20:00 behaved yourself. And so I found part of the problem with being at school was this, 'what other things do you do with your life outside the classroom, sir?' Became increasing a problem for me. And so in '82 it was quite a relief to resign and be out of that sort of false situation where I was

20:30 pretending just to be like everybody else.

**So even in what we would consider a fairly liberal profession like teaching, that confirmed bachelor situation became a problem for you?**

Yeah I mean, subsequently discrimination legislations and that sort of thing protects teachers and students to some degree. But I should imagine that very few gay teachers

21:00 of either sex would come out completely. They, students know, and they relate to certain teachers. Not that there is any sort of physical thing that goes on, there is an understanding there and a community that is operating within the school system. And a little network that develops. But it's

21:30 very hard even now I think for teachers, It would be very hard for a teacher to say, " I am gay, but I am not really putting the hard word on you male students or whatever the situation."

**Do you think students might be more accepting than the parents sometimes?**

I think young people, you know, I mean, I think in that first year, before I went in the army I was

22:00 seduced in a sort of an intellectual way by one of my students. He wasn't interested in sex at all but he wanted to have a close emotional relationship with me. And that was quite difficult, I mean it was, I had never had anyone want something from me like that because I had had such a sheltered

22:30 upbringing and I became very attached. And we went on a holiday up the north coast together. He had a few friends that we could stay with and we stayed in a few hotels. And that was a quite a powerful experience for me. He was a final year student; he was sitting for his Leaving Certificate. Very into

rugby, he'd been a rugby referee because he had both shoulders dislocated and he couldn't play and he was

23:00 quite small. And he just wanted a mature person, a little bit older than him to be a friend. So I don't know what was going through his mind. I declared myself at the end. I said, I like you a lot and blah, blah, this is me. And he said, oh, it's okay.

23:30 But nothing ever happened. And I wouldn't have initiated anything. But that's, you know, students they can read people fairly well. And I had a lot of, most of the students that I had dealings were exceptional students, either really naughty students or very, very bright students. And I just, I was just available to talk. I

24:00 was very self contained, I had plenty of self confidence, I didn't feel lonely or anything. And I felt that I was in a position to give. And I just really felt happy to be able to offer something, just a sounding board or to give advice. I mean I would sit in cars outside houses before the kids went in after drama class

24:30 and we would put on plays when I came out of the army. And I was in charge of the school magazine and did all these sorts of things. That's why I got a quite promotion I think. And I think if I'd have made an approach to those students they would have taken to it like a duck to water. But I was too naïve to be able to, or I didn't feel that it was, I had no concept of being in a sexual situation.

25:00 But looking back on it if I'd have ever broached the subject it would have been all on. And it was never something that I had been, I hadn't been hunting people, they would come to me. Because they saw that I was offering something you know.

#### **While we are on the topic, how obvious in those days was gay culture, in the '70s?**

25:30 I couldn't relate to it, the drag scene was completely mystifying to me. I never ever wanted to dress up as a woman or put on make up. Couldn't think of anything less appealing.

26:00 And usually it's straight men who want to do that. And I have got nothing against them but it's something, and that's the stereotype. Oh they obviously are gay or they are in the gay scene. I had, I was, when I was in Sydney in the '70s

26:30 before I went off to Junee I was just so consumed with school activities and the drama and the school magazine and the teaching. That I had no time to think of anything else, completely absorbed. And I got so much reward from kids for various reasons looking to me for advice or trying to straighten kids out who were going off the rails.

27:00 That I was completely fulfilled I had no urge to go off and look for sex or anything like that. I had the experience in Vietnam so I knew, with the American so I knew what it was all about. But it wasn't something that I was craving all day. Because once again the easiest way is to look after yourself and there had been a long tradition in my growing up of that sort of thing. So it was, very, very easy way of satisfying those sorts of needs without the involvement of

27:30 anybody else and just keeping it separate.

#### **Would you say that the gay scene was more hidden in those days?**

Well there were, I mean there was Kings Cross where all sorts of things happened. But it was too difficult for me to get to,

28:00 all though my life. It meant missing the train and needing a car and all this sort of thing. And when I came to live at Greenwich after the war experience I was looking at the ballet and the opera and so on. And those sorts of things I did in my spare time. I hadn't got to the stage of wanting to go to bars to meet people.

28:30 It was only I think, by the time I had come back from the Junee year after long service leave where I started to feel lonely. And I was looking for a relationship.

#### **What sort of year are we talking about?**

Well while I was in Junee I had a few years relationship with someone who came up to the country on the weekend

29:00 more or less. And because I was in an isolated place we could muck around a bit and then go back. But it was a very one-sided thing. I found it a good thing, good fun, but he was completely over the moon. So I just realised that I had

29:30 to stop it because it was unfair. And unfortunately when I made the big declaration he committed to come down to Wagga. Close to Junee to teach. So I ended up going back to Sydney but he came down there. So I mean, he went on, I think he has done a great job down there but that was a bit of an unfortunate thing. But I was looking for something where there was a bit more, a two way relationship where

30:00 there was something for both parties and no pretence. And so that big hunt began. So we were talking

about the end of the '70s.

**Let's cross back to Vietnam. You were there for how many months in Vietnam?**

Six months. More or less, so from June until December.

30:30 **How do you think you had changed over those six months, how did the Vietnam experience permeate you?**

Well there is an ongoing connection with Vietnam. I had grown up I had been educated in the classical tradition so European focus was my focus. We had done near-eastern archaeology so it was the

31:00 Tigris-Euphrates basin and that sort of culture, and the (UNCLEAR) culture and then the European, Roman and that was it. And suddenly being thrust into Vietnam by accident I suddenly became more aware of a completely different culture. And I was impressed by the country and the people. And it opened my whole eyes to

31:30 Southeast Asia. I mean I had the China connection through Dad. Which I wanted to explore, but the first trip that I went away for, overseas after Vietnam, was back to Vietnam. And so it continued to be an abiding interest. And I don't know whether that is through some subconscious guilt or whether I feel comfortable there or a mixture of things.

32:00 But I want to show as many people as I can what a great place it is, and what lovely people they are. So it changed, that changed, as far as my life was concerned I think that was probably one of the biggest factors that I was introduced to a new culture and became interested in it. So far as personality and growth and so on I think it may have been part of the continuing from

32:30 the beginning of army service. I became more confident as a person and so when I came back from Vietnam I went into the classroom as a different sort of a person. A different sort of influence. And I think I probably was able to offer more, or was prepared to offer more. Risk more in the classroom than I was. I think when, in my first year of teaching I was probably a prig. And

33:00 had a level of arrogance that was picked up by the students who were at the lower level of the scale and I couldn't have any relationship with them at all. When I came back I had a better understanding of humanity I think. And maybe I was prepared to be too forgiving. But it certainly worked with a lot of kids that otherwise could have had a problem.

33:30 **So National Service had made an adult of you?**

Yeah I mean, "it will make a man of you," is the phrase that keeps popping up, cropping up. And I think in a way that was true of me. The thing I can't forgive is that there were people who went through the same experience that didn't come out the other end. Or who went through the same experience and had

34:00 two years taken out of their lives unfairly. I mean the civil engineer that I went into basic training with at a time when he most needed to have the money, suddenly was back on a really basic salary with no chance of making it up. And I don't know whether he was guaranteed his position when he got back.

34:30 I mean it may have been the case I am not really sure. But people like that, it was like being sent to jail. Completely negative experience. And I just I marvel at the luck that I had in my two years.

**Tell us about your journey home?**

I can't remember.

35:00 There was an end of service time. I mean a lot of people who went up there had calendars that they crossed off the days; I've got ten days to go. I can't ever remember being completely involved with that, because I was having a good time and I was having a positive experience. So it meant flying back on some date and going on leave straight away. And then having to turn up to some sort of military barracks for

35:30 the signing out part of it. And I really can't remember but I made contact with Rob Jolly and I found out that he was okay and we went out to a few RSLs [Returned and Services League clubs] but that had no appeal to me at all. So quickly we realised that it wasn't the same sort of relationship any more. But then the invitation to be best man came along and

36:00 that was very nice.

**Were you glad to leave Vietnam?**

I can't remember feeling one way or another. The classroom situation was just a chunk of time. And

36:30 I wasn't able to build up any relationships. If I had left in the middle of the scout hall group I think there would have been a bit of emotion charged experience then. But that had been a time before. I think I went around to this French Vietnamese family and had a bit of a farewell with them. But there was nothing

- 37:00 no great feelings one way or another. I think I was probably glad to be able to go home.
- When you returned to Australia did you encounter any protests?**
- No because I didn't have to march down the main street in uniform. I was out of uniform very quickly and went straight. We had, it was in the middle of school holidays and the next minute I was back
- 37:30 in the classroom, in a really good school with really good kids. This is part of the problem with a lot of Vietnam veterans have, being on patrol risking your lives, going back to camp, going to bed, showering, packing all their gear, getting on the caribou, going back to Saigon, getting on the 707 and flying back to Australia.
- 38:00 And they have got blood and guts in their head, you know. Whereas the veterans that were involved in the First and Second World War generally speaking, had to go by ship. And they had time to adjust very slowly to a different way of life. Here was just pop, you know twenty-four hours, and you are in a completely different world. And when something bangs, you know, I mean this syndrome, really , really bad. And I was
- 38:30 very conscious of how quickly I came from Vietnam back to family, being with the family sort of thing.
- Did that cause you any problems?**
- No, no, the catatonic business I had got over that, there was no problem at all, I felt very confident and I was looking forward to going back to teaching. And resuming normal life.
- Can you recall any interaction with your father**
- 39:00 **following the completion of your National Service?**
- I think he has always been proud of my achievements. But he never expressed anything very much. There was never much communication. It wasn't until much later that when he accepted our relationship and told David that he thought it was
- 39:30 a great thing that things changed very much. And now he is the favourite son-in-law. It's quite funny.
- If you were to say to somebody that you were a Vietnam veteran what image do you think they would have of you? How comfortably does that sit?**
- It's always a shock.
- 40:00 They are always very surprised. And I mean when I said to someone that I am doing an interview for the war archive. "War archive, what's that, how?" No one relates me as being involved in that sort of situation. So it's very strange.

## Tape 8

- 00:35 **To fill in detail of Rob's liver problem, how did he get the abscess?**
- Because he ate everywhere, he ate local, he went, he had gone native more or less. So everywhere
- 01:00 he went people gave him things to eat. He had friends all over the place, he was probably knew more people in the province than quite a lot of people in the unit did. Very outgoing and I think he really enjoyed the situation there. And he ate something that he shouldn't have eaten. And that was the problem.
- 01:30 **Did you eat much local food?**
- On a few occasions. But generally I had to go back to the camp I didn't have, I wasn't organising my out of camp activities like he was. He was his own boss to some degree. And so he had more flexibility and he could drive
- 02:00 he had a Land Rover whereas I had to have a driver. So he was much more flexible with his time and could spend more time away.
- Were you given warnings about local food?**
- Oh I think we were generally told not to take any risks. But I mean if someone invites you it's very rude not to pretend to want to go along.
- 02:30 **Did you get much of an insight into religion in Vietnam?**
- Well I got a bit of an idea about the ancestor worship, that sort of Confucian thing and Buddhism. And the dings that appeared in the paddy fields were sort of like a mortuary shrine sort of thing.

03:00 But I was never, never involved in any of that until I actually took tour groups to Vietnam and it was all explained in much more detail. And there was the, it was, there were quite a lot of Catholics in the province. So there was a church in the centre of the town and another small one on the fringes as well.

03:30 **To jump back to the post-war experience. Can you tell us what the secrets are to dealing with a problem child?**

Well I used to talk them to death. Most kids that are naughty just want

04:00 summary execution, summary punishment. And let me get out of here. And I would sort of, what's wrong, I would drive them crazy. But it was just showing an interest. My experience with a school where a lot of discipline was being offered was my first promotion position as acting

04:30 English/History master at Meadowbank Boys High. And there were some tough cookies there. And there were some thrashing masters, caning was going off all over the place. And I had a magic start there because one of the jobs as head of department was to take assembly. And I remember the first day of school, you're on. And I had never been in front of a microphone ever before.

05:00 And I stood there and I could feel my knees trembling, it was cold, but it was for other reasons, I was scared stiff. And there is this mass of heads in rows in front of me. And staff all standing around working out what's this guy going to do. And I stood there not able to say a word. And silence fell.

05:30 I learnt that technique almost by accident. And I proceeded with, very formally, introducing whoever was going to speak and dismissing the assembly. And it was, the best thing I could have possibly done. And then I used to take kids out of classes for causing trouble. They all through they were going to get the cane. And I just talked to them. And sometimes we set up a little classroom where they

06:00 did work. And it was a sort of a time out situation. I said, look, are you prepared to settle down now and go back. And that's what happened. And then some of the kids who were in real trouble we gave jobs as spear holders in the play. And suddenly they, the stage lights are very powerful, and they were centre of attention without doing something

06:30 negative. So there were a few converts through drama activities. And the sports master obviously summed me up very well. And gave me the best soccer team, best junior soccer team in the school. And they told me how to be a coach. You basically don't say very much and just support us. And we became a really good little group, and they won the premiership. I've got a little pennant and everything. The most successful coach at, no it was a very, very

07:00 good experience for me being in an all male environment like that and being able to operate in a passive way without sort of being a flogging master. And still survive.

**So a lot of it was very intuitive for you?**

Oh yeah. And luck I guess

07:30 **Was there pressure from the other masters to?**

Oh there were a lot of derogatory comments made about me for not being one of the boys. But I was successful. And they desperately tired to keep me on there. But I didn't have enough seniority to get the full time position when it came up. I was pipped by one position on the promotion scale. So I had to go out to the

08:00 bush. But that would have been, I mean, I was overwhelmed by the kids, they had a demonstration and there were banners saying, we want Rob, and all this sort of stuff, very good.

**What is it you enjoy about, to use your phrase, developing the (UNCLEAR) ability to cope in the world?**

Well I mean, I

08:30 had a lot of problems growing up and other people had problems for different reasons. But I just discovered that I was good at this, listening to people and things like dealing with problems and giving affection and support. I felt very comfortable in doing it and I was very successful at it. The saddest thing for me was that I was trapped in the

09:00 discipline in the sense of intellectual discipline areas. The subject matter, I hadn't done any psychology in my degree so I couldn't move into counselling which would have been the sort of thing that I could see a future in. So the only option was to get qualifications and move into educational administration or to university teaching. So I was looking

09:30 for an escape out of the classroom only because I got tired of teaching stuff. And more involved in counselling and personal development. But frustration that I didn't have the qualifications to do anything with that.

**How difficult was it to turn your back on teaching?**

It wasn't difficult at all, the time had come

- 10:00 to divorce. And I had the problem about being a confirmed bachelor image. Dealing with that. And kids were changing and attitudes were changing. And I just didn't feel comfortable to continue doing that. And so when I had a chance to resign and then I had a supportive relationship establishing itself, it all fitted into place, it was
- 10:30 meant to be. And as soon as I resigned I was teaching at Sydney University part time. So it seemed to be a logical thing. But then I was stuck, what to do next. Having not taken that step. Initially while I was writing the thesis it was to take jobs in TAFE [technical and further education] teaching communications.
- 11:00 Going back and doing part time relief teaching in high schools. Doing the teaching at student teacher supervision at Sydney University. Doing exam marking for the higher school certificate. I earned more money by doing all sorts of jobs like that during one year than I ever earned as a subject master. And then I was
- 11:30 offered, the principal of the Women's College at Sydney University asked me to look after groups of American seniors coming to Australia to learn about Australia. So it's like a study tour type of thing, with lectures and so on. And I had to put it all together, coordinate it and look after them. And that experience was so exciting because once again, like the Vietnamese students, they were really keen
- 12:00 to learn, suddenly here were people who were listening to every word that was spoken and asked questions and responded positively. And I thought oh this is a good game. And I thought this would be an area where I could start a business. Because I had thought about setting up an educational counselling business. What I thought would be a good idea was to try to help
- 12:30 parents and kids make the jump from primary school to secondary school, and then from secondary school to further education. I saw that as a possible market. But this other educational tourism thing became much more obvious. I thought I needed a travel agent's licence and the Women's College
- 13:00 weren't prepared to have a travel agent's licence operating out of their facility. The council couldn't cope with that, insurance problems or whatever. So I had to establish an office in the city. And I did that.

**When was that?**

That was, I started with the doing the Women's College in 1987. And I started the business in 1989. And I had gone, I went to TAFE and did a tourism certificate. So I was qualified.

- 13:30 Then I took on a consultant who had some travel agency experience to be the holder of the licence until five years when I had, I could say that I had five years of international tours experience. Then I took over the licence. And that's where the baby was born.

**How many visits to Vietnam had you had before you started the business?**

I only

- 14:00 had the war experience in '70 and then the school holiday visit in '72. And then the...

**That first return was motivated to meet up with your friend?**

It was a mixture of primarily, I don't know, I think it was

- 14:30 there were two motivations. But I definitely wanted to go back. And see what was happening because I had you know students that I wanted to see again. I didn't have the opportunity to see very many of them. And then

**You met some?**

Yeah I met a few who were able to come down to Saigon. Didn't get up to the province.

**Why was that?**

Too difficult.

- 15:00 I couldn't drive, it would have been, and I mean I was being looked after very well where I was. So it started to fade into the background.

**How welcome did you feel from the locals?**

I felt quite comfortable. And

- 15:30 I was able to see Vietnam more as a tourist destination than I had been before. And I had entrée to a lot of things that I wouldn't have had had I gone on my own. But it wasn't a very long trip. Went up to Da Lat for Christmas Eve, that was a magical experience. The first time
- 16:00 I'd had venison. An order of nuns, French nuns that established a restaurant to support orphanages that they had established in developing countries. Called La Vive. And we had sort of Christmas Eve dinner

at one of these in Da Lat. A beautiful hill station that the French had established, pine trees, looks very unlike Vietnam. And this

16:30 orphan girl served the meal and then they did a little concert with Christmas carols and so on. It was quite magical. And then we went to Bangkok for a few days and so on, then I came home. But it wasn't until 1990 that I took my first group to Vietnam. That was the next time, 1990. And

17:00 things had changed dramatically then, and I was able to see the whole of the country rather than just the south.

**What sort of things motivated you to organise a Vietnam tour?**

Well I knew that it was a magical place to go as a tourist. And fortunately there were sufficient numbers of those curious enough to go. And as I said before, two of them had been involved before the north took over. And after the, no this is before '75.

17:30 One was a doctor in the army and the other was a nurse who was there with some international charitable NGO [Non Government Organisation]. I think. Being a nurse as well. But the rest of them were there for curiosity. And

18:00 it was a memorable trip. My first tour with my own group. And yeah, it was good.

**How did those two individuals react to being back in Vietnam?**

Well the doctor was with his wife and he was looking for the hospital in Vung Tau and couldn't find where it was, things had changed so much. And as I found out today,

18:30 the hospital was demolished. But eventually he was satisfied that he found the location. He said, "Oh they must have pulled it down. But I'm sure it was here." And you could see him visibly relax. I mean he had almost done what he had come there to do. And the only other veterans that I took were the Civil Affairs Unit group.

19:00 Thirtieth anniversary tour in 1997. And our aim was to go back to where we were of course. And so that was interesting. But there were no real problems there because everybody had had a positive experience I think. It was just curiosity to see the changes. And perhaps make contact with people from the time.

19:30 Or who remembered, I mean half the population had been born since 1975. Very hard to find people who remembered the American involvement let alone the Australian involvement. It's a very young country.

**What sort of reaction do you find from the younger people as to how they feel about that time?**

20:00 Vietnamese generally are very forgiving. All they wanted was to get rid of the Americans, the French, the Chinese in their history. They had a thousand years of domination by the Chinese; they were fighting all that time to be independent. And they

20:30 emerged with a culture that is very heavily influenced by China, but still completely different. And the French came along and tried to impose themselves. And they fought the French, then the Americans became involved and they fought the Americans. They just wanted to have their own territorial integrity, their independence. And

21:00 when you look at them, Vietnamese history, you can see that apart from any ideological issues, political issues, fundamentally the Vietnamese wanted to be independent. And it's been part of their motivation for generations. And if you put it into perspective like that's it's visible that any sort of political system isn't going to be the

21:30 be all and end all. And it was inevitable that the Communists were going to find it very difficult to stay true and pure. That some sort of middle way needed to be found. As most governments have found over time. That extremism can't last it's going to burn itself out. So they flirted with the Soviet bloc. My guide for example, was

22:00 sent to Czechoslovakia to be an engineer and came back with useless qualifications and the ability to speak Czech. Realised that he had to retrain himself, and he became a tour guide. Learnt English, as a way of surviving. After that the Vietnamese were in a hole and they realised they needed to be a bit of a glasnost, and the Doi Moi [renovation], that policy was the equivalent of glasnost. And they are moving to

22:30 a situation where there is still a very strong central control which helped the Vietnamese get out of the Asian economic crisis a few years ago. They didn't have very much impact from that at all. And I think the, it's a real tiger economy. I mean houses are going up wherever you look; there is investment, people being busy working

23:00 very industrious people. I think they are going to be a small power to be reckoned with. I think China is going to be, dominate our region, probably dominate our region of the world in the next two decades.

But Vietnam is not going to be left behind. The saddest thing is that they still depend mainly on primary products, like us. And they are the victims of world markets. So

23:30 the amount of product being produced in Vietnam has tripled. But prices have fallen three times. So they are back more or less where they are.

**If I asked you to give me a brief summary of the Vietnamese, a character of the Vietnamese, what would your response be?**

Well I think they are very family oriented.

24:00 They are very, very education oriented. They have a thirst for learning. They are hard working. They are very gentle people, they can be ferocious like anybody but they are very gentle people, very welcoming and friendly. And I suppose

24:30 there are other people, I've got friends who think the Laos are the best gentlest, nicest people in the world. And there are others that think the Cambodians are the nicest, but it's personal experience that created this. It's having personal contact with people from another culture. That affects how you relate to them and how you see them. And I guess Vietnam is my place.

25:00 **Could tell us how you came to meet David?**

I placed an ad and I got several answers. And he was very persuasive and I think starting a long-term relationship in 1980, probably saved my bacon I think. I was prepared at that stage to probably

25:30 have a lot of sexual experience. But there was no concept of protection at that stage. So at a very crucial dangerous period I found myself in a monogamous relationship. And I look back on that with a lot of thanks.

**Is David involved in your business?**

26:00 He helps with the mailing out of the newsletter and so on. He obviously is an intellectual support but he is concerned with his own career. And I think he would like to be able to continue with that. Unfortunately it hasn't been as successful as he would have liked. And but there is always a constant support there.

26:30 An interest in what I am doing and helping where he can.

**His line of work is?**

He is a writer.

**How do you feel about the way Vietnam vets have been treated in general? Do you think there has been a lack of acknowledgement?**

I think it's, there has been a turnaround in the last ten years. But

27:00 they were the tools of a policy that wasn't seen as being positive. And they became the scapegoats, convenient scapegoats. They were the obvious signs of a policy that was not popular with a large section of the population. So became the victims of abuse.

27:30 We were talking about the way Vietnam veterans have been treated. I think with the memorial and a positive reinforcement of treatment of Vietnam veteran problems. Medical, social and psychological and so on, there has been a change in attitude and time heals a lot of things.

28:00 I mean people in Vietnam that were in Vietnam are now grandfathers. And everybody loves their grandfather. So that changes things I think.

**When you made that statement you were talking about other people. Do you feel connected?**

No, I don't feel at all like a Vietnam vet. And that's why

28:30 I don't feel, I feel a fraud if I went on the march.

**So you don't?**

I don't, never have. We have Civil Affairs Unit sections marching in Canberra and Sydney and various other states. And they all get together. But I just think it's something. I don't know if it's something I have inherited from my father or just how,

29:00 I just, it's part of the mateship thing too, it's just something that I never related to. I've never been, I'd never go out with the boys. I've held positions on the Civil Affairs Unit society. Since it was formed or pretty soon after it was formed. Basically at the moment I am an ex-officio member that puts the news letter together.

29:30 So I see this as a way of being committed to the group. But the social thing, I just don't feel a part of it. It's not something I could take David along to. So I'm out of it because my other half isn't there. I mean I wouldn't know how that would affect people. So I would rather not do it.

**Do you ever turn on the television and march around on Anzac Day?**

30:00 I have been known to yes, yes, but often in Japan I am meeting staff for the university, I had Japanese students coming out here for short study and tours as well. So that is another part of the business and I am often away in April when the thing is on.

**You said you met up with Rob at the RSL; did the RSL remain a part of your life?**

30:30 No, when I was in Junee that's where the Rotary Club held its meetings and I was part of the Rotary things as well when I was in the country. But I, it's not, RSL clubs don't mean anything. I remember being horrified when I got to the RSL

31:00 newspaper that there was something about, I felt I was being treated as a senior citizen. And I thought well why are they sending me this rubbish. And I just got out of the RSL scene, I joined but I just don't, the club scene means nothing to me. And I don't have a connection of a group of friends

31:30 that I go out and socialise in that way. So it's sort of dinner parties that we have here. And so in that way I am a bit divorced from the whole scene. Because of my domestic arrangements I think.

**Do you talk about your time in Vietnam much?**

When it comes up in conversation. I have no reluctance to talk about it. And I don't, I am not ashamed of what I have done.

32:00 And sometimes it gives people an interesting perspective that they wouldn't otherwise have. They are interested to know that there was a Civil Affairs Unit. So

**Is that a surprise to many people?**

Yep. I think generally when you hear about troops being sent off you imagine the guys at the front with machine-guns and

32:30 rifles and so on. But there is a whole support network that always goes. I mean it's part of the problem in Iraq, I mean, two hundred and forty combat soldiers but a lot of support people there, doing sort of similar things to what we were doing in the Civil Affairs Unit And other things as well of course. It's a complex thing.

**Are you frustrated that a lot of people**

33:00 **don't know anything about that side of war?**

I don't think, maybe I don't think Vietnam is important enough. Our involvement in Vietnam wasn't important enough to enshrine in any... I mean people died there unnecessarily. But I don't see any sense in glorifying

33:30 that involvement or big noting about it all. It was a political adventure for the same reasons that Iraq is. You know, to support the Americans, we were obliged to make a commitment and the government made a commitment. There was no concept of trying to save the people from a fate worse from death. It was political expediency

34:00 I should imagine being the main priority. And of course there is always excuses why we need to be involved even though the war wasn't declared dead either, was it, I don't think.

**Looking back at that experience, is it important part of your history?**

Well when I think about my development, I have to say that my

34:30 army experience was a positive thing, and I said that before. And I chose to go to Vietnam and work with the Civil Affairs Unit and that's become a powerful direction in my life. So in that sense I think it's all been an important part

35:00 in my life.

**A sense of pride?**

Yeah I am proud of what I did. Yep. And maybe it's sort of like a balance against some of the negative things that I think have happened.

**How do you feel about the way that the Vietnam War has been portrayed in film and television?**

35:30 Well it's the cinematic process allows us to see a bit of the truth. But in the end it's entertainment isn't it? So it's being viewed through maybe a prism that's exaggerates certain things and distorts certain things.

36:00 And obviously there is a grain of truth in some of the stories that we come across. Some of the things are pretty horrific but we knew that horrific things, even more horrific things actually happened. And

there are things that probably happened that we don't know about. But My Lai [massacre] was a perfect example. Of the sort of things that could happen.

36:30 **How do you feel about the current war in Iraq?**

Well I think similarly. It was an expedient involvement and it's proven to have been expedient. Even more obviously than the Vietnam War I guess. If we can convert the whole thing into a United Nations act politically then there is a legitimacy in trying to

37:00 overcome some of the problems that have been created. Or try to, to give Iraq back to the Iraqi people. But it's not going to be easy and it's not going to be quick. And I think if the focus had been on international terrorism, maybe not so many Iraqi people

37:30 would have suffered even though they were under the control of someone as evil as that man [Saddam Hussein] is. There is no pretending that he is, did awful things to the Kurds and there is no freedom for ordinary people expressing their own opinions. But it wasn't I don't think the correct priority to go in there.

38:00 The weapons inspections should have continued and it should have been done with UN [United Nations] sanctions. The UN is a clumsy organisation but it's the best we have. Even if it has made mistakes and it has made quite a lot. It's much better than taking a unilateral reaction. And then having to deal with the consequences of the mistakes that might be made.

38:30 **Would you like to share a final reflection? Or any message as a final word?**

39:00 I don't think I want to say anything terribly profound. I mean I would like to say that I think this whole project is absolutely fascinating and to anyone interested in research of any kind that involves humanity, it's going to provide a great resource. I felt very honoured to have been selected to

39:30 take a part in it and I hope that what I have said provides useful material for whom ever might be doing any research and finds what I said relevant. And I just feel that it has provided me with a chance to actually say something about the gay situation. I mean

40:00 I have indicated a number of times that I never felt that I have been in a position to contribute to a demonstration and challenge to the status quo. But this has been, given me an opportunity that I might not have had to indicate the sorts of problems that someone who grows up with a body that's a homosexual body goes through. In the growth process. And how that impacted on my having to go into

40:30 a sort of very male war-type situation. Thank you very much.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**