

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Raymond Dillon (Black Jack, Jacky) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 3rd August 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2314>

### Tape 1

00:35 **We'll start with this life summary I was talking about.**

Righto, joined the army in 1967 and I went to Kapooka and Ingleburn and JTC [Jungle Training Centre] at Canungra and then I flew over as a reinforcement over to Vietnam, I was with ARU [Australian Reinforcement Unit].

01:00 and they allotted me to Charlie Company 1RAR [1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment]. I was with them for the rest of the time, I came home with them. I was only over there for nine months. I come home from there, I was in Australia for six weeks then I went to Malaya for two years and three months. Then when I come back from there I was going back over for a second trip as a MATS team,

01:30 Mobile Advisory Training Team with AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] but they stopped when the war finished. I ended up in 7th Battalion stayed there in Pioneers [engineering corps] then I done a corps transfer over to RAASC [Royal Australian Army Service Corps] but they changed it to RACT [Royal Australian Corps of Transport] in the end and I finished the rest of my time

02:00 in that. I went from there to Moorebank, Oakey and then over to Enoggera, 5 Transport Squadron and that's where I took my discharge. It was twelve years in the army.

**What was your main role when you went to Vietnam?**

Well I started off, went in as infantry and when I got to 7th Platoon Charlie Company,

02:30 the platoon sergeant he asked me would I be a platoon medic and I said, "Yeah, not a problem" because I'd done a bit of first aid and that was where I started then I stayed with them for a fair while then I ended up a section 2IC [Second in Command] and in the end I was section commander. That's how things went.

03:00 **Rightio, now we'll go in to details so now we'll talk about your whole life beginning with.**

I was born in Casino, northern New South Wales and parents, they busted up and I ended up out near Moree at a place called Weemelah and that's where I grew up from there. There was only two lots of Aboriginal families in the town.

03:30 We got on pretty good. There was a little bit of prejudice with some of the stations and that. We were known as workers and we were always at work. I went to Moree High School where there was a lot of discrimination there. After I got the chance I left, I went back to Casino and finished

04:00 my schooling there, high school. I had a taste of army cadets and that's why I like the services. When I come back I ended up I think just before I turned fifteen I was out droving for about two years and then I started doing station work, ringing as they call it.

**Before we go that far I might go step by step**

04:30 **and go into detail. You said your parents split up how old were you?**

I don't even remember, I think I was still only a baby. It took me a while to find out where my father was. He was a returned soldier. He fought in New Guinea. My stepfather was an alcoholic, quite a little,

05:00 get a few touch ups [beatings] from him. I think he was jealous because when he was with Mum they had four daughters and I was the only boy and wasn't his. It took me to twenty one before I turned on him. I didn't muck about. I don't know where he is now, where my father died. I didn't find out until three years after they buried him.

05:30 I was always working but I still had a hard life. All I knew was physical work.

**It would be a hard life with that stepfather too, wouldn't it?**

Yeah. He was a fencer. He had me working from when I was about eight years old onwards. He was a good worker, he taught me a hell of a lot

06:00 but as soon as he got any money he would just go and drink it. He wouldn't waste a penny of it, he would drink it all, mostly all bloody wine. Myself, I haven't had a drink for over seven years now.

**So you lived with your mum and you never saw your natural father.**

No. I did see him when I was about seven I think. Went up to school there for a while and

06:30 I went back out bush again. It's two different environments, the coast. I keep telling everyone now, I'm a freshwater bloke not saltwater. That's the way I look at it. I'm quite happy where I am now. It was only just not so long ago that I went back where I grew up. See the boss's son, me and him

07:00 grew up together on the station. Just like meeting a long lost brother because me and him got on really good. Mum used to go out and do a lot of work round the stations and that. The old fella [man], he'd get up and just go. Sometimes he'd work. Sometimes we'd have money, sometimes we didn't. Only for Mum, we wouldn't have survived a lot of it.

**07:30 Tell us about your mum, what kind of woman was she?**

She was a worker. She always told me she said even when there's a bit of prejudice around, she said, "Never ever class yourself lower than them. You're just as good as them if not better" and I've always grabbed that attitude. We had a falling out years ago and I haven't seen her. I spoke to one of my sisters.

08:00 I was always working, good money. Anything I wanted off the girls I had to buy it off, if they wanted anything off me I had to give it to them. Put a stop to that, I just went out on my own.

**You were the oldest were you?**

Yeah.

**And your sisters were from your Mother's second marriage?**

Yeah, stepsisters.

**Were you close to your sisters?**

08:30 I was for a while there then old fella, my stepfather he went down to Victoria way and they found him in hospital, loss of memory and all that and they wanted me to lend a car and I wasn't giving it to them, he'd done nothing for me. I think it was after that they were out to see who could rip me off the most. It wasn't funny, I know that. Mum used to play

09:00 both sides of the can or whatever it is. I was probably a bit gullible, young and gullible. After I got in the army, it was almost like a home for me.

**What about you mentioned that he'd give you a bit of a hiding, would he do it to your sisters as well?**

No, not that much, a bit of favouritism there. I could outrun him

09:30 at times. In a way he was a bit of a coward when he was sober and that but as soon as you get a bit of grog in him it made him six foot two and bulletproof.

**Would you have to avoid him when he was drinking?**

Yeah.

**So what do you do when you're a young kid facing this kind of thing?**

It didn't worry me much. I'd be out, pig dogs, used to go out, stay away all bloody day.

10:00 Shoot a pig with the dogs. If there was any work going around I'd try and pick up a bit of it.

**You mentioned prejudice in town. What was the first thing you'd notice as a kid, six, seven about how different treatment?**

Not so much in town. We grew up and I don't think there was any colour bar with the kids but some of the people they thought they were just a little bit higher than us

10:30 just because we were Aborigines. Mum used to go, if we went out to the station done any work for the day we'd eat out on the verandah. I remember one, she used to put money on the table, twenty cents, see if we'd take it or not. I fixed that up, I took the twenty cents and left a shilling and two sixpences. She never done it again, so she got the message.

11:00 I was out fencing, I can still remember it, eight years old, running wire. When I got the droving it wasn't too bad, you're out on a horse all day, you're on your own most of the time. It's pretty rugged, pretty rough but I was pretty well used to it.

11:30 **Pretty rough being a young kid being out there working.**

Yeah but that's the way I've always, I was always hunting, could always go and get a feed. At fourteen I could skin a sheep, not a problem, cut it up. I went back and had a look at the old town and it's just not the same. More houses

12:00 there, the old school's gone.

**What was the name of the town again?**

Weemelah, Aboriginal word for a place of wind I think.

**What about grandparents and all that?**

Well Granny Webb she was born up here in Queensland, I don't know whereabouts and no one seems to know. She went down to Casino and that's where

12:30 she was bought up, around there. When she died they put her age between ninety and ninety eight because she didn't know. She couldn't read or write. When I was over in Moree, Granny Dillon she had eleven acres or something of ground and she had her own house. She had a retarded son. Mum used to send the kid, me and my eldest sister to more or less

13:00 run the messages and that for her. She was in to that many religions but she could swear like a bullocky too. Used to do a lot. Had a lot of religious upbringing with her. The AIM [Australian Inland Mission Society] missionary, doesn't exist any more, they used to be Australia wide. Especially up in Queensland, Palm Islanders and all that, they used to go up the territory and all that.

13:30 Done a fair bit of schooling in Moree. It was a pretty bad town. I'll drive through it, I won't stop there. Our name is still down there. If they knew who my relations were they'd probably pull me to pieces.

14:00 **You say it's a bad town, why is it a bad town, in relation too?**

Discrimination, not the people that I grew up with, it's the strangers that's come in over the years. I was down there when Charles Perkins [Aboriginal activists and bureaucrat, organiser of the 1965 Freedom Rides to highlight and challenge discrimination in Walgett, Moree and other NSW towns], this is going quite back, when Charles Perkins went through there and caused a big stink. I missed that one in Moree and I was working over a place called Carinda near Walgett

14:30 and I think it was only a week after I got there, he went through about a week before I got there and I was out there for about three weeks and I come in to town and because I was a stranger the coppers [police] give me fifteen minutes to get out of town. I done it in ten. I was working over there. I could more or less say there he was me mentor, people I used to,

15:00 I had two lots there, I used to work with a bloke Ronny Doran and he offered me an opportunity and I didn't take it. He offered me to, apparently when you go for a pilot's licence back in them days you had to get a guarantor and it was a lot of money then. I said no. Then he wanted to put me on a station, send me

15:30 out with a big firm, AMLF was one of them [a pastoral company, Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company], as a jackaroo. They get them when they're sixteen and I I'd been around since I was fourteen, droving and that and I said, "I think I'll just", they teach you what they want to teach you, not what I know. He called me a good stockman and I took that as a compliment coming from him because he was a hard man. I got on very good with his family.

16:00 They used to leave me to look after the place. They used to do a lot of show work and the older boys, they were very good to me, they knew I would work. I done a lot of droving with them. I wouldn't go into town. I wasn't very much a towny at all.

**What about some of the traditions of Aboriginal culture?**

Didn't have much to do with it at all.

16:30 We had one old bloke, old TBD, Teddy Bear Dennison he taught me lots of tracking and that but we didn't have much at all. My grandmother in Moree used to tell us about the Kamilaroi [Kamilaraay] tribe and some of the things, Slaughterhouse Creek where they rounded up all the Murriss [Aboriginal people] and shot them. [Slaughterhouse Creek Massacre, Terry Hie Hie, 1838] But it

17:00 wasn't that much tradition. Sometimes you find an old Murriss, still got a few of them. Used to take things one at a time.

**What about stories, were you ever told Aboriginal stories?**

Yeah, a few of them there, just can't think of their names now but

- 17:30 they used to live out on a place called Neeworra. That's what they called it, on the Gil Gil Creek it is. There's a big U-bend in it and that's where the Murris used to go and have a corroboree every year. All the station owners got there together and they sat up all night making moulds for their .32 Savage rifles
- 18:00 and they were going to go and shoot them the next morning. One of the young fellas went and told them. Anyway they moved the whole camp out and just left a couple back to watch to see if he was telling the truth and they found out he was telling the truth. When they went down there was no black fellas in the camp. After that that man never had to muster a paddock or do anything. There was always someone there watching over him.
- 18:30 We had a few people out there, there was one bloke, old Ernie he said his people were the first ones out here on the first fleet an old Jimmy Come Lately and a full blood Aboriginal said, "So what, mine were out here to meet him", just things like that. I never ever learnt much culture and that. I sort of got out of it.
- 19:00 Started to get westernized ways and that. I still would have liked to learn. Old Dennison there, he'd go along and he'd see a horse track and he'd put his hand on it and he could tell you how many minutes ahead of you or where it would be. That's where I learnt a hell of a lot, bushwise, where the sheep would be by just by feeling for the wind or cattle were, just the opposite.

- 19:30 Used to do a lot of hunting and that, find emu eggs and that. It was pretty good though. It was hard.

**So you did learn these things from Ernie?**

No, Teddy Dennison he was.

**He taught you some of these things?**

Yeah, used to go out with him but he was an alcoholic. Teddy used to get drunk and he used to go stupid, pull a gun on you quick as look at you.

- 20:00 The kids and that there we didn't have any toys and that. We used to make up with fish tins, sardines, put a string on them and that was our cars or we'd go and find an old iron that you do the ironing with, put a bit of wire or string on it and pull it around and that was our cars. They used to get up there,
- 20:30 used to truck a lot of sheep and cattle away from Weemelah there because there was a rail head there. I used to go up there and do a lot of work there and that's where I learned to handle a lot of stock there, that was quite good. Then we started to get in to wheat and that. Me and John used to buy a hell of a lot of it out there. He bought an auto header. I was still at station wages, a dollar an hour and that was top money then, plus me station wages.
- 21:00 I was making good money but I was fit though. Even the horses and that I wasn't a very good buck jump rider or anything but I'd have a go at anything. I said there's one way in to a saddle and a thousand ways out and I found every one of them.

**Who were the people that you worked for mainly on the stations?**

Ronny Doran, Molladree [station].

- 21:30 He had a son, he bought Ingelah [station] for him. He's still got Ingelah. The eldest boy and the youngest boy they still run it today. I didn't see the youngest fella, he was only just growing up when I was there. Johnny is a bit younger than me but some of the things we used to get up to. Get out in the paddock and we see a young bull calf and we'd ride him down and toss him,
- 22:00 castrate him and ear mark him until we got him there and we just put a brand on him. It was nearly all in flood waters, ten months of the year, the Gingham Channel. That's all stopped now since they put in Copeton Dam [on the Gwydir River near Inverell], there's not much water gets down there. They've got all flood banks and that. They were quite nice. Mrs. Doran is still alive but the father, he ended up as a vegetable.

- 22:30 A very cluey man. I had to do a lot of ploughing and that, tractor work.

**Were you receiving the same wages?**

Yeah, station wages, contract. They knew they had to pay pretty good because I could get good money anywhere.

- 23:00 Most of it, ring barking you could get ten hours a day swinging an axe for four quid and that was hard yakka [work] but I was only on about nineteen quid [pounds] a week and that's about forty dollars a week but I'd get my room and board and that, about nineteen. It didn't worry me, I had it easy. Only time we had it hard there was when we had to do some
- 23:30 cattle or sheep, shearing or crutching, sometimes fencing and that. Most of the time just move the stock around. Had a very good line of ewes there, sheep and a good line of cattle.

**How old were you, doing this work?**

I think I went out there when I was about eighteen.

24:00 I said to him there one day, "I'm nineteen tomorrow" and he said, "That's right, I've got to wage your wages up" because as you go up, just the same as today. I think it was about twenty dollars, nineteen something pound and I was there until after I was about twenty three.

24:30 Stayed there on and off. Old Mrs. Doran used to say, "You've got that walkabout look in your eye, when you leaving?" and I said, "Well there's nothing going on here at the moment so I'll go". I'd leave there Friday night and I'd be working again Monday morning. Anyone knew I was out of work they'd come around and get me up the next day. I hardly ever had a holiday. It was mostly all stock work. Riding a horse ten hours

25:00 a day can be a bit strenuous. It was quite good, I enjoyed it.

**And you were doing this since when age?**

About fifteen, just before my fifteenth birthday.

**So between fifteen and twenty three were you seeing much of your mum and your sisters?**

Yeah I'd stay out and come in the weekends. I was only out about ten mile. Old Ronny helped me get a car and a

25:30 motorbike, I got busted up pretty good. In the summertime I used to work my own hours. John would get up at four o'clock and he'd go down to the paddock and he said, "Next minute I'd see a bloody cigarette lit up and it would be you sitting on your horse waiting for a bit of daylight to muster the sheep" because we had to do it in the cool. Half past eight, quarter to nine

26:00 the stock wouldn't move, that hot. I'd go and sleep the rest of the day or do nothing and come back about four o'clock and we'd get them in the shed. Worked my own hours. They were really good to me because I ended up in hospital there for a week in Moree, had some flu or something. I come out and because I used to nearly always,

26:30 when I go in to town I always draw a weeks wages out, I said, "I'll stay out a fortnight that way I'll have a week's wages". He said, "Oh no, you've got a week, I paid you while you were in hospital". They thought a lot of me. I used to write to them when I was in Vietnam, I used to write to Nita Doran and she used to always write back. It was quite good.

27:00 The girls, they scattered, of his. One of them married Dennis Piggott. He ended up a bronze medal in Montreal for horses. It belonged to their daughter the horse but he rode it.

**What about yourself, were you meeting any girls?**

No, hardly anything. When I got about

27:30 twenty there I started going out with a few girls, but more getting in to town there, getting on the grog and that. Come home with cuts and bruises so I give that away. Rum'd make a coward fight.

28:00 **I was going to ask about, you said you fixed your stepfather up?**

Yeah, I give him a touch up.

**What happened exactly?**

Come home and I found Mum under the bed, she was very distressed. He come over there and he started, I don't know if he was going to throw a punch but I got in first, busted him up. I don't know if I broke his jaw or what but I just put her on the train next day and sent her to Sydney

28:30 but they went back together again and I just give up hope. Bloody con merchant.

**So he hit your mum?**

Yeah he used to give her a lot of hiding. Seemed to be the bloody in thing with the Murriss out there. They put in town there they got about seven houses and they put the one couple in there and second night

29:00 he comes home drunk and put his head through the bloody fibreglass. Brand new house. The old Mungindi, she's a wild town.

**You said there were just two Aboriginal families.**

Yeah, the Duncans but they moved away and there was only just Teddy Dennison on his own and he was a pretty well respected stockman around town. That's who I learnt a hell of a lot of but as soon as he got drunk he'd go stupid.

29:30 We ended up having a big blue [argument]. I think the old bastard broke my nose. Left him in a sorry mess too.

**So was it difficult being the only Aboriginal family in the town?**

No, they accepted us because we were workers. Go to Mungindi, the town twenty mile down the road and a little bit different. You get the blokes cadging smokes and bloody drink all the time.

30:00 Even though a lot of my work was with a lot of them but as soon as they got the money they used to go and spend it and drink it. Me, I was just all the time looking for work. Come in jacked up and they'd spend it over the weekend and bludging then. I wouldn't wear that.

**What about some of those discrimination things,**

30:30 **not being allowed to do this or do that?**

Wasn't allowed to go to the swimming pool in Moree because I was Aboriginal and they had a balcony up the top, weren't allowed up there. Unless you were an excellent student they put us all down there in 1C, 2C. They used to give them a hard time though. I still remember him.

31:00 I think he ended up dying of a heart attack. Any backwards people or anything like that they stuck them down there. Even my mate Stumpy Caswell, he grew up, he was a champion swimmer at school. I can still remember, I knew his father and brother and that and he ended up

31:30 joining the army too and I ran in to him quite a few years later and he said, "You remember Richard Swan?" and I said, "Yes" and he said, "I couldn't blow wind up him, I couldn't catch him in the swimming out in the river and that" and yet he wasn't allowed in there. Stumpy was a champion swimmer, he represented the state at about sixteen, seventeen. He represented the Australian Army when he was in.

32:00 There was a lot of opportunities lost through discrimination.

**What did you think of this as a young fella, the fact that you couldn't go in the pool?**

They had a thing there called citizens right and there was a little bit of paper from three white fellas to say that you were a good guy. I would have been able to walk in to a pub with that, apart from that I wasn't allowed. I still remember

32:30 that and I've never voted, I've never registered in my life and I will not, yet I've fought for my country and all. That's one thing, the first trip over to Vietnam, I wasn't on it but there was a lot of other Aboriginals in there. I only found out this about two year ago, they weren't allowed to vote while they were over there fighting and the blokes never found out until when

33:00 they come back to Australia. They reckon if they'd have found out then the whole battalion would have heard. "You're good enough to fight for us but not good enough to vote for us". That's just my protest anyway. It's a funny world.

**Did this kind of piss you off as a young fellow, make you angry or anything?**

Yeah but I never made waves.

33:30 I just went about my own thing. I learned to mind my own business very young, you'll get a belt in the bloody mouth quick. My way of thinking Aboriginals are in two classes, the low class and the working class. One bloke I went to school with, I think it was Barry Duncan, I'm not too sure,

34:00 this religious mob was knocking round with and he was for the Aboriginals, he was a builder and he took on Barry as an apprentice chippy, carpenter. There was a big stink over that but the bloke had the qualifications to do it and he done all right for himself after he done his time.

34:30 **Would you ever cop it at school, one or two boys being?**

No. They seemed to leave the Murris alone, a lot of them could fight. I couldn't but if they double up on me or something like that it might be a different thing. Primary school they mixed in with the white kids but as soon as you got to high school it was a different matter.

35:00 **What happened in high school?**

We all were in the one class. There were some beautiful bloody artists. They could look at something and get down and draw it, sketch it. The old art teacher just used to shake her head. Some of them were good, we got through. Maths was my biggest thing but that's what happened when I went back out to the station

35:30 years later. I tried for the army first and I got knocked back because of my maths and Johnny got me down there and showed me how to do it. He used to make me do it on the ground and that out in the paddocks. I'd ask, he'd tell me. I think they were grabbing just about anyone when Vietnam was on.

**Just quickly about high school,**

36:00 **where was the high school?**

Moree Intermediate High. I left there and then I went over to Casino and that was a different kettle of fish all together. I was still in lower, 1C or 2C or something. I learnt a lot more there. We were more or less looking for play over in Moree and we'd get away with it, not at Casino there.

36:30 **And naturally the kids would group together, the Aboriginal kids and that?**

A lot of them used to mix with the Aboriginals and that. They lived in the town. All them blokes that I grew up with, Stumpy was telling me later, they were good in town, it's just the people that come in after, a lot of foreigners. He said, "They're the shit stirrers" [trouble makes]. That's why

37:00 I was shitty with Charles Perkins. He went up there with all the uni [university] students, he stirred up a big hornets nest and then left it. The black fellas had to foot the bill there. I was fourteen year old even though I wasn't known in Moree then, I went down to the Moree Mission. Down there there was a big religious thing

37:30 there but because I was a stranger they all picked on me. I had three fights in about a bloody hour and two hidings but I still had a go. One bloke he put me down three times before I woke up he was too good for me. We ended up the best of mates later. That's life. I was glad to get out to work after I left school. It was good to get on the horse and just pull, muster cattle.

38:00 A lot of the old people I was with they see I was willing to learn and they showed me things. Didn't teach me, more or less the same thing, they showed you what to do and you had to pick it up. When I was sixteen Ned Sullivan got hold of me, he had a team of nineteen horses and I used to have to

38:30 harness eight of them every morning and delve bore drains. They've cut all that out now. It's all piped. We used to get up about three o'clock in the morning, go and get the horses and we'd be yoked up and gone before sunrise in the middle of winter. It was cold on them black soil plains.

39:00 After I left school I just went out on the stations, out Westholm there for about twelve months straight, never come in to town, well, once I think. I used to get everything sent out because the Holders used to have a shop and anything I wanted they used to send it out. There was no need to go in to town. Money didn't worry me, went in with hundred pound, ninety nine pound

39:30 or something. I used to give it away, give it to my Mother and she went to Sydney with it. Then I moved back in to Weemelah, it was pretty close to home then. Most of the weekends, when I got a car I started going in to Mungindi and that. After I left, have a break with nothing doing, I went ring barking. Ended up

40:00 over in Coonamble, Sandy Camp. Come back and ended up with a mob called Binniky. He used to have some gun ring-barkers and that and I stayed with them 'til I cut myself and I just give it away then. Went back to ringing.

## Tape 2

00:32 **You've kind of talked a bit about your schooling but can you tell me a bit more about your teachers and classes and all that kind of thing?**

In Weemelah there's an old teacher there, Mrs. Robinson, they had a property just outside of Weemelah about two mile. She used to walk it every morning and walk home every afternoon. She taught about three generations in that school.

01:00 There was only about twenty kids in the school there at Weemelah and there was a bit of a cultural shock when I went to Moree, when you see about four or five hundred. I didn't know anyone there. I was only there for a couple of months and then the following year I went to high school. We had one there, Mr Wedgewood.

01:30 It'd be hard to describe him. Sometimes he'd snap. We'd bolt because the black boys give him a hard time. It was funny there. Then, I think her name was Mrs Robinson too, our art teacher. She was very good to me. She was more interested in art and all that

02:00 but there was none of the traditional painting there now it was just sketching and all that. That's something I think we could have done if we could have got people to show us.

**Did you see much of it around?**

No, I had hardly seen any of it. Even now, after I got out of the army I went up to Cooktown and

02:30 everything's done in pastel paint now. There was a girl, she was a stolen generation [part of the generation of Aboriginal children removed from their parents under government policy], I don't know what they're going on about but she was taught with ochre and that and how to mix the paint. That was when I first seen the first genuine one. She done it on canvas and I think that painting's in the museum in Brisbane.

**What was it like, that was the first painting that you saw?**

First

03:00 real Aboriginal painting. I've seen a lot of the other ones and I grew up with Namatjira [Albert Namatjira, famous Aboriginal artist] and all that but he used to do portraits and that. Art, I was really interested in that. Take it as it comes. We used to always pass our exams and that.

03:30 Some of them were pretty cluey, some of them just didn't want to learn but they had to go there otherwise the coppers would have brought them back.

**Did you see that happen much?**

No, I never seen it.

**Did you like school?**

No I didn't but I'm sorry I didn't get a better education. I got all my education when I was in the army.

**What was it that you didn't like about it?**

I don't know, just sitting in a classroom I suppose, confined.

04:00 Hard to concentrate when you've got other kids there. First year after that after I got in the army that's when I said Johnny, he taught me how to do a lot of the sums and that and when I got in the army and got to Malaya

04:30 I upgraded I think somewhere round the leaving certificate or something, class two. I had to do class one and class two. No, class three I did and then class two and I didn't go and do the other one. See they try to give you all these when we done the thing you only had about six weeks I think and they try to slam it all in to you in one hit.

05:00 Maths is one thing a learnt that helped me out later in life. At school though it seemed to be just one big joke. If you're pretty good at sport or anything like that you were made but I wasn't a very good footballer or good runner or anything.

**What kind of natural skills did you have?**

Nothing much mate.

05:30 Pretty good out in the bush.

**You mentioned before you were pretty good at skinning sheep.**

Yep.

**Who taught you to do that?**

The drovers. That was the main tucker, droving sheep. It used to take me a long time when I first started but when I got up about twenty one there

06:00 I was doing a sheep in four minutes. I had one bloke I helped him out there one afternoon and he had two sheep to my one. He worked in the slaughter yards. I was only talking about him yesterday actually. He showed me a few short cuts. I don't know if I could do it now or not. I could still do the beast, I could halve him and quarter him but I can't cut him up. That was one of the things you had to learn

06:30 when you're on stations and that, do the killing. They always had someone there to do the beef and that. Very seldom unless it was a big station that they'd kill a beast, it was mostly all sheep.

**You mentioned that you had a bit of a religious upbringing through, was it your auntie?**

Grandmother.

**Grandmother, what did that involve, Sunday school?**

Sunday school and all that.

07:00 That's how I got one of my first jobs in Warialda. One of the Sunday school teachers he used to have a competition, name all the books of the Bible from the first and second testaments. I learnt it in a week and he said, "You've got a phenomenal memory". I didn't take any notice

07:30 of it and he worked in spare parts and all the spare parts have got numbers. He said, "I'll get you a job up there", I got the job because of my memory. That was a bit of a sad case with him. He had a good job in Moree in spare parts for quite a few years. This is going way back,

08:00 I was only sixteen then. That was when the discrimination was really bad. There was a big Aboriginal wedding and he wanted to hire the town hall and he went and applied for it and they said, "Who is it?" and he told them, the Aboriginals want to go and book the town hall in Moree and they said, "No"

08:30 and they rang his boss up and next minute he was down the road looking for a job. You can believe it or not but it did happen.

**He lost his job?**

He lost his job and he had to get out of town. He lost his job because he tried to help, get the Aboriginals an

09:00 entertainment venue so they could have their reception and that in there. That was how bad it was. He was a white fella.

**Did they give any reason as to why he lost his job?**

I don't know. I was only young then but I still remember a bit stink up about it. Didn't get in the papers or anything but the grapevine was running hot.

09:30 **What was Sunday school like?**

Good. That's one of the things I tell people. I've been bought up in that many different religions it's not funny. In Moree there it was the AIM missionaries and when I went over to Casino there, when I was going to school there I first went to a Catholic school.

10:00 They were in to church nearly every day and all that. I had one argument with a bloke when I come back from Vietnam. He was right in to religion. I said to him, "Which one's right?", I said, "You just come back from Vietnam?" and he said, "Yeah" and I said, "Well they had Buddhism, Catholic,

10:30 Cao Dai [Vietnamese religion] and other religions and that, which one was right over there?", I said, "Do you eat fish heads and rice?" and he said, "No, I wouldn't eat that" and I said, "Well them people been eating that for thousands of years and they're still surviving. It's the same as religion". That's just my own point of view.

**Did you identify with any of the religions that you in contact with?**

No I just take it as it comes. If it happens it happens.

11:00 I respect all religions. If some come in I tell them I'm not interested, I've got my own beliefs, own thoughts and that. You could argue all day, like politics. I don't believe them either.

**So if it happens, it happens, is that pretty much it?**

Yeah, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

11:30 Sunday school was good. Granny Dillon she used to try and push it in to me. Then again, she was a hypocrite. She'd go to Sunday school, sometimes she'd run it and that and be a hypocrite for the rest of the week. I couldn't see any bloody sense in it.

12:00 Six days a bloody week you play up and go and ask for forgiveness. Who to? That's just my own thoughts. I don't try and flog it to anyone.

**So you mentioned the AIM, the missionaries?**

Yeah.

**What kind of activities did you see then?**

They used to travel around and they had a couple of missions up in the territory. They used to do a lot of good work but I don't know what ever happened to them.

12:30 Just lack of financial. They had a house just outside of Singleton it was. Every year they used to have a big convention down there and they'd get from all over New South Wales and Queensland and I think Victoria. Used to all go down there and you'd meet all different cultures, different people. Nearly all Aboriginals.

13:00 There was a lot of white missionaries with it. They were quite good, they worked with the Aboriginals. A lot used to come from Palm Island. Not so long ago there was one of the girls, I can still remember her, she was a beautiful singer. You could hear her voice in the choir when they'd sing in church and that and I think I seen her on TV about two, three year ago.

13:30 She wasn't singing though, she was just interviewed because she lives on Palm Island. It was one of those things that happened. There was a lot of grog and that down around there. A lot of them used to, the mission, there's another one,

14:00 a lot of dwellings just outside of Moree there on the Inverell Road, used to call it the top camp and there's a lot of kids I went to school with grew up there. I was just up the hill a little bit, up on the high ground where my granny had her house. The weekends I used to go down there and play with them. Sometimes we'd go down there and have Sunday school and then go back. I'd stay there

14:30 and play all the rest of the day and come home about sundown.

**Did you have any good mates during that time that you constantly hung out with?**

Sometimes, there's a couple of them but we just grown apart. A lot of the boys I went to school, some of them turned into drugos, alcoholics and that. Some of them done all right for themselves, got on the council and all that.

15:00 One bloke was on there, would have been nearly fifteen, sixteen years since the last time I'd seen him. He bought his house and all that. Raised all his family, he had about six kids. I grew up with him. I don't know where the rest of the boys are.

15:30 Wasn't too bad there, just the discrimination was the only thing that turned me off Moree.

**You mentioned in the break that you never want to go back there.**

I wouldn't go and stay there overnight. The last time we came back, me and my partner, we stayed at Narrabri. I went and fuelled up there and just kept going. Went out to Mungindi and we kept going from there.

16:00 We stayed in the next town from there, St George [Queensland]. Apparently it was a pretty lively town. When they see you in a fairly good car and a caravan and that they don't worry you.

**I notice that you've got a lot of nicknames, when did they kind of come in. Is it a childhood thing?**

In Moree they used to call me Ockey

16:30 after me step uncle. He was known as local pug [pugilist - fighter] and all that, I'd never ever fought but they said I looked like him but he was more or less white black fella. There's only two blokes to this day that still call me that, Ockey, that's Stumpy Caswell and Brian, he lives down at Boggabilla. I went to school with him and his wife.

17:00 I met him over in Vietnam and Malaya. He still calls me that. I seen him a few years ago, first thing he says to me is "Ockey". A lot of people look at me but then I got in the army and it's mostly been Black Jack. A lot of them still don't know my first name.

**They started calling you Black Jack?**

Yeah Jack, Jacky Dillon or Black Jack. There was two of us there. Merv McDonnel, he was Mac Black and I was Black Jack.

17:30 **Did you like that nickname?**

Didn't worry me, as long as they didn't call me late for a feed or a drink. At least I had an identity. It's not, "Hey you". That's the way I look at it. After I left school I was nearly always working, different jobs.

18:00 Went down to Sydney, had a bit of a go there.

**How was going to Sydney for the first time?**

I was there when I was little just on and off but I had people and relations down there on my father's side, real father. I used to go down and stay with them. I still see his son. He's pretty crook at the moment. Him and his wife, when Jumby retired

18:30 off the council because of ill health she went back to school, went to university. She's an artist, Aboriginal paintings and that now. She's the traveler. Jumby he'd just sit and play the horses all day. I hadn't seen him for about twenty odd years. I went down there for a reunion. I got a lot of memorabilia

19:00 of my father, when I was small and all that. Something I never had before. Some photos I didn't even know he took.

**Was it when you were in Sydney that you joined up first?**

I was down there, there was a drought on up around Weemelah and that, all up around in north west New South Wales. Went down there and I got a fair bit of work, it was only just casual. I was walking down York Street.

19:30 I tried before, a couple of years before that to get in but then when I was walking down York Street I thought, "Bugger it, I'll go in here and try for a job in the army". Anyway, I had bad feet but they didn't even worry about them. A fortnight later I got a letter saying, "You're going to Kapooka".

**So this was the second attempt was it?**

Yeah, second or third attempt or something like that.

**So you were just walking down the street and thought, "I'll join up"?**

20:00 Yeah.

**There wasn't any other?**

No, I was looking for a job. They pay you and they feed you. Never looked back, I was in the army twelve years.

**What was wrong with your feet?**

Planters, ingrown warts and club toes. But I never dropped out of a march or a run. I was a bit slow but most of them

20:30 expected an Aboriginal to be a good runner and all that but I got through everything.

**You said that they expected you to be a good runner, were there other expectations?**

They expect a lot to be good sportsmen, a good footballer and all that. I wasn't that but where I used to be pretty good on was in gymnasium when we were doing lifts and insteps

21:00 and all that. I was fit. I was only about nine stone seven and we used to lift a hundred and eighty pound bags of wheat, pretty strong in the arms. Pretty good. A lot of fellas were bigger than me and they were good runners but a lot of them couldn't even lift their legs up to touch the top of the bar,

21:30 just different, the different way they were brought up but put them on the road and say run twenty miles, they'd do it, no trouble.

**So you got your letter to go to Kapooka for training. Did you celebrate? What were your expectations, were you excited?**

Yeah I was because I always wanted to be in the army, ever since I was little. My grandmother used to say to me, "You used to march around here and tell me you were going to grow up and be a soldier". Dream come true.

22:00 We got down there in the middle of winter, cold. It was different all together. That's when they started to brain wash us. They'd yell at you and give you a new identity. I still maintain, that's where PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] starts, from day one rookie training.

22:30 I even had an argument with a professor from the Melbourne University over that one.

**Were you saying that that's when it starts then?**

Yeah, they take away your identity and give you a new one. You're not Ray Dillon then, you're 217624, that's a number, that's my army number and that's all I was.

23:00 They had us fit and that, they taught us to coordinate things and mould us in to a team and all that.

**Is that what you thought at the time?**

No, it's just when I look back at it. I've done a hell of a lot of reading on PTSD. I've been doing a lot over the last five years. Once you start there.

23:30 One thing I found out, there was no colour come in to it down there. If you didn't cut it, you weren't as good as the next soldier, you were out. So you just had to prove you were just as good as them. I stayed with them. A lot of other blokes dropped out. There was a lot of Nashos [National Servicemen] in there and a lot of regs [regular soldiers] but I was a reg.

**Must have been a bit of a shock to all of a sudden have these people yelling at you?**

After my stepfather, didn't worry me. I knew I had a job to do and that's what I've always maintained. You get in and do it. I used to like weapons and all that, rifles and all that. I'd prove to myself more than anything, I didn't have to prove it to the other people I was sufficient with it.

**24:30 What did you think of the discipline?**

I accepted it. A lot of people couldn't, they were very, what would you call it, free spirit. A couple of them only lasted a couple of days and they went AWOL [Absent Without Leave] but they got them back. Some of the fellas we had down there, they were AWOL and they had to go do the repeat.

25:00 They went through the second time. Got to laugh, they put us out in squads and they'd number you. As I say, you're only a number. There might be six in the squad and you might be number four. They say, "Number four" instead of saying the recruit's name, they just say, "Number four,

25:30 you're doing this wrong you should be doing that". I didn't see it happen but there was one bloke down there, I think he was number five and he kept mucking up, stuffing up big time. He threw his rifle down and, "What do you think I am, a game of bingo?" I seen some funny blokes down there. We had another fella there. We lived on the second floor, there's three stories

26:00 and we lived on the second floor and they'd tell us to go and change our clothes and you had so many minutes to do it in and one fella was running behind and he come out and the corporal yelled at him, "The only way you're going to get down here in time is jump" and that's what he did do, from the second story. That's how they had a lot of them browbeaten. Our corporal

26:30 said to us on the first morning, "Well you might think I'm a bastard, well I am" and that's the attitude we got straight away. They showed us how to do our, we was in tin huts then out at Silver City and we had it all nice and neat and that and they come through and they just wrecked it, this was wrong and there was a wrinkle here and they pulled the bed apart

27:00 and chuck all a gear and we were about a bloody hour sorting everything out but you had to do it.

**Did you fit in line pretty quickly?**

Yeah. I always had a good nature see. I was laughing and joking. Anything hard come along, I'd make a joke of it. A lot of blokes couldn't work it out, why. "Worry about it". That's just me.

27:30 **Would you say you found it easy?**

No, it wasn't easy. I made it easy in here. Sometimes it's hard. We were on a route march there one day and he said, "How you going?" and I said, "One foot after the other and they're both out of step" and the corporal just looked at me, shook his head and walked away. That's after about twenty miles. What else? You couldn't

28:00 say, "Oh I'm doing okay". That's the way I looked at it.

**So what did you learn at Kapooka?**

Weapons, drill, map reading. A lot of camouflage and all that, a lot of tactics, a lot of shooting. The one I really enjoyed was map reading.

28:30 **Why?**

Well, I was always out in the bush and I was interested to see how they used to do it because I think a lot of the bush training, you know, bought up in the bush, helped a lot. I just had to interpret their way of thinking. It was good. The map reading was good, camouflage and concealment.

29:00 The physical part I didn't mind it because I was fit. A lot of people they made it hard for themselves. The only thing used to worry me was long runs and route marches and that because of my feet. They weren't so bad as they are now but after I come back from Vietnam I went to Malaya and they aggravated it. That's how I got the TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated].

29:30 Even a lot of the blokes said to me, "How's your feet?" that's the first thing they'd say, "How are you going Jack? How's your feet?" "Yeah, all right". It's why I don't get that much exercise now. It was quite good. Most of our boys stuck together. We separated when we got to Ingleburn. After I done Ingleburn there. Because of my feet I had to go and have special shoes made.

30:00 They flew out and I had to go and do Canungra. I got on pretty good there, just like one big family there.

**Are there any people that stand out during that period that were really influential in your training?**

No, just run of the mill boys. A lot of them were stuck together. Some of them I run into again.

30:30 A lot I haven't seen for years, seen since Vietnam or Malaya. Oh yeah, Jock Stewart, he's here in town. We went through rookie training and corps training together, Scotsman. He's about the only fella that I can remember going through there with.

31:00 A lot of them come back here but where they went to I don't know. A lot of them scattered all over the place.

**What gear were you issued with initially at Kapooka?**

Just anything that they chucked on you. If you could put your foot in it, it fitted you. We didn't start to get our clothes

31:30 until after about two months, proper gear. Mostly all just hand me downs. I call it hand me downs anyway, baggy trousers and that but you still had to keep them clean and ironed and all that. We got our battle dress, because it was winter time. We started looking after, shave and that. I was never a good dresser, still not. I wasn't very good on the parade ground because of my feet.

32:00 But, good after there we went to Ingleburn that's where we done our corps training. That was a different kettle of fish [situation] all together. There was one bloke, he was a second lieutenant and he come up through the ranks, Les Tranter. A lot of blokes said,

32:30 "You know Les Tranter?" and I say, "Yeah, he put me through rookie training. That's a long time ago, 1967". He's got a place down in Victoria, he's got a hardware shop. I only see him at the reunions though, he comes up for the reunions. Most of a lot of blokes I seen in Malaya, I see some of them. I know quite a few here at the RSL [Returned and Services League] and that. A bloke I was talking to this morning.

33:00 Canungra was a bit hard when I went up to JTC.

**That was after Ingleburn?**

Yep. When we was at Ingleburn we did a lot more tactics, a lot of it in the field. It was only basic standard at Kapooka but that's when we learnt map reading and that down there, camouflage

33:30 and concealment down there in Kapooka and when we come up there we had to more or less put it in to practice. Down there, nearly all went in to infantry, they were looking for infantry blokes then. I didn't want to go in to anything else so I just went in to infantry.

**Why didn't you want to go in to anything else?**

I wanted to be a soldier, a front line soldier. Don't know why? Wanted my bloody head read, I know that.

34:00 Some blokes, one bloke went to tanks, another one went to artillery and all the young people that couldn't go overseas, a lot of them ended up in medics. I think one ended up as a cook or something but about forty odd other blokes nearly all in infantry.

34:30 That's when, 1967 they were just starting to send them off back up.

**What sort of things did you get up to in your spare time?**

Down in Kapooka you hardly had any time. If we did we'd go down for a beer and you'd have to be back in bed, lights out, you'd have to have everything, the room you were in, there was four of us in the room but they had partitions,

35:00 two on one side and two on the other, everything had to be spot on, clothes, had to do your own ironing and that sometimes. You hardly had any time there. You had duties. Go and do guard or work in the mess or something like that. They kept our minds occupied

35:30 all the time.

**Why do you think they did that?**

Don't know. Well they keep you focused. An idle mind can play up. When you're down there you go from daylight to dark and sometimes after dark. The old belief was they used to put bromide

36:00 in your meals to stop you thinking about sex and that. You didn't have time to think about sex. You used to do it in periods, you'd be thinking about one thing, what you're doing here and then they'd say "Right" and move you over to, you might be doing map reading here and next minute you'd be going over there, doing weapons training over there, then you'd go down to the gymnasium. If you were going from one to the gym,

36:30 you'd have to go home and change. You'd go home and change and then come back down and then you'd do the gym and then they'd say right, back in the other gear and go and do something else. They just kept your mind occupied. Didn't give you a chance to think for yourself at times because they wanted to teach what they wanted you to learn. That was their job.

**What about Ingleburn, did you have more spare time, any kind of social activities?**

37:00 A little bit. I forget how long we were there. It was mostly all out in the field. They teach you the fundamentals in Ingleburn and we used to go down to Wollongong, down Bulli Pass or Darks Forest and put everything you learned in to focus. Weapons and all that.

37:30 They kept you pretty busy there too. A lot of guard work but after we finished corps training it was a different thing. You just sat around and done nothing, while you were waiting there. They might give you a yippee shoot out on the range or something like that, keep your eye in. After you finish there they shift them straight up to Canungra. I didn't go with my mob because of my feet. Lucky too as far as I was concerned,

38:00 they run the guts out of them fellas.

**Were you reunited with them later though?**

Yeah they come back but I didn't fly out with them though. They flew out before I did. I went in February. January, February I went through Canungra and I didn't go overseas until June.

38:30 Then it was more or less just physical, acclimatizing to the heat and all that up there. I went up there ten stone and I come out eleven and a half stone and there wasn't an ounce of fat on me. Much tougher and all that. I was lucky, I went through with an artillery mob. We had a couple of infantry blokes in there. It was quite good. I just forget, he was a national serviceman,

39:00 the platoon commander. He knew I had bad feet so he made me forward scout and they all had to walk at my pace. It was quite good though.

**But you got your feet fixed up?**

No, I didn't actually say I could honestly say I got them fixed up. When they tried to fix it they aggravated it and made them worse.

## Tape 3

00:38 **We were just talking, you were at Canungra and you got separated from the rest who went earlier, that was because of your feet was it?**

Yeah.

**Was your feet ever going to threaten your army career?**

By rights I shouldn't have been in there I don't think. When the podiatrist seen it she wanted to take a photo of my feet and put it in the

01:00 podiatry news letter. I said, "No, I didn't want to make waves, I wanted to get over there". She fitted me out with arches because I had high arches and that and I had club feet, that's how I walked. They tried a few things but I could never ever get shoes, boots to fit me. It was only

01:30 a few years ago a podiatrist mentioned it, these are surgical shoes I'm wearing and one foot's size seven and a half and the other foot's eight. I never knew that. I got through.

**Was this foot problem from birth?**

They reckon it's hereditary but I can remember when I was small I was kicking cow pats, old dry ones and there was

02:00 a bit of wire in one of them and I got a piece jammed in. But I've got both feet and it was only one foot. Apparently it's hereditary, I've got a very broad foot. I persevered, kept going.

**Would it cause you pain going on long marches?**

Yeah, a lot of it. I get them done every month now if I can. DVA [Department of Veteran's Affairs] pays for that.

**I mean when you were going on some of these training exercises how much pain would you be in?**

02:30 A lot of pain but I never showed it. Otherwise you were weak. If you were tough enough, you were good enough. That was the attitude they taught us in the army from day one. Everything else physical I was quite good at

03:00 it was just long marches and long runs.

**What about at the end of a long march, what would you do once you could relax, would you have to massage them?**

I soaked them. Most of the time we had a lot of blisters, but after I got out of Kapooka I very seldom got a blister. I'd have one good shoe fits you properly, the other one wouldn't.

03:30 When I got the arches it made a big difference. I didn't get them until I got to Ingleburn and I went in and seen the podiatrist. Her name was Jessie Trotter, I can still remember that. How do you come to get a name like that for a podiatrist?

**Was there ever a threat that someone like Jessie Trotter**

04:00 **would put you out of the army for this?**

She could have done. If she'd have put it in the thing I don't think the army would have wanted to make waves because they had conscientious objectors. I loved the bloody army. It was good. I knew I was going overseas but I stayed there and when I come back to Canungra

04:30 I was mostly on the bloody grog nearly every night. They flew us out and landed at Singapore and then went straight over to ARU.

**Before we get there I just had a few more questions about being in the army. You mentioned earlier it was like a family for you, tell us about that.**

You had a lot of blokes and still maintain it today.

05:00 A bloke says he's going to do something and he usually does it. Some of them you get some bloody idiot but nearly all the infantry blokes were pretty good. You're sleeping in the same bloody hut and that with them. You shared everything. It was really good. Once you got accepted, even though I went over with a different mob I was soon accepted and all that. I had to go out

05:30 and go with them and I always pulled my weight. That's how they taught you. If a bloke was a dickhead, he was more or less on the out. We had one bloke was a thief and the blokes give him that many touch ups it wasn't funny, he couldn't help himself. If you wanted anything, anything missing you just go down, open his locker, it'd be there.

06:00 I never ever knew what happened to him.

**How was your mateships developing, were you making good mates?**

Yeah. Quite a few good mates. Where they went to after I left them there, when they flew out. Some of them ended up warrant officers and all that. I didn't get very far. I just wasn't confident I suppose.

06:30 I was no good on the parade ground because of my feet, I couldn't march properly. Out in the bush was a different matter.

**What about at this stage in training, were there any other Aboriginal blokes that you knew there?**

Didn't see any. Met a few of them, different units. Met one bloke there, he was a SAS [Special Air Services] fella. I flew over with him.

07:00 One of his cousins ended up in Charlie Company with us. He come over there, we got on best down in Sydney there and he was one of the Aboriginals got killed over there with SAS. Apparently, I don't know, I never heard the full story but what I heard was it was his own fault. They teach you in infantry you go out

07:30 one way and come back the same way or you come back into where people know you. You might go out another way but you come back where someone can recognize you. He had a bit of a contact [met the enemy] and I think he had to come back and he come back the wrong way and they just naturally thought it was someone else. I don't know what the full story of it was but it was pretty sad. He was a good mate, well, wasn't a mate but

08:00 I knew him.

**You mentioned the rest of the group went before you.**

Yeah and I run into them, a lot of them ended up in 1 Battalion. Some of them went to 3 Battalion. When we were in ARU it was more or less like a holding area. They acclimatized us, run the guts out of us there for couple of weeks until we'd sweat. We used to do TAOR

08:30 patrols [tactical area of responsibility patrols, perimeter patrols], go out and that was all of a night. We'd wipe ourselves out, get pissed.

**You mentioned before the conscientious objectors, what was your view of what was going on at the time, did you have much of an opinion on the Vietnam War at that stage?**

No. One of the conscientious objectors was

09:00 Darryl Somers [later a TV personality], he was over in Holsworthy boob [military prison] and then he complained about when they give him a hard time so they moved him over to Ingleburn and I used to guard him. I never, ever spoken to him or anything but they had a big protest march over there one day and the coppers were out there and they could pick the army blokes out because we had all short back and sides and all that. They

09:30 pointed out a few of the ring leaders, you know, "If they start anything, them's the blokes we head for". We had a few charges, it wouldn't have taken much but it was fairly peaceful. Right out in front of the boozier.

**Tell us about this job of guarding Darryl Somers.**

Oh it was just he come in and we was on guard there.

10:00 We might be doing round the area and we just had to make sure there was no one around or we'd be down the back with a magazine. Two hours on, four hours off. You didn't get to see much. I didn't speak to him or nothing.

**Where would they hold him?**

In the boob in the slot, just inside the gate, the guard room. When they had the demonstration he could stand on the chair or something and wave to them. That's the only time I got a look at him, we were

10:30 told not to go near him.

**How long would they hold the conscientious objectors?**

I don't know, I got shipped out, where he went to after that I don't know or what happened to him. He had his beliefs.

**What did you think of him or others which were doing this at the time?**

Same thing I look through at life,

11:00 if you want to fight you'll fight. If you don't want to fight you'll walk away. Just my attitude. I was trained to do something and I'll see it through. I just wasn't interested in them.

**Did you have any impressions of what kind of people were doing conscientious objections?**

No. When we was going through Kapooka

11:30 there, I don't know if he was a conscientious objector or not but some of them just would not try. Didn't want to do anything. A lot of simple things. I don't know what happened to him. I know a lot of them were trying to get discharged, the Nashos and that. They just didn't even try. I thought that was a bit weak. You can have a go.

12:00 Some of them they used to make them have a go. Where they went to I don't know after that.

**What about the mix of people, like from city and country?**

One bloke was nearly crying because he was from Western Australia and we were giving him a hard time. What were they "sand gropers"? Then there was the "crow eaters", South Australians and

12:30 the "cross country basketballers", they were from Victoria because there were rugby league and Aussie Rules all mixed up and somebody got upset about it. We used to just laugh at it, used to stir them up. Aussie rules, I never ever played Aussie rules but I loved watching it. But it was state against state until everyone mellowed in. After a while you forgot all about it.

13:00 Somebody'd come up and you might have a shot at him, "The only good thing out of Victoria is the road to bloody Queensland or New South Wales", something like that. I was mostly bought up on rugby league and that.

**What about the difference between say city raised and country, was that a factor?**

No. Sometimes we used to say, that's the trouble with the city blokes,

13:30 "You don't do this and you don't do that". I've always been taught to try and help people instead of putting shit on them.

**Speaking about the conscientious objectors and all that, what did you think about the protest movement before you went?**

"Rent a crowd" I called it. If you have a good look at some of the videos of different protests

14:00 you'll see that a lot of the same people there. It never worried me. If a bloke didn't want to.

**You didn't see what he was like, Darryl Somers or anything?**

No, he would have been a lot skinnier. I don't know how he ended up in bloody Holsworthy.

14:30 When you sit back and think about it, well that's his belief and it was just a lottery number that he got called up. Some of the blokes were regs with me, one fella while he was in, I think he was in Ingleburn, shows it's a bit joke, come out and said, "I got my national service call up here".

15:00 Just a bad roll of the dice. I never ever worried about it. As I said, if you wanted to have a go you have a go but if you don't. A lot of the Nashos when I was in Vietnam, I preferred them to the regs when I was second in command, when I got reinforcements. A lot of them used to get in and work, good workers. Most of a lot of the vets [veterans] there were only young fellas, only nineteen. They were a bit more mature, the Nashos.

15:30 Never ever seen a conscientious objector overseas or anything. Some of them I heard that they didn't want combat and the battalion made them medics and all that. Something that never worried me.

**So tell us about**

16:00 **after this, you got the news to fly out?**

Yeah. Put me on pre-embarkation leave and I come back up. No, seven days they give you leave and we flew out about eleven o'clock or something. All my family come down and see me. We landed in Singapore the next morning,

16:30 had breakfast. We had to wear a civvy [civilian] shirt because they reckoned they didn't want army uniforms. Everyone was wearing the same shoes and trousers and all of it's civvy shirts. It was a bit of a joke but we had a feed there and we flew on to Vietnam.

**What did your family think of you going?**

They were quite pleased. A war on. I don't think

17:00 my sisters understood it much.

**What did you get up to during that week?**

Just got pissed, played up. I used to travel all over Sydney. I think I was living in Paddington somewhere.

**What kind of places would you go out to?**

It wasn't too bad. When I was young, when I was in the army that's

17:30 when I first met my mate, another bloke, a civvy bloke and he showed me all the rockers and all that, all the dives [pubs]. That's where I used to just knock around there. Go there and end up at the Chevron Hotel. There was another one after I come back called Tiki Village, there was some good singers there. John Rawls used to sing there. Probably never heard of him have you.

18:00 I used to just sit there and look at him singing. He'd turn the microphone off. His voice just traveled. Apart from that, it went pretty quick.

**Then you were off on the plane.**

Yeah.

**Tell us what kind of expectations did you have of the place you were flying to?**

18:30 We heard a lot of stories and that but the first thing that hit me at Tan Son Nhut [airport, Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City] was heat. It was just opened our eyes up, see everyone walking around with bloody weapons and that. The Yanks dressed up in bloody big six guns. We didn't stay there very long, they just put us on a C124 [aircraft] flew us out

19:00 it was only about twenty minutes, they said, "There's Nui Dat" and next minute we were down on there. They just dropped, stomachs were still up in the bloody air. They put us on trucks and took us back over to ARU. They put us in tents and all that. Next day they started to run us, get the sweat out, sweat us and get us acclimatized.

19:30 We'd do guard duty. Probably go out on an overnight bloody TAOR patrol, ambush or something like that.

**First, how did you feel about actually going in to Vietnam yourself?**

It was a big joke for me. I was looking forward to it. It's

20:00 a big adventure, put it that way. Doing something that not many other fellas will do. I was going in to combat, a combat zone. I didn't know where I was going to end up because I was going over there as a reinforcement. I could have ended up anywhere. That was quite good. I run in to a lot of the boys that were still there, they hadn't been posted out.

20:30 I used to have a lot of the other battalions used to laugh at us running up and down the road there. Fifty or sixty blokes, no shirts on, sweating. Got used to it though. We'd go, get on the piss [drink a lot] that night. Got a bit confusing when we first went there,

21:00 what we'd been taught and what they expected us to do was just entirely different things. When we got to the battalion it was different again all together. The battalion had their own training ideas and you had to quickly adapt with different environments. That's just my point of view anyway.

21:30 It was hot, I know that. It was looking at a different culture. I'd been brought up with the Murriss, seeing the Vietnamese was a bit different. But I never ever got any contacts while I was at ARU which was good although they dropped a

22:00 bloody shell short on us one night, smothered everyone in rocks and bloody dust. That was just a malfunction with the round.

**So ARU, that's.**

Australian Reinforcement Unit.

**And that's the first place you went.**

Yeah. Sometimes a bloke would come and pick us up if they wanted a couple of guards, to go out with civil aid.

22:30 If they wanted a couple of shotguns, we called ourselves shotguns then, a fella'd go out there, I'd have an SLR [Self-Loading Rifle], he'd have a bloody M60 [machine gun] or something like that, we'd go out and sit in the back of the Land Rover or something, go out to different villages. Things like that. Sometimes we'd do a "cordon and search", they'd take us out. Did lose one of my mates there though. We done a cordon and search,

23:00 I flew over with both of them and one week it rained and they said, "Clean your weapons and soon as we get back". One fella cleaned his weapon and I still don't know why he put his magazine on and

cocked it, pulled the trigger and a fella across writing a letter copped it in the head. He only lasted a couple of hours. That shook us up a bit. Not as much as the bloke that pulled the trigger though,

23:30 he just went out of his tree [became mentally upset] after a while. He was a cook, transferred over to infantry. Never found out what happened to him.

**How did he go out of his tree, what did he do?**

He just refused to touch a weapon. He was a cook by trade so that's where he went back, to the kitchen.

24:00 The ARU some of the staff, what really pissed me off was an M60, you could have an AD [Accidental Discharge] very easy with a cock in it and the sears used to get worn. My mate had it, he got twenty eight days field punishment and twenty eight days loss of pay and they ended up taking him to court marshal

24:30 and I think he got out of it. The CSM [Company Sergeant Major] wasn't as far as I know wasn't a combat CSM but he got up and told the OC, the officer commanding, he said, "That never happens". He found out it does happen quite a bit. They seem to think when they got up there

25:00 they were more or less bloody God. It was a different kettle of fish when we got to the battalion, this was only just a holding unit and the OC, I don't know where he'd come from or what he'd done or seen but he come out with a nine mil [millimetre gun] on one side of him and a K-bar knife on the other and thought he was bloody Rambo [action hero from film] I think. That one, a couple of little things like that

25:30 did piss me off.

**The ARU, what kind of mix of men are they, where did they come from as a reinforcement unit?**

Mostly they were like say RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] or anything like they would have, they might stay there for a night or something like that and then they put them back in the unit but infantry you had to wait there and wait for a medic to come in but sometimes the medics, they'd ship them straight out,

26:00 all depends on different corps. We had a lot of Kiwis [New Zealanders] there with us and they ended up in Whisky and Victor Company. Quite good, met quite a few of them there. After I left there one of the blokes I flew over with him too, he was out doing a TAOR, wanted to go out

26:30 have a shit and he come back in and I don't know this bloke was on a bloody, he had an SLR, I don't know if he woke up all of a sudden, I still don't know what the story was but he put about six bloody rounds in him. He only lasted about twenty minutes. He just walked outside, telling him he was going to be out there, this was in the dark, that's the story I heard

27:00 whether it's true or not.

**So he shot his own?**

Shot one of his own blokes.

**Just because he didn't know?**

He didn't say anything, no one told him there was anyone out there. It was in the dark and didn't know who it was. It's just life.

**Was this on a patrol?**

Yeah it was on a TAOR patrol.

27:30 They reckon another bloke was sitting down there, rigging up a claymore [mine] and I don't know, they reckon it was underneath power lines, never got the full story of it, it went up and they picked him up in a sand bag. There was a couple of accidents over there but there was only the one with Jock Mitchell, old JC

28:00 and I never ever seen him again, JC but Jock, they buried him in Malaya.

**So tell us about these patrols, the very first ones in the ARU?**

We'd go out and just recce [reconnoitre]. We could go out and we might have what you call a listening post, have a radio, go out so many paces, they always had someone there

28:30 that could call in artillery. We could all call in artillery but we had your DFs [Direct Fire artillery]. We were always in contact with Nui Dat, sometimes we might go out. We were always under, we'd never go out any further than the artillery would let us, always had fire on call. We got caught one time.

29:00 We went right out and we had the 155 [Howitzer artillery battery] was supposed to be covering anyway I think one of the battalions was on operation up north of us, they had to call in the 155 so they couldn't protect us so we had to race back. That was the first time I ever seen where Long Tan was fought. We

come back, I think we done about three clicks [kilometres]

29:30 very fast. That was in the middle of summer.

**What had you come in to contact with the enemy at this stage?**

No, I seen a lot of locals and that but you didn't know who you were fighting. A lot of people were out gathering food and that during the day.

30:00 Sometimes the blokes would bring them back in, blindfold them. I think some of them went two or three times, they knew the bloody drill. I never seen any enemy or anything like that, not until I got to the battalion.

**Tell us about these first impressions you had of the local villages and local people.**

Never, I felt superior, the way

30:30 we were trained up and they're walking around with a bloody hose although we heard a lot of stories. "Clark Kent in the day time, Superman at night". That's the way they were described to us. But you see kids and that running around there. Whether they were good or bad I would not know, whether they were Viet Cong I would not know. Sometimes out in the free fire

31:00 zone if we'd have seen any of them out there we probably would have zapped them.

**What kind of impressions did you have of the place just as a place to land?**

I liked it because the land, you could grow anything there but that's when they were starting to put in bloody Agent Orange [herbicide used to defoliate the countryside]. We used to lay down there of an afternoon and see the planes going

31:30 over with all this bloody stuff coming out. We didn't know then, we didn't know what it was coming out. It was beautiful, the soil was beautiful over there. Nice rich red, some places real chocolate. That was the first impression I got, you could grow anything there. That was more or less what I was looking for.

32:00 When you look around you'd see some of the way they used to live. Some of them weren't much bloody better than the Murriss back home but then again that wasn't their fault, more or less I'd say it was our fault. First time I run in to a contact, in a battalion. The ones that suffered were the bloody kids. You see the kids, little babies. That's something that

32:30 pissed me off, I was a bit upset about it. That's their home and we're shooting shit out of it. You just had to take it as it comes.

**When you first got there and you're seeing these developing country kind of villages and stuff.**

We very seldom went near villages.

33:00 Only in a cordon and search. Sometimes when we were doing some of the shotguns, that was quite interesting. First time I went out there I seen this sheila [woman] and I said, "Hello, someone's smacked her in the mouth" and the driver said, "No, she's eating berry" betel nut juice. That turned me off a little bit. Some of the

33:30 we used to go out to deliver some stuff out some of the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] outposts. We'd take vegetables and all that out. That upset me a little bit too, they'd know we'd come in with fruit and vegetables and all that, a bloke I went through rookie training with, he was there and him and Jock and it was just like

34:00 back at school again, all the women are standing round waiting and he said, "No, just leave it", and they'd get everything together and then he'd let them go through and they were all fighting over bloody jack fruit and that. A lot of language. You never seemed to realize, you see all the signs around there in the places like you used to go down, go through

34:30 Baria to get out to Phuoc Tuy, Dat Do and that, you see all the bloody big bullet marks on the buildings and that, there's somebody shooting. It never really hit me until I got down Long Dien I think it was, Dat Do, I'm not too sure, one of them and they hit us with three little two-inch mortars. First one landed behind us, second one in front of us and right

35:00 in front of company headquarters. Some of the blokes got hit. That's when I patched up my first fella, he got hit in the arm. He was the MFC [Mortar Forward Controller], started to wake up then that, "Hey, they mean business here".

**We'll come to that later, we'll just talk a bit more about being in the ARU, did it seem like a mix of all sorts at this stage or where they pretty much feel like**

35:30 **an infantry battalion itself?**

Well it was nearly all infantry. We all had the same training, we all knew what to do if the shit hit the fan. But when you went back in there you just went and grabbed your tucker, sat down or you go into the boozier, grabbed the beer. It was only ten cents a can then. It was all VB [Victoria Bitter] mostly.

- 36:00 There was no discrimination, sit down, talk to other blokes, ask them what they do, "Oh, I went out on TAOR patrol, didn't see anything". Sometimes we'd get lectures, do a lot of first aid and all that, meet other fellas from Kiwi and all that because they were waiting there
- 36:30 for themselves to go out. I think it was 2 Battalion or 4 Battalion I'm not sure. It was a big thing for them, to get out, same as us. A bit apprehensive first up. You don't know what you're heading in to. We were still up in the air, we didn't know whether we were going to 3 Battalion, 4 Battalion or bloody 1 Battalion.
- 37:00 When we found out we settled down after that.
- Where were you to be posted?**
- 1 Battalion.
- How long were you in the ARU before?**
- About four or five weeks I think. There was some regs went over there and a couple of Nashos.
- 37:30 A lot of us ended up in Charlie Company. They had one bloke from ARU and we got there and were sitting outside the battalion headquarters waiting for somebody to take us down there and a fella come out, "Any of you's can type?" and one fella said, "Yeah" and he goes, "What are you like at typing?" and he goes, "About eighty words a minute. I worked for telecom". He ended up in BHQ, battalion headquarters because he could type.
- 38:00 He was a touch typist. Rest of us we [(UNCLEAR)] get our company. We had to wait until they sent us out. Anymore about ARU or anything?
- No, we'll talk about moving on to 1RAR.**
- Funny we got out there, they put us in 7 Platoon, me and Kevin and Billy Lang.
- 38:30 They flew us out, it was an operation called Platypus. We gets out there and it's stinking hot and we're out in the middle of nowhere, it's a fire support base. They said go over to pioneers and as soon as we get over there they said, "Right the first thing you've got to do is dig a shell scrape". It didn't worry us, we got in there,
- 39:00 dug the thing, next minute a voice said, "You boys are in the wrong position, you've got to be two foot to the right of that, so he threw the shovel down, said, "Yeah, righto then", and he was going to get out and start filling it in again and move it over and he started laughing, it was the battalion padre [priest], he was only having a shot at us.
- What was it like to come into?**
- 39:30 Strange. There was a big contact up there that's where a couple of my mates, I got to know them real well, one bloke's still here, another bloke's still down at Bowen there but he got wounded.

## Tape 4

- 00:37 **I just wanted to go back just a bit, before you left and you knew you that you were about to be deployed what kind of briefings were you given about what was happening in Vietnam?**
- They told us a lot about, they lectured us a lot about the religion and that,
- 01:00 and different things. They had Catholic, they had Cao Dai and Buddhism and we had to respect all religions, we didn't care what, treat them with respect, the monks and all that, any of the churches and that. A lot on malaria and all that, we had to take Paladrin every day
- 01:30 and other diseases you can get in there. A lot about the women and that, "Just keep away from them" and all that. When I sit back and think about it over the years they only wanted you to go over there and fight, that was all. You weren't allowed to socialize or anything.
- 02:00 Most of it was first aid. We done a hell of a lot of first aid. Mostly, a lot of the diseases, "Watch the rats" and that, get the diseases, what they do in the leaves and that, care for the water. We used to have our own tablets
- 02:30 to put in drinking water and that. That's when we were out in the bush. That's most of it I think.
- What did they tell you about the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the VC?**
- Oh yeah, booby traps was another one they did emphasis a hell of a lot. I never seen any. I don't think I seen one

- 03:00 booby trap. They psyched us up that Charlie [Viet Cong] was, the impression I got, I had a big argument with one of the officers I thought later on they were made out that, "Charlie was this and Charlie was that". They didn't say much about the NVA.
- 03:30 I didn't know much about them myself until I run in to them. A different kettle of fish for these fellas. It was mostly just all about the locals. As I said, "Clark Kent in the daytime, Superman at night". They did wise us up to the kids and that, what they can do and what they have done. They'd get
- 04:00 insulation tape, wrap it round a grenade, round the trigger, pull the pin out and chuck it down a petrol tank and when you're down the road it can go off. I don't know whether it happened or not. Mines and that on the road. They teach you how to look for gear
- 04:30 in a cordon and search, what to look for.

**Because you went over 1967, 1968, is that right?**

Yeah.

**Did you see guys coming back?**

No, 1968, 1969, I come back 1969.

**So did you see guys that had come back earlier then?**

Yeah, a couple of blokes I was with in Ingleburn. Two of them we used to go out and

- 05:00 do a lot of work parties with each other. I don't know what happened, I can still remember Hinds, he was a very active man, always laughing and joking, he used to stand out in a platoon or anything like that, there was a crowd around him with his voice and all that. There was an accident at ARU I don't know whether the other fella that done it tripped over or not but
- 05:30 a bloody M16 [gun] went off and he copped it right up through the lungs and that. He's still alive. He was then. The other fella, he was hit in the arm but he wasn't over there very long either. That's one of the reasons I didn't like the ARU too much.

**Because of the accidents?**

Yeah. There was no professionalism there as far as I could see.

- 06:00 When you got out to the battalions they were professional.

**So you mentioned some of the recces you did with ARU what other activities did you have to do with them?**

Mostly guard duty. As I said, we done a lot of shotgun work, civil aid they'd come down, grab a couple of blokes and we'd go out. We seen a lot of Phuoc Tuy Province like that, I did

- 06:30 anyway. We'd go out, some of the blokes were funny, the first time we went out we had two interpreters with us. We pulled up at some junction and next minute they jumped out of the wagon and got down behind this bloody bund wall in the rice paddy. I said, "What are you doing down there?" and he said, "Snipers". We didn't see any there but we joined them.
- 07:00 It was a bit of an eye opener. Sometimes went right out, with civil aid there was teachers there, there was builders there and we used to go out and we just had to stand around and make sure nothing happened to them, that was about all. It was just a swan most of the time, just a look around.
- 07:30 Apart from that, it was general. TAOR, come back, have to do duty, couldn't drink or anything. You go round waking blokes up in the middle of the night. They'd be under the mosquito net so you had to kick the bed.
- 08:00 The ARU had a lot to account for. Some of the things went on there. Even when you left there and went to a battalion they sent you straight to another unit [(UNCLEAR)] back to ARU.

**So what was that transitional**

- 08:30 **period like, going in to 1RAR?**

A lot different. Where we were all hyped and ready to do this and do that but what we'd been taught more or less from day one, we were expecting Charlie to jump out anywhere and when we went out bush sometimes we didn't see him for weeks or something. When we ended up in the fire support base, only went out for one night

- 09:00 and there was one bloke I ended up we went out there just for the night and then come back with them the next day because they flew us back out but the night before I got there one of the blokes was on the machine gun and about midnight Charlie come down the road, this fella opened up on him, must have hit him in the stomach because

- 09:30 it took him the rest of the night to die. After that, he was no good. As soon as the dark come. When I got

back and they asked me to do platoon medic I had to carry terror packs round to give to him of a night so he could calm him down. We tried to get him off our books [shift him] because we couldn't take him bush. Then again I don't blame him, listening to someone

10:00 moaning and groaning out the front of you, about twenty foot away.

**How did you find fitting in with them?**

Pretty good. They accepted me because I was a platoon medic then. The other platoon medic he was going up to do the batman's job [be an officer's servant].

**When you first joined up?**

When I joined, that was his last operation as platoon medic and when he come back he moved up to

10:30 the batman's job with the OC [Officer Commanding], Digger Campbell. He just handed me the medical kit. I used to carry shell dressings, morphine and all that, cream. I'd go up and have a bit of a yarn to the company medic. I just sat there and that's how I got to know nearly all of them. There was blokes since then I've met

11:00 and they say, "Which company were you in?". They say "I was in Charlie" and I was in B and didn't even know him. You mostly stuck to the same mob all the time.

**So when you first joined up with 1RAR, did it take long to fit in?**

No, pretty good, no hassles about that

11:30 and neither did the other blokes. When they found out I was a fairly good drinker and all that, they accepted me. They didn't question me or anything.

**So if they found out you were a pretty good drinker, were there kind of initiation type?**

Yeah.

**Tell us about that.**

I don't know, you just sit down and have a beer with them.

12:00 I got on quite good with them. One bloke, I still ring him up. A couple of them, one down at Umina and the other one down in Tamworth. The one down at Innamar, he come in as a reo [replacement], the other fella was one of the originals, went over with 1 Battalion and come back with 1. I still ring him up and find out how he's going.

12:30 I had no hassles with them, no discrimination or anything. As I said, I went over there as an Australian soldier not as an Australian Aboriginal and they took me on value, on what I could do. I was just a medic. Sometimes they called me "headquarters wallah" [wallah means an employee] or something like that, didn't worry me.

13:00 When we used to go out, I'd make sure they was all right.

**I guess they had been there for a while.**

Oh yeah.

**And they would be really tight, so having someone come in to that?**

Yeah, I run in to one bloke and he said to me, "I don't remember you, I got burned at [Fire Support Base] Coral" and I said, "I come in after Coral, I was a reinforcement". "I know what you mean mate", because

13:30 my hands were getting tired from shaking hands with the new fella and waving goodbye to the other blokes. We got the shit shot out of us. I forget how many blokes went from just one platoon. Used to cop a fair bit. After the first contact they were hit and I looked after them.

**So how long was it**

14:00 **from when you first joined the 1RAR between when you were offered to be the medic?**

I landed in one day in 7 Platoon, we stayed the night, come back out of the scrub, flew out and landed back in camp at Nui Dat and the platoon sergeant said to me, "Would you go platoon medic because I haven't got one" and I said, "It doesn't worry me where I go mate" and that's

14:30 where I ended up.

**Why do you think he picked you?**

All the other blokes were already in sections and I don't think any of them wanted to do it. They all had their own jobs and I was the new fella and because he didn't want to ask the other two boys because they were both big boys and he was short, a machine gunner. The big boys can carry the machine guns.

Three of us marched in there the same day.

15:00 He said, "You don't mind going medic for me" and I said "No mate, there's nothing else going, I'll do it". I think the sections were pretty full up 'til then. I think he had three sections then in the platoon. Two of them they both went to, carried a machine gun and I just went platoon medic and

15:30 I was in platoon headquarters with him nearly all the time. He give me a lot of what to do. I had to go and have a yarn with the company medic and all that. We just made sure I had to carry about nine tubes of morphine with me and sometimes about half a dozen big shell dressings

16:00 and a lot of the blokes carried their own shell dressings, it was good, they usually had them on them. Oakey used to just, I got on excellent with him. All we had was a radio operator and him, we didn't have and a platoon commander at the time, a lieutenant, an officer. He used to run, they were going through that many people.

16:30 I went down that was not long after that we went down to Dat Do I think it was or Long Dien or some bloody thing. B Company pushed Charlie out and we blocked them off and that's when I first started to patch the blokes up. I patched up first up

17:00 Phil Thomson and he started off Veterans Council, Vietnam Veteran's but he's died since of cancer.

**So when your platoon sergeant offered you to go off and be the medic were you feeling a little bit apprehensive, you had first aid training but did you feel that that was going to be adequate?**

Yeah I was in platoon headquarters. I didn't have to, a lot of it

17:30 conniving on my part, I didn't have to go out and do TAOR patrols and that, but I still had to do picket on the radio of a night. I didn't have to go out and do, sometimes I went out and if they had to do a standard patrol or something like that sometimes I might have to go out and do one of them. I had it fairly easy in the platoon headquarters but I learnt a hell of a lot there,

18:00 tactics and all that and how the platoon sergeant thinks and all that. You soon pick it up. In the end I could bloody near anticipate him. That's why I think he liked me because he ended up making me 2IC [Second in Command] of one of the sections. It was quite good.

**So talk us through a daily routine at**

18:30 **platoon headquarters as medic.**

As medic, I'd just get up, we had a batman there and sometimes if he wasn't, that was for the officer but when Oakey was there sometimes I'd make him his brew in the morning because he'd be out checking everything, see the sections were doing okay and if I had to cook him a meal, I'd cook a meal for him, same as the radio operator. We all kicked in, helped each other.

19:00 One bloke was over there a pretty long time, a radio operator and he knew a hell of a lot. He come from 7 Battalion and stayed behind an extra six months. We just got on pretty good, split everything up, if we were going out bush. Him being the radio operator they'd give him half a dozen batteries so we'd split it around platoon headquarters or give one to a section, make them carry it.

19:30 I used to carry a couple. In the end I was carrying bloody claymores and everything to help the sections out.

**So you're at headquarters all day, was there a sense of when the rest of them would get back after being on patrol and using the term on the frontline as such, was there, did you feel a bit excluded**

20:00 **because you weren't there, you hadn't witnessed what they'd witnessed or experienced?**

No, they'd come back and they'd tell us. Besides, I was a good source of information, being next to the radio operator. You know, "What's going on now Jack?" Sometimes I'd tell them, sometimes I wouldn't, it all depends.

**What were the sorts of things were you hearing on the radio?**

Where we're going. Might here, sometimes of a night time, someone might have

20:30 sprung an ambush way out somewhere and you'd be on the radio and you could listen in to it on the net. When the boys wake up in the morning they'd say, "We heard there was a contact" and you could say, "Oh yeah, that was D Company or B Company, I think they got one or two kills" or something like that. Just little things like that. I think they appreciate it, had a rough idea what was going on. That was about

21:00 communications was a big thing in the battalion. Tried to be. "Which way are we going next?" Most of the time they had a resup [resupply], the platoon sergeant was supposed to do that but he'd be with the platoon commander and whoever, sometimes I'd get up and go out and split up all the rations, "This is

what

21:30 you fellas are taking” and what section’s taking that, give them their food and all that, water resup. I’d go round and help them all. If there was wires to put up, concertina in the fire support base out, go out and give them a hand. Apart from that, took things as it comes.

22:00 **What kind of interaction did you have with the locals?**

Very seldom see them, if you were on R&C [Rest and Care] or something like that, end up in the bar. When you were in the battalion hardly ever see any locals. No, got on quite good, if anyone

22:30 had a temperature, anything I couldn’t handle as a medic, straight to the company medic. Send them out, tell him what he’s got to do and all that. You had to keep your eye on him, especially if you went through a big heap of bushes, swamp or something like that, pull him up and say, “Hey, think you’d better do FFI, [“free from infection” check] and they’d

23:00 roll up their trousers and you’re find leeches and that on them.

**What would you say the most common wounds were?**

Tinea, very bad. Used to put this purple stuff on it, I don’t know what they called it. It’d sting going on but it’d be from here right down the legs, just covered in bloody tinea.

23:30 I’d say ring tinea, I don’t know, I’d say it was more or less like a bloody ring worm myself. I was brought up if you had ringworm you’d do it with Mercurachrome or something. Rash was another one, a lot of blokes get cramps and that too. Some blokes scratch themselves

24:00 you wouldn’t use shell dresses, we had air splints and that too if anyone broke their arm, roll it out. Something I was a bit disappointed, I never seen after I come back from Vietnam, they were really good. You put them on your arms. I done Phil up and he hit an artery in there and put the shell dressing on, put the

24:30 air splint on, zipped it up and blew it up and it stopped bleeding. I’d say a very good idea.

**So on the last tape we were talking about Operation Platypus, I think you kind of started on that, do you want to tell us a bit more about that?**

25:00 Well apparently they had a big bunker system, they tried to take it out. I don’t know, for some unknown reason they pulled them out but they ran in to a claymore. There was one bloke killed in it and about six or seven wounded, nearly wiped the section out. That’s when the bloke come out fighting first. I’ve spoken to

25:30 the bloke that got wounded and the bloke that pulled him out and this other fella claimed he did all that. Same happened to me, I’ll tell you that later on. That fella still believes that he done that and he was nowhere near it, probably about three hundred yards behind him. Why he said it I don’t know. There was, I don’t know if it was the same time but the same bloke

26:00 he wrote up and said, “He done this, he done that”, another fella read it and said, “He didn’t do, I did it”, and he got very upset about it, he won’t go to a reunion. They’ve been trying to get it all sorted out over the years. Quite a few things happened. I call them wannabes.

**We might go in to that in a bit more detail later on, I just wanted to get some more information about operation Platypus, so you went with them instead of staying at headquarters?**

26:30 Yes the fire support base, they sent us out and I thought we were going to be out a couple more days, I had about three or four days’ rations. They said after they had the big contact with B Company, they got them all out and they pulled them back and Charlie Company was the blocking force and they ran in to that other Charlie, blew him away and they made the decision to pull the whole battalion back and

27:00 flew us out. They bought in B52s bombers I think the next day, something like that, next night. It was a big bunker system. They had a lot of secondary explosions after the bombs went. Some of them, I don’t know what size bombs they hit them with but they used to put big craters down. Some of them ten, fifteen foot deep.

27:30 That was my first time with the battalion. Then we come back. I think there was another incident there, the APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier] ran over a mine and one bloke got killed in that too I think, going up the Firestone Trail. Not too sure on that one but I think one of the blokes got killed and another one had diesel on [him] so they bought him back, washed him down and sent him back out again.

28:00 I don’t know, just get him back, the shock, break him out of it.

**As the platoon medic, what kind of, in preparation for the operation, what kind of supplies did you take with yourself?**

Deep heat, that purple bloody paint.

**What kind of quantities as well.**

Probably only one or two tubes or something like that.

28:30 A tube I think because that'd probably, if I wanted something all I had to do was just go and ask for a resup. I'd see the platoon commander and he'd ring up company headquarters and say, "Jack wants", might be Deep Heat or something like that, that way when we get the next resup I'd have it. Sometimes you'd go out

29:00 and you wouldn't see the rest of the company for a couple of days or something like that. Sometimes you'd be with them all the time. Most of the time we worked with companies. Sometimes we'd work in the fire support base and we'd do patrols out from that. If I wanted anything, most of the stuff I used to get while I was back in camp if I went out. If I knew I was going out

29:30 I'd make sure I'd have about six shell dressings, always counted my morphine. I'd have little stuff, sticking plaster for a scratch or anything like that.

**Were you pretty busy through that operation?**

No, just more or less following the crowd.

**Did you have to carry all that stuff by yourself?**

Yeah. I had an A frame.

30:00 They used to put the radio on it and I had the pack underneath it. I was lucky, I didn't have a radio but I put another pack in the top of it, put extra gear in it. I'd go out there about eighty, ninety pound on your back plus you still had your webbing on and that was seven mags of 7.62 and an SLR, two hand grenades and two smoke [grenades]. On your webbing used to carry

30:30 two water bottles but we soon learned to carry extra ones and put them on the pack because that's one of the heaviest things you carry, water.

**How did you find the gear holding up?**

We had a pretty good CQ [Company Quartermaster], anything we wanted renewed we got it done straight away. Some of the other, rest of the battalion, some of them were really good, some of them were really bad.

31:00 You couldn't get anything out of them. I know one officer went down there and grabbed the Q store [quartermasters store] sergeant or whatever he was by the throat and threatened to punch his head in if he didn't give the blokes new boots. He got the new boots but our blokes were pretty good if we wanted anything. What we used to do was we'd get our greens

31:30 and they used to put, they called it mosquito repellent for mites and all that, chew through anything it would. We'd put two pairs, one pair of trousers, shirt and socks in the kit bag and it would be marked, might be platoon headquarters. After say six or seven days out there we'd

32:00 get a change of clothes. We might be near a creek, something like that, have a bit of a foot tub. The socks what we used to do, some used to carry socks with me, sometimes change of clothes, you got wet in the wet season but most of the time we turned the socks inside out and put them back on again. It was a game with the Q staff and the battalion, standing orders and that, You had to

32:30 carry certain things. Webbing was good. You had to be able to carry all your gear and it was pretty well standard. There was no fancy stuff. Sometimes someone would carry a bayonet but most of the time we all carried a machete. I used to strap my machete and that to my big pack

33:00 because when you're going along and you have to do anything you drop your gear, you've still got your webbing on and you go and do it and you didn't have that extra weight. Always take your machete with you, clean it up of a night. Sometimes we'd have an entrenching tool but most of the time we carried one because we had to dig in of a night. Of a night everything was pretty routine.

33:30 They'd go in, they'd put you down and say, "Dig a pit here". That was good being in platoon headquarters I new where all the machine guns and that were, we usually had three of them out.

**What kind of area would they pick?**

Sometimes it'd be up high, on a hill, a knob, something like that, sometimes might be, "Go in to the scrub" and that. If there was any bamboo we'd try and find it.

34:00 Some places was hilly and some places flat.

**Did you manage to get much sleep?**

No, pretty well broke when you're woken up two hours to sit on the radio. I could, for some unknown reason I could lay there when I wasn't going out on the guard where the other fellas were, they had to

be alert all the time, I could lay there and I could doze off and, "Two Charlie one", as soon as I heard that,

34:30 I knew that was me. "Three Charlie one" I think, I forget now. As soon as your call sign, it seemed to be in the back of your memory and you could hear it. You'd be awake and answer it sometimes every hour they'd give you a

35:00 radio check on the hour. You had to come in, wait your turn for the rest of the battalion, then you had your company one. Most of the time the battalion one we very seldom got on to but you had three platoons out there and they all had to come in in sequence, 7 Platoon, 8 Platoon and 9 Platoon. You say, "OK" or sometimes they might send what they call

35:30 sit rep [situation report] through and sometimes it'd be on code and you had to write it all down. If it got too big you'd get the radio operator, it was his job. I'd cook tea for whoever wanted it, corn beef and curried rice. We had a lot of good stuff over there, a lot of Yank [American] rations and that

36:00 was a bit different to ours.

**Speaking of the Yank rations, did you come in contact with the Yanks much?**

No, very seldom. One fire support base there we got them out there and they carted a lot of the concertina wire and that for us otherwise we would have had to cart it in little wagons there. They done a clearing patrol for us and they just opened up with everything, 155.

36:30 Anything in there, the first hundred yards was rat shit, fifty cal [calibre]. They said, "That's how they do a clearing patrol", where we'd go out another gun and come back on our own, we'd go out and sweep the area. That's how they used to do it, just clear the area.

**What did you think of that?**

Gung ho [aggressive]. They had plenty of ammunition. It was a bit of a spectacle

37:00 but they just did things different to us. In platoon headquarters I found it fairly easy. As I said, headquarter wallah. When they wanted me I was there.

**Were there on going jokes about the Yanks within the platoon?**

No. They had a different view of the war than what we did. Never had much to do with them, the only thing I liked a lot, some people they didn't like them but when we had dust offs [medical evacuation helicopters], aerial ambulance. Where the Australians

38:00 were a bit wary coming in, the Yanks they'd come down in a couple of places and got our blokes out. That was something I really liked about them. I'd buy them a drink any time. They'd come down, if there was leaves around they'd chop the bloody leaves out with their rotors and never seen it. One bloke got hit. Australians were a bit wary.

38:30 I don't know. Australian policy with equipment and all that was very fragile I reckon, as far as I was concerned.

**How do you mean fragile?**

Well they wouldn't get rid of anything. One bloke, Broderick, I was trying to think of Brian's name, he got up there and I think when Prime Minister John Gorton went over there, he said, "Any complaints?" and Brian Broderick said, "Yeah"

39:00 and they said, "What is it?" and he said, "I was here in 1965 in the first trip and we're still using the same bloody machine guns. I think they might be a bit worn out". He got in a lot of shit over it but we got new machine guns.

**In your opinion were they worn out, the machine guns?**

Yeah. They done twelve months there, went back, done all the training there, come back, they done Coral, getting worn out.

39:30 I wasn't at Coral but I think they used a fair bit of ammunition. That's just the government's attitude. They went over there with leather boots first up, they ended up with GPs [General Purpose boots]. When we first got in the army, anyone seen with GPs, "Oh gee, how'd he get them?" We had to wear hobnails [hobnail boots]. Little things. They didn't have enough decent pack to cart your bloody gear in.

40:00 Things like that.

## Tape 5

00:35 **We were just talking about this Platypus operation, tell us how were you taken in, you didn't**

**go out with the platoon?**

No, well, they took me out, I think we went out by truck, APC and they just dropped me off and you had to walk in off the Firestone Trail.

**What, by yourself?**

01:00 No, they were just there on the other side. Just went and hootchied up [made camp] for the night, put us anywhere. That's when I heard about Macca getting a kill the night before. When the bloke took all night to die, set him off.

**Tell us what exactly happened with Macca. You were there or this was before?**

01:30 It happened before I got there.

**Who was Macca again?**

Just one of the blokes in the section. He fired, opened up the machine gun, got him and the bloke took all night to die. I don't know what time he hit him or anything but it played on his mind as soon as dark comes.

**The bloke he hit, the VC?**

Yeah,

02:00 he just walked up the track and, "Bang". From what I can understand he just laid there all night moaning and groaning, didn't die until early morning. That played on Macca's mind I think for the rest of the time. Apparently he's still around but haven't seen him.

**So you didn't hear this VC?**

No I didn't hear,

02:30 didn't even see him. They went in, they'd had a contact the day before and a bloke got hit with a 45 calibre in the leg and shattered all his leg here. Another fella raced up and patched him up. I forget who got hit or anything.

03:00 It was 7 Battalion. I don't know if any of the other battalions but 5 Battalion got hit the day before that very bad.

**So when you went in there what were the first things you had to do?**

They just said wait over there. I knew one of the blokes in there, in the company. He was in a different platoon.

03:30 **You didn't have any immediate tasks of fixing any one up?**

No. I wasn't even a medic then. I was just a rifleman going in as a replacement. I didn't find out I was going to be a medic until I got back to camp.

**So did you face any contacts once you got in there to Platypus yourself?**

No mate, no. It's all hearsay, the blokes and that.

**Did you see any of the blokes**

04:00 **being taken out who were hit?**

No, just heard it on the radio, APCs and all that had all the coms [communications], they carried a fair amount of radio gear.

**They just wound up and you had to go back to camp.**

Yeah. That's when he asked me to be platoon medic and I said, "Yeah, I'll do it" and that was it.

**You talked a bit**

04:30 **that you were based at HQ. Platoon headquarters.**

**But did you still have to go out on patrol as a medic?**

Sometimes I went out as an extra man. Mostly if they were going out on a big ambush or something like that I'd probably go with them

05:00 but we was all trained up on radios and all that even before I got to Vietnam. We did codes and all that.

**So if you were to go out on an ambush would you be mainly a medic or mainly rifleman?**

I'd probably be a medic and where the radio was. You'd be behind, could go anywhere. Apart from that

05:30 just normal standard things.

**Did you know exactly what to do in a given situation if men were hit with shrapnel, bullets?**

I was told, "All first aid was ten per cent knowledge and ninety per cent common sense". All I had to do was just stop the bleeding and try to get them back. If they were in bad,

06:00 another operation later on I had to use that, just patch blokes up.

**Maybe we'll talk about that now actually.**

Well we got them on the Firestone Trail, we got a resup and there was a couple of new march-ins. We just had a resup

06:30 anyway A Company had a contact so we just packed up all our gear and moved on near this track. I was feeling pretty crook that day, I still remember it. That was first turned me off a lot there too, there was a couple of VC walked down the track. Anyway, they two new fellas was there and they opened up on them. They got two of them.

07:00 Anyway they done a sweep and one of the blokes sung out, "There's wounded here". So I raced up there and his bloody guts blown out, there was nothing I could have done to save him. Anyway this voice at the back, "I don't want bloody wounded, I want bodies", it come from the boss of the company.

07:30 The bloke just pushed me aside and zap, fixed that problem. That's one thing I used to often think about. I knew there was nothing I could do about it but being the medic, the instinct is just to try and do the best you can even though he wasn't one of ours. They just claimed two kills.

**08:00 Why would the commander want that or order that?**

You tell me and we'll both know. He was pretty highly decorated, a couple of MCs [Military Crosses] and bar [repeat award]. If he ever sees this movie he'll know who I was talking about it. I hope he does. But the blokes

08:30 that initiated the contact, we moved out of there and we went and camped about four or five hundred yards up the track, it wasn't up the track, through the J [jungle] and we camped there the night and next morning we got up. We pulled up for a smoke or something,

09:00 right on this track, didn't know what was going on. I was in platoon headquarters and we didn't have our platoon sergeant or platoon commander there, old Blue was running it and next minute one of our section opened up and got one of the VC, walked down and they said, "Righto, we'll do a sweep".

09:30 Everyone stretched out in a line and just walked up. I think at one point my mate, he's here in Townsville here somewhere. He said, "I timed it, it was about one point five fifty seconds", they opened up right around and just before that we was walking up there and the MFC said, "Spread out, if they open up they'll get us".

10:00 Anyway they opened up and I just dropped. The radio operator because he had all his gear and the radio, he dropped back and leant against a tree and moved over on his side. I just happened to look up, must have been about a fifty cal I think because it chopped the tree in two. He would have copped it right through the chest. That's when the shit hit the fan. After they stopped they said, "Blue's hit" and I thought it was our platoon sergeant.

10:30 So I went over there and he said, "No, not me" and it was Barry "Bluey" Collins, that's the fella that was in that paper there, he was the one who'd only just been in the country about four or five weeks. He only just joined us two days before. He said, "Vince's hit" over there. I just went over and said, "You hit?" and he said, "Yeah".

11:00 Hit in the hand. I said to him, "I'm the black medic, I'll fix you up mate, I'm here to patch you up". I put a shell dressing on him and I said, "I'll put a shell dressing on you, head back". That's when he said to me, "Hey Jack, when you see the cowboy movies, they shoot the gun out of your hand, they just drop the gun. I got hit in the bloody hand mate and I still can't find my rifle".

11:30 I can still remember that. I told him, he said, "I remember that too, you've got a good memory". Then I went over and I fixed up Vince Nissan. He got hit in the leg and one straight out his back. That's when Barry said to me, he said, "Do you remember much about it?" I said, "No, I'm just patching them up and sending them back". I said, "Why?" and he said, "When they opened up the second time", "I said, "Yeah",

12:00 "You know what you done?", I said, "No", "You just laid on top of Vince, stopped him from getting hit". I don't remember, still don't, don't even remember doing it. I got them back and they said, "There's a bloke just over further". Hooky Hughes is one of the blokes in the photo, he was hit in the hand, he was dazed. Put a shell dressing on him and sent him back. They said, "There's another bloke down over there". I went over

12:30 and he was hit in the head here by a sniper, must have been up in the tree. The bullet lodged in his wind pipe. He was breathing through here and he was still conscious. I was always told just talk to them, talk

- shit. He lost a lot of blood. I put a shell dressing on there. I called up the company medic and I said, "Bring the plasma with you" because I didn't know how to give plasma.
- 13:00 He was the company medic, he done all that. I had to, we give him plasma and I had to hold the plasma up, get down myself, we were behind a big log, I knew I couldn't get hit and I had to hold him down and talk to him, just talk shit. Could have been hit in the hand there too but
- 13:30 they could hear me talking and lay in to me. After things settled down one of the blokes on the machine gun I said, "Hey, give us some covering fire". For some unknown reason he said, "I'll draw the crabs" and I said, "I'm trying to get this fella back". Clarky [Lorne "Doc" Clark] went up further because we had a couple of bodies up there, another bloke up there, Pete Fushtie. He was up the front
- 14:00 and there's a couple more up the front and Clarky went up there and I got this other fella back and they said, "Slattery and Pauly Evans is there". Pauly Evans was one of our blokes, one of our platoon. I went back up there to try and find him. Clarky come back, he was just out of his tree. Peter Fushtie, he threw a smoke grenade and that give him cover to come back, got
- 14:30 out of it. I've got a lot of time for Pete. I went back up, I found Slattery and I tried to drag him back but they hit me again so I had to leave him there. Went back there, I think I smoked about a packet and a half of smokes in about an hour and a half, I just chain smoked. I was pretty shook up.
- 15:00 We pulled right back and they brought in artillery. Then they bought in an air strike the next morning. I wanted to go up there with them when they went in, 9 Platoon and old Blue said, "Nah, you stay here". I was sitting down there and he said, "Clark come along and
- 15:30 someone moved Slattery". I said, "No they didn't, I did". I never said anything. Nothing else was said. There was another bloke, he was artillery, he got hit in the arm with a bit of shrapnel next morning. After the thing they pulled us back out and they flew us home. We had two killed and about
- 16:00 five or six wounded out of it. We were back in camp a day or so. I got a Saigon guard out of it, I was told I done a good job and what pissed me right off, I never said much about it at all but I got hold of the book. You can't blame the author, he was only doing what he was told. Company medic, I wasn't even mentioned.
- 16:30 He went up and found Campbell, give him plasma, dragged the body back and that. A lot of people ask me, "How can you remember?", but it's something you never forget when you're in there. I can still remember laying behind the bloody log. They were in to us and I thought a limb fell across my back and I looked around and it was a bloody
- 17:00 crate snake crawling across. A thin neck and big head on him. I froze. That was one thing, I said, "I'll take you on mate, not the fellas out the front". The night I read about it I was drunk. It was here in Townsville they said, "That operation's in there", I read it and I got that wild
- 17:30 I got in the car and drove out to Lavarack Barracks looking for him. If he was there I would have killed him or busted him pretty bad. He was gone. I fronted one of the blokes next morning I said, "Hey, how come I never got a mention in that bloody contact, I was the one that done up, I went back up three times". He said, "Oh we couldn't think of your name" and I said, "Hey, how many effing black fellas was in
- 18:00 that bloody platoon?", medics and that. I calmed down. That's when I started to have breakdowns from PTSD and that. All this time, you think you done a good job and someone takes all the bloody credit. I've seen him. I never said anything. I'll get him on his own. I won't touch him but I will ask him why. I know he's a wannabe, he wants
- 18:30 to be this and wants to be that.

**Why did he?**

I don't know why.

**Do you want to say who he is?**

I've said his name a few times, they know who it is. Even now I've spread the word around.

**What's his name again?**

Lorne Clark.

**So he claimed credit?**

Yeah, he done everything, I didn't do a thing. I was the one that called him up.

- 19:00 I was the one that got Campbell back. I was the one that dragged Slattery's body back as far as I could. That's why I like to get a hold of the after action report to find out what was said. I still can't. I've got to go through the archives but they got to get the thing from Mitchell Library down to the War Museum so I can have a look at it.

## **Why do you think others**

19:30 **would let him get away with saying?**

I learned to live with it. That's what started to bring me down.

## **Why do you think others would let him get away with saying this if they knew the truth?**

Don't know mate, live and let live I suppose. Fair enough, I can't knock him, he done some good work. I only found this out a few years ago

20:00 that Campbell, the fella that lost his eye and that, he done a crackometer [good job?] with him. A lot of blokes told me they wasn't expecting him to live but he did pull through. Clarky did, saved his life.

## **I'm interested to know what kind of things, when you say you'd talk shit to**

20:30 **Slattery, what kind of things would you say to him?**

I talked about football, what team, tell him, "The bushrangers are coming, they're going to brass this bloody area up", just try and keep their mind off it. He was out of it. I said to him, "I talked shit to you that day", he couldn't remember anything. I was sitting in Canberra at the reunion. I see this fella walk in

21:00 and he had the scars around his eyes and no eye, a glass eye, artificial eye. I just look at him and said, "You're Campbell aren't you?" and he said, "Yeah, how'd you know?" and I said, "See that scar there, I was right there when you got it". He didn't even know that. I seen him another year, back in Sydney it was and we were talking about it and he said, "I'm going to go down and see Clarky, he was up there and done everything" and I said, "No,

21:30 I was the first one to you. I called Clarky out". Clarky knows about it, knows what my feelings are but I've never said anything.

## **What kind of things does someone say to you when they're kind of out of it, hit, even close to death?**

Nothing much, I patched Vince up,

22:00 I remember talking to him and that, I send him back. He come back again and joined us again. Just a little bullet like that left him a big bloody scar on his back. Run in to him years later. Ran in to one bloke I was working in the mines. I said, "What battalion were you in?" He said, "I was in 5 Battalion" and I said, "Oh yeah, do you know

22:30 Vince Nissan?" and he said, "Yeah", "Has he got a big scar down his back?" and he said, "What, did he tell you about it?" and I said, "Nah, I was the one who patched him up". End of story. A lot of them used to come in here, start spinning a few [(UNCLEAR)]. That was one that really upset me. After that I come back from Saigon Guard and then

23:00 Oakey O'Kane was running short of blokes so he said, "Will you go 2IC for Pete?", "Yeah". So I went out and thought to myself, "There's a lot of other blokes entitled to it" but Oakey said, "I'm putting you in charge, putting you as 2IC, not them". I asked them, "You fellas got seniority over me anyway". Okey said, "You do it" and I done it. After that,

23:30 what happened then, I had R&R [Rest & Recreation].

## **I had a couple more questions about being in that situation, being fired upon. You mentioned you almost have memory loss, do you feel the fear for yourself of being hit?**

When I used to go in, I knew there was someone out there I was shitting myself

24:00 but as soon as the first shot was fired I was all right, just normal reaction. That's the way we were trained, to react to certain things. Anyone that said they weren't scared going in to a contact is a bloody liar and an idiot. I still maintain there's more live cowards than dead heroes.

## **What about time, does it stand still?**

Just don't even worry about it.

24:30 I went through there, it took me a while to find my gun, all I had was my medical kit. That day, that's the day the choppers come in, the Yanks and they said, "Throw smoke" because that was one of the procedures. They threw smoke and it drifted over me and right on top of the where the bunker system, I think it was fifty four bunkers we hit, an engineer mob, we

25:00 cleaned them up. Anyway I think the pilot or co-pilot got hit in the throat and he had to shoot through. When the boys were in hospital down there they come along and apologized. Whoever it was, I don't know which one it was, but they said, "Sorry I had to leave you's there because I had to get my man back". Some of them were a bit upset about it that he shot through but the other

25:30 fellas come in straight down. We had a couple of very badly hit boys. I don't think any of them died

there except the two that got killed in the initial contact. Old Blue Collins, Barry, he got hit at eleven o'clock in the morning and he didn't get to hospital until about quarter to four. He was walking wounded.

26:00 **How do you patch people up exactly, what do you do?**

Stop the bleeding. You don't patch them up, just give them first aid and all that.

**So a compression bandage?**

Yeah, you put it on. We had big shell dressings, just put them on, wrap it up tight as you can. If it keeps bleeding just try and get him back, so he can get the plasma in him, stabilize him.

26:30 It was an experience. Woke me up a bit.

**I was interested to know, how did you know, it was a bunker system you came across, what did you know about this bunker system?**

We didn't, we didn't know what we run in to, not until the next day when we had a look.

27:00 They were NVA, that's why I had a lot of respect for them after that. VC, if we got a contact with them, I wasn't worried about it, I was still worried but when you're under the NVA, they were the trained soldiers and they were committed. They'd stay in there and fight. I have a lot of respect for them.

27:30 If I knew it was NVA, that's when I started shitting a bit. You didn't know who you were running in to, who you were fighting. After that I done my knee in and had trouble most from Canungra

28:00 but they wouldn't let me go out. They said, "Oh no, you can stay there and do guard duty back at battalion headquarters, Nui Dat". I had no option but to stay there. They went out, my section. They opened up, one bloke up in front, they opened up and I think Billy Flippance, I think he ended up getting him

28:30 but he sprayed the area pretty well but they said, "Do a sweep", so the boys put an extended line out and went up and on the end of them they had a big claymore. They killed one fella, Oakey O'Kane, he was a bloody good mate of mine and wounded about six other fellas. That's where a lot of people say there was a guilt complex, I should have been there.

29:00 That's the way life it. I just take it as it comes.

**Well, you had a knee injury.**

Yeah, but I was starting to get over that. I said to Jack Hillis, "Can I go back out?" and they said, "Oh no, you're fit for fire support base" and Jack Hillis said, "If he's not fit to go out to his mob, he's not going". So Jack refused to let me go.

**I'm interested**

29:30 **about your opinion, you said there were fifty four bunkers, did you ever see the bunker system?**

Yeah, went through them the next day. I didn't see the fifty four but they told us but they told us there were fifty four in the report.

**That's quite a large?**

Yeah, we didn't know what we hit. I don't now if they were, I think they were an engineer mob, engineer NVA but they were cleaning them out,

30:00 getting them ready, I think they were old bunkers. You didn't know what, where they were or anything. Like on Operation Platypus, even Dave will tell you the fella talking to just a while ago. They got a lot of secondary explosions when they put the B52s in. They never found out what that was, on the outskirts.

30:30 **So what's, I guess that raises the question of what it's like to fight an enemy that's so good at concealment.**

That's right, you didn't know where he was. That's why there was a lot of different, when we was on operation we didn't have a front line. We had a rear echelon and all that

31:00 but when you went out there they could be coming from anywhere if they wanted to attack you. Didn't know where you had to keep, three sixty degrees. That's how we were trained, all round defences as regards the scrub. They could let you walk right through a big mob of them and you wouldn't even know.

31:30 Some of the places were very thick and it was up to the fella up in front who was the forward scout. He was the one that dictated the pace. It was a rough job but nothing you could do about it.

**What effect does this have on you as a soldier, no front?**

Well I never ever been in the front

32:00 myself like they fought the Second World War so I would not have a clue. All I know is what I've been trained at.

**I guess what I'm getting at is it's quite different.**

That's where we had a lot of trouble with the Second World War blokes and all that. Where they'd put them up sometimes some of the places they'd put them out and they'd be there for so long and then they'd pull them back

32:30 and they go back and rest. We had to go out there a couple of weeks and we'd come back and might do two days R & C and we're back at it again. That's where a lot of different wars, different armies and you've got to take different tactics.

**It's quite a taxing thing.**

Yeah. You got to be alert at all times. That's why the other day, last Friday I think it was, I walked out of a shop

33:00 and this bloke beeped the horn about from here to you away and I nearly leaped about six foot in the air. I've calmed down a hell of a lot but still there though, I will never get rid of it. I was lucky when I come back. I was only in Australia six weeks and I went over to Malaya. Close to the same environment.

**What about things like sleep**

33:30 **on patrol, would you sleep at all?**

We pulled up and they'd say, "Five minute break", we'd have a catnap but then they was two hours and sometimes they might have single pickets all depends what the situation is, looking for a bloody in a very dangerous area they'll have double pickets, stagger them, usually done two hours,

34:00 sometimes I remember one time for a fortnight we ambushed by day and patrolled by night. That knocked the arse out of us.

**When you were hit in this situation, before with the bunkers, was there any consequences of trying to find the enemy or locating them in local villages?**

No, we knew which direction they were. This fella come in on the side, we track him, must have been a sentry. We got him but

34:30 we didn't know where he was. We could see they had fire lanes and everything, you could see where the trees had been cut off and only come up to about here. All they could see was your legs, when you were walking through the fire lane. It was pretty well set up. That's what it was there for, so we walked in to it.

35:00 **What about local villages or anything?**

No villages anywhere near it.

**You were talking earlier about searches, did you go in any village searches?**

I didn't go in any searches, they had a special mob there that do that. We was more or less the sentries on the outside so no one could escape.

35:30 They'd cordon the village off, another lot would go in, they'd move all the people out then they'd go in and search.

**What was this like to do, this work?**

A bit tedious. It all depends where you were. In other battalions I've heard they tried to do a cordon and search and they run in to

36:00 a shit fight.

**What about yourself, your impressions of doing this, was it hard because of the local people?**

No we just had a job to do and we done it. They said don't let anyone come out and we didn't let anyone come out. We didn't shoot at them or anything.

**Was there any stress with this situation with the locals, feeling resentful or anything?**

No, some of them

36:30 accepted it and some of them, you didn't know exactly what you were going to find. I wasn't a medic when we done the cordon and search, I just arrived. They said, "Go there, that's your position, you stay there". When it finished

37:00 then we went back out.

**I guess it's also a difficult situation because you've got civilians, women and children.**

You didn't know what was what because they can pull a trigger just as good as a bloody grown man can. I didn't get that many, I think there were only about seven

37:30 contacts. That Operation Windsor though, I'll never forget it. The amount of people that got hit, killed. They reckon Fire Base Coral was worse in some places.

**What kind of thoughts run through your head when you're behind the log and you can't move and there's firing going on?**

38:00 To be honest with you I wouldn't even think what I was thinking about. I knew I had to keep my head down and arse down because it hurts there too. I was worried about the blokes up the front. I still even do that today, anyone's hurt I go straight over and try to help them.

38:30 I don't now, you just keep at it I suppose.

**How do you move in that situation, how do you move about from man to man?**

On your guts, low as you can get. Unless you're in some dead ground or something, you could stand up. Where I was there was a big log in front of me, I knew I couldn't get hit. When I was holding the plasma up they were tickling around it though.

39:00 A lot of people keep asking me, "How can you remember so much?" But it's something you never bloody forget. I went through a couple of other contacts but that one was more. I used to have some bloody nightmares about it and some guilt complex, "If I'd done this, that might have happened", but hey, nothing you can do, that's something you've got to get rid of.

39:30 **Do you remember in the situation you were thinking about possibly being hit and killed?**

No. The only thing when I think about that a lot of people when you come back and one bloke said, "Being an Aboriginal you'll be able to get money from ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] and or black fellas and that" and I said, "Mate, over there the bloody bullets didn't discriminate".

40:00 If we had a black fella he got hit, didn't ask him what colour he was. That's the way you got to look at things.

## Tape 6

00:33 **Ray I just wanted to ask you, after Operation Windsor, actually leaving and going back to the headquarters, what was that trip like?**

Platoon headquarters, they were with the company, with the platoon all the time. You didn't have anything separate.

01:00 They used to always come to us, that's where they got all their orders and that from. We sat down and talked about it, told Wally. He nearly got hit back there and he broke down and cried poor fella. Fell down and hit the tree and rolled over and chopped the tree in two. How lucky can you get. I said, "If you're going to get hit mate, you'll get hit". It's the only way you could look at it.

01:30 It was a big adventure when we went over there but in the end you're living day to day. If you wake up tomorrow it's a bonus. I still do the same.

**You know how we were talking about your ideas of religion, I guess that would have really come in then.**

I don't know, it probably might have. If it's going to happen it's going to happen. What do they call it, the Chinese, if you're time's up, it's up.

02:00 **What kind of debriefing did you have?**

I didn't have any debrief. That's what pisses me off about Operation Windsor, I wasn't there for the debrief.

**Why were you not there for the debrief?**

I don't know but I'd like to know. They come back and Blue said, "Hey mate, they said to congratulate you, you done a good job".

02:30 **So a debrief happened?**

It happened, that's what I'd like to find out what was in it. When I started to work things out they said you should have looked at the after action report and then I started to find out a little bit more. Find the after action report. It's a little bit hard to get.

03:00 I rung them up and they would have had the file down there before I went down to Canberra, they would have got the file over and I could have had a look at it. I'd like to know what was said. No one seems to give me any idea what was said.

**So there was no session about, from your platoon commander where you got to talk about what you'd all just been through?**

03:30 Oh yeah, just amongst the boys themselves, at the boozier. Some of them just went up there and we just wiped ourselves out. Jack Kelly used to look after us when we come back. He used to tell anyone new coming in there, they'd say, "Oh the boys are making a bit of noise up there" after they come back from an op [operation] and he'd say, "No they're all right, just let them go". If they want any help, they'll get me. He might come up and stick his head in,

04:00 "How you going boys?" and walk away. He used to leave us. That was one of our outlets I think, the grog. Wipe yourself out.

**Was it the escapism of it?**

I think so. We didn't have much of a guilt complex then. That was close, you know, something happened, oh yeah, that was pretty bloody close.

04:30 Didn't worry about it then. Some of them might have went back, thought about it later. It's still close.

**Just at the end of the last tape you mentioned that you have had dreams or you've had a bit of a guilt complex about things that you wish you had of done.**

Yeah.

**What were those things that you wish you had of done?**

I often wish I could have dragged Slattery's body right back.

05:00 But they were in, somebody's shooting at you they haven't got much of a choice, have you. That was the only thing. Dragging him back, she's a bit hairy [dangerous] as the saying goes.

05:30 Like I tried my best and the reaction I got was in that book, it wasn't good enough. Someone moved in and took all the credit. One bloke got highly decorated out of that and all he done was throw a smoke grenade. Took him guts to get up because he was up the front.

06:00 I take my hat off to him.

**When was he awarded the MM [Military Medal]?**

It was announced on the Sydney coming home. We all come back on the HMAS Sydney.

**What was the reaction from the rest of the guys?**

"Congratulations". I'd like to know what was said. I'll find out.

06:30 **So you get back and everyone has a drink, do you get some time off after that operation or was it pretty much straight back in to it?**

A couple of days later I ended up in Saigon as a Saigon Guard.

**A couple of days later?**

Yeah.

**Was that usual to be so quick?**

They used to rotate everyone. A couple of us went.

07:00 From our company a couple of them went there and I run in to a couple of blokes there. Another Aboriginal fella, in mortars. We got on pretty good together.

**Were you happy, sad, what kind of feelings did you have leaving the platoon after such an experience like Operation Windsor?**

07:30 Just good to get away from it. Just get away, see different things, you're not going back out bush bashing. Seen a bit of life. It was the first time I seen a bloody band for six months, a live band.

**In Saigon?**

Yeah, in Saigon. We played up something shocking too.

08:00 We didn't get on good with the pogos [persons not involved in contact], the fellas posted there. One fellas complaining there one day, I wanted to get up and snot [hit] him, he said, "Oh we got bloody T bone steak again for tea" and I thought, "You're joking". Here we are, we just come out of the bush

living on bloody hard rations. Give me the shits. That's the way it goes.

08:30 **What kind of things would you get up to?**

Just get drunk. We'd go and get on the back of a motorbike with some of the Vietnamese and they'd take us back to Canberra. We'd be cooeeing all the way. Just couldn't give a stuff.

**Did some of the men seek out the local women?**

Oh yeah.

09:00 I'd be lying to say they didn't. Sometimes we went down to the bars but mostly back at night. It was more or less a no no to stay out all bloody night. You didn't know where you ended up or what happened.

**What about yourself?**

Same here, we'd go back about ten o'clock. Go and have a sleep, get ready for the next day. Everything worked out,

09:30 they rotated it well. Everyone had a night out, a couple of nights, a day off. We had to be back at certain hours. All we had to do was sit in the bloody sand bag bunker with a wire screen around it, an AR [Assault Rifle] with twenty rounds in the magazine will stop a lot of war.

10:00 Bit of a joke at times I think. They had movies there every night where we were staying. They had a bar there. You couldn't play up like we did when we got downtown. They had good tucker and they had bloody sheets. It wasn't too bad there. We couldn't,

10:30 we knew we had to go back. Live to the fullest.

**Time to de-stress?**

Yeah more or less, that's what they used to take us down for R&C too. Go down there and the blokes, the MPs [Military Police] used to bring a lot of our blokes back. They'd have the charges written out of what they'd done, they'd give it to the OC

11:00 while he's sitting at the pool. I was there one night, sitting down there all drinking. I think they bought about three or four of them back, here's all their charge sheets and Major Oners said, "Right, I'll look at them tomorrow". As soon as they got out of sight, outside the gate, he just tore them up, he said, "They're down here to relax".

**What were the charges for?**

Playing up in the bar.

11:30 Some of the things, I can still remember I had to go up escort for one of them. The charge read out something like this that, "Going down such and such a street" that was in Vung Tau, "He was in a sulky going full gallop singing out hi-ho Silver". The horse and sulky

12:00 that was the taxis and this fella took over the reins. He got seven days, it was supposed to be seven days punishment but they said, "Righto, you can be on the CP", command post, I think he done about three nights there, the rest of the time he was out in the bush, they didn't worry about it. He was a pretty good digger, lively that's all. "Full of spirit" as the saying goes.

12:30 He's got plenty of spirit, not full of spirit, he probably was bloody full of spirit when he got the charge, got caught. It was quite good. He come back with a sick head.

**Was there quite a party atmosphere in Vung Tau?**

Yeah, went out to enjoy themselves.

**How did you see a lot of the younger guys in particular dealing with sexual frustration**

13:00 **and being away from loved ones?**

I don't know. Some of them used to got "Dear Johns" [letter ending a relationship]. Most of the time used to put the letter up on the notice board, let everyone else read it, laugh about it. You didn't see many "round eyes" down there, that's a white woman.

13:30 Only nurses if you were in hospital. A few French ones there. The boys went down there, they played up. Everyone enjoyed themselves. Come back short of a quid, though we didn't spend much money, everything was so cheap.

14:00 You could go to the PX [American canteen unit] and get, I forget how much we used to pay for a bottle of old bourbon, black label Johnnie Walker, top shelf stuff, pretty cheap. We'd take that back to camp with us and when we were watching of a night, just wiped yourself out, you might wake up with a headache but you'll get over it.

**How often would that happen?**

When we was in camp, nearly every night but not all spirits,

14:30 mostly a lot of beer. When I was back in camp and the boys went out they said they're coming back on a certain day they said, "Get some beer and we'll fix you up". The message come back and instead of buying a couple of cartons I bought a pallet, only cost me eighty dollars. They paid it all back, all chipped in. I got ice and that and we had big steel trunks for our gear and I put the

15:00 beer in that and ice and when they got off the truck it's the first thing they did, have a beer. They'd have probably two cans and they'd strip off then they'd go and have a shower. When they come back they'd get stuck in to them again.

**So during the drinking sessions what would you do for entertainment?**

Bullshit to each other.

15:30 One of our things we used to sit in a big circle. We had forty four gallon drums, I think two of them and when you finished your can you had to throw it in and if you missed it was ten dollars over the bar. It was only ten cents a can. I got twenty bucks over there for my birthday or something like that and you always had free beer. You didn't have to have money on you. They put it in your book.

16:00 That was really good. We had a ball. Parties and that. Sometimes some blokes would play cards, some just sit and drink. I think I only seen about two fights over there amongst the blokes. We got on pretty good together. A lot of rivalry between platoons, you know, digging each other.

16:30 All in all everyone got on pretty good. No animosity or anything.

**How would that rivalry play out?**

Probably put a joke on someone. It's hard to say. Someone says, "You come up to my place and drunk all my bloody grog, when are you going to replace it?" or something like that.

17:00 Next night you'd probably go up there with a couple of cartons or something and just sit down and drink it or go in the boozier and get a heap of grog, just yak high about it, play records. Tapes more than anything. A lot of good music and that.

**Can you remember any of the music? Which bands in particular?**

Louis Armstrong.

17:30 It was in the movie, Good Morning Vietnam. I forget the name. A lot of [Rolling] Stones. There was a lot of them there. I just can't even remember some of the bloody songs.

18:00 I know we used to listen to the radio, American forces radio. Used to get some laughs. One thing everyone used to listen to was Chicken Man. The CO didn't like it so when Chicken Man's coming on everyone turns their radio on and give him the shits. They used to like listening to things because instead of used cars

18:30 and that it was all used water buffalos or second hand ducks and that for sale. Quite funny in some places.

**Do you think because people are in such an extreme type of lifestyle that there was a lot of excess in terms of drinking and just that people were really living excessively?**

A lot of them were living from day to day.

19:00 Woke up tomorrow it's a bonus. We got the shit shot out of us there a bit. I just forget how many blokes went through 7 Platoon alone, from the beginning of the war to the end. It was bloody phenomenal. Blokes getting wounded, Nashos going home when their time finished, you had new crew and all that.

**19:30 Was there much of a drug culture there as well?**

Only had one bloke come back and see me one day, he wanted a tube of morphine. I said, "What do you want that for? Who's hit?" That's the first thing I said, "Who's hit?", "No" he said, "I just want to go for a trip" and I said, "Well you'll go for a bloody trip in a minute", he knew I meant it too. He never ever come back. They took the morphine of

20:00 us because you were only allowed to carry two tubes of morphine. I used to carry up to nine. I went and told the platoon sergeant. He said, "What?" he said, "Go up and ask that fella are our bloke's going to get hit one at a time?" If you got hit you'd know there'd be three or four of them. That's something as a medic over there, I never give anyone morphine. I was too busy patching them up and somebody else would give it to them. A lot of the blokes carried it around their neck with the dog tags.

20:30 Wrap it up in insulation tape round their dog tags and that's what we used to do. It was only just a little plastic tube, just put it in and squeeze it in. Some of them, then when you hit them the morphine and if they were bleeding

21:00 you just get a bit of blood off him and just write "M" on him and if you can write out a tag and write what time you give it to them. A lot of them get the hit and they're still in pain and that, they can overdose. You had to try and mark it down.

**What about other drugs, did you see evidence of marijuana or anything like that?**

No. more or less a no no. If they did, I didn't see anything.

21:30 Heard a lot about it. Cheap as shit over there. More or less that's the Yanks but the Australians I never heard much about that.

**Can you go in to a bit more detail about your duties as a Saigon Guard?**

All it is is just sit there at the thing and check who was coming in and out.

22:00 Everyone had to have an ID card and we just checked them, even if they were Australian. Sometimes you might have to write it down. I had an interpreter there, she was usually a female and up to a certain time, curfew time, I think it was about six o'clock, any Vietnamese that come in there she used to check them and search the women

22:30 and if they were blokes pat them down. It was mostly boredom, just sitting down there watching out the street, just looking to see if there's an attack. I don't think it ever got hit but I think it was just relaxation more than anything after what we was used to.

**Where were you living?**

At the Canberra

23:00 hotel.

**What was that like?**

I think it was two to a room and about three or four stories high. Had good tucker there. Could get a beer there, relax a bit, write letters or anything. We didn't mix much with the pogos. "Saigon warriors"

23:30 we used to call them. We were all "bush bashers", "grunts", "cannon fodder", whatever you like to call it.

**You just mentioned you had the opportunity to write letters in the Canberra hotel there, did you write much to home?**

Yeah, I wrote to quite a few people, parents, even Anita Doran.

24:00 One day I got letters we were out in the bush, there was about eighteen of them. I was writing to some uni [university] student and she was trying to, the way she was wording the letters I don't know if she was trying to get me to commit myself, I think she might have been anti-Vietnam and that but I wasn't coming in to it so I just stopped writing to her.

**What type of things would she write in the letter?**

What she's doing.

24:30 She asked a lot of information that shouldn't have concerned her. She might have been digging but I just dropped it. She was in Victoria I think. That was in ARU after that didn't bother writing back. Most of them to all my family and

25:00 relations and that.

**What was it like getting mail from your family?**

Good, really good. Give you a bit of a boost.

**What about care packages?**

I only got the one, that was in Malaya. We never got much care packages,

25:30 nothing worth getting sent over because you could get just about anything you wanted at half the price. We used to get a lot of what the Americans called sup packs, had cigarettes, shaving cream, lollies, Hershey bars, chewing gum and all that. Even a pad to write, pen and paper, envelopes. Some of the blokes got them.

26:00 In the battalion a lot of them never ever seen them.

**Did you see more of the Americans in Saigon?**

Only if you went out and got on the piss with them, that's all, when you're on leave.

**What about the Negroes?**

Good, got on good with them. One episode there a bloke, Billy Devine, I don't know where he is or

whether he's alive or dead. He was down there and he'd been bought up in back waters of Australia [America?].

26:30 I was sitting down there talking to him, he was a northern Negro [African American]. We got on, the three of us sitting down there and this other fella stuck his head in. Billy said, "Come over here you black bastard and have a beer with us". He come over all right and pulled out a cut throat razor. "Man he called me black". Well he was black, he couldn't argue about that but I tell you, we had to do some fast talking, me and this other fella.

27:00 He was from the Deep South. I was glad I never got in to it or anything like that but I heard there was a lot of segregation down there. I all depends where you were from, north or south. I seemed to get away from that, I didn't want to worry about it. Colour in our army didn't worry us, as long as you could do your job more than anything. They seemed to make a big issue of it with the Yanks.

27:30 There wasn't much to do. Just take it as it comes.

**So how long were you Saigon Guard for?**

Only about a week. All I can remember of it.

28:00 Get up and do your job and head back out.

**So what was next after that?**

Went back after Saigon Guard, got a new platoon commander. Tim Fisher [later a Federal politician and Deputy Prime Minister], he was the platoon commander there. You know who he is? He was with us for a while.

28:30 That was down Baria there somewhere. One of the boys come back and said, "You'd better go and check the boss, he's in the sun over there and he's as red as anything". I think he was a hundred and four when I took his temperature. He was unconscious. He had malaria. Lost two stone in about two days. That's another thing, I don't know whether it was class distinction or what but he didn't want to know any of us.

29:00 **What do you mean he didn't want to know any of you?**

He went down there to the reunion down there. He said, "I won't march with you but if you've got a flag I'll carry it for you". The boys just told him to piss off. The old 7 Platoon fellas. He didn't stay with us long, after he got crook we never seen him.

**What was he like as a CO?**

Platoon commander.

**Platoon commander.**

Couldn't knock him, he had a ton of guts.

29:30 Got hit with a mob of wasps there one day, seen him go back in and get the gun and that. We went and done a lot of patrolling with him. I never had any contact with him. He was more or less like a figurehead then.

30:00 The ambushing at night and patrolling all day, we'd probably get about two hours sleep a day, something like that. Apart from that I never seen him in action. Some say he was a bit of an idiot at Coral. I don't know if it's true or not, some say he done a good job. I wasn't there so I can't come to any conclusions. He treated us pretty good, the platoon and that.

30:30 **So were you positioned back as medic at the headquarters?**

When I was with him, yeah. I just forget who his batman was, he had a bloke to cook his tucker and that. He'd listen to you. I went out, we went through a swamp on one patrol there

31:00 and I felt I had bloody leeches on me and I said, "We'd better have a FFI boss". We used to call him "Bigfoot" because had a big foot, about size fourteen I think. Anyway I checked everyone over, get everyone to check themselves. One fella came over and they were all over his private parts. He said, "Look at this", and he had leeches hanging off and

31:30 I rolled a smoke, lit it and it was the only way I could get them off, burn them off, I just touch them on the back of their heads. Sixteen I took off him, old Slack Williams. We kept out of that sort of area, leeches and that. Go round check 'em. That's something you make sure you do.

**So how much longer did you have then, you went on R&R didn't you?**

32:00 Yeah, Thailand.

**How was that?**

Good, what I remember of it. Wild. Had about four days there I think. We lived pretty high. Me and the

other fella we just joined up together. We drank plenty of piss. Went round a few of the tourist things and seen it but I've been back there

32:30 twice since. It was quite nice actually.

**Then how much longer was it before you headed back home?**

I still had a few, it wasn't very long after that. What happened after that? I was 2IC.

33:00 The section commander got crook so I had to take over. We were that short of blokes instead of having three sections we only had two. I was lucky enough to win the cut of the cards and I ended up with the platoon machine gunner. We went out and because I had two guns I had to do the ambush. Anyway, I used to always discuss with the blokes where they want to camp, hoochie up [makeshift shelter] of a night, harbour up,

33:30 how they want to be put out on the ground. I wouldn't tell them. Unless they were I wasn't happy. A big party of VC walked past in front of us, got one of them. We got about five hundred kilos of salt and about four hundred kilos of rice out of it.

34:00 I stayed there until the rest of the platoon caught up with us. I wanted to move and the platoon commander said no. He said, "No, stay here, keep your positions". I said, "Hey, they know where we are?" It was one of the things, we found one body. We went out and done a sweep

34:30 and could only find one body and I said, "Drag him back over and put him in front of the machine gun for the night". We set claymores up out there. I said to my 2IC, "Have you got everything set up?" and he said, "Yeah mate". He was pretty good, he knew his job. Next morning he said, "Hey Jack, come here" and called me on the side and I said,

35:00 "What's wrong mate?" He said, "Every one of those claymores I put out last night were turned around". They came back at night and turned them around. So if anyone's hit the thing we would have copped it all. I said, "Don't say nothing, not until we get back to camp". When I did tell them, one bloke broke down and cried, was very toey [anxious] then because we only had a fortnight to go. We had to do another sweep next morning

35:30 and for some unknown reason he wanted to follow tracks. It was a no no for us because that's where you get all the booby traps. When we found out where we were at the end of the day we were sixteen hundred clicks, nearly a mile out of position where we should have been. They put him in the departure lounge. He got fragged [killed by his men] over in 8 or 9 Battalion

36:00 after he come home. The bloke that done it was my forward scout. I don't know what actually happened but I know, Peter Allen his name was, stayed up the front too long. You get that jittery and that. I try and rotate all my forward scouts but he liked the job.

36:30 That's what I heard. That's one of the blokes told me years later, he was up front too long. But then again when Lieutenant Condry come in to the platoon he told us his ambition was to lead a bayonet charge. Kevin Gilmore told him, "You're in the wrong bloody platoon for that mate, getting the shit shot out of us is enough". Apparently he did lead one over in 9 Battalion and he got a fair few wounded.

37:00 I don't know what the story was after that. I heard he was blown up with a hand grenade, in camp. I don't know, are you a bit surprised at some of the things I've been telling you. It's just some of the things that happened.

**Lots of accidents.**

That was no bloody accident. I think whoever done it, done it on purpose but I heard he was set up though.

37:30 What the whole story is I don't know, I've never tried to find out, it had nothing to do with me. Apparently he done about fifteen years I think for it. So at times I think I count my lucky stars. That's what I said, sometimes I thought what I should have done

38:00 and shouldn't have done that. Although there's nothing I done I was ashamed of over there. It's just some things I thought I could have done better.

**Did you enjoy your time as 2IC?**

A lot of people ask me, "What did you think of it out there?" Well out in Australian bush they sit down and have a cup of tea with you, all them bastards want to do is shoot you.

38:30 You work it out for yourself. I liked the country though. My mate, he's gone back quite a few times. People when we was over there everything was desecrated with bombs and Agent Orange and all that. It still had beautiful soil. It's the bushy in me. Apparently they do grow a lot of good stuff there.

39:00 I never wanted to go back. My mate said, he's gone back, he's going back over there teaching English. That's Barry. He got everything cleared with the DVA and all that.

## Tape 7

00:37 **Vietnam's a funny war in many ways.**

The war that we couldn't win.

**I was going to ask you about that. Why do you say that?**

We had the firepower. If they had air cover mate they'd have flogged the shit out of us. If they had air superiority. That's why they went underground.

01:00 We didn't know where they were. When they stopped, we didn't go into Hanoi or anything like that up north. We put our, we were given a province and that's the one we stayed in most of the time except for the training team and that.

**The factor of the enemy being hard to find**

01:30 **was there also a factor of having to trying to fight a war when you try to fight it to win over the people but there's difficulties with that?**

Me, my thoughts are and still are too, just like today, bloody politicians. They do one thing and turn around and more or less shit on you. Fair enough we done a lot of other things

02:00 like build schools, orphanages and that. But then again people, my mate was telling me Australians are very welcome over there, even now. You were fighting someone and you didn't know where he was, who he was, you didn't know what he looked like.

02:30 If VC, he was a local guerilla and they say, "Be careful of the people in the black pyjamas". You go over there and you see them all in black pyjamas. You could have been down shopping in the local markets and you could be standing next to a Viet Cong. The government made a booboo [mistake] and paid for it.

03:00 After we left there, when they started pulling out, I seen some of the documentaries come back, intelligence reports said they were slowly pulling out. What was the good of us going over there? I'd say bloody Afghanistan's another repeat.

03:30 You just take it as it comes.

**Must be particularly hard to win over people when you're suspicious of half of them being the enemy anyway.**

We never tried to win any. We kept out of that lot. We were out in the scrub bashing. A lot of the other people, some of them got on good, some of the interpreters were good.

04:00 We had one, every time he took a sickie we copped a lot of shit so he knew something. Don't know where he was going. We just had a job to do and we done it to the best of our abilities.

**I guess it's also hard as far as winning a war when you're based in these small bases and yet the land around is.**

Open to no mans' land. You were surrounded. As I said, you didn't know where they were coming from.

04:30 They reckon that Phuoc Tuy province, that's where we were in Nui Dat they said they had that under control yet now we find out there was a big tunnel complex about two mile from it. So how do you get on? Who was lying?

**What about, earlier in the day you mentioned that you saw a plane flying over with the Agent Orange.**

05:00 They were spraying something but they were going back down to Vungers [Vung Tau]. There were about four or five of them. They used to fly low and spray everything.

**Would the spray come down on you?**

Yeah. That's why I think there's a lot of children deformed and that, all the soldiers come back. Some of them were good, some of them were bad.

05:30 **Did you ever suffer any health problems that you could associate?**

No. One thing they hit us with a thing called bloody Dapsone [antibiotic] when we were over there. They reckoned it was for malaria and that. Later we found out it was just something the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] was mucking around with. I was on the bloody

06:00 scheme. It never affected me or anything, as far as I know it hasn't. I think it had a thirty year block on it and then when we did get a copy of it when it finished thirty years I don't think they told us the truth.

**What did they put you under?**

Dapsun.

**What is that?**

It's like a little white tablet. They said it was for malaria. We had to take Paladrin and Dapsone. There was only

06:30 a few got it. The Dapsone. A lot of blokes with side effects, that affected a lot of them too.

**What kind of effects did the dapsun have?**

Some said they put it down as PTSD but see they don't know exactly what was in the dapsun to find out what it could have caused. I think the government knew what it was, that's

07:00 why they put the thirty year lock on it. They probably thought we'd be all bloody dead and gone and wouldn't worry about it but a lot of blokes kicked up a stink about it.

**What do you think some of the symptoms may have been?**

Could be anything mate. Same as that Agent Orange over there, took the government years to accept that. They only tell you what they want you to know.

**Well talking about this kind of**

07:30 **subject, being kind of almost used for these various purposes, what do you think they thought of the ordinary soldier, some politicians, do you feel like they used you in some ways?**

I've often thought about it. Before I joined the army I done a lot of pig hunting. After I come out of the army I done a lot of pig hunting. As far as I'm concerned we were just glorified bloody pig dogs.

08:00 That's my opinion. When you get a pig dog you train him up to do exactly what you want him to do. When he gets bugged and ripped about or shot about you either put a bullet in him or just let him loose. That's exactly what the Australian government has done. They're starting to pay for it now. A lot of blokes are starting to get things. Fair enough I get good medical and all that now but I tell you I had to fight for it. It took me five years to get my pension.

08:30 That's what I, that's just my own thing. Over there if we had a contact all we got was more ammunition, told to go back out and look for them. Fair enough, now they've learnt one lesson, Timor and all that, if they have a contact they get counseled straight away. A lot of people get upset when I tell them we were glorified pig dogs but I couldn't

09:00 give a stuff. That's my thoughts.

**Speaking of which, mentioning people like Tim Fisher and maybe people of that kind of privileged background, were there many privileged people amongst the grunts anyway?**

Mate, you have a look at what Agent Orange and that done. How many disabled children has he got? That answers a lot of questions, doesn't it?

09:30 **Nice thought too. Tell us about returning to Australia when you got to the end of the tour, tell us coming to the end of the tour before we say coming to Australia, that last week or so, what was the feeling like?**

Very toey. I lost the cut of the cards and I was the last one to do a bloody TAOR in the battalion. It was out of me and another bloke, can't think of this name, a Scotchman, but I lost and I took them out.

10:00 I had a couple of old timers there that had been there nearly full term. He said, "Jack where you going?" and I said, "To find the deepest bloody hole I can find Eddy". He said, "Good on you". We took some reos, advance party from 5 Battalion come over and I had all DFs and everything, if anything happened I could call in artillery or mortars

10:30 or whatever I liked. I said, "We'll just do radio picket", someone on the gun and radio together. There was only like six of us. We just had to sit out in front of Fort Denison. They kept waking me up, "There's lights out there" and I said, "Well leave them there". I didn't want to make waves. They were full corporals and I was only a lance jack then but they had to take notice of me because I was in charge.

11:00 I don't know what they thought of me but I wasn't going to go out and look for trouble. After that it was only a couple of days later we shipped out.

**Did you actually cut the cards to do this?**

Yeah.

**Tell us about this situation, got a deck?**

Yeah had a deck, they said, "Who's going out, it's between you two", the only NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] around, both lance corporals.

11:30 I don't know, I can't think of his name now, McDonald, but he shuffled the cards, said, "Cut a card" anyway, he beat me. I said, "Righto then" away I went. What's the good of arguing, we could have stood out there and had a bloody fight but it wouldn't have made a difference.

**Do you remember the card you pulled?**

Wouldn't have a clue mate but I lost anyway.

**Tell us about the difference between**

12:00 **rios or just new guys coming in, were they more likely to get hit?**

No, just the luck of the draw mate. If you're going to get hit, you're going to get hit, no two ways about that. My mate, down there in Bowen, he tells a story when he gets over there one of the section commanders was only there for six weeks and he got hit. He had three bullets in him. He's laying there

12:30 and he said, "Dan, get a note and paper". Dan says, "Hello, what's this?" He goes and gets the note and paper, thought he was going to write out his last will and testament. "What do you want Joe?" He said, "When you get back to the Dat I want ten dollars each way on Kingston Town in Sydney". That's the sort of thing. You just had to look at that. That bloke, Paul Evans, he only had about three or four days to go.

13:00 He shouldn't have been out there but he got zapped.

**At any time were you there when someone had their last moments?**

No, not there. Just before Coxy copped it we were sitting down there. We were both on the piss and he said, "Come on, let's go up to the boozier", I said, "All right". I grabbed my, you had a big silver tray to put all your food in.

13:30 I had a knife, fork and spoon set and we gets up there, we're drinking and they say the tucker's on now. So we went round and sat down and I said, "Where's your dinner?" He said, "Put it all on yours" so two of us got our two meals put on the one thing. We shared the knife and fork and spoon. About four days later he got zapped.

14:00 He was a little white fella, tonne of guts. That one did hurt. We were both sharing off the same bloody plate and a couple of days later he's rat shit. I've learned to live with it but that one did get to me.

**Tell us, you lost the cut of the cards but you survived this night.**

Yeah, I was going to make sure I did.

**So tell us, you got the news,**

14:30 **packing up.**

Nothing much. When Tim Fisher was running the platoon we had a bloke there he had a Yankee forty five [pistol], he showed everyone. He said, "I've got a beautiful Yankee forty five. I'm taking this home". He even told the skipper. The day we got on the HMAS Sydney Tim Fisher met him at the top of the gangway, "I'll have that pistol"

15:00 and he just handed it to him. He got fined twenty five dollars for trying to smuggle a pistol. He didn't tell anyone about the second one he had. They kept us twelve days on the boat. They could have done it in about five but they tried to bring us down because we were way up here, high. They tried to get us down. The only thing we had to do was just dixie bashing [cleaning pots].

15:30 A lot of the blokes got sea sick and they gave us plenty of grog, two cans a night. You had to have tickets for it. Some of them used to get sea sick and I'd go round collecting tickets off them. Go through a couple of times 'til they woke up to me. I used to sit up and play cards all night with the sailors and

16:00 sleep in the day time. Where the other fellas were trying to sleep of a night I'd go up and sleep on the deck, somewhere up on the forecastle somewhere. She was a long trip. Sometimes they'd lock us in. That was claustrophobic. When we got to Sydney they pulled up out near Townsville. My mate, he was crook so they put him in hospital here.

16:30 We headed down the coast. When we got to Sydney we marched down through Martin Place and all that. We handed our weapons back in and they said, "See you in about three weeks". When I got home I stayed about two or three days in Sydney then I bolted out bush.

17:00 Believe it or not I went back working. After that I come back. I think three weeks later I was in Malaya. Six weeks at home. I was lucky, I missed out all the anti-Vietnam stuff. I was away for two years, two years, three months. Over in Malaya it was more or less a second Vietnam. You didn't walk around with a loaded rifle like we did there.

17:30 A lot of sport, a few exercises.

**What was your purpose in Malay?**

Showing the flag. They done it for years. We was the last battalion in Malaya. They moved us down to Singapore.

**Showing the flag, what does that mean exactly, what kind of things would you do?**

They had a, against communists and that,

18:00 insurgency. That was Borneo and all that when they had all the guerillas over there. They had a big barracks at Terendak out at Malacca. The British and Australian and New Zealanders and we used to do a lot of exercises and all that.

18:30 The government must have had some lease run out or something, some bloody thing so we had to move. We just moved down to Singapore.

**What were you doing in Singapore then?**

Hitting the bloody grog most of the time. I was eleven and a half stone when I hit Malaya, playing A grade union, when I come home I was nearly fifteen and a half stone,

19:00 an alcoholic piss pot. I lost a hell of a lot of weight. I was still fit for some unknown reason. I could do all my marches and exercises that I had to do, keeping fit for everywhere. That's where they started bugging my feet up, they cut them out, cut the planter warts and just aggravated it.

19:30 It was pretty good over there. Our other platoon commander over there was Jeff Kennett [later Premier of Victoria]. He was an idiot then, he's still an idiot. He was a young national serviceman, officer. It was good for the boys.

**How was he an idiot?**

I don't know. We'd just come back from bloody Vietnam and he spent a good fortnight teaching us how to do

20:00 a certain drill, this group range indication and target, "grifting" we called it. Telling us how to do this when you come in to a contact. That was okay. They had these targets. We were all spread out in formation and Collins, he was the first one through. When the targets come up he was supposed to sing out to the group, machine gun where the target is

20:30 and type of fire. He said, "There they are, bore it up them". Jeff just took his hat off and threw it on the ground. He just give up hope. We used to call him Mr Sam Brown. He was always duty officer, he was always in trouble for doing something wrong. If I ever see him again I'll tell him that too.

**Jeff Kennett?**

Yes.

**What was he in trouble for?**

21:00 Anything. He was out there and they had all the big dignitaries there and he was commentating on the Aussie Rules because a lot of them didn't know what Aussie Rules was, he was explaining the rules. One bloke caught it and dropped it, some bloody thing, useless bastard or something. In front of all these dignitaries

21:30 he got in a lot of trouble over that one.

**Did he have that kind of assured?**

Very confident, confidence in himself. He got in trouble, "So what I'm in trouble", he couldn't give a stuff.

**Was Tim Fisher over there as well?**

No, he was a Nasho, ninety day wonder.

22:00 Same with Jeff Kennett. "Shyville" they called it, it was supposed to be because they were trained out at Scheyville [a base in NSW]. Even a lot of the blokes would say to them, "Are you a ninety day wonder?" and they'd say, "Yeah", "A Scheyville boy?" and some of the would get upset about it. I don't know, some derogatory remark made about them.

**What does Shyville mean, is that a place?**

22:30 No it's really Scheyville, that's the name of a place but the boys changed it in to "Shyville". They reckoned they were shy of a fight or some bloody thing. Some they done a really good job, some were real good, some were real bad. A couple I come across were real good.

**How long all up were you in this Malaya and Singapore region?**

Two years and three months.

**That's quite a long time.**

23:00 Yeah. I done a lot of traveling from there. First year I went back to Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan. Come back Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore. Second year I was there I flew to England, see Europe and that. Ended up down the Rhine. It was an experience, worth seeing. I reckon travel is the best education you can get, see how other people live.

23:30 **So two and a half years, were you doing patrols or anything?**

Sometimes we'd do exercises. A lot of sport over there, rugby union, tennis. A lot of other things. They have a Commonwealth week every year. The Aussies done all right in that. The rugby union, we had ninety per cent

24:00 of our players were Aussie Rulers in Union and they could drop kick a ball from just about anywhere. I don't think they liked it, the Poms. I liked it over there. You played the Kiwis, get out the football and try and kill each other and afterwards you'd party.

**Quite a different lifestyle**

24:30 **to Vietnam.**

Different lifestyle, yeah.

**Now at this stage were there any of the issues you've had with Vietnam?**

No it didn't worry because I was still in the forces then and we were still orientated with the forces. I didn't have any trouble until after I got out. Before if you had any problems, someone was there.

25:00 You could talk to some blokes who were with you when it happened. We'd sit down and probably have a bit of a yack, then we'd forget about it. In a way I was very lucky. I went from one extreme environment, come home and then went back to a lower level. We didn't walk around thinking your life was in danger but we were still over there

25:30 with indigenous people and that. It was a different outlook on life. Went out on some big exercises there, up on the east coast. There's a lot of pretty country over there, that's another pretty place, good soil again. A lot of rainforest and that there.

26:00 **Local interaction, did you get to meet locals much?**

Yeah, every Saturday there. When we went over there you had the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Tamils too, different races, multi races and any time anyone had a holiday you got the holiday too, our battalion.

26:30 So what else is there to do but drink? But a lot of time, weekends, Saturdays we used to go down and play Rugby League because mostly they were all Union in the army but for something different we'd go and play. We'd go and be sitting down there at the cricket club at Penang in Singapore itself and who's playing football, hands up and in the end you walk in there with your gear, "You, you, you you're on his team", "You, you, you, you're best of mates,

27:00 you get out there and try to bloody kill each other". Sometimes we'd have a game of cricket and if you caught anyone out on the full you had to have a can of beer in your other hand and you weren't out 'til you had six runs.

**All this fun and drinking, does the army encourage you to go too far with drinking?**

No but they encourage you to drink though and smoke. Pull up five minutes for a smoke

27:30 and when you come back from the war zone, one thing they emphasis in PTSD training, what do you do, they go back and they pour the grog in you son, hook in to it. "Hand up, who's a non-smoker", bloke puts his arm up, "Good, you can go out and sit guard there and these fellas can have a smoke".

28:00 If you don't smoke, go through the actions. That is one of the things. You're encouraged to drink. It was one good relief. What I put it down to is it was the only bloody medication they had.

**In a way it could be like seen as temporary medication too.**

Yeah, temporary. Blokes get drunk and

28:30 if any of the blokes got killed, best mate, they'd get him up and if he didn't drink, he was drunk that night though. They'd get him and just wipe him out. Wake him up and then sit down and talk to him. A lot of the blokes were quite good at that. If anyone was grieving and that they tried to help him, talking about it years later is just one way of getting over it.

29:00 A lot of blokes bottle it up.

**It left quite a number of men having alcohol addiction and definitely nicotine addiction.**

Yeah. I still smoke but I haven't had a drink in seven years. When I started to break down big time I had to go and see the psychiatrist and say, "I need help".

29:30 They put me in the psychiatrist ward in Mackay there, the pioneer hospital. I was in there for three and half months. Turned me in to a drug addict, had me on eight valium a day. Slowed me down. I was hypo [hyperactive].

**You said in the army you didn't really have these kind of symptoms?**

No.

**When did it hit you exactly?**

I think I started having it after, well, about

30:00 ten years after I got out of the army. I went back and I started working. I was still with a group of men, I was in construction and all that. I was still with men but it was a lot different to the army, the standard of discipline and all that. When I got in the mines and had a steady job when I went home and that then I used to sit down and start thinking. That's the same as a lot of blokes even with families.

30:30 They wait until, it doesn't hit them until after the kids have grown up and left home. Then they start thinking, when the kids are gone and that. There have been a lot of marriages break up, a lot that stay. The ones that stay with their husband need medals I tell you. I was going to work pissed and I'll admit it.

31:00 I even told them out there. When the doctors said, "I'll put you in hospital for a while", the day he put me in was the day I stopped drinking and never looked back. Otherwise I'd be buried by now.

**So there was the drinking, was there anything else, what was going on in your mind?**

I'd wake up in the middle of the night, get up. What I used to do was get a book,

31:30 get up about two o'clock, read 'til about five and go back to bed. Wake up about six. Then go to work. I was on shift work too. That was day, afternoon and night shifts and half the time your body clock did not know where you were. I had to get help big time. I had to see a psychologist first and I went to

32:00 see the psychiatrist and he put me on medication. I wasn't into drugs and that. I give them away. Then I found that I had to take it. The same with a lot of other blokes, they're on medication.

**What kind of medication helps?**

Anti-depressants. Had to go and do, I done a lot of lifestyle,

32:30 I was helping a lot of Vietnam vets, steering them in the right direction. It took me, one bloke three years to get him, he needed help. He reckons he didn't, nothing wrong with him. Last Anzac Day he come up to me and said, "Thank you very much for what you done". It wasn't only him, there was two other blokes at the same time. That made my bloody day.

33:00 I was on my own. I shacked up [lived with someone] a few times. There's my partner I've been with three years. She's still wary of me. I've taken her to lifestyle courses. I've done a two month PTSD course here, eight weeks here in Townsville. That sorted me a hell of a lot out. There was only two single blokes on it.

33:30 I said to them blokes with their partners and they started telling us a few facts and I said, "I must have been an arsehole to live with back then". I've calmed down a hell of a lot now.

**When you say an arsehole to live with, what kind of behaviours are you talking about?**

Grog. One sheila, I caved her jaw in. I was having a nightmare, she touched me

34:00 and I spun around. I felt about that small. Wondered why she wouldn't sleep with me any more.

**Any case of flashbacks or anything like that?**

Got a lot of them, nightmares. Still do. I'll probably have some tonight, talking about it, but I find talking is

34:30 one of the best, therapies there is. A lot of vets [veterans] will talk to other vets. We've all been through the same thing. Yet when I first started out with the counseling service they had a lot of women. A lot of blokes wouldn't talk to a woman. But they'd open up to another vet.

35:00 Now finding a lot of them talk to the women now. There's still a lot of blokes out there that won't come in, nothing wrong with them. That's all I worry about now. If I find a bloke, I'm an accredited peer facilitator and I can only give information, I can't give advice but I can steer blokes in the right direction.

35:30 You know, "You go and see so and so. He'll try and do that". I keep a check on them, find out what they do and what they've said. Sometimes they come to me with some of their problems. Help them out as much as I can but you can only help people that will help themselves.

**What motivation did you have, why did you want to do this role of helping people?**

- 36:00 Well I had this John Langford, a psychologist down in Mackay, he said, "What would you like to do?" and I said, "Well there are a lot of blokes out there like me, I'd like to help them" and he said, "Yeah" and he encouraged me. He was quite good. I've learnt a hell of a lot about PTSD through the years.
- 36:30 As I tell people the first thing my mate told me was when they start to come out of their shell, we tell them, "You've got to change your ways to suit the world, the world won't change their ways to suit you". You get a lot of people saying, "I've got this wrong and that wrong", and I say, "I don't want to hear about your disabilities mate I want to hear about your abilities, what you can do". When I done the peers facilitators course I had to do
- 37:00 a spiel [talk] on PTSD. There was a lot of civvies [civilians] on it, it had nothing to do with the army. I told them when I went in there and told the psychiatrist, he asked me what was wrong with me and I said I had alcoholic constipation and he said, "What's that?" and I said, "I can't pass a pub or a beer". Funny at the time.
- 37:30 I said, "I ended up in the bin". One of them said, "What's the bin?" and I said, "Loony bin, nuthouse". The first day he started me on four valium a day and I asked him the next day, "When do these things start to work?" so he doubled it. I was on eight valium a day. It quieted me down, he rolled me. It took them two months to wean me off it. I come out and I was bugged, I couldn't do a thing. It's only the last eighteen months or so
- 38:00 I started to get really back on my feet. A lot of them got a bit of a surprise even admitting you've been in the bin but I knew quite a few veterans. It was a loony bin, psychiatrist ward but it more or less dried you out because I was drinking a carton a day. I was pissed going to work, pissed when I come home.

**How did you manage to function at work?**

- 38:30 I was mostly on a dozer [bulldozer], on my own. I don't think I could have worked with a group. When you're on the dozer, on the stockpile, no one else come near you.

**Was there a spark that got you sent to the bin?**

Yeah, when I read about Operation Windsor, that was in 1997 I think it was.

## Tape 8

00:32 **Just what were you doing after?**

When I come back?

**Yeah, after Malaya that is.**

Over there they asked, we could have got anything we wanted, what corps we wanted to go to and that, corps change. There was an opportunity, they were looking for advisors back in Vietnam. I put in to be an advisor to go back over there in a mini MATS team,

- 01:00 another section of the training team. I went and done that, that was about six or eight weeks. I was ready to go back, on pre-embarkation leave and that's when Gough Whitlam [Prime Minister of Australia] got in and when they sent me over to 7 Battalion,

- 01:30 when I was in Malaya I done a Pioneer course and I ended up with pioneers. I just sat down and thought about it and thought about it, I'd do a corps transfer. I went over to truckies [Royal Australian Corps of Transport]. I stayed in there for about five years. First I was in domestic, more or less like army taxis, bus drivers and all that. Then I went to field force and that was in 5 Squadron, in Brisbane, Ennogera.

- 02:00 Then while I was there they wanted me to sign on again and they reposted me back down to Sydney. It's too cold down there so I said, "I'll get out". They offered me two hooks [a promotion]. I said, "If I was worth two hooks I'd have them by now". I just didn't feel like taking on the responsibility, I had it in Vietnam and it was a big thing because you had to look after all the blokes before

- 02:30 you look after yourself. Even as a 2IC you worried that everyone else had a feed and all that. After that I just got out. When I got out of the army I went bush.

**So you wanted to leave because they were taking you to Sydney?**

Yeah, I didn't want to go back down. Spent about seven odd years in Sydney on and off before I

- 03:00 went overseas and after I come back.

**What was it like to leave the army after all this time?**

I was lost for a while but when I went out bush I was all right. I was doing a bit of roo shooting then I

ended up in Walgett and that's when I started to wake me up a bit, "You're not in the army now". That's when Charles Perkins

- 03:30 [(UNCLEAR)] riots. I just moved around. I went back to Dorans place, back to Molladree and stayed there for quite a few years. Even when I was in the army I used to go back every holidays, I'd take holidays in October, that's when they're stripping the wheat. I'd cart wheat, making extra money,
- 04:00 all cash in hand. Where my roots come from I used to always go back. Then I ended up, 1980 I came up to Rockhampton my mate said, "I might be able to get you a job". I got a job in construction out at Bogantungen with Leightons in heavy machinery and that,
- 04:30 surveyors. Never looked back after that. Although it took me eight years to get in to the mines. It's not what you knew, it's who you knew. I got in there. Even in the mines and in construction you stuck with the same blokes, work with them all the time.
- 05:00 They didn't class what colour you were, if you could do your job they accepted you which I liked. Same out at the mines. Stuck to the same crew, I got on pretty good. But it was strange though, a bloke, me and him joined up on the same day, we used to work together in construction. I didn't see him for about three years because he was on a different shift and a different area of the mine.
- 05:30 I learned a hell of a lot out there. I nearly cut my leg off, dropped a freezer on it and I come up here to see the Vietnam Veteran review board. I had a sheila with me then, she stayed down at the beach hut. That's when I found out all about this book, that's when I went down.
- 06:00 Started to go down big time. Even my mate picked it up. I didn't think Angela, she knew I was overseas and that. She was very concerned about it.

**When you said you went down hill from here, had there been signs thought before?**

I knew there was something wrong with me. When I was on stravers

- 06:30 and that I was getting agitated. I seen the doctor and he put me on serapax. I stopped taking it because I was driving heavy machinery. I didn't notice anything until I used to play a lot of darts and I was going around representing Moranbah a fair bit and I run in to my mate and he hadn't seen me for twenty five years
- 07:00 but he recognized me the way I walked. He come up and I heard this voice, "All Charlie Company blokes are poofsters" and I spun around, I was drinking then. He said, "It's me, Stan" and I said, "No, Stan was skinny, you're too fat". "I've put on weight mate" and he started to get me in to the pension and that, seven years it took. Yet some blokes
- 07:30 got it in three weeks. Met some mongrels, wannabes. A lot of blokes, some blokes listen to other people talk about their experiences. Dave said, "Mention the one up at Mareeba", and I said, "Yeah". What happened,
- 08:00 they were up there doing a welfare course and they all had their 1 Battalion blazers on. This fella strolls in, "Oh you're with the 1 Battalion were you?" and they him there was a couple there with two trips. He was outgunned for a start. He said, "I was in 1 Battalion too". They said, "Who were you with?" and he said, "7 Platoon Charlie Company with Oakey O'Kane and Condry". When I heard,
- 08:30 when they told me I said, "Hey that's bullshit, the two of them never worked together". Anyway my mates said, "Oh you'd know Jacky Dillon then". He'd never heard of me. "Well you should do, he was the platoon medic and he was the only black fella in there". That fella got up and walked out and never come back to the course. He was a wannabe. He'd heard about some of the other things
- 09:00 but they won't tell me who his name was, he lives here in Townsville because I'll front him but I found out later he was a trucky. When you start talking about things that you didn't do that's what I get pissed off about.

**You told us about how you were put in the psych unit in Mackay, what was that like in there?**

At times it was funny. We had, a lot of

- 09:30 civvies in there too. The women were funny there. One woman she was telling us how she come to be in there, she said, "Oh I was going to hang myself but the bloody old man went and hid all the rope". Another one there cuddled me, she said, "I just want to talk to a friend", we got on pretty good. I took her back to her room and I went straight around and told the head psychiatrist,
- 10:00 I said, "Hey I'm a patient here, not a bloody doctor, you'd better go round there and do something". I talked a couple of blokes into staying. One fella, he's still around. Bloody as I said you've got to talk and he was telling me how he was going to commit suicide. He said, "I got into a boat and I rowed out into the bay. I had a five point nine six", some kind of weapon and he was going to blow his brains out
- 10:30 and fall in the water and all that and I said, "Well what happened?" and he said, "The water was too rough". I couldn't laugh at him, I was starting to get back on my feet again, starting to get my wits

back. I said, "I'm going to make a cup of coffee" and I got in there and I pissed myself bloody laughing. But he's still around. When you listen to him, I don't know what we were doing over there, he won all the battles. I've struck a couple of them

11:00 like that.

**What about yourself, did you have any bad thoughts of things like suicide or anything like that?**

No. Too many sheilas to chase mate, too many islands to see and too many bloody bridges to cross. They asked me all the questions when you're in the psych. I don't know what the shrinks thought of me. He had to tick a flick on the

11:30 computer and he come to one question, he said, "Do you have sexual problems?" and I said, "Yeah" and he said, "What are they?" and I said, "I'm not getting any". After a couple of months there I started to get back as I was. I thought to myself, "That's a good thing". He let me out for about three days and I couldn't do a thing. When I come up to Bowen, I had a boat up there,

12:00 I was just useless. Take me quite a few years to get back on me feet again. There's nothing you can do overnight.

**Now you said there was the spark which was the book and all that, was there any behaviour or anything you did which made the doctor want to put you there or not?**

Yeah, grog, a carton a day.

**That's right, you told us that.**

I was doing

12:30 stupid things at work. I was driving the biggest bloody dump truck out there. I was a fairly good operator and I shouldn't have been driving it in these conditions but my mind was miles away. I nearly run into a big hydraulic shovel. I started to stop and think, "There's something wrong here". "Why am I",

13:00 I used to be on the Fourex Light, I used to drink that and I'd get pissed, wipe myself out and go to sleep but I'd only sleep for a couple of hours. I was just nervous. Couldn't do a thing. I knew there was something wrong with me but I didn't know what it was. That's what I found out, talking to other vets that's what I told a lot of people too I said,

13:30 "I had a lot of problems and I though I was the only one with it, a lot of the problems and when I went in the pioneer hospital there was five other regulars in there too with the same symptoms. I wasn't on my own".

**You told that quote at the start of the day that it starts on the very first day of joining.**

Yeah that's what I reckon, PTSD. You have a look,

14:00 if you ever get a hold of that movie, Not in the Forces Now that's where I first picked it up. When you stop and think about it, it's right. When the professor said, "How do you come to that conclusion?" I said, "Well I've seen blokes, I see a lot of vets and non-vets and one non-vet he had more anger than what I did. He didn't go

14:30 overseas, he's never been out of Australia. So where did it come from?" I've struck a couple of people that haven't been overseas and still got all the symptoms, even navy. It's got to tell you something doesn't it.

**So the theory is it's the breaking down.**

The breaking down, brain washing I think, more or less. We weren't debriefed when we come back from overseas and some of the poor buggers,

15:00 as I said, I was lucky. I landed in Australia, went bush, come back, three weeks later I'm back overseas again. Some of the blokes I've had to help were put off a plane at midnight and told to piss off. Mate, they just come straight out of the J, straight in to the big lights, "What do we do now?"

**So PTSD can be caused by**

15:30 **being in one world, say the military world and then being thrown in the civilian world?**

Yes. You can get traumatized by anything I've found. Even a death in the family, car accident or anything like that. It doesn't take much to trigger it off again. When people have a lot of flashbacks and that, that's when they start worrying. I've learned to live with it

16:00 but I'll never get rid of it.

**What exactly happens in a flashback, do you actually feel like you're there?**

Sometimes I am. It's like an old standing joke, the psychiatrist says, "When was the last time you were

in Vietnam?", "Last night". It's a scary thing.

16:30 I've learnt a hell of a lot. The twelve years I was in the army, it was good, I was treated as an equal. It was up to me if I wanted the promotion and I didn't want a promotion.

**What's the best memories of being in the army or being in Vietnam for you?**

I don't know about memories but the best part of the army is leaving it I think.

17:00 It was a bit cultural shock when I did that too. Coming out of more or less a home, you could go anywhere in Australia and always get a feed and a bed as long as you had your papers. Now, you're outside and you're hungry, you're hungry.

**What about the worst thing of all your service time, in particular Vietnam?**

The time the bloke yelled out

17:30 he didn't want wounded, he wanted bodies and I was the medic. Just pushed aside and zap. That's life mate. I think he's out of his tree now too anyway. He wasn't even, wasn't our real, he was second in charge, he took over

18:00 while the other fella was away. There was a lot of answers I'd like to find out but whether I can find them out or not is another thing.

**Were there any regrets you had from being in the services or the army?**

Yeah. I often thought now that if I had an opportunity to go back instead of going back to Vietnam as a force

18:30 I should have done a trade, cooking or something like that. Would have had something to do when I come back here. I can always say one thing, I was never ridiculed in the army and always treated with respect. I got on good with just about everyone, with some of them I had a few blues.

19:00 I was more of a bloody worker for them, a lot of blokes knew they could rely on me. I'm not putting tickets on myself, just stating facts. If they wanted anything done I'd go and do it for them.

**And you said for the most part you were treated equally and all that.**

Yep.

**Was there ever an occasion being an Aboriginal soldier that you got**

19:30 **unfair treatment?**

No. The boys'd back, they'd bear up too. As I said, I was an Australian soldier, not an Australian Aboriginal. When they said they're doing a thing for Aboriginals and that, myself, I reckon that's discrimination. I turned around and said to one bloke, "Who are they doing one for?", because

20:00 I was in the army with Italians, Kiwis, Poms, I said, "Have they got the same thing for them?" We were all one bloody thing. That's just my way, it's probably the way I was brought up and that. Some blokes wanted to make a big bloody thing. There's an Aboriginal out there I'll go and help him, if there's a white fella I'll go and help him. We're all in the army. Before I used to be a big niggly about where they served

20:30 and that, if he was a pogo but we were all in the army and we all went over there to do a job and we done it. Just take it as it comes now.

**How are things now, now that you've had all this help and stuff, have things improved?**

Good, yeah, as I said I done a PTSD course. I never had a partner,

21:00 never had a girlfriend or anything, it was only a couple of weeks later I started seeing June. We come back up after six months and we had a review on how you're going. Doctor Rogers said to me, the director, "How you going Ray?" and I said, "Pretty good. I've got myself a partner now. What I've learnt from here, I had to

21:30 change me ways". He said, "Oh is she an Aboriginal girl?" and I said, "Piss off, she's top shelf, mate, white one". If you don't mind, that's just the way I express myself. I even got on good, I still go down and visit him. I think a lot of people find I've got a strong sense of humour and that, I'm happy go lucky.

22:00 I couldn't give a stuff. If it happens it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't.

**Well coming to the end of the interview is there anything more you want to say or add to the record that we might have?**

No. As I said the only thing when you sit down and think about it, we were just glorified bloody pig dogs. You're trained to do something and when we were finished we were discarded.

22:30 It's like wearing a pair of bloody shoes. When they wore out you just chuck them away. Now they're starting to wake up that we do have a problem. When you fight the DVA I tell you, you've got a battle on your hands.

**Do you think we've learned anything from the experience?**

Yeah, it's cost them though, that's where it hurt them I think. Everyone's got the same problem.

23:00 They go right back to the action reports and everything now. That's where they bought a lot of blokes undone. A lot of fellas talked about other people's contacts and what they done and that and they're telling the same thing. Whoever does the psychiatrist, well, "His trouble is PTSD". Another bloke, a mate of mine here, he stayed with us the other night. He come up, he was on the first trip

23:30 and they lost one of their blokes. He said, they had to pull back because they were in a heavy contact. Where they left him, I don't know if it's true or not but they put a lot of bullets in there just to make sure he was dead when they found him. They went back the next day and he was gone, they never found him. When he told the psychiatrist that, the psychiatrist wrote down, "I think this man

24:00 is lying". When Trestle found out about it he went straight out here to the battalion, got the after action report, come back with it, wrote on the bottom, "I do not lie" and handed it to him. It all depends, we had a lot of trouble with psychiatrists and doctors. DVA doctor, don't go near him.

**Is that why you rely on each other who'd been through it more?**

24:30 Yeah, been through it. If we got a psychiatrist who could understand. One psychiatrist I know of he had a lot of trouble with his father because he was Second World War and he got shit on big time when he come back. He said, "I'll fight for Vietnam veterans".

**Well we might call it a day there. Thank you very much.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**