

Australians at War Film Archive

Barry Caligari - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 18th August 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2383>

Tape 1

- 00:30 Well family-wise my paternal grandfather came from Pinao in Switzerland during the gold rush in the 1850s and 1860s and on my mother's side they were Hines they came from County Clare in Ireland, and they settled in the same area,
- 01:00 Ballarat, during the gold rush. In fact the Hines there were four or five Hines involved in Eureka stockade, one was killed and his cousin was wounded so that's where the family started. Being mainly an Anglo-Saxon community Protestants and Catholics, which tended to be Irish and Italian
- 01:30 and they tended to marry which became a bit of a cultural thing. From then my paternal grandfather fought in the First World War. They moved to Western Australia from Ballarat when things got a bit tough in the gold fields. And of course the gold fields went the same way, so they became farmers. And in the Depression of course it got very tough over there too so they moved back to Ballarat.
- 02:00 My father worked in much the same area as the family, he was a farmhand and he worked out of Ballarat a bit where I guess he met my mother and married her. They travelled around Mildura, share farming at Tocumwal, Finley, places like that, cattle and cattle properties.
- 02:30 During the Depression of course which was before they were married he worked on the dole and the railroads and the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. By the time the war started there was much more employment in Melbourne and he got a job down there at Fisherman's Bend. Of course the war in Europe was starting then and he was working in the aircraft factories.
- 03:00 My mother children, schooling in Melbourne, St Kilda. Housing became very short in the 1950s, they were evicted and I volunteered to go back into the country where my grandparents had a farm up in the gold rush area. And I spent the last eight or nine months, possibly a year of my
- 03:30 schooling at the local school and left when I turned fourteen and did a fair amount of farm work. Plenty of pocket money in those days from catching rabbits because of the Korean War and the rabbit fur was very expensive fox hunting, there was a bounty on foxing. So there was plenty of money for a school kid, but when you tried to get a job
- 04:00 whether it was potato digging, looking after cattle or dairying or whatever it wasn't easy and wages were not good at all. So by then my parents had purchased a house in Melbourne, I moved back down there and worked for a wholesale retailer for about a year and then went into retail soft wear, you know men's clothing and things
- 04:30 like that. Most of my time was spent trying to convince my parents to let me join the army, but they weren't that pleased with the idea. But I just about had them turned around at seventeen and a half, might have been a bit later, and they signed the papers and I joined the army. The first three months was at recruit training at Kapooka. The second three months was in
- 05:00 Sydney corps training, and then I was lucky enough to be posted across the road to the 3rd Battalion which was getting ready to go to Malaya. Malaya for two years, Malaya was Malaya, came back to Australia to Melbourne, married Chris
- 05:30 we had known each other for the two years I was in Malaya and during that time we saved up and bought a block of land and built a house on it down in Melbourne. And so we packed up our chattels and moved by train and three railway gauges to Brisbane. We were in Enoggera, we lived at Gaythorne and Red Hill. We were there for four years.
- 06:00 During that period of time of course we had two children and for a private soldier it was difficult financially to survive. Well you can survive but you couldn't see yourself making your way for the future. So as Chris said a mate of mine, we had been around a fair bit, knocked around, we had both married and had young children and we thought, this is not going to get us

- 06:30 anywhere and at that time there was a special allowance for ex-servicemen. In the Queensland public service system; one of the divisions I think the third division you could get into with a leaving certificate and I think that was, it might have been a degree or matriculation. So we thought we would do that so we did the leaving, and of course by the time we finished the leaving
- 07:00 they had cancelled, this was the special nature of it. By then we were getting ready to go to Malaysia. And we thought well we will do that anyway, a bit of an adventure. So we went to Malaysia for two years and during that time of course confrontation, there was still operations on the Thai border with the communist terrorist or the insurgents there wasn't much happening but we still
- 07:30 did operations up there. And then of course there was confrontation and 3RAR [3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment] was involved in landings at Kaesong and then of course spent some time in Borneo. During that period of time I was selected for direct commission and was sent back to Australia for a qualifying course passed that and was sent back to 3RAR, went to Vietnam for fourteen days I think and then
- 08:00 back to Borneo. And for all of that free travel they sent me back to Puckapunyal in Victoria to assist in raising the 7th Battalion. It is just interesting a thing that is not written about a great deal is that the three battalions of the Australian regiment split into nine in three or four years which was quite remarkable. And I think it is a
- 08:30 testimony to the training of the three battalions that were in at that time. So when we got to Puckapunyal we received half of 3RAR which was mainly the single men, who had just come back from the tropics and were in Puckapunyal and we were going to make up the rest with national servicemen, which most regulars were pretty apprehensive of and worried about,
- 09:00 but in actual fact they were outstanding soldiers. So there was eighteen months at Puckapunyal raising a brand new battalion and then back in Vietnam again for a year, I guess a year there was much the same as a year with any other battalion. Accommodation was operational, operations were frequent,
- 09:30 unfortunately casualties were too. After the year there the battalion came back to Holsworthy New South Wales and then they wound down, we received our colours there from [Sir] Roden Cutler which was most appropriate. And I stayed on there until about September I think and then
- 10:00 I was posted to army headquarters as staff captain grade three which was probably a bigger culture shock than anything else. About eighteen months I was in the Directorate of Military Training getting cups of tea and shuffling paper and I was posted to the Australian [Army] Training Team Vietnam. And I spent a year there, six months in the Northern Provinces
- 10:30 in the 1st corps, and the remaining six months I served in the 2nd corps as an instructor with my own team of instructors, warrant officer advisors and then I came back to Canberra and I was posted
- 11:00 I was doing something in Canberra anyhow. One of those things that just happens I guess. I was there for another two years and in 1974 I attended the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College, I was the first Australian student to attend that, it had been running for about three years and that was in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.
- 11:30 That was very pleasant, that was a great year there and we had a good time. The three children had grown up and they went to the American school there and they loved it. We came back on board; I had been posted to the Directorate of Infantry for the second time which was good news. We came back by
- 12:00 boat on the Centaur went across on the Indian Pacific to Sydney and when I was in Perth I got an urgent call from Canberra saying I was placed on the short list to be the military assistant to the vice chief of the general staff and I informed them that I already had a posting order but they weren't impressed with that. And when I came back I sort of enquired around, I had already had a run in with this fellow before, he was a real tartar [a hard taskmaster], so I was
- 12:30 pretty apprehensive but I didn't say anything, we went back to our house and unpacked, we didn't have a telephone and a big black car pulled up and said that I had to go in for an interview. I had no uniforms or anything it was all still on the water, so I had to go and borrow a suit I think and I went and had the interview and when it was all over I was reasonably sure I wouldn't get the job and so I went back to the military sector here that looked after the postings of officers and he assured me that if I wasn't
- 13:00 selected I would go back to the Directorate of Infantry which I was very happy with. And while I was there the existing military assistant came in and handed him a piece of paper and I thought this is it. And he said, "You have got a job." I can tell you story about when I struck him the first time. I spent a year with him,
- 13:30 and I was only expecting to be there for a year, because that was a big thing you only had to suffer for a year. But then he was replaced by another general and I was stuck there for another year, so two years there as MA [military assistant]. I had a long spin of staff jobs. I went to the Directorate of Army Development,
- 14:00 I was looking after infantry weapons, that was the writing of requirements for different weapons to replace weapons systems, new weapons, modification of weapons things like that, very interesting but

very unproductive. You think of a good idea and they would be approved you would get the money allocated and when the time came the money would go and you would end up with nothing, very frustrating.

- 14:30 From there, I was promoted to lieutenant colonel and Namibia was just on the rise there, there had been a big battle with the United Nations to get the South African government to release the Namibia which was an ex-German
- 15:00 territory I think and under a mandate, and apparently there was a bit of agreement by the South Africans to think about releasing it to the United Nations and so the United Nations immediately started looking for forces to go in there in the event that it did get its independence. I was put in charge of the advance party to go over there,
- 15:30 sort out our facilities and what they wanted and what we wanted and allowances and things like that. So I had to get inoculations and documentations and things like that. And it sort of dragged on and on and I was taken off that after about six months. I can't recall how long it went on for. I became staff officer grade one in charge of
- 16:00 concepts and research in the personnel branch which was mainly to do with, I suppose computers in those days, we are talking about the late 1970s and computers were a novelty at the time and very few people had any specialisation and that was the side issue that was coming in at the time. I spent two years there which was quite pleasant.
- 16:30 The other thing right through my career was following in the footsteps, not following in the footsteps but being with [Major General] Peter Phillips who became president of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and won the military cross in Vietnam. He was I guess a mentor for long periods of time. From there I was posted as commanding officer of 1 RAR
- 17:00 which was of course the, I guess as far as you can go as an infantryman in the army is being the commanding officer or the regimental sergeant major infantry battalion. So that took me to just about where I wanted to go to and I had a great time for two years. We travelled the countryside, we did exercises, looked after civil emergencies
- 17:30 and things like that, just had a great time. And when that came to an end I couldn't see much future, I had been posted to a very good staff job in Brisbane actually. I told them that I would prefer to go into training, once you have been a commanding officer there is not many places for you to go. Training was the only active, everything else was staff and I had done a fair share
- 18:00 of staff. So we just agreed to part on very good terms. There was nothing they could find for me that was in my view active enough and they certainly couldn't find a staff job that would satisfy me so we just agreed that there really was no place for me left.
- 18:30 We had been around Australia a fair bit the family and I and we agreed that the area the Caligari settled in in Western Australia, in Manjimup and up in Pinjarra was very attractive but just a bit too far from the east coast where the kids obviously had to be educated and end up employed. And so we settled on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales and the Atherton Tablelands, we just liked them.
- 19:00 And being in Townsville and being close up here it was easier to look at a block of land and buy a property and although we probably preferred Northern New South Wales from the family point of view. But having just been down there and had a look at the traffic down there now I am glad we settled up here. So we built up a Murray Grey stud and we have been in cattle ever since we have been here which is over twelve years now.
- 19:30 Very happy with it. And apart from travel to New Zealand, Cook Islands, China, Japan Africa, Europe, the United Kingdom we have been quite happy to keep our counsel up there. The only thing I didn't mention when I had that stutter, I went to Joint Service Staff College and there was a couple of trips there,
- 20:00 one to India, but again that was six months of academia which you do because that's how you progress but you don't enjoy it. And that's about my life I think.

That's fantastic, and your children what are they doing or what do they do?

I have two daughters, they are both directors in the public service, one is a director in customs and the other is a director in statistics. And of course John,

- 20:30 he is just finishing off the junior generals course I think they call it and he is going as a brigadier to training command in December this year. His two boys are currently going to Marist Brothers in Canberra and that's a bit of a family tradition and they are going to Scots College in Sydney. In fact
- 21:00 all of our children went to the local state school we could see it it was across the road, it was a good education and we were quite happy there. But while I was in Vietnam AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] one of the teachers decided to make a political comment about whether people should be in Vietnam or not and I think
- 21:30 the teacher said that people shouldn't be in Vietnam now. We didn't push into our kids whether it was

right or wrong it was something did. He wasn't concerned about it, Chris was more concerned about it than I was because I didn't know about it. And she went and saw the headmaster and said she thought it was totally inappropriate for this conduct

- 22:00 and he flat out refused to do anything about it. and so we took him out of the school and sent him to Marist and so that's how that tradition started and when he came back to Canberra I think they gave him some priority in getting his children in and so it worked out well for him anyway.

I want to take you right back now and here a little bit about your memories of growing up, what are some of the strongest memories for you?

- 22:30 Well in Melbourne one of the strongest memories was that they dug up all of our playgrounds and put in trenches and barbed wire in the Second World War, I can remember that quite clearly and I thought that was terribly unfair on the little folk around the area. I quite enjoyed school but I at no time did I ever think I would be there much longer than the age of leaving, I just wanted to go to work.

- 23:00 A lot of big family times with the Irish side and the Italian side they like people, a lot of that.

Did you have a big family of brothers and sisters yourself?

I have a brother and a sister, three brothers died. I don't think that had an impact on me, a younger brother died,

- 23:30 two were elder, and I was too young to know that one way or the other, but I guess that had some impact on the family, Mum and Dad. Moved around a bit in the housing there, housing was very scarce. Some houses you wouldn't take and the houses you would take were generally short term so I think we lived in four or five

- 24:00 houses I think in the time I went to school down there. It was like an event every couple of years, you got used to it. just like being in the army, you carry the house with you. I liked the farm, the chance to get back into the country was great. I liked camping and fishing and hunting and things like that and that was the sort of thing

- 24:30 that kids in those days did. You played your football and your cricket but that was sort of the school thing and if you were any good at it you went on to the region, but there were far better footballers and cricketers than I.

What did they farm?

My grandparents had a dairy farm. But

- 25:00 around about the Depression time I think, I suspect they were dairy farmers and in those days it was all horses and carts and so you would milk the cows and then you would separate the milk and the cream and you would keep the cream cool in those Coolgardie safes, water and hessian and things like that. And I think once every two or three days they came and picked up the cream and on the day they picked up you could give them whole milk too. And I think when the

- 25:30 larger milking concerns started up, you know fifty or sixty head in rotating dairies they got bigger and bigger and of course transport came the way and they were only filling up big tankers and so they weren't concerned with tanks. So to answer your question, by the time I can remember my grandfather was painting houses and my

- 26:00 grandmother was growing vegetables and milking the odd cow and things like that, collecting eggs, and when I was there I was shooting and selling rabbits and skins. There wasn't a lot of money around but enough for a very comfortable life . There was no movies or night clubs, and if you went into a pub you would get kicked out very quickly so it was quite safe there.

And what about your mum and dad, what sort of people were they?

- 26:30 Dad in fact was unlike most of the Caligari's, he was very short. his name was Antonio Caligari which he absolutely hated and I think you, you would quickly buy yourself a fight if you called him Antonio so he was known as Jack. He was a very hard worker, typical Australian, going the six o'clock swill they called it in those days, the bar shut at six o'clock

- 27:00 and so you would knock off at five o'clock and drink as much beer as you could in the hour and play euchre or whatever it was. He was apparently from what I hear he was quite conservative being a farmer, and that lasted up until the Depression. Apparently they were loading sleepers and it used to be four men to a sleeper for the rail and a new contractor

- 27:30 took over and made it two to a sleeper which made it really back breaking work and I think it was two shillings a day or something, not a lot of money. And so they went on strike. Which was something which was completely foreign to him. He went on strike and the contractor sacked the lot of them and brought in more. There was so many people

- 28:00 unemployed they would break their backs for two shillings a day. So that taught him a big lesson and he

became a pretty strong unionist after that a bit of a rebel. And when he moved down to Melbourne he got into the unions again and was no longer terribly fond of the bosses, of course that caused a bit of conflict between him and the family which was still reasonably rural. He became an

28:30 SP [starting price] bookmaker, well he didn't he became a runner for an SP bookmaker. He got picked up twice and I think the third time he went to gaol. The last time they nearly picked him up, as I say he was only very short but he could fly over fences and they couldn't catch him so they gave it away. He was a smoker like all of us I guess and he ended up with emphysema and he died in 1988

29:00 pretty miserable death. And so I think had a lot of us known how bad smoking really was we wouldn't have gone through that. Now you just have your fingers crossed these days.

Were you close to him?

He was a very strict disciplinarian, and yes I was close to him. We didn't go fishing and playing football and

29:30 things like that but he was always there. He never had a great temper, you were either right or wrong but yeah we got on well.

And what about your mum what was she like?

The whole family, mums family the Hines were very gentle people. She was,

30:00 well she is a lovely lady. She is still around, she has Alzheimer's so we don't remember much together. Stuck on me there.

Whoops.

She sort of softened the blows of Dad I guess, she was the soft one of the family

30:30 and he was the hard one, and that's a good way to have it.

And what was school like for you growing up?

The playground was great but the classrooms were a bit of a nuisance the Christian Brothers were pretty tough teachers, I think you learn a lot there. They were certainly good role models, pretty active people, very interested in teaching us sport and physical fitness

31:00 and of course religion was number one on the agenda. I spent four years there, I spent two years in primary which I think was one of the nuns orders and three or four years at four years at Christian Brothers and I enjoyed that. I think I preferred, when I went to the country school I think I preferred that more.

31:30 Well in fact the curriculum was mainly rural, it was looking after seeds and cattle and fences and things like that. You did reading, writing and arithmetic and all of these little add ons which suited me a lot more, I was a lot happier with it. You might have only done one day of it, and then theoretically, but I didn't know they did that I sort of came from the city

32:00 up to a country town and I thought this is strange we don't get that down there. And no science none of those strange subjects they were teaching down there, this is good to hands on stuff and so I enjoyed it.

So you moved around a lot but you didn't move schools, you stayed at the Christian brothers?

No in the early 1950s housing became impossible you couldn't sort of move around. Mum and Dad were saving for a place and they got evicted from the

32:30 one that they were in and I just volunteered to go back to the country because they then had to farm out the family down to relatives there until they could get another house. And save enough money for a deposit because the cost of housing was going up, the war was over and immigration had started and it was a bit tough in the cities so I was happy to go back to a country school and spent the last eight months of my schooling there.

33:00 And do you remember the day the family was evicted, do you have a recollection of how the family reacted?

It wasn't unusual, see this was the way it normally happened, you sort of had a house and it wasn't permanent nothing was permanent because it all depended on how much rent you could afford to pay. So the time when came when the house either went up for sale

33:30 and you moved on or they were going to charge you more rent which you couldn't afford so you had to find something else. This was a, if you heard someone talking about a house you would tuck it in the back of your head because you might need that information later on. But it got pretty desperate down there in the 1950s, it might have been the migration going on at that time. A lot of Italians and Turks in fact settled in the area down there.

34:00 We were in a suburb of Melbourne and luckily enough we stayed in that area, so we tended to stay at the same school. But I can't remember exactly what day it was, my guess is that it wasn't worth

remembering because it wasn't that unusual.

And what do you remember of the war years?

Not very much, I can remember the ARP air raid precaution people coming around and burning off whatever they burn off in the gutters

34:30 every now and then. I can remember them coming around looking for rag and bone and metal I think for the war effort. I think at school we had evacuations of the school. might have been primary school in those days. As I say the tragedy for us was that they were digging up a lot of gardens. A lot of soldiers Americans I can remember.

What do you remember about the Americans?

35:00 Not a great deal, I had a feeling that they weren't popular but I can't put my finger on any, you tended to move away from them. I had the feeling that it wasn't nice for girls to go off with Americans and that sort of thing. I can't recall any vehicles or aeroplanes or things like that, just that feeling.

35:30 **Do you remember being either impressed or unimpressed with their uniform or their look?**

No.

And your father wasn't involved in the war?

No I am not quite sure whether it was health or the employment he had or height. As I said he was a real I was going to say Italian, I suppose that's a bit, he was short, dark and

36:00 very wiry. He was a boxer, footballer and he wouldn't back down to anybody. The simple things like, he was driving a truck down in Melbourne and in those days the things just wouldn't start, you would pull up and they would stop and just wouldn't start again. And the chap behind him started blowing the horn and so he just got out of the vehicle pulled the keys out of the ignition,

36:30 chucked them into a garden somewhere walked back to the truck again and started to try and fix it. There weren't many vehicles around in those days. You can imagine road rage today because we still had road rage then

And where did you go from, well actually in Marist Brothers did you have a close circle of friends at that school?

I wasn't in Marist Brothers I was in Christian Brothers.

37:00 My son was at Marist, did I have any?

Did you have a close circle of friends at Christian brothers?

Probably not as close as I had at the state school, at the time you had this state schools, Christian schools, and church schools and slogans on the walls like 'Proddy dogs jump like frogs' and

37:30 'Out of the water..' and similar things like Christians can't recall what they were now. It was on the verge, I suppose it could turn nasty every now and the, but it was that. and all of my friends, in fact the close group that I was friends with were from the state school, it was just that they were closer, we were closer to the state school than we were to the Christian schools and I think you tended to have neighbourhood rather than

38:00 school friends. You played street cricket and you would play the next street, and so if those kids didn't go to the Christian school whatever school it went to it didn't matter, it was depending on who was in the street. Most of my friends then were from the state school. In fact I was down in Victoria recently and I saw one I hadn't seen for twenty-five years, still the same friends. He grows wine

38:30 rather than cattle.

And what do you remember about your grandparents farm, when you actually moved out there?

I know it back to front, in fact when I was in Victoria I visited it again. It is very small, my ninety-year-old uncle still lives very close by. We went down to see him in fact. He was reminiscing

39:00 about the Hines' in general and the gold fields and Eureka and his father, my grandfather was a miner too and he gave me his scales and a few other odds and end, flints, snuff box, these things that weren't used in my day. The matchbox were

39:30 Vesters it was a wax match that were banned, they have been banned for about fifty years I think, they were very hard to put out once you started them. They were contained for those that had them in a silver box, very small Vesters matches, they were made of wax with a phosphorus tip on it and you would pull one out and turn the box over and there was a serrated edge on it and you struck it on that. You could strike them on anything, wood or issue so they were very dangerous matches, little things like that which I quite appreciated.

40:00 I was glad to receive them.

Can you remember what the farm looked like and the house?

Oh yeah. It was quite small, they had an easement on the side which was state government and they had that enclosed and they had the rights to that. But they had a much larger area down the back where they ran cattle but when the cattle went and they could no longer run cows

40:30 they gave away that and they just had the house and a very large garden. Very well tended vegetable garden and just enough room there for a couple of cows. But the old house which is still there, it has changed hands a couple of times, four enormous pine trees out the front, but the house when you look at it these days, I can remember there was three bedrooms,

41:00 sort of a family room that not a family room,, it was the lounge room, you didn't go in there, that wasn't for kids. And then there was the kitchen and a sort of an area where before refrigerators came in or electricity for that matter it was just a cement floor with an enormous cupboard full of all sorts of goodies. They were from a different era all together, the kids, that's my mother and father

41:30 and brothers and sisters everywhere, they used to buy them things, and when electricity came in up there I was still going to school and they bought them one of those, it is like a big toaster these days, a big rather large opening with a grill in it and electric element on top and they bought them an electric iron. Now I know for a fact, I don't think they ever turned those one.

42:00 They used to keep shoes, when they kids weren't, when the kids were coming they would take them all back out

42:04 End of tape

Tape 2

00:30 **Electrical appliances they weren't using?**

Yeah the grill they used to keep shoes in when the kids weren't visiting and the iron was used to keep the door open. And they still used the old flat iron, you know the one you put on the stove? And these were bought for them because my grandma used to light the stove about five o'clock in the morning, that was for everything, the ironing, the heating

01:00 and the cooking. It went all day long summer and winter that was just a fact of life. The only thing that change when electricity came I can remember was instead of having a large wet battery operated radio and lights, electric lights they were terrific.

So with that enormous extended family Christmas must be an interesting time?

Christmas was. More so with the mums side, I think she had

01:30 four sisters and two brothers I think and generally they would all be there, it would be quite a big Christmas, search around for the Christmas tree and presents and there was lot of fighting and chasing and cricket, those sorts of things that family do. They were a very close family.

02:00 **Did you ever get along to any cricket or football games?**

When I was in Melbourne I did, I used to religiously follow Richmond, I knew couple of the players, one was from Western Australia. When I was in Melbourne most Saturdays I would be at the football if I wasn't fishing or doing something else.

Was Richmond doing well when you were growing up?

Well they were always up there. You hated

02:30 Collingwood and Captain Blood was Dye [Jack Dyer - Collingwood football player], he was the captain of the Richmond and I think at the time the Roses were playing for Collingwood. You were reluctant to admit that you barracked for St Kilda because they were still losing at that stage of the game. You always hoped they would win one day because at that point in time they had never ever won a championship. It was a religion down there, it probably still is, if you didn't

03:00 know your football you wouldn't get into a conversation on a Monday, Tuesday or a Wednesday because that's when the whole thing was winding down. Then you had Thursday, Friday Saturday it was starting back up again. So you really had to know your football.

Did you have a particular favourite player?

Player? I recall this Western Australian chap was probably a friend of mine and I was interested in what he did. We met accidentally actually, he played for Richmond and he also worked at a sports store

03:30 in Little Bourke Street in Melbourne where we used to buy ammunition and fishing gear and all that and I just realised one day that it was the same guy I was watching out on the football field and so we got to be quite friendly.

Do you remember a particular grand final or game that?

I didn't go to grand finals, it just wasn't worth the bother. There was a limited number of seats for your club.

04:00 It was at the Melbourne football ground. You had to get there and get back out again and you had to fight when you were in there to see anything. I think I went to one, I can't remember which one it was and I thought never again. You really have to be religious to go to those finals, you're pushed and jostled and someone takes a mark and they all stand up in front of you and you can't see a thing

04:30 no I couldn't go through that.

So what did you do on grand final day?

Depending when it was cars were a big thing in those days, we had an old 1925 Dodge [American car] which we every two weeks you had to pull it apart and put it back together again and find spare parts for it. The weekend we were often away camping or fishing or whatever so it never took precedent

05:00 over that. Mind you some of the people that were there in our particular street or whatever would go and then our allegiance would be strained working out if you were going to the football or going fishing. But there was never any doubt in my mind, fifty, fifty, be about fifty, fifty.

So when did you start to develop an interest in joining the army?

05:30 I don't know, I think my grandfather had an influence in that. I had an uncle also who was in the Second World War and I knew a few people that went to the Korean War, they might have been mixed up with fishing club or something like that. But I am not quite sure, by the time that they were around that I didn't have it in mind anyway. I can't recall a time

06:00 that I didn't want to join the army. I can only go back to my grandfather or something like that.

What did he tell you about his experiences?

Not a great deal he got shot in the face in France in the Battle of Hamel, I can't recall him talking too much about it, but it must have been there. He had stuff, I think he had a uniform,

06:30 I think he had the old shaving piece of nickel plated tin in a sort of leather fold. I can remember a few of those things from that era. He didn't like weapons, I don't think he had a weapon in the house, he may have once but not after the First World War. He was written up in a book on the 2/2nd Machine-guns

07:00 written by a chap called Kearney called In Good Company. When he died my grandmother gave me the book signed by the author and with her inscription on it as too. So I think it might have been somewhere around there.

So how did you come to join up then?

Well I went, when I turned around my seventeenth birthday I told them

07:30 I was going to do it, and I went in there but I couldn't join up, I got all of the papers and brought them home and Mum and Dad wouldn't have a bar of it they just thought it would go away. But I kept on going into town and picking up the enlistment brochures and my parents had all sorts of problems with the pay, you'll get shot, you're too stupid, anything at all to turn you off it. But I just kept trying.

08:00 None of my friends were even vaguely interested in the forces, they were off on their science kick, they had their future mapped out, most of those kids do, carpentry or woodworking, there is no great brains there. Even people that had a science bent, I think the college had a special class,

08:30 Saint Thomas Moore's was a place where you got pressure instruction in science and things like that, none of them belonged to that, they had idea for the public service and like that but they all thought I was wacky, so there you go.

What did you like about the idea at that time? What appealed to you about the army?

09:00 I think it was probably the adventure, what people did, you saw a fair bit about the Second World War and the Kokoda Trail and you say, "That's tough, but I think I can do it." Well you say, "They had to do it so I guess you have got to do it." Probably in that area there, probably Walter Mitty, Danny Kaye

09:30 played Walter Mitty in the movies, a bloke who had daydreams about being a great fighter pilot and things like that. apart from that I don't know, perhaps male comradeship, because you tended not to play with girls in those days. I met Chris just before I joined the army and my mind was certainly made up by then. I don't know just something you did I guess.

10:00 **So when you finally did get in what happened then?**

Shock, good Lord, signing on was no problem once I could talk my parents into it. I think it was in Spencer Street or Flinders Street in Melbourne. Everyone was very nice and you fronted up there with your overnight case or bag whatever it was. And I think we were there for two or three days waiting for draft, and

10:30 they took us around to the Melbourne lock up where Ned Kelly was hung and there was a mask of Ned Kelly there and I think they had his armour down at the exhibition building. And we didn't do anything apart from touring and we thought this is all right. And then we got on a train, in those days I think it was all day or all night one of the two. And then we got to Wagga Wagga and got on a bus and

11:00 well shocking thing getting off that bus. From that point on it was screaming and hurry and queue up here and sign there they issued everything just about on the first day I think. I will tell you how good they were two battle dresses that I was issued in the first week of June 1956 I still have, I have work through every rank, they are still in very good condition. When I got them I

11:30 was ten stone, a hundred and forty pound and these things they just hung on me and even I knew this wasn't right and he said, "You'll grow into it." And then having seen that Are You Being Served ? on TV [Television] now I know why. But I did grow into it and they fit perfectly now. So all of that trouble and then the mornings having been used to sleeping into about nine o'clock

12:00 when you have got an office job being dragged out of bed and you have got to take your sheet out and undo your bed and on parade at half past five in the morning. Wagga Wagga at half past five in the morning, in the middle of winter the fronts is crisp and I thought I don't know about this. And then to try and get into the showers to get everything done by seven o'clock

12:30 parade at seven and you had to have breakfast and have a shave and there was only cold water, trying to shave, you weren't too sure you were shaving, there was so many people trying to look in the same mirror as you. The first six week I think was just parade ground and drill, up and down and saluting. I wasn't too sure you know, it was a very difficult time. And we had all of the inoculations,

13:00 there was small pox which some people reacted to very badly.

How did they react?

Swollen arms and big lumps, glands swollen underneath, trying to use a rifle must have been almost unbearable. I didn't have much of a problem but I felt very sorry, and it wasn't a small number. The accommodation there was those Second World War half moon corrugated iron huts.

13:30 And there was about fifteen beds on both sides and you had your locker and your bunk and bed. And that was virtually it. Some of these people were physically ill, if you wanted to go and see the doctor you had to pack up everything you had into your trunk, pack a haversack with whatever you needed for a night or two as though you were going to go to hospital. And then you went over there at six o'clock in the morning and you hung around and I think the doctor arrived, if the

14:00 local staff couldn't handle it, the doctor arrived at whatever office hours there were, I guess eight o'clock. And then he decided whether you went to the hospital or not, there was a hospital in Wagga. If you went in there well everything was packed there was no problem, if you didn't you came back and you had to unpack. So, it didn't take long to realise it was an us and them. Either we sort of hung together

14:30 or we hanged alone sort of thing. and if you were too sick for an amount of instruction, I can't remember how long it was, you got back squadded which meant you had another week or two weeks in absolute misery in another organization. So you left all of this group of people that had become your family and you moved to another place. Anybody could be in this situation and it didn't take long to realise that you had to make sure that all of these

15:00 people got through because in actual fact you were talking about yourself. There was no real loner mentality there you just had to get on. As I say it was just us and them and I think one of the big things that I learnt there was the sum total of the whole is greater than the total of all individuals because

15:30 it was the group that made the difference and I can only assume this is the outcome of years of army training. In fact there used to be a saying that the British formed colonial armies by finding a very large paddock and you put all of the men of military age in the paddock and you leave them go for a day

16:00 all of the trouble makers you go and pick them out and make them NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and take them away and all those left you left them for another day. And all of those that wouldn't make good private soldiers you make them officers. So this is how you made up your army. I think it is a deliberate thing that has been happening over the ages specifically for that effect, you realise the power and the importance of the group over the individual and I guess you become more of a team player

16:30 than an individual because you can't survive. Well I suppose you can survive but it wouldn't be pleasant.

And where have the other men come from?

All over the place. I joined up with a chap from Richmond, Tubby Gunson. Excuse me for a sec. Yes I joined up with a chap from Richmond, friend of mine and we served right through until the time I got

out,

17:00 he died recently and we are still in contact with, we're friends with the family and we visited the widow down there. So there is that group of people that you knew and then you picked up people from all over the place. There was someone from Goondiwindi who I haven't seen for a number of years, but he would still be there if I can find him.

17:30 People who served right through the army are now living all over the place in retirement. Even in that early stage you make these friendships, not in everybody's pocket, but they're always there if you want them. If you want to know something or do something or speak to somebody, if they're writing some bit of history they want to confirm they are always there.

18:00 **Any accident in the initial training time?**

Nothing I can recall I was going to say I can't even recall a car accident but there weren't any cars around more likely to be trampled by a horse than run over by a car. I can't remember any in recruit training or in corps training. When we started getting ready for Malaya there was a few accidents

18:30 as there always are, it is just one of those things.

And what did you do in recruit training, what were the classes?

It teaches everybody in the army in every corps from every arm of service just a basic survival. You have got to have drill for basic survival, haven't you? You know. You have got to be able to salute for basic survival I suppose you do actually, you

19:00 end up in gaol. Basic weapon handling, machine guns rifles, I don't think pistols. But certainly, machine-guns and rifles. Sub-machine guns. Gas warfare, nuclear warfare, the Geneva conventions. There was a lot of home keeping stuff, how to read a pay book, how to mend your trousers, how to darn your socks a lot of religious moral rearmament type of stuff from all of the religions,

19:30 in fact I had a Muslim friend who, they used to have a thing called a COs [Commanding Officer] hour and everybody had to attend and he got a bit cheesed off because it was always the Christian fellows and he never got a go. But a lot of physical fitness, I think the first physical exercise of the day was about six o'clock, that could last for half an hour, that was PT [physical training] or cross country running something.

20:00 And you never stopped moving, you were moving all of the time. Field craft, digging trenches, water safety, swimming. I don't think people taught swimming but you were made aware of the fact that you should learn it as quickly as you can but it wasn't really an army thing that was taught. But a lot of those sorts of survival techniques. A basic for

20:30 everybody in the army so no matter who you were you knew roughly that a driver could do these things at that level.

What did you enjoy about the training?

Practically everything. I didn't like being embarrassed and made a fool of, although it was not popular then and it is not popular now, but now it is not political either, but you do learn from it. In those days it was

21:00 more you than anyone else because everyone suffered the same thing, just that you got your turn every now and then. But it did teach you. Like if you dropped your rifle that was a mortal sin and the trick there was if you could beat it to the ground you didn't get into trouble, but that was pretty hard. So there was little problems, I came down to Melbourne, I think we got one leave

21:30 and I came home and stayed home. And I bought all of the stuff I had to have ready for the parade when I went back down with me, in those days they called KDs, khaki drills and they were almost impossible to iron, it was like ironing sheet metal and Chris said she would do it. So she did a nice job and I got all packed up and everything and of course the morning I got on parade of course she had ironed the seams on the side rather than the middle oh gee I was in trouble, that almost broke up a great romance I can tell you.

22:00 **What happened when you got in trouble what did they do?**

Oh not a great deal they could do extra press ups or extra drill or, a lot of the stuff is illegal of course, it is just easier, you might get a kick in the pants, depending on how upset he is at the time. There is nothing said about that, there wasn't a lot of that, I am not saying there was brutality, just that that could happen.

22:30 And quite frankly it was probably a better alternative of the two. I can't recall any formal charges of anybody at that point in time. Although there were some people that went to gaol, you could go there for insubordination and disobeying, that was not on and that got you very swiftly moved to the gaol.

23:00 All of that once it was all over it was forgotten it was not kept on your record, as far as I know that was a training record, but you didn't want it there either. So it was mainly embarrassment, extra drill,

sweeping out the lecture rooms, extra duties or something like that. The problem was that it put you further behind, if you took an hour or two out of your day

23:30 you wither missed a meal or you were late for a meal and if you were late for a meal and you got on the end of the queue it was the last ten people on the end of the queue that had to become the servers, and so you had to stay there until everyone was served, even the latecomers that came after you so it sort of put you back a little bit further, the whole thing was timed. And it taught you to use time very well. For example when you went out in the morning for parade

24:00 at half past five with a sheet you could do one of two things you could take it off your bed or go and buy a sheet and don't sleep in your bed. So that saves you five or ten minutes because when the inspection started at eight o'clock and if it wasn't exactly right it would get pulled apart and you had to do it again so there was a few of us bought a few extra bits and pieces, sleeping bags and what have you and slept on the floor, it was far easier. I am not saying all of the time, on the weekends you slept on your bed but for the rest of the time it was just easier to do it like that.

24:30 **Was there any blokes in the initial training that just didn't handle it and left?**

There probably were, I suspect they might have occurred early in the piece during the inoculations. But it wasn't easy, it wasn't doing a Max Clinger in MASH [American comedy TV series], you had signed on, you had taken the Queens penny as they called it in those days and you did it. Mind you different times, all of

25:00 us wanted to walk out but if you went AWOL [Absent Without Official Leave] invariably you would be picked up and court martialled and whatever brought back again and you have got to do a fair bit of that before the army gets sick of it. because the alternative is that people get away and say well that's an easy way out. If today's situation was the same then you say, "Well look I started smoking marijuana." And you would be out like a shot because there is zero

25:30 tolerance. But there was nothing there, you were beating your head against a brick wall, it just wasn't worth the bother and you may as well just stick around and put up with it. and as I say as the group melded together you looked after all of these people too. And that's a great thing with the situation then. You had these large rooms and people didn't have the option of being depressed because you were looking after them and moving them on as best you could. There were no doubt people you couldn't help,

26:00 I can't recall any. Today of course with motel accommodation, single bed rooms, my guess is you have got people in there that are terribly lonely and no one knows about it. If you had a bigger room or had a bigger number, I know it is great to have a private room and all of that, it really is flash. I think for socialising in the army and people being away from home there might be a better solution

26:30 I think, because as I say in a room with thirty people you can't do that and if you did you tell somebody.

So you met Christine before you went to recruit training, how did you meet?

At a dance in the Melbourne Town Hall in Melbourne, we weren't great dancers, but the time came and I think that the mind turns that way I guess. After a while fishing and shooting

27:00 is all very well but girls are better sort of thing. Again it was a group thing, not school, we went and did very embarrassing dancing lessons, this wasn't really bloke stuff this dancing and so you go to the Melbourne Town Hall and you all stand in a group down the end of the room and all of the girls sit around the corners and never the twain shall meet sort of thing. And one day I just plucked up enough courage,

27:30 I had danced with other girls but I am pretty clumsy anyhow. We sort of survived pretty well. I think our first date was Melbourne Cup Day 1954 or 1955, might have been 1955. and we just sort of stuck it out from there.

What do you remember about the first date?

28:00 Enjoyable. I think we won, dare I say it a dancing competition, I think we got some sort of prize of crockery or something like that. I can't imagine what it was, she must have been a darn sight better than me because I was pretty terrible.

How long were you seeing her before you went onto recruit training?

Well it was 1954

28:30 Melbourne Cup Day is November 1954, and I joined in 1956 so it was eighteen months. It must have been the year after November 1955, probably eight or nine months. We were pretty well, our minds were made up then because we both contributed to buying land

29:00 and building a house and, there was no strict engagement and wedding and marriage and dates and all of that. We just bought the land and I came home and we got married. There was no big deal about it.

How did she react when you initially went to recruit training?

Who Chris? Oh no problem. She earned more money than me for most of my life actually, she

29:30 was a book keeper stenographer. She went to McRobertson's High in Melbourne and she was well schooled and she worked for D&W Adams which was a pest extermination firm in South Melbourne. She was the secretary at the South Melbourne Town Hall and then she got a job as a book keeper with D&W Adams and it was ages

30:00 before I caught up with her salary, ages.

Had you had many girlfriends before Chris?

Only a couple, very temporary, they couldn't stand me once they got to know me.

What was it about Chris?

I don't know we just sort of blended together. We have both got our faults but luckily enough they weren't the same. We were able to tolerate each other a bit. It has just been one of those things, it

30:30 has never been something planned or mapped out, it was just something that happened and went along.

So what happened after recruit training?

After recruit training it was corps training. Each of the services and the corps, the arms in the services have their own corps and you go along and do specialist training for that particular corps rather than general training for the whole army, it's a great system actually. Purely infantry,

31:00 basic infantry individual work, more weapon training, more weapons is mortars and bigger machine-guns, use of vehicles, there is tactics, more field craft and a lot of marching, endurance training. In fact I was talking earlier about the friend I had joined up with in Melbourne, his name was Gunson, he was a big fellow, they called him Tubby Gunson.

31:30 But I can remember him on route marches with blood coming out of the eyelets of his boots, but he wouldn't give in. What do you do? Not to say that he couldn't complete it anyway, but you have got to do it again and so you may as well just stick it out and people help you, carry your weapon, carry your pack, you get that you know.

How long were those marches?

The qualifying

32:00 march I think was twenty-five miles. That was two days and a night, I think it was twelve mile one day and twelve mile the next and that night you feasted out on bully beef and biscuits you know, great day out.

Where was corps training?

That was at Ingleburn, things have changed a bit but there was a unit called the 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment Depot Company. It wasn't a battalion it was a left over from the Korean War that sort of channelled reinforcements to the battalions

32:30 in Korea. And I think the last reinforcement group to Korea was might have been June 1956, early 1956 I think that was the end of it. And it didn't last that much longer, it then became the corps training wing over in the infantry centre which had moved up from Puckapunyal over close to Ingleburn.

33:00 So the infantry centre 4RAR Depot Company, 3rd Battalion was also then in the same area. Very close area all of those units.

So how did life change, was Kapooka easy?

Kapooka was easy, you know you were treated almost as being human, maybe sub-human. But, the other thing there was most of the instructors were professional infantrymen, mainly Second World War.

33:30 Same in Kapooka but there you had all arms of services teaching, you could have service corps or ordinance corps or infantry, but down here it was just purely infantry. And although they didn't, they weren't that kind it still was a professional thing. They were able to help you in infantry work. Some of those people I still know today

34:00 they are older men now of course, but they are still around. I have a high regard for them.

What appealed to you about infantry as supposed to any other?

I don't know, I really couldn't see myself in anything else. I knew all of the corps, I knew what they did, where they trained, what they trained in and it didn't sound fun to me. Infantry sounded fun, it sounded like an adventure. And I would say a fair percentage joined for that reason. You can see a lot of things,

34:30 being a truck driver, people enjoy driving trucks, but I really don't want to do that eight hours a day five or six days a week, and the same with helicopters you know. I know the people who fly helicopters are very dedicated. I can remember when I was president of the examination for captain once

- 35:00 the sort of presiding judge and, captain or major, and we had all of these people sitting there taking examination, you know turn your papers over, and pilots have blue berets and some hadn't taken their berets off and some didn't even turn the paper over. And I thought this is a bit strange and I just sort of sat there, you have to sit there for half an hour, you can't leave before half an hour and when the half an hour was up
- 35:30 they all got up and handed in their papers and signed their bits of paper. And I thought what's going on? This was strange. And so I went and asked a friend who was in aviation. It was quite simple, if they passed the examination they would have been promoted and they couldn't fly a helicopter. You see all of these little rhythms that go on. So if you work out in artillery you have got big bombs to carry around.
- 36:00 You can go through them all and strike them off and you're left with infantry as being the place where you think you can fit. Whether you do or not is a different thing all together.

And was there a particular instructor that mentored you at that time?

Not really, that's where it is us and them. If there is something puzzling you there is probably someone you would go to and get the

- 36:30 right information. From memory I think one chap who instructed down there is now living up in Cooktown. And when up that way I look him up, but at the time he wasn't somebody who was your bosom buddy. These were pretty tough fellows, Second World War and Korean War, and they knew you wouldn't survive unless you were tough.
- 37:00 I am not saying that they wouldn't help you out if you had a problem but I am saying they wouldn't make it easy for you unless you had a problem.

What are the significant memoirs of that corps training for you?

Corps training? Bush fires around French's Forest, around the nuclear reactor being constructed and we were put around that. We had floods in Wagga when I was in Kapooka which was a great break, we loved floods.

- 37:30 Fire fighting was the thing that sticks out most. We moved around day and night trying to put these fires out. From the training perspective it was much the same as Kapooka, you had much the same weapon, still carrying .303 rifles and you had some other interesting stuff. I guess the route marches were memorable for all the wrong reasons.
- 38:00 Coming in contact with hard rations for all of the wrong reasons. But generally speaking you came from Kapooka with a percentage of that platoon you went through with as infantry, the rest were other corps and you came from 4RAR and you met up with other groups of people who had been in previous groups going through Kapooka to make up a platoon to train, so some people arrived before and some arrived after but your core group
- 38:30 and the group you tried to get in with when they formed into sections was that mob you knew from Kapooka. For example another mob they had there had Kevin Wheatley in it. Kevin Wheatley later VC [Victoria Cross], and it took a while, you all knew you had to hang together, you already knew that and so it took a while to blend the different groups into one group and from that
- 39:00 friendship and camaraderie that you need to survive. Although survival was no longer a great problem, if you got through Kapooka you wouldn't have any trouble. One of the worries people had was where are they going to be posted to? Because you had different groups of people, some people wanted to be posted back to where they came from which struck me as being rather odd actually. And then you had some that wanted to go to 3RAR
- 39:30 because they were going to Malaysia, in fact I think just about the whole platoon went there. And you had as I say some of those that didn't want any of those options for personal reasons, maybe they have a girlfriends or something I don't know. so all of this is going on and you have all of the inoculations and you're feeling quite fit again and you know, it wasn't a big deal, it was quite comfortable.

Were you keen to go to Malaysia?

- 40:00 Oh yes, I think everybody was. They might have had other problems that took their mind away from that but I can't recall one person who wasn't wound up ready to get to Malaya if they could get there. The problem wasn't wanting to go to Malaya the problem was being given the opportunity to get there. This is another
- 40:30 reason why everyone was trying to keep a clean nose, they didn't want to get into trouble and although these things befell you anyway you tried to ameliorate as much as you possibly could if the occasion arose, you just didn't want to miss that chance. And as I say it was quite good.
- 40:49 End of tape

Tape 3

00:37 **So lets go back to Ingleburn, how did the process of being allocated to a battalion take place?**

In those days it wasn't that difficult because

01:00 3RAR was very short of people, it had been wound down after Korea and it had been used for odd jobs around New South Wales command, well they still carried out training but they were badly used in my view for duties. So what basically happened they basically put the whole platoon over to 3RAR, but in normal circumstances you would be interviewed and asked what you would like to do and be given some options about what the army would

01:30 like to do with you. Somewhere along the line you get a piece of paper saying this is where you're going now and you might be ecstatic over that or very depressed, depending where you were.

Was there any aspect of your recruit or corps training that you didn't like?

At the time probably most of it, the drill, I have never liked drill I have never been good at it.

02:00 In fact to give you an example when we came back from Vietnam in 7RAR, the battalion was winding down, we had Sir Roden Cutler coming to present the colours and people were being posted out of the battalion to other battalions and other jobs. And you need full guards, guards of fifty to a hundred men, it is a big deal the presentation of colours. And so all of these company commanders were being slowly posted out

02:30 and so the ranks were becoming juniorer and juniorer and we had a meeting one day just normal routine meeting on how the colours parade was going. And the CO [Commanding Officer] said, "We just got a posting order for Major so and so Barry you'll you will have to take one of the guards." And the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] nearly broke down and cried and said, "For Gods sake Sir not him." So yeah that never really changed. At the time you can think of a lot of things you would rather be

03:00 doing than walking and digging holes, but when it is over you can look back and say you have done that so.

What about weapons training what experience had you had with weapons prior to the army?

Extensive, rifles and to some extent pistols. It was a normal thing in the country for boys to have rifles, it was a rite of passage, it just happened. You went shooting rabbits and foxes and things like that.

03:30 I bought my first weapon when I was about fourteen I think. Pump action twenty-two, every penny I had went into buying that weapon. You had a vehicle, all of the boys had a vehicle but buying your own weapon was a big deal.

What did you use it for?

Rabbits mainly, rabbits and foxes. Rabbits were good pocket money foxes I think were

04:00 about five shillings a scalp, because they were vermin. They were killing lambs and things like that so it was worthwhile for the environment and certainly worthwhile for the pocket. In fact once you paid for your ammunition it probably wasn't, it was good fun and you had some reason to justify it.

And the weapons you used in the army during the training periods were they different from what?

Much heavier calibre, yeah much bigger kick,

04:30 you had to be much more alert and careful with army weapons.

And how did you find dealing with those weapons?

No problem. I have always enjoyed weapons, balance and power and things like that. And you carry all of them, for a couple of weeks you're a rifleman and then you're a machine gunner. Forward scout with a machine gun or shotgun or something.

05:00 There is plenty of variety, it doesn't make you a crank at all it is just an interest.

When you joined the army did you have in mind the idea of the possibility of going into a conflict situation overseas?

Yes but it was all romantic. As I say it is Walter Mitty dreaming of going and knowing out tanks, Audy Murphy? Yes those sorts of movies were on and I guess when you're kids you play around

05:30 cowboys and Indians, I think that's just part of the game and it becomes a bit more of an adult game but you don't realise how serious the whole thing is.

So you said when you realised there was a possibility of going to Malaya you were really keen, why were you so keen?

Another country. I suppose Malaya was sort of in the back of your mind anyway because of the 8th Division being

06:00 treated so badly there during the Second World War. Singapore, Raffles, exotic, you read books about these places and you wonder if you ever will and the opportunity arises, yes you want to go. You have got to go.

How did you feel about being posted to 3RAR?

Well I always had a feeling that that's where I would go, for no other reason than I knew they were short of people

06:30 and they were going overseas and that was the rumour. I probably would have been depressed at the thought of going somewhere else. It was a famous battalion too.

Well what were your thoughts about the battalion and being a part of that battalion?

Well we knew a bit of military history at this stage of the game and people were wearing the presidential citation from Kapyong and 3RAR all wore the

07:00 citation as a sort of a unit award while you were in it. You were well aware of the background of 3RAR. Again you were close to it, other battalions did just as well over there but they probably didn't have the same glory. Kapyong and Maryang San were particularly vicious battles that 3RAR fought and you're glad to be

07:30 going to a battalion with form, it is just one of those things.

And then when you went to the battalion people were allocated to different parts of the battalion, how did that happen?

You're talking to the wrong bloke about these things, everything I did was not normal at that point in time. Normally speaking if you go to a battalion you go to a rifle company, you become a rifleman for one or two years and then if you're good enough

08:00 and you apply to go to support company you just might be selected for one of the specialist platoons. In those days it was machine-guns, mortars, pioneers and signallers. You just might be selected, later on in my time there was always a list and you probably left the army before you got the chance to go into a platoon. When we marched into 3RAR, we marched in as a platoon, lined up outside

08:30 the battalion headquarters and they just said, "Has anyone got any preference where you want to go to?" And I thought this is a bit odd because I knew it was unlikely, you wouldn't go anywhere else but maybe a driver or to a rifle company. And so two or three of us picked specialist platoons and we got it, which was rare as, certainly rarer these days. In my time after that you couldn't do that. And so I asked to go to pioneers

09:00 and I got it and it was wonderful.

What was pioneers and why did you want to go there?

Pioneers did a lot of rural type things, they built fences and dug holes. Well in fact there might have been two reasons, they were basically battalion engineers, they did all of your spade work, your basic tools was pick and shovel and an axe and you chopped down trees and around camps

09:30 you fixed fences and painted and laid cement and all of those odd jobs around the place. The other thing too that was in the back of my mind and I know this for a fact was that the Snowy River Mountains Scheme was in full burst at that time and they were looking for plant operators and one of the things that the pioneers used to have before I joined it was plant operators.

10:00 You could apply for and do a course to learn how to drive plant. Plant operators were getting very big money down, so you're looking ahead, but like everything else in life by the time I got down there it was no longer an option. Even to the real engineers.

So was 3RAR actually stationed?

It was across the road.

It was at Ingleburn so you just stayed there?

10:30 Well that's why we had such a close relationship with them. We knew what they did, we knew where they were, we knew when they fired. We saw them in town, we spoke to them. We had instructors there that had been in 1RAR, who had been at the Battle of Kapyong, so we were well informed on 3RAR.

So can you tell us what it was like to actually join that platoon and what it meant for you on a daily basis what you were doing?

It was

11:00 much more relaxed again, probably just as much relaxed from recruit training to corps training and

from corps training to battalion which is collective training. And these people didn't, these were Second World War and Korean veterans with a few older people who joined the platoon probably a year or two before that.

11:30 And you were sort of tolerated you weren't, it wasn't this all join together and we will survive sort of thing. this was a bit different, this was, "Okay you're here at the moment." And I think some of those were in a situation where they had to wait to get into pioneers and here is someone walking straight in off the street sort of thing. and so all of these combine for a situation, "We will tolerate you and if you shape up

12:00 we might keep you.", that sort of thing. There is no discussion about, if you got charged or under some disciplinary process it is unlikely that it would happen in that platoon. You were more likely to get a cuff under the ear or a kick in the pants. It was just that that's the way it went, no brutality, no bastardy at all that's just the way it was.

12:30 If you were going to be officially charged it was a big deal and you're in trouble. Apart from that you just did your job, you got all of the worst jobs of course being seventeen or eighteen. And most of the others as I say were probably well in their twenties. I was very young in the platoon and I just kept out of trouble.

So what were the jobs you were asked to do?

13:00 Well if there was a particularly nasty job, cleaning grass around septic tanks or something. Anything at all that they didn't have to do it got passed down the line and you had to do it. but there wasn't a lot of that, there was a lot of training going on at the same time. I am just saying if someone had to go and get the tea, in fact it was even worse if you didn't smoke of course you had no option. You could go and get the tea or run over to the

13:30 to the kitchen, and run down and see so and so about this or going and take this message over there, you were it. You just did it, it was certainly more comfortable to go and do it, you didn't argue.

Just going back, did you have any special ceremony when you came out of corps training ?

Not in those days. I guess the big thing from getting out of Kapooka was when you went to 4RAR you got the Royal Australian Regiment flash because

14:00 you were in a depot company of the regiment. That was about all you wanted. When you got to 3RAR of course you got the citations. Now I think it is all done there is a big parade and it is all done with a lot more ceremony, but I don't think it meant any less to us then in those days. It meant just as much.

So you moved across the road, were the living conditions different?

No all of the camps, where Kapooka in fact was the big

14:30 half round huts thirty in a room these were all Second World War buildings they might have been hospitals or different units had been through. They were weatherboard with fibro asbestos or tins rooves and there was something like ten to a hut. Two rooms of four and two rooms of one or two at the end. the accommodation was good. You

15:00 had a bit more privacy, the water there was hot. You didn't have to, everyone didn't have to get there and out in five minutes, it was a bit more relaxed. The meals in the army, you can always whinge about them but I think they are generally good, plenty of it and they are well cooked and well presented. So it was a continuation from Kapooka, it could be bad at times but generally speaking it was very good.

What about social life when you were training at Ingleburn?

15:30 We had leave local leave was it think every night, if there was no lectures on or you weren't occupied you could go into town and most of us sort of being young you drank a bit, tried to stay out of trouble. You really did try, you were in uniform more often than not. And it wasn't pleasant to be picked up by the police and taken back to battalion.

16:00 In fact I do recall that there were several occasion when we had to take up collections to get people out of gaol, bail people out. It happened every now and then. So you would try to keep it quiet but it happened.

What were they being bailed out for?

Oh, being drunk or the police would tell them to get in the back of the van and they would tell them to go and get stuffed or whatever. You know if you were in a country town somewhere the worst thing that

16:30 could happen, the police sergeant could say, "Well I will tell your dad." You would rather go to gaol or get a kick in the pants than have your dad know, it just wasn't on. It was that sort of arrangement.

So at that stage were you drinking under the legal drinking age?

No. I would have been of legal age, I would have been close on. But in the army there is no such thing, you were all paid as adults and the canteen is there

17:00 you could drink in, but as far as I know it didn't give you the right to, well it must of because the age was twenty-one in those days and we had no trouble drinking in town if you were in uniform.

Was drinking encouraged in any way or was there any pressure to drink?

Not encourage, certainly no pressure, it was just there. The unfortunate part about it was that there wasn't much else you could do. The timetable you had in camp and

17:30 at Ingleburn, I think if you wanted to go into Sydney, it was about half an hour on the train and then you had to come back again and you couldn't miss the last train or else you would really be in trouble the next morning. Social life, no I wouldn't say but you had some good mates there and there were plenty of other things to do if you wanted to look around. In those days you were close to the parents

18:00 of some of the soldiers and if you knew them you would be taken home, if the parents had a car and they might take you out and you were sort of guaranteed a ride back to camp. But getting caught somewhere and not being able to get back to camp you know. In 4RAR we were reasonably well aware that if you made a wrong move you might not get to 3RAR and you wouldn't get to Malaysia and so you might spend a great amount of time in the army being annoyed with yourself.

Did you miss home?

18:30 You do miss home, being in the army can be a very lonely place at times, that's why I say putting soldiers in a single room and away from the mateship, to be divorced from the mateship may be very difficult for people today. It didn't happen that much in my time because if you were lonely there was always something to do. There was always the Salvation Army, hut there was always biscuits

19:00 and coffee. You know it never got that bad, but if you were feeling really depressed and certainly some of them did coming away from their families the first time, there was always somebody there. "What are you going to do?" "Lets go and do this." Nothing grand but there was always something to dig you out of the doldrums which was very pleasant.

What did you miss about home?

19:30 Well I suppose the laxness of it, having three meals a day cooked for you, not having to do the dishes and having all of your clothes ironed and your bed made and your girlfriend down the road. There is a lot of attractions there is no questions about that. But you do get over that. It helps because later on when you do start going overseas it fortifies you for longer separations and that's pretty handy because there can be longer separations there too.

20:00 What sort of communication did you have with your family and Chris?

Mainly mail, when I joined the army it was a penny post all soldiers could mail a letter anywhere for a penny, later governments changed that but at the time it was quite good. The canteen sold more or less units, the envelopes, you could even buy tick and flick ones, I am well unhappy sad, tick whatever you want to say. You could send some sort of communication

20:30 back quickly. I am not saying I was a great letter writer but home was generally happy with what I was providing.

When you joined the pioneers you said you had a sense that you weren't entirely welcome?

Well you knew, it was either the dropping water technique, they finally got used to you being around or you were generally accepted and one day you just woke up and you were there.

21:00 It didn't happen overnight but it did happen, one day you just woke up and thought gee things have changed around here. I am not saying you still didn't get all of the rotten jobs but the attitude changed.

What did the bloke who had served in Korea and World War II tell you about their experiences?

Not a lot. This would probably, on the odd occasion when you had

21:30 platoon parties and that it was handy because some of the older ones would open up. We had one chap who was, he joined the platoon after me, he was ex- British Second World War soldier. He was about thirty-seven in 1957, he was a paratrooper and I might be exaggerating here but I think he was on Operation Market Garden the

22:00 parachute landing in Holland, one bridge too far away or something. He had been around a long time and he would tell you stories, mainly funny but there was a bit of stuff there that you could relate to. The platoon sergeant, in fact we had two of them there at one stage of the game, I think one of them was Second World War, some of the corporals were Second World War, some of the privates were Second World War.

22:30 They were around and they didn't walk around talking about it all day long, but a few beers and relaxed a social situation where they weren't platoon sergeants they would speak a bit about it.

Did they ever tell you stories that made you have second thoughts about going into conflict?

No not really, especially stories about Maryang San and Kapyong

- 23:00 which were pretty vivid in a lot of the memories of the Korean people there at the time. Not it was just like a movie, you didn't, it is just like you see a movie with these things and it has no affect on you whatsoever, and I think when people are talking you put things in your mind and think oh that's interesting I will remember that. It is not reality to you, it is like a movie and reality comes when reality comes and you have to face it.
- 23:30 **So as such a young man in that situation surrounded by the people that had these amazing experiences what did you think about them?**
- I was pretty happy with all of them actually, there was nobody there, apart from being called a wog and those sorts of things. It just happened, nicknames in those days, I thought I came out rather well actually, I did worse at school.
- 24:00 **What were your thoughts about those men?**
- I thought they did a really good job, you wouldn't really hear it from them, you would hear it from other people about them and you could form your own opinion and I was very happy to be amongst that group.
- So can you tell us about the training you were doing and the preparation leading up to going to Malaya?**
- 24:30 Well the whole thing changed a bit before my time from the Korean type open warfare or trench warfare to a guerrilla type, counter guerrilla warfare, counter insurgency, whatever you want to call it and there was a lot of patrolling activity and ambushing around camp, this is where you learnt different
- 25:00 hand signals and where you learnt different tactics but not in a broad sense because we also had to keep up our pioneer training, river crossings, mine warfare, flame warfare, demolitions, destruction of obstacles, all of these things came in our area. This is where it was much more interesting from a soldier's point of view, well in my view anyway, to be
- 25:30 in pioneers than to be anywhere else in the battalion because you had all of these add ons. But when the time came you were structured and organised to be a rifle platoon and nothing else but with all of this training going on you didn't do as much intense infantry training as the others but you chipped your hand in all of the time. So there was field signals, tactics, the use of signals sets and signal procedure, artillery, the use of artillery,
- 26:00 using weapons on fixed lines on tripods and things like that and then you might go out for a week and do mine fields and then you would come back in again and do something else to do with some other aspect of infantry training. But as time went on you were closer and closer to, I think we left in September of that year, around about June it got much more intense and there was much more active patrolling, being
- 26:30 away from camp weeks at a time and then of course the final event was Canungra and the whole battalion went through there, I think it might have been six weeks and that was very tough. They sort of majored in cruelty up there I think, obstacle courses and competence courses and I recall the battalion marched from down on the coast somewhere, all of the way up through
- 27:00 Wiangaree Forrest to O'Riellys, I can't remember the height but it was a walk that took a week, real gut busting stuff. From there you just trained day in day out, all hours, raining, cold, hungry, it didn't matter it went on relentlessly. There were sneaker lanes for pop up targets and there were nights where you sat there waiting for an bush
- 27:30 and nobody turned up and you would think they would chuck somebody in there at some stage of the game. All of these things to get you ready in case something happened. But have you dumbed down so that if it didn't happen then it is not a big deal, you just get used to boredom. We call it great coats on, great coats off. You have to get used to this ninety percent boredom rather than the ten percent activity
- 28:00 because most of it was just that. As I say in Canungra it was getting back to recruit training days, it was shout, abuse, hurry, jump off this tower, and there were accidents up there. We were talking about accidents before, I know one name, but I think there may have been three killed in a vehicle military accident and
- 28:30 there might have been another one badly hurt in a road accident. Training accidents, I was talking before about Tubby Gunson, he is a big fellow and he used to have a lot of trouble climbing the ropes and he used to skin his hands, and he would still try and do it with hands that were bloody and blistered. You would have a great deal of admiration for these people, just sheer guts.
- 29:00 **Any accidents with weapons or?**
- I can't remember any occurring there. I am sure I would have heard about it, there was certainly enough firing going on. I don't think so. Canungra was a very tough place, but also a very safe place and apart from the motor vehicle accidents, there might have been people who fell off the tower and hurt

themselves, fell of the rope and broke their leg but I

29:30 can't recall one weapon accident. Don't forget that the battalion had done a lot of weapons training building up to it. It was blindfolded tests and stripping weapons and putting weapons together, not firing blindfolded, but just about as much as you could do with weapons before we got there. So it wouldn't surprise me if there were no accidents with weapons, there were overseas but not there.

30:00 **Did you know the men who were killed?**

I knew one.

How close were you to him?

I knew him quite well, his name was Norm Findlebury as I remember and he was a signaller and I think he might have been in the same group we were in from 4RAR.

And how did that affect you and the others?

It was a big shock, more so, not that we were that close physically because we were all over the place and doing different things

30:30 but you knew straight away it was somebody you knew and it was just so difficult to come to grips with. It was training after all, he was driving a truck or he might have been a passenger in the truck I can't remember now. I think he was from the signal platoon which was one of the special platoons in support company. I think that might have been the first death I experienced in the army, I can't remember any others, I am sure I would have.

31:00 **So it was a big shock and a little hard to deal with?**

Yeah. I don't know about hard to deal with for a number of reasons, one is that we were flat out anyway and didn't have a lot of time to ponder over it. It would have been a bigger shock if we had had that time. Maybe those people who were working with him all of the time would have felt that. But from our point of view it was, "Good grief did you hear? I can't believe that I was only talking to him last week."

31:30 "I can't believe that are you sure it is right?" that sort of thing.

When people died in that situation in training did it affect the troops at all?

If you were close most certainly, especially if you had been involved in it, had some hand in it. Whether negligently

32:00 which happens now and then. In fact I remember you talked about 1 RTB [Recruit Training Battalion] before, I can't be sure but I think during Korea a hand grenade got lobbed into the waiting area where people were actually priming grenades and throwing it, I think he actually put his hand back and it went the other way and I think there was a couple killed there, now I can

32:30 just imagine the shock it would be for that particular group, I think it was actually Kapooka, because they had probably just all got themselves together and all of these people working with mateship and camaraderie, and then for that to happen. It would take you a day to accept the fact I think, and to be in amongst the group that it actually happened to. Also your age and that, no hardening at all for this sort of thing to happen.

33:00 **During this intensive training particular at Canungra and with weapons, preparing to go into a conflict situation did you stop to consider the possibility of yourself being wounded or killed?**

Never. Everybody else not me and I think most people say the same thing. Somehow or other you miss all that.

Did you think about being in a situation where you would have to kill somebody?

Mmm.

33:30 **And what did you think about that and how you would deal with that situation?**

I don't think you put much mind to it. You're taught to shoot at targets, and taught about an enemy, the philosophical points, you don't hate the enemy it is nation against nation and all of that. It was never a big deal with me, the only thing that would have probably shattered me as it

34:00 did other people was women and children.

So what were you being told about what was happening in Malaya and what your role would be over there?

As a private soldier surprisingly little. You got the doctrine, you got what you were fighting and who you were fighting and what they were fighting for and what you were fighting for. The nitty gritty

34:30 day to day things you just didn't know. There was a pamphlet which was called the ATOM pam, Anti-

Terrorism Operations in Malaya which I think the NCOs might have had access to at a later date, but when we left Australia just a general overview. When we left Australia we had another six week two months training in Malaya before we actually went on operations and it was

35:00 much more detailed then. All of the tactics were specifically tailored to anti-terrorist operations rather than Australian conditions which is broader warfare, Second World War stuff.

At that time in Australia was there a strong sense of the communist threat?

35:30 Well as I went to the Catholic school, I am pretty sure Archbishop Mannix might have been in Melbourne and I am pretty sure that it might have been drummed into you until you forgot it, I am pretty sure it was around then, but I couldn't put my finger on any specific period. Communism wasn't good, in fact interestingly enough I had a friend who was a communist, I can't think of his name now

36:00 but he used to do a lot of body building and he was an instructor at the police boys club which was down in Prahran. So from my point of view it was all sort of a bit doctrinal, he sort of used to talk about it, the rising of the masses but it just went in one ear and out the other, I was just a kid enjoying myself. Communists were over there and they were bad, but I don't think it affected me one way or the other.

36:30 **So when you left for Malaya how prepared did you feel for the situation you were going into?**

I think totally, if you look at it on the other side I can't think of any situation I ended up in on active service that I wasn't trained for, I didn't have to think about it, it just happened. And looking at it from there, I would say

37:00 by the time we got on the boat, and we were still getting instruction on the boat of course, weapon handling and all of that. I reckon we were world leaders, this sort of thing didn't worry us. We were Australian soldiers it had all been done before, we will go there and we will do it again. It wasn't really a thing we thought about.

37:30 **How well equipped were you?**

In Australia? abysmally, in Malaya I thought we were well equipped, we were equipped over there of course, we got weapons the lot, and I thought we were quite well equipped. There might have been some, the big thing that occurred there was that rather than being rigidly controlled on what you could wear and where you could wear it,

38:00 once you had been on operations, as the people who had been on operations before had told us, it doesn't matter. And so when we actually got there you found you could put anything anywhere as long as you carried your allotted ammunition, grenades, signals battery, where you carried them as long as you were fighting ready no one really cared. And so you had people especially

38:30 big people who drank a lot of water especially in the dry period over there carried something like two gallons of water around their belt just to survive from one water hole to the next. And you can't do that unless you sort of modify everything. The issue pack over there was meant for a day or two's resupply, well we would go for fourteen days on a march without resupply so you needed more packs.

39:00 And the poor old signaller, he not only had to carry his own rations, well as I say other people would help him, but he had this big heavy radio and an extra battery and aerials hanging all over him and he had to go for a long time with very little food, so there was a lot of weight loss.

So when you said you were abysmally supplied in Australia, can you explain that?

Well it was all, gee whiz I think some of them were 19, the Patton webbing, the

39:30 blanco, you put a coloured powder on it to keep it clean. It was webbing. I can't even describe the webbing, I can't think of what it looks like any more, but it was a thick belt and it had a buckle at the front that maybe you could or couldn't do up once you had everything on your belt, everything rubbed all over the place and you had to wear it as it was set down. And

40:00 as far as surviving was concerned on the parade ground you had all sorts of bits of brass all over it that you had to clean. So you had this blanco this powder going on, water and powder and then you had to clean it all off to get the brass clean, it was, then you put it on to go on an exercise somewhere and it just rubbed all over the place and there was no little pockets or pouches, terrible, had stuff hung everywhere, didn't like it at all.

40:30 **And what about equipment in general while you were training in Australia?**

Well the weapon was a .303 so there wasn't much trouble there. The Owen gun which was an Australian invention it was quite good for what it was made for but it was going out of fashion, it did cause a lot of accident. We had people that I know that were hurt by that weapon.

I will stop you there.

40:59 **End of tape**

Tape 4

00:30 **We were talking about guns?**

In Australia of course we had the old Second World War weapons, there was the .303 rifles, Owen gun, Vickers machine-gun, two inch mortars, nothing really changed over all of that period in Australia. And when we went to Malaya on the boat, well just before we got on the boat in fact a new weapon came out which was to replace the .303 called the SLRs, self loading rifles.

01:00 And immediately you had two groups of people, those that wanted the .303 and those who reckoned this new weapons was you beaut because it was semi-automatic, you didn't have to cock the weapon like the .303. So that lasted, when we got to Malaya of course you couldn't get a .303 and some people deliberately got 303s. But the SLR proved itself as a, it lasted from 1957,

01:30 something like about thirty or forty years, it was a good weapon. But some people didn't see it that way. And the same with the Bren gun, we carried the Bren through Malaya and it was a great weapon it was almost unstoppable. But then when Vietnam broke out of course you had the American M60 in vogue then and then you had people who preferred the Bren gun and I think they re-chambered that to take 7.62 [mm] maybe to accommodate

02:00 that worry. Yeah weapons are always confusing. You have always got the ones who want the ones that have just gone out and the ones that want the ones coming in, it is never easy.

What was your preference at that time?

Shotgun.

Why was that?

It just seemed to be convenient. It was lighter, it carried plenty of ammunition. I spent a bit of time as a forward scout and so it was an ideal weapon for a forward scout, I spent a bit of time as a Bren gunner too but if you asked me which one I

02:30 preferred I preferred the shotgun.

So before you left for Malaya what sort of instruction did you receive regarding the culture you were going into?

A fair amount, it was a long time ago now but we were pretty well versed on most aspects of the day to day culture and we had some frightful embargoes

03:00 and draconian, the lash would be back again. I hate to think of what would happen over there. And it proved pretty good actually, we are talking about a time when the White Australia Policy is the policy, we didn't see many Asians in Australia.

03:30 They were communists, they were certainly all yellow, these were just things that were taken for a fact. We learnt about the Japanese in Singapore and how cruel these races could be. And so this was the underlying current in the Australian culture. I think that the army did quite a good job to take us out of that mindset and

04:00 show that this was a different culture different to ours and certainly one that had to be respected. And anyone that didn't was in for a very hard time indeed, and so I think that held up pretty well.

So you said there was some draconian measures in place, what can you?

Send you back to Australia. If I can't recall what they were now, certainly any abuse of any civilian would put you on the next boat home in chains more or less.

04:30 I can remember that quite clearly that that just wasn't on and it wasn't on. We realised well before we went.. mind you I don't think it was that big of a jump it wasn't as though you were going to go over and abuse anybody, it was just that they wanted you to know that you didn't have any superiority or any additional right above the people of the

05:00 country and that's the way it had to go.

And did you learn about their customs that you might have to be careful about?

There were, we didn't to a certain extent. Using the wrong hand to eat with and speaking to women which was single women was taboo, a few things like that.

05:30 Generally that situation seldom arose because most of the operations we were conducting were mainly in the Chinese new villages and they were sort of, the new village I think there about two thousand new villages with about half a million Chinese living on the edges of civilisation, they were sort of growing food just on the jungle fringes and

06:00 they could in fact supply and resupply communist terrorists. And so they were all brought in from there and put into special camps much like barracks with barbed wire around them and to go to work they

could only take a certain amount of food there was only a certain amount of food in the camp and they were searched going in and out of the camp. It was real concentration camp sort of stuff without the violence or the brutality.

06:30 It must have been very hard on those people. But that's the sort of places we saw most on operation. The Malay Kampongs or the villages were in the more settled areas where they grew paddy or they grew rice and that sort of thing and we didn't sort of stop there to do operations or see them. There was no doubt in anyone's mind how to treat people.

07:00 **What language instruction was there before you left Australia?**

No a few of us heroically bought books on the language, but they would only laughed at us if you used it anyway. They certainly preferred it if you used it, operationally you had to know a few words you know stop, lie down just general words, you could do it you know by example if you wanted but it was handy to know a few words. Later on

07:30 during confrontation I went and did I did a language course for something to do, but in those days some people are natural speakers, they pick it up very quickly and others weren't that good. On operations you always had people called JCLO, junior civil liaison officers they could be surrendered enemy

08:00 soldiers at one time or people who were paid and they did all of the interpreting for you. You learn G'day and how are you going? And things like that but generally speaking there was no emphasis on it at all.

In terms of the actual enemy that you were going to be facing, what were you expecting and how did that compare with previous situations say 3RAR had been in in Korea?

Entirely different.

08:30 Korea was open warfare, it was just masses of people and battles that waged for a day and aircraft and heavy artillery and tanks. There is none of that. The enemy that we were facing were people who had mainly Chinese who had been armed and trained by the

09:00 special operations executive in the Second World War, British guerrillas, they came out and dropped these weapons, trained them got them ammunition, Chin Peng got an OBE [Order of the British Empire], so it was all pretty pally in those days. When these Chinese, or the communists tried to exploit the racial

09:30 problem in Malaysia and you had the uprising in 1947 in Sungkai Seaport, these people just went back and got their weapons again just went back in the bush. They had been there a long time, the Japanese in the Second World War, they hung around there for a while and handed in some weapons and went back where they came from in 1947. An example was in the area 3RAR one of our

10:00 targets was the State Secretary for Perak, his name was Chung Chau, he had been there from day one we chased him around for two years and didn't catch him. And when I was there at staff college there in 1974 they were still chasing the same fellow around the same place, and as far as I know he didn't give up until 1989 when Chin Peng gave up. They were very experienced jungle fighters there weren't many of them,

10:30 we were there in 1957, in 1956 2RAR were ambushed by I think a platoon strength, twenty or thirty and I think after we left the 4th Malay regiment might have seen twenty or thirty, but that's on both sides of when the battalion was there, they were perhaps the biggest groups or concentrations, they seldom travelled in any more than two or three.

11:00 **Can you tell us about the trip over from Australia?**

A fair amount of excitement, we had a few married families on the boat, the HMAS Australia all getting used to it, seasickness, up the coast of Australia we had a ship wreck in Torres Strait, an oil tanker the Francis Dove in Torres Strait and that put

11:30 people to the life boats. I was on guard that night and I could see all of these lights on this boat, ship wreck coming towards us. You sort of look at the rail and then it would go out of sight and you would walk over to the other side and it was there, it sort of zig-zagged in front and then tremendous impact. And this thing went skating one side of the troop ship and all of the

12:00 sparks sort of flew down the side. It was man the boats, everyone to their, I am not quite sure what I did actually I was on guard I don't know what I had to do. But everyone had to go to their stations and everything went fine, there was no panic, no drama at all. The biggest problem they had was trying to clear the soldiers mess of people and I think it might have been up on the upper deck and they were arguing with the duty officer, "Don't worry about it, when the

12:30 water gets to the bar we will hop off and do our own thing." The duty officer saw it a different way and so I think a few of them might have ended up in the brig that night. But that was the only, no trauma just soldiers with a few beers in them doing what soldiers do.

What was the vessel you collided with?

The Francis Dove an oil tanker.

An oil tanker? And how big was your troops ship compared with the oil tanker?

Look I am only guessing but I would say the same size.

13:00 I don't think it was much smaller, as I say I could see it out there lights everywhere and I was just wondering where the thing went to every now and then.

When the actual impact occurred there was no panic at all?

Not that I saw, when it happened they sounded boat stations and married people went out there and most people just did that. as I say except this lot that were just happy to

13:30 wait until the ship started to sink before they panicked.

And in fact did they get off before the ship sunk or?

It never did, it was holed above the water line and it next day the engineers on board went across to Thursday Island and from memory they were after some metal aggregate to patch up as much of the hole as they could above the water line. I think we travelled on after that at a slower speed so there would be no bow wave that

14:00 affected the hole. I don't recall any injuries at all to anybody. It was just a very loud crash it was quite reasonable to assume that they would go to life boat stations and after half an hour or an hour they stood down. The only affect on us I think was a slower trip and the collision affected the fresh water and we had

14:30 brackish water to drink on the way to Singapore.

No one got sick from that?

No I think most of the soldiers changed to beer, I think there was plenty of that on board. And I assume cooking was done in whatever water they could afford.

What do you remember about leaving Australia and any farewell of your family and Chris?

Yes my mother and Chris came up

15:00 and we spent I think a week there, actually that might have been the week before, we might have had seven days pre-embarkation leave and then it was a closed camp for seven days and then we took off. But my mother had relations there so that was handy for me too when I was in Sydney. That was my mother aunty and they stayed there and it was great to see them.

What did Chris and your

15:30 **family think of you going into that conflict situation?**

I don't know I, well I don't think greatly because the amount of training, it wasn't like Korea there wasn't great casualties coming out of the place they just knew there was people wandering around over there and every now and then they shot a soldier. So keep out of the way sort of thing, I don't think it was a big deal.

So the farewell wasn't a big deal then?

No it wasn't

16:00 I think my aunty and uncle turned out to see me off which is probably not the greatest place to go, troops ship taking off, people lining up, numbers being counted out and you can't see anybody anyway. It is not a great family reunion anyway on the docks.

So after the collision where did you travel to?

Singapore.

16:30 We landed at Singapore, it was one of those days, you go into dock about ten or eleven o'clock when you're up at half past three in the morning and getting all of these little stages counting down to getting off. So a lot of time was spent sitting around after you had done something. But the discussion on the wharves was pretty lively because this is where 8th Division had, the last ships had left

17:00 and the hospital ships the Japanese air attacks and MZ [Military Zone] special force operations there, so people were looking to see if they could see anything like war damage or where the MZ special force had operated, but of course it had all gone by then, there was no sign of any real damage there.

17:30 But you knew it occurred around here.

So what were your first impressions of Singapore?

Oh vivid. Little boats all around the big boat trying to seel soft drinks, I can't remember how we got them up I think we threw a piece of rope down to them, I think they called them bun boats for some reason or another. The smell, the heat, the sun, the sun was just everywhere. A lot of activity on the docks there there

18:00 was trucks lined up and all sorts of officials, I think there might have even been a band there. You could see parts of town and lots of push bikes. And of course the Asian it was the first time I had ever seen a country full of Asians and people just going about their work. Once you're off the boat and going through Singapore itself,

18:30 the canals, the monsoon drains, we are used to gutters here, there is monsoon drains, two metres across and three metres deep. The waterfront, absolutely jam packed with boats, how they could get in and out was absolutely beyond your imagination. People cooking on boats and eating on boats. When you got into town there was bicycles

19:00 everywhere, there was a constant stream of bicycles all crossing each other. The main labour was women. They were building structures like apartments and it was all bamboo, the scaffolding, it was all tied bamboo and the women picked up, you know the load carriers on their shoulders? Picked up a bucket of cement in one and a bucket of cement in the other, or would be plopped on there and then they started climbing up these bamboo

19:30 structures and pouring it into the foundations, you know. We thought oh this is probably a good idea, the blokes don't do that work that's too tough. Stalls, everything along the street, meat hanging out, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, ducks, all variety of fruit and vegetables, people yelling out, it was

20:00 very noisy and I think a little bit intimidating. All of a sudden, you have read it in books and seen it in pictures but all of a sudden you're there and it is a different situation all together. With the VIPs [very important persons] well they looked like it, that sort of environment.

What about the standard of living?

Very poor and very rich. There was very little in the middle,

20:30 if there was you didn't see it. I think there was the odd Mercedes around there, but most of the people were on push bikes and most of the hawkers were hawking pretty marginal amounts of merchandise to make a living. They had what they had there for the day and it wasn't a lot, might be a few bananas that they picked out of the back yard.

21:00 So not real good, the other thing too on that, one of the tragic sights there was crippled children begging in the streets. Now I understand a lot of that, they were made cripples just to do that job. That was more as a profession, a profession of begging and these children were treated in such a way that they were crippled and they sat on the street and took

21:30 money. We didn't see that, we didn't realise that, I don't think they told us about it and when we say it we thought this is terrible. Terrible business.

So where did the battalion go from Singapore?

We went straight to Niassa Camp which was in Johore Strait which was the British training centre for anti-terrorist operation in Malaya and there we settled into

22:00 a very large corrugated iron camp for the whole battalion and we started getting issued with our greens, it was an operational area and so training was done in an operational area. Our first, one of our first contacts was a corporal in a mortar platoon out doing an exercise which rapidly turned into an operation. I think it was a

22:30 CT [communist terrorist] or 2 running with a dog and I think he shot the dog. His name I can't remember just as well but he got chucked over that for a long time. So it was one of those situations, just be careful, we are going to do this and that but if you come across someone wearing khakis and he is carrying a weapon you can just about guarantee he is an enemy and not one of your friendly instructors.

23:00 It was much like Canungra with the weapon handling, use of different weapons. The big difference there was that all of the drills were specifically targeted at terrorists, we hadn't done these in Australia. Some of these were similar, but some of them were quite foreign to us. These were drilled into us again day and night until you could do them in your sleep.

Can you describe some of those

23:30 **drills that were foreign to you?**

Talking about different tactics, one thing that we were never ever taught in Australia and quite frankly never entertained us; in the event of a shot being heard either from the forward scout or somebody near the forward scout, the enemy, the whole patrol just fanned out and attacked. What normally happens is that you put down fire support

- 24:00 before you commit troops because you could run into anything. But by that stage of the game the numbers were that small the chances of doing that were just infinitesimal, so this was a tactic for getting into an enemy camp and doing some damage without any support at all apart from what you had in the attack. That took a bit of getting used to and
- 24:30 a few things like that that we just weren't used to. Once you were trained and you did it, it was okay. The other thing they taught was two man patrols which was a bit different for an infantryman. You have to have a very high degree of map reading ability to carry out, this is a lot of patrols, two man patrols moving on the same axis so you're only about a hundred metres apart
- 25:00 and so you really had to watch what you were doing and you really had to have some skill in map reading and you know generally speaking it takes a while to acquire that skill and this is just one of the things that was happening that we wouldn't have thought about in Australia.

So normally how many people would be in a patrol?

Normally a section of ten. Established as ten but you're normally lucky to have more than five or six, in fact I have seen some ten man patrols go out as two and three, got down that far through sickness and leave and things like that.

- 25:30 **So in this way it was different, what about the actual lifestyle you were leading there, the living conditions, the food the atmosphere?**

Yeah must the same as Canungra. It was a tented camp, in Niassa it was those corrugated iron tropical huts. Ablutions were ablutions, cookhouse was a cookhouse, we were paid if I remember correctly three dollars ten Malaya a day for eating British rations.

- 26:00 Because they were below a standard and we had a food supplement you got cash, if you were in an Australian camp of course you didn't because you got Australian rations. But if you were on British rations you got a pay supplement each day. They had some funny ones like half an egg, and their love of potatoes just defied imagination. I have never seen so many different ways of cooking
- 26:30 potato, nor have I since I came home.

Did you like that rations?

Oh they were okay. You know I think if you're hungry you'll eat anything and they are certainly better than hard rations so you have got to be fair about it.

So can you tell us about the lead up to the first major operation or patrol for you?

- 27:00 The battalion left Niassa and headed for Perak which is north Malaya and we took over the camps that were left there by the departing 2RAR and A company and pioneers went to Lass which was on the Perak River, quite a big river, B company went to Sungkai Seaport, they year before or sometime before that there had been a grenade
- 27:30 thrown into a coffee shop in Sungkai Seaport, so it was always a bit of a hot spot. And Kuala Kangsar they had the battalion headquarters. They were all about ten or twenty kilometres apart and little outposts all over the place, but they were the main camp. We were at the end of the road at Lassa and we patrolled from that camp, there was a big bridge there across the Perak River we used to cross over there into a forest reserve,
- 28:00 we would operate through there. So a normal operation would be a platoon of twenty, maybe twenty-five men made up of three sections, probably night time just for deception, would move out through the wire, across the bridge and then start searching a different area for whatever intelligence you had. Generally there is some figment of intelligence.
- 28:30 Unless there is a specific operation to make sure there was nothing in the area you tended to work on some form of intelligence. We were told at Niassa was that the best we could expect was a thousand hours patrolling for a sighting of the enemy. Something like
- 29:00 two thousand hours to contact him and less than fifty percent of those would be successful. And to put that into real figures, three battalions chased communist terrorists around Malaya for five years,
- 29:30 there were forty-five contacts, there was seventeen enemy killed in action and seven Australian killed in action. And as you can see there is very few fish in all of that water, it was very hard. As I say these people were probably the most expert in jungle warfare of anyone in the world. They had been there so long, they knew the area so well,
- 30:00 very intelligent, very well prepared, they were indoctrinated and they didn't want to fight. They placed their security so well that you were lucky to come anywhere near them. If they were protecting a senior then you could expect a fire fight but apart from that the chances were minimal, they saw you long before you saw them. We couldn't take toothpaste,
- 30:30 scented soap, anything at all with smell in it. You couldn't shave, you couldn't clean you're your, in some ways it was a bit difficult but the slightest indication that there was friendly forces there and of course

they had a very good intelligence system, and they wouldn't be there. They could move a very long way in a short period of time. They didn't want to die, they

31:00 wanted to survive and they did.

So having been briefed about the unlikely chance of coming into contact with them how did that affect morale and the ability to work well knowing that it was unlikely that you were ever going to contact them?

Well we were lucky, my platoon was lucky because we had a lot of success.

31:30 But it was tiresome, it was very gruelling, you were working anywhere from the lowland swamps on the coastal strips which no one liked because it was full of ticks, dengue, malaria, you name it leptospirosis and cephalitis and you preferred not to be there. The other option was up on the two thousand three thousand metre spine of Malaya

32:00 where it took you seven days to walk into position and you carried rations, water was a problem, especially in the dry season. You had to carry enough water to beyond your next watering place in case there wasn't any water there and that became a big issue. We often had OrangUsli, the native Negritos of Malaya

32:30 they were often guides for us and they would carry things and they knew where the water was, but you would say, "How far away is water?" and they would say, "One smoke." Which is normally an hour and you would send a patrol down there with water bottles and they would come back six hours later. All they wanted to do was kill the OrangUsli because their smoke was a bit different from the European smoke.

33:00 So you had to do it tough to get up into the mountains. Once you were there it wasn't too bad, a lot of the disease problems had dropped off but you had sort of picked up water problems on the way. And then if it was in the monsoon season and you were staying there for a while and there was going to be an air drop, they can't drop it if there is low cloud cover and so then you're going back to old camps and digging up old trash heaps to try and find a

33:30 packet of biscuits or something to try and survive on. And there was the odd occasion when they took things into their own hands and they shot talking about rarely, but the odd occasion where the platoon shot game just to survive. You had a problem with aircraft, first of all a lot of the maps had patches of white,

34:00 there was no gridding at all because they had never ever been mapped. And if you were in there somewhere and you're trying to get an aircraft to drop a parachute or several parachutes to you it wasn't always easy to guide them in. we had big balloons, they were generated, carbide generator, do you know carbide? It is a hard rock and you put it into a container and you pour water on it and it immediately gives off a flammable

34:30 gas but it is lighter than air. So you would put this stuff in the generator and pur in water and put this big plastic balloon on the end and send the balloon up through the canopy, that's assuming it can get up through the canopy. Once it got up there well you weren't too badly off, but quite often the aircraft couldn't find it so you went hungry every now and then.

So the patrols, you said you went on some patrols that were fourteen days, what were the sort of conditions you were moving in? Can you describe

35:00 **the terrain and?**

Depending where you were, if you were in the highlands it was quite clear, you could see for about a hundred metres in the jungle, big trees and very little undergrowth and it was a soft pad of leaves, you could move very quietly there and you didn't have to often worry about tracks because people walked anywhere. Normally a sign of habitation is tracks and there weren't that many there and if there were they were well worn.

35:30 But it was quite clear, quite pleasant living. It was great because we used to have hammocks made from parachute silk which was two or three panels of a parachute with a nylon cord and you would stretch these between two appropriately positioned trees and tie it on and then you slept in the fold of it and you sort of hang down and it was very pleasant. It wasn't pleasant for one bloke one night,

36:00 I was talking before about the British thirty-seven year old NCO. One night we were in camp, now the camp is just a bivouac, you might be there one night, you might be there several. It is just a piece of jungle where you have cut a very clear track around the outside perimeter of it, all sticks, everything cleared and one going six o'clock to twelve o'clock, just like the face of a clock and that's completely cleared. The platoon commander and the platoon sergeant

36:30 slept smack bang in the middle. The platoon sergeant was the only person who was allowed to have a flash light. You never talked you only whispered, it was very quiet. With perfumed soap and that, all of this things were just to get as close as you could, when you came out of the things to adjust to was normal conversation, it was quite awkward first up. So there we are in the temporary camp

- 37:00 and around that perimeter you put a vine so no one could wander out of a night time. If you struck the vine you knew you had gone the wrong way and of course when you're wandering around looking for a sentry that's not real clever so it was very well controlled, everyone was spaced around in a certain way. The machine-guns were here, everyone knew where everyone was without even knowing who they were, you knew where the weapons were. Very early in the morning there was a bang, a rifle shot was fired
- 37:30 and there was a rustling and a smell. We thought what's going on? And then somebody said, "There is a tiger in the camp." Now this caused a fair amount of fear, I think this always caused more fear than the enemy. A few months before this happened there was a New Zealand soldier out in the jungle I think at a place called Fort Legat and he was a
- 38:00 signaller and he was lying in his tent and a tiger actually dragged him out by the head. The section commander actually scared the animal off with a machine-gun but that didn't help this bloke who had his head badly lacerated but he was the only signaller there and we worked in Morse code so he had to send his own evacuation signal to get a helicopter and get him out. So this made the whole thing a little bit more poignant, you were a little bit more aware of it. So
- 38:30 anyhow shot, tiger in the camp all of this rustling. No one is saying nothing, not moving. And one of the section commanders said, "Well check if everyone is there." And everyone is reluctant to speak, you don't draw attention to yourself at this time of the night. And we contacted all of our people and everyone seemed okay, but one bloke who didn't front up, didn't answer was this British chap
- 39:00 and who was going to see what was wrong. We called to him but he didn't answer and we thought oh my God and so finally enough of us got the courage to go and see what happened. Well what had happened was this animal had run straight through under his tent and hit the hammock this nylon hammock and spun him around and he was lying upside down bent like this and he was all red and they had to cut him down. That wasn't the
- 39:30 biggest problem, the biggest problem was trying to wake the picket the next night because all of these hammocks went about eight metres into the trees so getting to people wasn't easy.
- So tigers worried people more than the terrorists?**
- It certainly did me, the few people that saw tigers. More from the unknown especially when this Kiwi got taken, it was the odd CT and the odd shot but this thing was always there.
- 40:00 And that was the sort of bivouac you had each night, that was in the mountains, down on the coast of course it was much more difficult, you had the rubber plantations, they were the biggest problem because a lot of them were dirty that still had all of the jungle growing through them. They just sort of tapped through the jungle and then there was the clean ones but the clean ones used arsenic or cyanide or something to kill all of the weeds and so you had to get fresh water. And you often ambushed down there on roads or tracks
- 40:30 where this secondary jungle was very thick and just full of things you didn't want to know about. But you were closer to camp, hospital, getting help, re-enforcements than you were so I guess everything has its benefit. But generally speaking I think most of us preferred to be in the mountains.
- 40:54 End of tape

Tape 5

- 00:30 **Can you tell us about coming across the CTs camps?**
- Generally speaking the camps were very small, two or three or four and generally not well prepared, a hole in the ground with a banana leaf over it or something like that to conceal them. That was the general, but there were big camps up on the border. These were very
- 01:00 intelligently sited and very well engineered. For example you could have a camp with four or five huts, probably a platoon size position and it was right next to a waterfall and the waterfall covered the noise of the camp, therefore their sentries were outside the noise of the waterfall,
- 01:30 they were way away and you couldn't get within cooee [within hailing distance] of them. These camps were just so well positioned and the cooking facilities, they had little clay stoves there and they had long pieces of bamboo that dispersed the smoke up into the canopy so you couldn't smell it. Water was taken from the gravity feed from the waterfall down bamboo pipes so it ran straight into the kitchen. I think there might
- 02:00 have been, males and females there because in one case there was a covered in section which wasn't normal, had banana leaves covering all round. Pits everywhere they had dug in pits in case they had an air attack which is most unlikely I just couldn't see them believing an attack had been there, because as soon as they heard one shot they would disperse anyway, they would leave everything and just run. As I say, you can understand how hard

02:30 it was to get to these people who were so expert. Our camps made noise with our chopping, trying to chop out the roots to make our camp of a night time. Theirs was all covered by the water fall. And normally this is the way they went about it. their sentries were always miles away from the camp and there was always more, if there was thirty people in the camp there would be five or six sentries spread all over the place.

03:00 And this is where the, if you hear a shot in front of you, you immediately attack, no one is going to hang around, if you were lucky at all you might be tracking someone. It was that hard to get to them.

So did you find these by accident or did you have intelligence about where these camps were?

Generally speaking you probably had a bit of intelligence about this ten kilometre square and you then set up your own patrolling program which generally mean

03:30 checking out all of the rivers, all of the creeks, that's the first thing you do because they need water and they have got to cross water to make a track, this is generally how you pick them up first, once you pick them up, which wasn't often you have a number of assets, advantages. First one was you generally had Iban trackers they came from Sarawak, they were river Dyaks.

04:00 They were big ear lobes from hanging things in their ears and tattoos, all up their arms and back, you know real tribal warriors and they did our tracking for them and so if you got a sign and went and got them they were quite good and rapid at tracking them down.

What would they do?

They would just read the signs. They probably weren't as good as our Aborigines but in the jungle they were quite good. They could pick up turned over rocks and a bit of a

04:30 twig broken here, if they lost a track they would then start doing a procedure that they have of doing a half circle and getting bigger and bigger and they would pick it up and be off again. Usually two of them and they would have an argument every now and then about which way to go. They were very pleasant people, in fact we have stayed in contact with some of those. One of them a chap called Nagau,

05:00 when I went back to Malaysia in 1974 to the Malaysia staff college I was travelling around some of their units, that's what the college does and I met him there as a staff sergeant in the rangers. And he was telling me how difficult it was for their education, they had to pay for their own and that set me thinking and I contacted Peter Phillips, ex-president of the RSL he was commanding officer of 3RAR and I just asked him if Nagau was an ex-

05:30 member of 3RAR would he be entitled to the Kapyong bursary or scholarship which 3RAR provided for children of 3RAR soldiers and he said he wasn't quite sure but not to worry they would fix it anyway. And whatever he did they paid the tuition fees, I didn't enquire of the detail but I know Nagau was ecstatic and he tracked down Maringai

06:00 who was another tracker and they did the same for his kids, so it all went well, the brotherhood, it was great.

And what was the first contact you heard about or came across yourself?

Well there was several in the battalion. One of the battalion section commanders a chap called Ollie Brown who is now deceased, he was Second World War, ex-Korea and he was a corporal in Malaya,

06:30 that's how much experience we had. He was a real character, he was one of the battalion characters, he had his own set of ideas on soldiers, for example when you join the army for the first three years you have a brown pay book, and you hate this brown pay book because the yellow one is the one that means you have been in the army more than three years, you go to the Q Store [Quartermaster]

07:00 and try and fill in every line. It was just a sort of a thing growing up I guess and he used to hate brown pay book soldiers and when there was a pay parade sort of thing he used to make everyone hold up their pay books and all of the people with brown ones had to go to the back sort of thing. And he saw a couple on the road and they got out of the vehicle and chased them, one might have got away. So you hear these things through the grapevine because you're not in that much

07:30 contact with the other groups you had your own company, very close knit organization. Very close knits platoons and very close knit company. And the battalion was just something that existed somewhere else, and you heard about these other kills, the other casualties. Peter Phillips again he started off the first tracking team with dogs and Ibans and its own armed force and I think that was very successful several months later, I think

08:00 they attacked a camp and they might have killed three more. So you heard about it but it might have been a long time after it happened and then the details were sketchy. It would have been better I think if the every time something happened next time the platoon got a chance come and have the people from platoon come and explain everything that happened. But I guess these things were so rare that it maybe wasn't worth the effort. I would have liked that, but these things just happened.

08:30 **So when did you, what was your biggest contact while you were there?**

We were up on the Thai border and it was an operation called Jaia and because we could not travel into Thailand they had I think the Malayan police field force attack a camp they had very good intelligence on. And so, we were under the

09:00 command of the Kiwis [New Zealanders] for this operation and they set up cut off ambushed in the area and so they sent the platoon with the platoon commander and the platoon structure into the area and told them where the attack was and the likely escapes routes were and then they asked the platoon commander to sort of recce [reconnoitre] and pick the best positions for the ambushes. And myself, I was a section commander at that time as a private

09:30 because there was no NCOs around, which must have been a problem right through I think because you know leave sickness and things like that, you end up losing a lot of people. Anyway myself and three other Australians, plus Maringai the Iban tracker we were miles away from the ambush site, a kilometre or two, again

10:00 to stop the noise, the signs, you can't go anywhere near a track they won't pick it up. They were that expert. So we moved up there very early in the morning, I think we stayed there for the night, the ambush was set, two enemy walked down the track, one of the soldiers shot one and the other took off onto the Thailand side

10:30 and we got the tracker followed him for a while but getting into Thailand was an international incident. And so he was the only one from that operation. All in all we were talking about contact before, there was another contact by the platoon, three men, Max Hanley who was later killed in Vietnam, Rod Mullins and Blue Ramsey who is now deceased

11:00 they put up a three man ambush in a rubber tapper shed. Concrete shed about ten feet square with mesh on the outside open to the elements, roof on top a couple of tubs to coagulate the rubber with acetic acid to make the sheets. They found some food there, they found it very hard to get food and I think it was a bucket of sweet potatoes that had been noticed there.

11:30 It was an all night ambush. They went there just after dusk and sat there all night long until first light. Five enemy came to the rubber tapper shed obviously to get the sweet potatoes and Max being second in command opened fire when they were just about breathing on him and I think they killed three which was great news for them,

12:00 but more importantly the two that got away, one had been shot through the neck was a chap called Lam Po and his wife which was a branch committee member, pretty high up in the pecking order. Luckily enough a scout car coming past picked these two up. We were hot on their trail so they weren't going to go anywhere but the scout car got their first, they had a machine gun

12:30 which wasn't loaded and the driver had a pistol which wasn't loaded. And they got these two back and that in actual fact caused a big collapse of the organization, with these two, the next day after this contact we went out to the end of the road, I think we were going pig shooting or something I can't recall. Might have been a patrol, something to do. And there we actually picked up another one,

13:00 he gave himself up, he surrendered. And he was second in command to Lam Po. He didn't even know Lam Po had been shot. So they put these three together with a couple of others that had been quietly captured and with them they put a rather shortish signaller from the signaller platoon 3RAR, I think his name was Lance Corporal Collins, and he travelled with

13:30 these five or six recent enemy who in the case of Lam Po only gave himself up because he couldn't go anywhere, he was shot, and they travelled around all over that area you know to show here we are. There was no announcement in the paper or anything, and they went around getting everyone to get used to the fact that he was okay and the whole organization was there, which it was apart from these three people that had departed. And they started convincing people to give themselves up,

14:00 it was a very big operation and we didn't know it was going on. Apart from the signaller who I think was extremely brave. Apart from him it was probably confined to a very small group in battalion headquarters. But they wandered around the jungle for weeks on the old horns and that what they did, got intelligence and picked these people up and Lam Po in fact he and the company commander who had been chasing him for a couple of years had a great talk about this

14:30 and I think he ended up in Epo which is very close to Sungai Seaport. But I thought it was a great story.

Did you know this was happening when you were there?

No, we knew something was happening because our area was declared you had two areas over there, white and black. White areas where you could move freely and black areas where you could detect enemy so that's where conducted operations. And there were black areas that were no go areas and when complete number of map squares were made no go areas

15:00 you could only assume there was special operations going on in there but you wouldn't have a clue what it was. The British intelligence and the way after the high commissioner was killed there in 1952, the reorganisation of these new villages and restrictions on curfews, a lot of it was quite draconian, a lot of

people out there got quite hungry and a lot of intelligence started coming in. And the British intelligence,

15:30 not just the British but the Malay CC2 was the propaganda expert in the Malayan Field Force police or something like that. and he was a master at dropping leaflets and things like that and he had quite a big name. Once they were onto them the intelligence was good, trying to get onto them was where the intelligence was bad.

16:00 **When you were involved in the ambush where someone was shot what would happen to the body of that person?**

He was flown back for identification which as you can imagine was a bit of a logistic nightmare because we were miles from nowhere, there was no helicopter. I think we had to carry him back to our base which was a kilometre or two straight down almost vertical and from there I think they sent some New Zealanders in with a stretcher and they took him to a helipad and flew him out

16:30 to wherever they get flown out to. My guess was for identification and to work out where he was in the chain and if he is there then where is the rest of the group? Try and put the whole thing together again. It would also give them some insight into what happened when they attacked the camp, after action stuff.

So was there a debriefing because it was quite a small group that came across those men, was there a debriefing?

Not really, it was only a five minute brief from the platoon commander.

17:00 **Were you guys pleased?**

Oh yes, well put it the other way, if two had have got away imagine where you would be after all of those thousands of hours of searching around and I am not trying to play lightly on the fact that someone was killed, but yes it was relief, a lot of relief rather than being pleased, it was just, had you have fouled it up you may as well leave the army I think, you would be

17:30 dogs meat.

Relief that the training had worked?

Relief that you had been so well trained by the unit and so well led by the platoon that you were expected to do it. If you didn't do it then you know I am pretty sure that you would probably have a career black mark, so relief at that point.

Did you all open up fire at that point?

No, there was only one shot fired and one was killed and the other was one off. You can't

18:00 shoot randomly, you have got to be sure of your target and as soon as he took off I made sure the enemy was dead and called the Iban and went straight after him as far as we could follow to see if we could catch him too. But he got away and of course just being the two of us, the other three in the ambush stayed there because that was our firm base to get back to, so yes relief.

18:30 **So are there nay other significant memories in that two years for you?**

Twenty-first birthday.

How did you celebrate that?

Very well actually I didn't patrol that day I can remember that. I was allowed to sleep in, I had an extra issue of rum. We used to get little tins of plum pudding and they had one of these with twenty-one matches in it and one of the lads had gone to a lot of trouble

19:00 and carved a twenty-first birthday key out of a solid piece of jungle timber which must have taken him some time. We had a whispered happy birthday it was memorable, a great day.

They whispered? Were you in the jungle?

Yeah you couldn't talk. We had a platoon sergeant, his name was Ned Larson he looked like a big Swede [Swedish] big man, had been to

19:30 the Second World War and Korea, very balanced, very good temperament but I don't think he would tolerate you talking. Very easy to get along with but as I say, although we snuck out with the odd little pen light torch there, but you wouldn't want to get caught with it, he had the official torch and if you got bitten, stabbed or shot that was the one that came to your aid.

20:00 As I say he was a fine man but you wouldn't want to push him too far.

And other memories for you, was there R and R [rest and recreation]?

Mainly on leave Penang was a great place, the general tempo was something like fourteen days on operations and two days in Penang for single men and of course the married men went home for the

same time. You could go to a married quarters

20:30 because you had some very good friends there and you stayed in there. A better option was Sandy Croft which was a holiday camp and it was very well done. It was only barracks and the same mess hall, the same sort of routine, it was very relaxed and you didn't have to go to meals. I think you paid a nominal amount to get there and the only thing that strikes me there was I was talking to a chap called Nelson, he was from

21:00 the Lincolns I think and he was on his final leave before he went home. And they had a diving tower twenty or thirty metres off the beach and he was out there one day with two or three other people and lightning struck and he got killed. So you know it just shows you, things are never what they seem to be.

It is random isn't it?

Yes it was, and the other two survived but we couldn't bring him back, he was long gone. Apart from that Sandy Croft was a great place

21:30 there was grog, entertainment, good meals, I think you could get a meal practically any time you wanted it. Busses going into Penang, there wasn't a great deal in Penang, there was a few sights there a few old Japanese forts and depots, there was a couple of us who liked to look around the old World War II stuff, particularly around Kuala

22:00 Kangsar where battalion headquarters was because that's where the two Japanese advances along the coast and inland actually met and came down the coast. We went down to Malacca and had a look at our withdrawal from Wau down to Yong Pen I think where Colonel Anderson the CO of the 2/8th won his VC [Victoria Cross]. There is still a bit of stuff there, an old vehicle chassis.

22:30 He was the first bloke I think to actually break the Japanese ambush technique of getting behind you and then you had nowhere to go because you weren't used to walking in the jungle in those days and you sort of withered on the vine. But he couldn't see a great deal of sense in this and he cleaned it up and took it out and from there you had the bigger ambushes later on. I think it was the first flaw in the Japanese arm as far as the 8th Division were concerned,

23:00 it showed that something could be done you didn't have to hang back and get murdered or try and lose yourself in the jungle. I think he was a bit of a torch bearer.

It sounds like you looked at a lot of the area, almost toured the area?

Well I was there a couple of times and every time I got the chance and there was something close by it wasn't hard to find information. The Chinese were quite good, a lot of them spoke

23:30 English and they were only too happy, because they had suffered pretty badly at the hands of the Japanese and they were only too happy to take you and show you and speak to you, but you had to find an English speaker. The Malays didn't speak a lot of English, certainly not enough to explain anything and they really weren't fussed that much by the Japanese it was mainly the Chinese. I think the Chinese having occupied the place, in fact it is just interesting that

24:00 Australia is always so quick and humble and fawning to thank the Americans for coming out in the Second World War when it really wasn't altruistic, it was really the only place they could go and form a firm base to launch an attack. We happen to be here and we are grateful for it. But you know to replace the 9th Division which we left in the Middle East they sent over two untrained regiments. One got lost

24:30 on the Kokoda Track and suffered terrible casualties, both of them copped a pounding at Buna and there is a book by a lady called Mao who points that out and after all of the rousing Australian got from Macarthur about how bad we were and how slow we were they actually had to take Australians and put them in those two regiments to show them how to fight. That's an aside. So you look at European situation and you wonder

25:00 what would have happened if the French hadn't folded as quickly as they did fold.

So being in those places did you feel great affection for the World War II soldiers?

Yes I was just going to say that I think Australian owes its freedom much more to China than it does to America I think the Japanese had twenty-nine division tied up in China. If China had have packed it in that would have been twenty-nine more divisions they would have had instead of the ten that they attacked Southeast Asia with. So history

25:30 needs a bit of brushing up there I think. Yes Second World War people you met a lot of them, people who had been all over the place in fact there was a lot of them when we were still in Vietnam. Some people with absolutely remarkable stories. Far more remarkable than anything I could ever tell you, people that you could just sit at a table and listen to them;

26:00 where they had been, what they had done, the hardships they had suffered. You know not whinging just telling you what was there, it was very interesting to listen to at any time. I think that, you always get the impression I fact I have had a lot of arguments with one of my best mates about the youth of today, will they would be ready for war, probably won't, it would probably be pretty soft and it will probably be

pretty hard to come by too with the aging situation,

26:30 but never, you can go back to any war you like and it is always been there. Today's Long Tan Day, one company of less than a hundred facing at least two and a half thousand they had eighteen killed and twenty-four wounded in the space of twenty-four hours.

27:00 D company got all of the credit but there was a battalion there and there was RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] aircraft taking big risks. That just went on and on, nobody gave up. They just hung in there until the armour came and the artillery came and you know they were terrific, absolutely terrific.

So what do you think it is about Australian soldiers where they have that tenacity?

27:30 I would like to think it is history. But apart from that it might just be the way that Australia was originally formed, I don't know I think there is a lot of history in there, military history and civil history and it is mixed up with ockerism [Australian boorishness] and I don't know, it just happens.

28:00 National service a lot of us were wary about, strike me pink what's going to happen here? You know. Whether they will be running off every day and won't stay. And yet you know when we all went through Vietnam I think the casualties between national service and regular army was as much as three hundred and seventeen, it might have been a hundred and forty to a hundred and seventy or something like that.

28:30 Marginally more regular army I don't know, you certainly had regular army in the structure, in the backbones of it. But they always come good you know? We had no trouble with them when they came in. They were absolutely ideal.

Just going back to the Malay situation what is your overriding impression about that experience and how it had benefited you if it did?

29:00 I think other cultures, just recognise the fact that there other people on the face of the earth and they're all trying to make a living, they're all trying to survive and they have all got different ideas but in the end they all get to the same place. There probably was a bit of racism there, probably unintended. You called Malays John. It was just done. But until

29:30 somebody complained about it I never recognised it as being a problem. I can't recall of any incident where, there is always punch ups in bars and thing like that, mainly between the Kiwis and Australians. And there is probably arguments between drunken Australian soldiers and Chinese taxi drivers. The Malays weren't really that close because their food was sort of curry and probably not that attractive

30:00 to the European Australian palate, more used to Chinese and European food. So there wasn't a problem there. I can't even recall doing an operation near the Malays but there was probably problems, there always is you know, bars and beer and busses and things like that.

What about the brothels was there much happening in the brothel scene?

The British had it pretty well controlled they

30:30 had areas you couldn't go to, there were no go areas and if you got caught in there you could be in a bit of trouble. Then you might not be too because I think thanks to Breaker Morant, Australia has had a great legacy from that court martial, it is very difficult for people from the foreign military police Americans and British to arrest Australians. So there was always that going for you, thanks Breaker. And these places were often controlled, they were inspected

31:00 by British medical officers, personnel anyhow and I think there was a sort of unofficial risk that existed, that if you were going to go anywhere and you really wanted to take a risk here is a place there and they give you a list of the, I think they call them blue light, places where you can shower and all of the rest of the things. And of course all of the prophylactics were available and

31:30 if they were warned. But there was certainly disease associated with it but I don't think, it never got to the stage where it was a big issue. Of course people weren't happy if it did occur. You certainly knew you would be looked down on for a while.

Two years is a long time to be in that situation so how important are the bars and brothels to soldiers?

32:00

There is probably three groups, there is that group that love it and there is the group that won't have a bar of it and there are those in the middle that had other things to do. There were the sights to see, there were plenty of places there that were quite decent. Some of us went down to Raffles for no other reason than to go to Raffles you know?

32:30 To see if the pop marks of the bullet marks were still there from the Japanese shooting six and in front of it, those sorts of things, there was plenty to do. If there is a fight going on you can almost guarantee it would be Australians against Australians, New Zealanders against New Zealanders or New Zealanders against Australians or British against the lot. It was just one of those situations. But I can't recall any big deal about the

- 33:00 policing of the brothels or the location of them or the scarcity of them. They seldom existed anywhere near the operational areas. I have never heard of anything in Sungai Seaport. Epo certainly which is a pretty big town a fair way away from Sungai Seaport, but certainly in Penang it was built for the, it was much like Australia when the Americans came here bars opening, there was
- 33:30 different bars, in fact units and sub units had their own bar. And that was usually the beginning of a problem if someone else walked in there. It wasn't open warfare but you just weren't welcome if you were in a Kiwi bar, unless you were taken there by a Kiwi. I remember one bar and I will never forget this, there was a group of Kiwis, mainly Maoris and they had guitars They all seemed to sing well and play well.
- 34:00 And they were covered in blood, what they were doing every now and then, someone would finish a bottle and I think they were bottles of German beer, small bottles of Duxen Carlsberg and that and they had this big fan going above the table and every now and then someone would finish and chuck the bottle up into the fan and say, "Shrapnel." And sometimes it would break and stuff would go everywhere and sometimes it wouldn't. I think I left just before the MPs [Military Police] got there, but you have got to wonder.
- 34:30 **So the shrapnel was the glass?**
- Yeah the bits of glass coming, not every bottle, I think the fan was a bit tatty too now but obviously some of them broke. Maybe they were throwing glasses up there too I don't know, sometimes the glass would go up and probably come back down again. But you know you see some things in life that you can only wonder why.
- Did you have a particularly colourful or memorable drunken experience?**
- Funnily enough not in that time.
- 35:00 I was a bit wary actually it was an operational area and unless you were in Sandy Croft I had a few friends down there and we certainly got drunk on a few occasion but always close to home, getting drunk in town didn't make much sense to me. The funniest one was later on when I had two children and a wife and the thing in Turenda camp this is 1965,1966, 1962
- 35:30 1963 somewhere. The practice on Christmas New Years was to go and visit all of your friends, you do that all day long, have a drink here and there and try and get home sober. So I have got two children, one and two and Chris is about eight months pregnant this is New Years Eve and the baby was born on the 26th of February so it was only about six weeks away. And we had another friend. Faye Waters
- 36:00 having a child and Chris wanted to go up and see her on Christmas Eve while she was in hospital, and so she took the two children and she left me with some Scot, I don't know if it was one of her mob or what, I can't recall who it was now but I do remember him having a piece of coal and somehow or other there is a link in the culture between coal and New Year, I don't know, but he would insist on toasting the Queen.
- 36:30 I am a republican for starters and I am not a strong drinker and he was drinking I think it was Vat 69 or something and it was a tumbler full and he insisted I would be being not very sociable if I did not toast the Queen. We had about five of these and I was nearly on my ear. By the time Chris got back I was vertical but paralytic
- 37:00 and Chris tells me that I was acting like a zombie, I was mechanical. I couldn't get across monsoon drains I couldn't jump that far and so I had to find the steps across and she had to get me home. I think we walked home, God knows how and when we got to the house we didn't have a key and so she had to climb up onto the second floor and get through a window to get inside. That was certainly the most memorable I ever. I was sick for a month.
- 37:30 **How did you come to leave Malaya for the first time?**
- It just everything cooled down, the battalion was withdrawing from operations. If I remember correctly we went in to do some open warfare training, we went into a training phase. Quite frankly I have difficulty remembering, we
- 38:00 caught the ship the Flaminia which was an Italian ship it was a big novelty, they served wine at lunch time which was probably a bit erratic. I think we caught it in Penang. It just sort of faded away it was no longer relevant.
- Were you looking forward to coming home at that stage?**
- Oh yes. The you couldn't get home from over there, things have changed a bit today I had a friend who lost his mother at home and he was desperate to get home and of course
- 38:30 there was no special leave or anything so he couldn't go home. I felt that pretty deeply I felt he should have gone home. But yes you do, not continuously a bit like depression I suppose it comes over you every now and then and you have just got to shake it off again. Yes I suspect there was some very lonely people there, especially those who engaged in alcohol and that to try and drown it, it only makes it worse.

- 39:00 But we used to talk about it, the big thing was that we didn't need psychologist and counsellors was that everyone was like a party line, everyone was aware of each other situation. You knew who was in trouble with their wife, you knew whose kids were in trouble you knew who had been picked up for being drunk you knew all of this because as I say it was a very tight outfit and this
- 39:30 could only help people. You would go down for a beer and someone would be unhappy about something and you would end up getting all cheery and happy and you know he would say, "Oh stuff it it is not worth worrying about." And Dear Johns they were pinned up on the notice board. They caused a fair amount of unhappiness, probably more so than you would see or imagine but you knew he had to be looked after
- 40:00 in those cases.
- Many in that time?**
- Several. I am talking about a company, I am not talking platoon, in the platoon there might have been one I can't recall any. Because it was a pretty old platoon I was one of the younger ones.
- Why were they put up on the board?**
- It was just a tradition I guess in a particular platoon, not over the whole army it was just there that's what happened to them. People saying, "Look what happened to me. I have been given the big shove."
- 40:30 These things just happened but there were funny times too. I remember one lad got himself into trouble in Epo. He was a driver he might have been back late or something and the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] caught him, who was something else again, and I think he got seven days CB, confined to barracks, you can't go anywhere you know it is an operational camp and so to make this lad learn his lesson
- 41:00 the CSM, we were living in a rubber plantation in a place called Lin Tang and his job was to get his trailer on his vehicle and he had to go around and he had to water every rubber tree in the camp. So this is pretty boring type work and when he knocked off work and before he could eat I think he had to go around and there was hundreds of these things so they got splashed on pretty quickly. But half way through these
- 41:30 seven days a monsoon struck and the place ended up about half a metre under water and so the CSM came out and he looked around for this bloke and he couldn't see him anywhere and he went over and he was still in bed and so he went and kicked him out of bed and gave him a real bullocking and he said, "What was your punishment?" and he said, "I had to go and water all of the trees." And he said, "Well what are you doing?" "Its raining." And he said, "You have got a rain coat haven't you?" so here he is out in the middle of the, you can't beat the CSM. In fact the same bloke, I was on
- 42:00 picket one night and
- 42:01 End of tape

Tape 6

- 00:30 **So you left Malaya and you came back to Australia and you got married at some point?**
- Yes that was arranged, that was all fixed up for me.
- All fixed up for you before you got back?**
- Yes that was all done. It was all.
- So when did you come to the decision to get married?**
- Well as I said before it never really happened it was just a natural progression of things that happened, see we already bought land in
- 01:00 joint names while I was over there. It was pretty obvious that it was going to happen. I just accepted the fact that it would be done and it was. It was a bit of a family affair you know we had to get ourselves into mode and get back to, the battalion was based in Queensland and so we had to get up to Queensland and I can't recall when it was, we didn't have a great deal of time down there. And on the train
- 01:30 going back to Brisbane we came across a couple that we met up with and spent time in Sydney with. I think they got off maybe Sydney or maybe Brisbane, doesn't matters. But we find out maybe a year later they sent us a letter were actually related, they were cousins, didn't even know it.
- So did you have military wedding?**
- No, just family organised. Chris has very few in the family, there is only, there was her mother,

02:00 her father had died and her sister and a brother-in-law. And of course there was my mob which made it difficult to pare that down to get four or five which we did. And you know even today we agree we would have even less if we did it again it was just too much hassle. I think there was twenty, we might have had fifteen Chris had five.

How had you found maintaining your relationship while you were away?

There was no problem there.

02:30 Chris had problems, well you know the problems that happen when you're not there. I think I mentioned before about the school and Vietnam and politics. That's a bit of a crisis because you think pretty seriously about taking a child out of a school where they are doing well and put them somewhere else, there are higher things to worry about. And I guess things breaking down and things like that, no personal problems at all we just went on as

03:00 usual.

And even early on in the relationship before you were married it wasn't an issue for you as a couple?

No not really. Children just came along when they came along, Chris had to give up work of course, she was working as a book-keeper up there too. When John came along she was full time and still a mother then I think

03:30 because Sandra came along two years later and then Annette was two and a half years later. So that made things pretty easy for us I guess.

I think you mentioned earlier with two young children it was quite difficult to maintain a family on your salary, so that contributed to your decision to go to Malaysia is that right?

No, it might have been, there was more money involved,

04:00 it was certainly the way we understood it cheaper living and so we would have done much better. But I think it was just the opportunity to go, once again Chris has got a life, it is great for the kids, you had amahs [housemaids] over there, private soldiers had servants, it was all pukka sahib stuff and it was very enjoyable. You could become very lazy if you put your mind to it.

So what was your role in Malaysia when you were there?

04:30 When we went back to Malaysia I was still in the pioneer platoon. I was then a corporal and initially I was involved in preparing the families with inoculations and documentation. They call it, I forget now, draft conducting officer and you had to help get all of the families ready with all of the bits and pieces that go along with it. And they had

05:00 special doctors in for all of the inoculations and people had to turn up at particular times to get particular inoculations that you had to be careful about. The children may or may not have been done so it was a pretty arduous task to make sure things were done right. There probably wasn't that much to be done manually. The doctor there was I think a chap who had come from Beaudesert.

05:30 He was a soldier in the First World War, this is from talking to people, he got mixed up with the air corps, he was a trombone player so he played with one of the philharmonic orchestras, he became an instructor at Point Cook during the Second World War and he then went and did medicine and became a doctor, so he was a pretty old doctor by the time he got up there. He just never stopped, he was unstoppable. So they brought in all types of people to help out during this rush period.

06:00 Once we were in country we moved to Turenda camp which was purpose built, they were purpose built battalion lines with accommodation, everything, just like a hotel they had everything. Fans and all of these things soldiers never see. Big parade ground for the RSM and there was a guard room there for all of the drunks, big monsoon drain and

06:30 very neat and tidy. I think we were only about the second unit in there so it was in very good condition. Your own stores and so it was a great place to be.

So the family lived there?

Yes I could walk to work in five minutes, all the same being the British system you had officers quarters and senior NCOs quarters and you had soldiers quarters, they were all divided. And you had officers beach houses and sergeants beach

07:00 houses and ORs [Other Ranks] beach houses. But yeah everyone lived comfortably there. Bit of friction between the British and the Australians and different units, but overall it was a very pleasant place. When they were building it, it must have been a couple of years before we arrived there, they left a spirit down the back of the camp that they couldn't move

07:30 and when they built the town part of it, the shopping centres and that they built I think it was a Buddhist temple and they put in a receptacle there for this particular spirit to go. And the big day came

when they had the shaman priest there to move this spirit and they had a vehicle down there all done up with the receptacle in it and they coaxed this spirit into the receptacle and they were going to take it quietly down and put the receptacle in the temple but unfortunately when they stopped

08:00 at the boomgate to go further this thing hopped out and went into the guard room, it went into the sentry box. So that was immediately no go, so it took about two hours to coax this thing back out of the sentry box. You can imagine all of this happening at the front gate of the battalion. Trying to get a spirit out of a sentry box into a receptacle on the back of a truck to take it back down to the temple. It was an interesting time for a soldier being a sentry.

So as a married man with children,

08:30 **now how did that alter if anything, your experience in the army?**

It was just easier. When we arrived there, there was a cholera outbreak and we had a problem with water and looking after children and keeping water that wasn't properly treated out of the place and making sure they didn't drink it somewhere else. But apart from that there was an amah there who looked after the children and did the cooking. You didn't have to have an amah you could take the money but gee whiz

09:00 they needed it, you know and we were surviving quite well. There was wives clubs there. Most of the women, the wives had their own thing to do. They had their own children and you had your own little street groups, so you had your friends. So wives clubs probably wasn't the first thing on their mind, looking after the family, friends and shopping.

09:30 And you kept officer hours, you left there dressed at half past seven and you arrive home at half past four or five, I don't think we worked on Saturdays or Sundays and so it was quite pleasant.

And you had two children back in Brisbane is that right?

Yes 1960 and 1962 so they were one

10:00 and three and Annette came along in February the following year.

And while you were in Enoggera was there any significance even for you in terms of your career?

I think I was promoted to corporal but if you hang around long enough they are going to promote you anyway I guess so I got to that stage. The biggest thing that happened there at my time was that they changed from a tropical battalion organization,

10:30 about seven hundred people with three companies and you knew everybody to an enormous organization called Pentropic where you just got lost. I think there is sixteen hundred and ten people in a battalion so it over doubled, and there was five companies and weapons and bulldozers and signals there. Just enormous and even as a soldier you felt the effect but you just didn't know anyone, total change,

11:00 everything was new. We had new equipment which we didn't complain about. Those contacts you used to have in the old rifle company that you grew up with that sort of came through the system with you, they just sort of disappeared. Mind you I guess at this stage of the game I guess people are finishing their tours and disappeared anyway so it might have all happened at the same time. But it just became big and awkward and you started saying, "What am I doing here?"

11:30 But there was big exercises out the back of Singleton and I guess by then we either knew that things would get better or you would do something about it. Very big organization.

So while you were in Malaysia with your family did you have to spend a lot of time away from home?

Yeah

12:00 when I was there I would say we spent about five months on operations between the border and Borneo and you had two or three weeks exercises every couple of months so there were periods of two months at the

12:30 most and a week or two at the least, but that's always happened that didn't change when you're away. The tempo increases on operations but you're never always home it doesn't happen that way.

And how did you find that as a father?

I found it a bit difficult, I did resent periods when you have got boys and girls there and you think that they need a father, probably don't actually,

13:00 but you do miss them and you miss a lot of growing up. And I think that's the part that most fathers overseas miss, their kids growing up. They're making do with it.

And was one of your children born while you were in Malaysia?

Yes.

Can you tell us that story?

Annette was born on the 26th of February. And the same day I was promoted to sergeant, I tried to

13:30 impress upon them that this had happened but the RSM wasn't going to be swayed by that so you had to front up for the compulsory wetting of the heads, for me not the baby and there was a fair bit of drinking to be done but finally I did get away and I wasn't really in great shape and I think I might have got to the hospital six o'clock and of course the British are real strong on visiting hours and who can visit who and when

14:00 and so I checked the desk and said this is who I am and what I am here for and they said, "Well you can't come in now visiting hours are over." And of course they might have picked, I was certainly aggressive and I said, "That may be so but I am going to see her anyway so you may as well tell me where she is I will just look for her." So I found out where she was and they tried to stop me from going up the stairs but I went up the stairs anyway and I had three following me and they finally gave me.

14:30 So that was, of course I had to explain why I wasn't there earlier and why I was around the corner a bit. We had a bit of a problem with the hospital. We had John in there, I think he had some sort of throat infection that went on for a long time and it wasn't clearing up. And so there was a chap in town called Doctor Ho who was trained at Melbourne University and he had a good reputation and I thought okay we will take him out and go private.

15:00 And the hospital said, "Oh you can't take him out." I said, "You're joking." And we took him out, thank goodness I didn't have to go back again after all of that drama, they probably got to know me by then.

So your wife had just had a baby and they wouldn't let you in to see her?

But that's how they are in the army, quite rigid, not like us where things can be bent a little, in this system things were quite rigid.

15:30 It wouldn't happen now but when the visiting doctor was around all of the ladies who were pregnant or had just given birth had to lay at attention and sheets this far down, I kid you not. Talk to my wife she is not impressed with it and she is a Brit [British]. We had a few problem. Interesting, when the Australian doctors started to go over there they were mobbed by the Brits and everything, they had queues a mile long.

16:00 Not to say the British doctors weren't good but they weren't as good as the Australian doctors.

So were there any significant operations for you while you were there that time?

Apart from going up to the border on account of terrorist operations which was just like a big exercise but there was a bit more danger there I guess. But we were down to about six hundred CTs by now and they really don't want to see anybody.

16:30 In October I think the confrontation impacted upon us although I think the Kiwis and the Brits and the Malays certainly had been involved earlier, in the, I think it was an air drop in Johor. Singapore had been might have had a few infiltrators there and there was certainly fights going on over in Brunei and Sarawak and

17:00 possibly Sabah. Ours started some time in October when I think a group of thirty Indonesians came across from Sumatra and unfortunately they landed south of Turenda on a little island south of the canals so they all tied up in the mangroves there and 3RAR or D company plus mortars and pioneers and a few other attached troops

17:30 were sent down there to sort them out. And I think we arrived just on dusk and so a cordon was put on this basically an island, and next morning they flew over a few jet aircraft, I think they may have broken the sound barrier over the top of them and we had a CSM there who was firing a two inch mortar illumination so there was light all night

18:00 and they slowly started to give themselves up in dribs and drabs, having spoken the language they sent me up to where the cordon was to talk to them and to say, "Look if you don't give yourself up now we are going to start firing artillery and mortars. Not a wise move." And slowly they started to give themselves up, we took the equipment off them, they had a lot of money on them and we gave that to the Malaysian at that time Field Force.

18:30 And these people were lined up and taken away to the clink I guess, we didn't see them again. Interestingly enough the chap who had been firing the mortar all night long, when dawn came he was exhausted and so he just laid down on his back and dropped the mortar tube in front of him. And later on when the Malaysian Field Force came they didn't have this weapon and they asked me what's that and one of the chaps that was there he sort of lent over and he

19:00 kicked the trigger on it and this thing fired and illuminating round. Not dangerous but it was a sort of a sandy bank of the river and it skated straight down this sandy bank and of course all of the Indonesians were being held captive there with a couple of machine guns on them and all hell broke loose because

the machine gunners weren't sure what the noise was and the Indonesians thought they were being shot at and

- 19:30 I don't think the CSM actually woke up. I think he was so tired he was still out to it when it went off. So that was an exciting day, but it only lasted a day and it was virtually all over. From there later on in March of course the battalion was rotated through Sarrawak during confrontation and the different companies settled at different posts at Stass, Areeket Bookit Knuckle and Bau.
- 20:00 These were forts, they were dug in bunkers, completely protected with sand bags, minefields around the outside with remotely controlled mines around the outside and it was a pretty big deal. There was one artillery piece there, some
- 20:30 had mortars, and that was very close to the Indonesian border, about a kilometre or two away. And that where they launched different operations. I think we had seven kilometres of front and the job was just to keep them out of Sarrawak, certainly keep them out of Kuching which was the capital city about thirty or forty kilometres away. There was a couple of nasty incident there. One of the platoon sergeants
- 21:00 Reno Whelan was killed on a mine patrolling, I think that was 3 platoon and he was replaced by Sergeant Vince Weller and a couple of weeks later he was killed on another mine, different area. You can imagine the feeling of the platoon it was terribly sad.

How did it affect the platoon?

They were cut up, I am not too sure the second time I think I might have been on my way back to Australia. But the first one. Reno Whelan

- 21:30 was a very much respected old soldier and I think that affected them pretty badly and the second time I hate to imagine. I think the platoon commander might have been away on both occasion too, he might have been ill, but that wasn't a good outcome. The other things that occurred there which was a novelty. I mentioned the camp being surrounded by barbed wire and these remotely controlled mines. Claymore mines sit above ground
- 22:00 and it is remotely controlled, it has ball bearings in it, faces the front, had a wide arc and in front of that there is a trip lead, and so if anyone comes along and trips the trip lead you know which claymore mine they are near and so you fire the mine and hopefully save your fort. On one occasion there was a big storm, the sky was black, it must have been mid afternoon and it was starting to rain and it was blustery and low and behold a helicopter starts coming in with the commanding officer on board. And
- 22:30 he is in the distance giving his position and we give the clearance and a bolt of lightening hit the aerals on the top of the command post and of course the electricity travelled down the aerial, hit all of the remote electrically controlled mines, set all of the mines off all around the camp and they in turn set off all of the trip flares, so the whole camp became ringed with flares firing and the noise was astronomical.
- 23:00 It was deafening and apparently when the CO came in and landed and he abused the company commander and told him he didn't need all of this reception all lights and that, "Just tell me where you are and I will come in sort of thing." And the poor company commander was still suffering shell shock from the whole thing, of course there was no communication or anything. So that was funny.

How did people react when that happened?

- 23:30 Calmly, the only concern that anybody had and I was talking to the padre actually, the only one that struck everyone at the same time was the pickets, the guards. Because they sit outside of the camp and we were hoping that the mines were no where near them. so that was the only concern at the time, people were rushing down at the time to see them and they were, apart from ringing in the ears, they were okay.
- 24:00 **It must have bee an amazing noise?**
- The whole thing was you didn't know what it was in the first place, you thought you were being attacked by something. The whole thing was built by Ghurkas in the first place, I think we relieved the 1/10th Ghurkas and of course they are great soldiers but they are small. And of course when they dig holes underground, bunkers and things like that it is not the same as having them built by Europeans. And so getting into and out of your
- 24:30 accommodations was not always easy. And your head across the top her was always bruised because sure as hell you would hit something on the way out. And when they left, when they flew out, I was with the advance party there so I saw them go. The thing that fascinated me was you know, you have heard how regimental Ghurkas are, and they are, here are all of the packs lined up on the helipad to take them out. And they all had a bottle of
- 25:00 something like rum and a bottle of whiskey, and one had a white cap and one had a red cap and they were all in the pack on the same side, all regimental, all of the whites, all of the reds. It makes you wonder if this had been an order or it was just the way they think, I don't know but I thought that was quaint.

So while you were in Sarrawak where was your family?

Turenda.

So they stayed there that whole time?

Yes.

25:30 **And what was exactly your role with the Indonesia confrontation?**

I went across to Borneo with A company and I had two, I was called upon to patrol anyhow which is just a normal part of being an infantryman. But my main task, being in pioneers was to try and fortify the camps so it was a bit more impregnable than it was, put in more fortifications

26:00 and things like that. So I got that going and probably patrol and came back. We had local labour for that, local communities came in and, they were something else. They used to chop down quite large trees for what they were doing with their machetes. And when they were nailing something with quite large nails they would hit it with the back of their knife. The machete that they cut the trees down with they used

26:30 the back of to hit a nail. I had trouble hitting a nail with anything, I wouldn't do it with that. They sit up there cross legged and knock these nails, very clever.

So what rank were you then?

Then I was sergeant, I had been promoted on the 26th of February and I was over in Borneo in March. The actual pioneer platoon I think, Andy Matte he passed away recently in Tasmania,

27:00 had a state funeral I think, he was a platoon commander and I think they were using one of their senior corporals as the platoon sergeant.

And how had the Indonesian confrontation varied from what you had experienced in Malaya?

From my experience, apart from the mines, the communist terrorists as far as I can recall didn't use mines at all. That's the first thing that makes you be careful, when you have to worry about where you can go and where you can't go

27:30 especially when you have just lost a couple of sergeants, and more than that there was a soldiers too and an Iban too I think. So that's a whole new ball game you have got to be much more careful. The size that they could concentrate in, I think after we left a Ghurka won the Victoria Cross in much the same area. I think his group was attacked by a company so the forces were much bigger where as the communist terrorists

28:00 really couldn't concentrate in more than five to ten at the outside twenty, you're now looking at forces of over a hundred which is getting comparable to one of our companies. So you really need a company to be pretty well fortified. If you're going to take all of the troops out of it except to say one platoon could fight off a company, that's the ratio that at least you require.

28:30 So it became bigger you had artillery pieces which we didn't have in Malaya, if they were there I didn't see them. There were mortar locating equipment in the positions, if mortars were fired, and there were mortars fired by the Indonesians, if mortars were fired then these could pick them up and they could then fire back with the artillery piece. Just scale and much more static, much more defended statically then you were in Malaya. Malaya was a barbed wire fence

29:00 and if you were lucky a sentry on the gate. Unlikely, there was a sentry in the camp but not specifically on the gate.

And having been promoted to the position of sergeant, how did that affect your mindset or your approach to what you were doing?

Not greatly, I had been acting as sergeant and platoon commander for some time before that at different times during the two years. Again it was a pretty experienced platoon,

29:30 it had been around a long time. We all knew each other, knew what we did, knew how to not upset each other and things went pretty smoothly and so I didn't have any troubles there.

So you had been acting as platoon commander, what did you see at that point as important in terms of commanding other men?

It is a bit different because again

30:00 it is like being part of a big family. New people came and went but the backbone was always there. I don't think we changed that many corporals over there. It remained static and no matter what rank you were or weren't we all had a job to do and I think we all respected that. So by seniority well had luck you were made platoon commander and you had to, for example,

30:30 go down and do some work on the ranges with the platoon. We had to go down to Port Dickson and fix up some accommodation down there, with a corporal in charge of two other corporals and I think thirty

people but there was no problem with that because everybody knew that it could befall them. So you know you had your family spats and that but it didn't change the basic structure of the whole thing.

31:00 **So as you were being promoted you didn't feel a different sense of responsibility?**

Not really, you had one but then you had one before that too. If you were corporal acting as the platoon sergeant you were just as responsible as the sergeant acting as platoon sergeant. No one was going to say, "Well he wasn't a sergeant he shouldn't have known that." because you have been given the job you should know it. That's generally how it would be looked at.

So given the fact that the scale was much larger and you were facing some weaponry that you hadn't been faced with before, how did that affect if anything your approach in terms of tactics and ?

31:30 Well once again I wasn't in that position I would go on patrol as a member of the patrol with another platoon so I wouldn't have any responsibility at all because it had its own structure, own platoon commander, sergeant three corporals and they have got another man who happened to be a sergeant but I had no command function at all, it didn't matter I would just go along for the ride.

But did it affect the way you approached patrols for example as opposed to the way you had approached them in Malaya?

32:00 Well I wasn't in charge of planning, but it certainly would yes. But if I had to do something it would certainly be big and you would be more worried about security and more worried about artillery support. You would be looking at all sorts of support weapons that were in range of whatever you had to do to help you out. Reaction forces to come and help you out. You had to keep your mind all the time

32:30 on the fact that you could get jumped, you could be outnumbered, so yeah that's certainly the way to handle it.

What about the terrain in Indonesia was that different?

Well on the border it was hilly, very hilly. As you went closer into Kuching it flattened out and you had paddies and things like that. But much generally hillier than Malaya which had that large coastal plain.

And did you go on long patrols and you had done in?

Not long, I think the longest was five or six days.

33:00 And the only memorable part of that, we used to go into all the villages and make sure everyone knew you were in the area and who was the boss, and what we did, and what we wanted them to do and get information, intelligence. And we would often stay in the long houses and the only disconcerting part of that was that some of these had skulls hanging in them, we were told they were Japanese but who knows?

Who told you that they were Japanese?

33:30 The head man, but you don't know.

Were they?

Just the skull, very old I suspect they might have been there for a long time, but it was not uncommon. Not hundreds of them two or three were just part of the deal, it might have been some pagan turn out with the ancestors but it didn't help.

Bit unnerving?

Unnerving yeah.

So for you what other

34:00 **significant memories do you have of the Indonesian confrontation?**

Not a lot, it was all pretty rapid. When I came back commissioned I went back to Borneo for a short period and then I was off to Vietnam so for that time I was pretty well occupied anyhow. And when I went back there I did pretty much the same thing. Being a spare lieutenant in an operational area is not

34:30 helpful to anybody. In fact I think I was a permanent duty officer, sit at the control post and control that. There is nowhere else to go. No platoon commander wants you with his outfit and there is no other outfit for you, you're spare and so you end up doing, command post duty is the best you can expect.

Just talking again about the

35:00 **sergeants that were killed with the land mine, how did that affect everyone, the soldiers in your platoon say? In terms of morale and concern for your?**

The morale would probably be affected for the platoon, it was probably a difficult one by the time the second sergeant was killed. For everybody else it just meant you had to be very careful.

- 35:30 We seldom walked on tracks anyhow but sometimes you were obliged. You usually find these things on tracks and you just had to be a little bit more careful if you are going to walk along a track that you clear it as best as you possibly can. There is not much more you can do. I think everyone is scared of them you would be silly not to be, because you had to be ultra aware. And those places where you normally if you're going to stop for a cigarette or a break and there is
- 36:00 trees sitting out in the open, well you would be foolish to go and have your cigarette there. It is a great place for putting a mine, you may as well sit out in the sun, might be hot and sweaty but at least you're alive. So a great deal of uncertainty enters into the equations. No longer the possibility of being jumped by a whole lot of Indonesians, you have now got the possibility of walking into a mine kilometres away from any Indonesians.

- 36:30 Just something else we hadn't experienced before. In fact mine warfare you had to go back to Korea to find it.

And did that affect you in any way having to deal with the tension associated with that concern?

Not really my concern was to get out there and have a look at the mine and identify it. But I think they flew in some engineers from somewhere else Sarrawak to do that. That was my first concern

- 37:00 to know what we were dealing with, exactly what the mine was, and once you know what the mine is you have a rough idea how they are going to deploy it, so that was my main concern.

By this time you have three young children, when you were in Malaya of course you weren't married with children, did that change your concerns for your own safety at all in any way?

- 37:30 I don't think so, I have always been a devoted coward. All of these things are in proportion, if you try and keep your emotions in proportion to the danger. You're foolish if you are not fearful of things that are likely to kill. There are not many people around of that mind. You are aware but you know that being aware is just that

- 38:00 it can't stop you you have to keep on doing your job. And you do your job to work around those problems as they arrive. You don't view those problems as a prohibition on carrying out any further tasks.

How much communication did you have with your family in Indonesia?

Not a lot, that was a difficult one. Mail was a bit of a problem there as I recall. But we have never really been that letter writing all of the time,

- 38:30 even if there was a problem. If you got a letter you just assumed that they had enough time to sit down and write one. I know that soldiers can get very upset and lose morale rapidly if the mail system fails, but that was never a problem with us, we knew each other and if we could write we would write, and we did. But it can be a problem for some.

How long were you involved in the Indonesian confrontation?

- 39:00 March until, I came back from the course in June I think, two or three months.

And you went back to Malaysia at that point to your family?

I went back to Australia at that point to get a commission and then I went back to Borneo to fit in there and as I say we really were out of place because we couldn't really fit in. they sent us off to Vietnam

- 39:30 for seven days whatever it was, fourteen days and then we came back and they found us a lousy job doing the accounts. We picked up the pay for the battalion coming home, I think it was half a million Malay dollars and I think that took us half a week to count it all, so they found some pretty lousy jobs for us actually.

What was involved in getting a commission?

- 40:00 Not as much as there is today it involved application, recommendation, approval, then you went away and you did a four week course, it is called a qualifying course, a knife and fork course it is called from our perspective.

- 40:30 And it was just testing, mainly infantry tactics and that but you were given problems that you had to solve and they weren't things that came out of normal training, a lot of psychological and cryptic, problem solving tasks but there wasn't a great deal of instruction. Either you passed or you didn't there wasn't any half way,

- 41:00 and after your five week period you went back to your room and on your bed was a piece of paper it was a typed piece of paper and on there somewhere was either yes or no, the only difference between them all, and if it was no you were told all of your bags had to be packed and you had to be out of the quarters in two or three hours on the bus going to the airport, and if it was yes you stay behind for the graduation ceremony. So pretty quick stuff.

- 41:28 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 **What it was you went to Vietnam for and what did you see when you got there?**

On the recce? It was a familiarisation, I think there was a fair indication Australia would be committed in Vietnam. 1 Battalion went there in 1965 and it was an idea cooked up between American and Australia to send as many officer as they could across to

01:00 military assistance command Vietnam and we had a lot of briefings and then you would be flown into different parts of the country and then you would stay with the operational people for two or three nights. Whether in provinces or battalion or armoured corps or whatever and it was very varied. And then you would come back and write a report. So having people all over the country and writing reports on what happened and what they were doing and so I think it gave the Australian military authorities a fair idea,

01:30 an unauthorised type briefing on the intelligence and capabilities and tasks of the units that were in Vietnam.

Prior to going there for the recce what did you know of the situation in Vietnam?

A fair bit. We had been kept pretty much aware of Vietnam for a couple of years, just as a possibility. These things happen all of the time, there is always information floating

02:00 around that you never know this could become our problem. And that had been on for a while, so in the theoretical level you knew the shape of the forces, you knew the history of it from Jap [Japanese] and the French and Dien Bien Phu and Street without joy and all of those battles that had occurred they were analysed, what could have been done better? What assets could they have used?

02:30 What are they doing wrong? These sorts of things, so they were really pulled apart. The problem was by the time you got the information you needed it was a getting a little bit out of date. We had a good idea of the scale, of course that doesn't mean you have any understanding of it when you get there and you actually see it, perception and reality. It wouldn't have been that big of a shock to those people who had been to Korea, the helicopters might but the scale of it, they had been there before. But to people

03:00 who had never been involved in virtually open warfare, I know they called it counter insurgency but the forces were big. As I say it is Long Tan Day today, two and a half thousand and barely a hundred and half of them casualties, it is a pretty big battle. We hadn't struck that for years.

Do you remember your first impression of Vietnam when you got there?

Yeah mass, the scale of things.

03:30 The airports packed with military aircraft, armed helicopters, fighter aircraft, bombers. Thousands of troops trying to move all over the countryside. When you're in the aircraft you can see white smoke here and there and probably the odd aircraft going in to do strikes. I was lucky enough to have a day with 1RAR the unit I was later to command and they had

04:00 they weren't there at the time they were out on operation and while we were there they arrived in a sky full of helicopters, the sky just turned black. I didn't know there was so many helicopters in the world quite frankly. And they landed on the LZ [Landing Zone] and just churned up this big cloud of red dust that engulfed the helicopters and acres of land, it was just unbelievable you know? And then you just say, "Strewth this is big."

04:30 **So how many would you estimate?**

I think there was forty or fifty helicopters being used, probably not on the one lift, but to me, I got couldn't believe it, helicopters everywhere and how they could all land and everyone get off and take off again without anyone sort of being hung up by the heels or something, I don't know. They were a very professional organization.

05:00 **What was the demeanour of the soldiers?**

Very tired. Very dry I think it might have been the dry season up there.

Where had they been?

I can't remember the exact area they had been, my guess is Bien Hoa or somewhere around that main base up there. They tended to patrol around that to keep the main force units out of there the enemy units out of there and they worked very hard. They had some terrible area to patrol and they did it very well.

05:30 **Did you know at that stage that you would be?**

Oh no that's like the lottery that is. Gee whiz, you don't know you going to win the lottery, it happens.

Being trained in the military was there a certain excitement for you at what was happening in Vietnam?

Yes there was. Reading about it and then actually seeing it and then actually getting involved in it and while you're involved trying to absorb

06:00 the scale of it. It takes time. And you know I guess in that time mistakes happen, you're just not aware of things, nothing in Australia or training could prepare you for it. But generally speaking when action happened you were well trained. '

So what did you take from the recce, what did you think were the important things that you took back?

Well I was fascinated a bit by the politics of it.

06:30 I was in an area called Co Cong which I think was south of Saigon and it was a very swampy area, very high Viet Cong infrastructure well known, the Americans had it pretty well plotted out I think what was there, and it seemed to me that the figures I was hearing there were a bit of a worry something like

07:00 thirty or forty percent they believed was Viet Cong infrastructure or Viet Cong sympathiser which is a pretty high percentage of the population. I think there was an election there shortly after I got home or somewhere and they voted almost impeccably for the government. It puzzled me a lot but I was assured that it wasn't that unusual because the election was a mockery from that area when they knew what the

07:30 election would have been. So the politics over there, all they were worried me a little bit. What you read in the papers and what you saw on TV and reality, what was actually happening there, were not always the same. It wasn't, not that it is my problem but as a casual observer, it didn't bother me one way or the other. The other things that struck me was that the Americans were

08:00 very well organised. They had the facilities, they had the, probably not all of the people they needed, but their security was good and I thought it was well thought out in most cases. Apart from that I would have liked to have gone out with some main force units and see what the operational areas were and the fly ins and outs and things like that. but you are thankful for what you get.

08:30 So how long was it before you actually went on your first tour if Vietnam?

That was 1965, I was there eighteen months later with a battalion with 3RAR and national service had been raised and trained. When I think about it, when you asked me the question I just find it hard to believe that you can do that.

09:00 But a lot of people worked very long hours for years.

You find it hard that in eighteen months you got a battalion together?

Yes it is very hard, well see they have got to be trained. If 3RAR provides the skeleton, the structure then the national service and 3RAR soldiers were going to provide the flesh and so you put the

09:30 structure in place and then you have got to get this material and train it and put the flesh on it. So there is recruit training and corps training and 7RAR did both at different times. That takes you up to putting someone in a battalion, in a platoon but then you have got to train that person for what? A month or two to get him used to platoon tactics and what he has to do there. Then you have got to get the platoon in the company to learn company tactics and then you have got to get the battalion to face up to other battalions

10:00 in an exercise to shake the battalion down. You know it takes a long time, and all of this time you have got people coming in, national service, different intakes, intakes getting short on time because you have to have six months residual service to go to Vietnam and we had one intake the second of 65 national servicemen who only had four and a half by the time we were ready to go. And they weren't going to stay in Australia,

10:30 they wrote to every politician in Canberra and their states and local members and everything saying, "This is not on. "And I think they went, but only for four and a half months though because there was that much esprit de corps amongst national servicemen well I guess national servicemen in that battalion, I can only speak for that battalion, maybe others were better, maybe they weren't. It was a very vigorous organization. Tons of esprit de corps and morale.

11:00 And God knows why in Puckapunyal which is just a dust bowl in summer and in the middle of winter with snow and sleet around you're living as though you're in a tropical environment with greens and light sleeping bags. In fact they had to issue extra battle dress and blankets. Prince Charles was wandering around there at the time too with Timber Tops, I don't now how he enjoyed it.

What was he doing down there?

He was a Timber Top down at Geelong Grammar and they used to go up there to the alpine

11:30 region for bushwalks and whatever princes do I don't know. But we heard he was in the area.

What is a Timber Top?

Timber Top is a part of Geelong Grammar, I think outward bound type training. You know bush country I don't know, did a lot of skiing, walking those sorts of things. Probably just a couple of days out of school I guess I don't know.

12:00 But they apparently used the area frequently and I bet they were better dressed than we were, than the soldiers were anyway.

Was there a different way of training the nashos to the regular guys?

Everything was exactly the same. There were some differences initially when it first started. It was a terrible system politically, well not politically

12:30 it was a good system politically, but for any thinking person perspective to ballot people for conscription I can't think of anything more hideous, you either do or you don't. Other countries in the world can find alternatives to this and I just thought it was terrible.

What would your choice of alternative have been in that situation?

Increase the standard, whether it be education or physical or whatever. You could bring

13:00 everybody in and bring in some other form of service, public service. Norway, all conscripted but you can take your choice you have military or civil, if you take civil it might be a bit longer I think but you have an option. Everyone does it, everyone does this little bit for their nation. I think because you have a particular birthday,

13:30 for example Peter Cosgrove and I have the same birthday, chuck a ball and you're gone. I can remember General Daily I think he was still CGS [Chief of the General Staff], I was working in Canberra and he was saying one day that he went across to the Red Hills Golf Club I think, he played there. And there was a party going on, about six or seven young fellows

14:00 and they were all cheering and getting drunk and having a good time and he kept hearing national service, army, Vietnam and so he went across and said, "What's going on?" and apparently one of them had been balloted, I have got to wipe my nose. What are we talking about?

The party.

Yeah so there is a party going on and he went across and asked what is going on and they said, "Oh Billy is balloted." And he said, "What's the big deal you could have joined the army." "But not for two years."

14:30 They had thought it out these people. "Well why didn't the rest of you volunteer to do the two years?" You could do that apparently, volunteer to do the two years national service if you wanted to. And they said, "Oh no we have got school and our lives mapped out. "It just wasn't in their zone. If they got balloted they were quite happy with it. So from that point of view as a CGS he saw that

15:00 this is how they feel about it in this instance but the reason why the others won't join the regular army is because they are just not interested. But if they had been called up, like any Australian they would have done it. My only view is that I think it was a bad way of doing it.

Did you have national servicemen who tried to get out and just couldn't handle it?

There were a few but honestly I don't think any more than regulars. I can remember one bloke, he got into trouble in Kapooka, this is recruit training.

15:30 He smashed up a bar and got mixed up with the police and was in all sorts of trouble and I think that court case might have followed him down and as soon as he got to the battalion he decided that he wasn't going to do this and he went AWOL and probably got seven days CB [Confined to Barracks] or something and went AWOL again and ended up in gaol and then he had to go back and do the court case in Wagga I think.

16:00 While he was away he smashed up another bar down in Melbourne and the police were back looking for him again and of course we had him in gaol so he wasn't going to go anywhere and then he had a court case to face for this second offence and he is up for a court martial for being illegally absentee, I think the second time he was in detention. And the CO said, "What are we going to do with him?" and I said, "Well don't worry they will give him the court martial and discharge." That's what normally happened.

16:30 Especially with civil charges. So this bloke I think he was court martialled, he got time in detention. When he came out the police were waiting for him for this other charge and he went to penitentiary for that, something or other two or three months and then he came back again, poof, there he was. And I thought they can't do this, and anyhow I knew there wasn't a company in the place I could put him. I was the acting

17:00 adjutant whatever I was doing. And I said to the chief clerk, "Look give him something to do up here because there is no way in the world anyone will want him down there." And so anyhow after a week or

couple of months this bloke is doing all sorts of jobs. Clerking here and he can do this job and that job and he was starting to feel his position. Getting the COs morning tea,

17:30 I don't think the CO probably knew who he was. And he would go into the mess and say, "I want some morning tea for the CO. "and they would say, "Well tell the CO to come down and get it." And he would ring the phone up and say, "Is that you colonel?" "Yes." "Sergeant Cook." All of these little tricks and he became a valuable asset around the place and ultimately the RSM came to me and said, "I want

18:00 so and so." And I said, "What for he is working here?" And he said, "I want to make him a regimental policeman." And I said, "You must be joking his record looks like the memoirs of Darcy Dugan you can't do it." And he said, he had spare rank he could make him lance corporal and he went there and he did a top job and I think it was only a couple of months after arrival

18:30 there as a policeman, and he was a very good policeman too. Only a couple of months after arrival in Vietnam that he was second in command in a rifle company. And he came back and he finished his time, I think you add on the time you spend in gaol on the end of your time, non effective service. And he finished that and he got out quite happily and he started up a small delivery service and did very well. I think my point is that yes, there was but you know it all wasn't bad and a lot

19:00 of them, did mess up but not to get out. They just messed up like any other soldier and those that put their mind to it, probably did get out but they wouldn't have got out, it would have been a hard way of doing it.

What about the guys who just weren't strong people?

They were, there was a medical board then and you would have to be pretty clever to feign before a military medical board. I am not saying it couldn't be done,

19:30 but it would be difficult. If somebody after any activity at all wasn't cutting it the first place he would go was the doctor. After you couldn't hurry him up or he looked sick or he gave some indication he is in distress that the first place he goes to. The doctor looks at him and says it is a bit of heat and whatever the case may be and he comes back and if it happens again, eventually you have got to look at it a bit closer

20:00 this time and eventually there is a medical board convened and he is looked at very closely. I can't recall that there was many of them and if there were I can't recall many of them getting out that way. But I have no doubt there were.

How long did it take for the regulars then to accept the nashos?

Pretty quickly, once you had the 3RAR people and I can once again only talk about this one battalion,

20:30 7RAR.

Sure.

The 3RAR had been around forever. The single men came across from 3RAR and they became stationed in Puckapunyal. And then as drafts would have it, people either came in trained in recruit training but not corps training or training in recruit and corps training and then they needed platoon and company training. So you had all sorts of people coming in at different levels of training. And I think there were a couple of groups that came

21:00 in without recruit or corps training so the battalion had to do the whole lot. So this was all being done by people from 3RAR, people who may or may not have had rank at the time, because you're not going to promote everybody, not the British system you can't work it out that way, so everyone just had to chuck in. As I say it was a tremendous effort in that period taken. All this was taking place in that eighteen months,

21:30 sorting the people out and getting them trained. There wasn't a great deal of time to think about whether you liked national servicemen or not, they just got on and done the job and everybody accepted it. My guess it that if you had a platoon of mixed, normal platoon infantry battalion you would not pick. If you picked the people you think were national service you were probably wrong, because the regular army fellows were coming in at seventeen or eighteen and all of the

22:00 national servicemen were twenty or older. There is nothing you couldn't find in a battalion, well borers, veterinary surgeons, school teachers, they were all there and they had a bit of life experience. When you talk about national service it tends to the old and bold reflect back to the 1952 system where you were all eighteen, but no these were well educated, well thought of

22:30 people who did a very good job in the army.

What about the level of education, the more educated trying to fit in with the, was there any social schema?

No there wasn't. you could find these people if you wanted, when we were in Vietnam we had a local village that was resettled and the battalion used to look after them and do things for them I think it was called the

23:00 it was referred to as the village of a thousand distractions because you were always doing something else when they wanted something. And these people animal husbandry people, they were all there and if we didn't have one the other battalions would. But there was some very well educated people there and they were just private soldiers and they soldiered on. In fact we ran our own education courses there, for soldiers to get more pay they have to have higher education. And we got the syllabus and our teachers and

23:30 all the lesson plans and they taught the soldiers and they were actually examined by education officers who were down in Vung Tau in the service and the majority of those passed and the teachers were happy to keep their hand in, they were all their. And I think by the time the battalion came back from Vietnam from an operational area most people had grouping of a higher level, extra pay of a different level and they were very happy

24:00 good for morale, good for the teachers and a very happy battalion.

And what was your specific role in that eighteen months?

I got the raw end of the stick there. Because I came from extensive OR background, the day the battalion was formed on the 1st of September 1965 I think there was ten people there, there was the commanding officer, 2 IC [second in command], there was myself

24:30 two or three other officers and they were from different corps, not from infantry just seconded, there was one British officer or two, and there was two NCOs I think, that was the beginning of the whole thing. So you immediately need someone to look after the Q Store and there is someone with Q experience, and somebody to look after the personnel administration, well the other corps weren't going to be much use in the infantry

25:00 personnel administration if they came from another corps, it would be difficult for them, and of course the Brits would have no idea. So it was pretty obvious who was going to get it. I was sort of sitting in the background there but I could see it coming a mile away. No one wants that job.

Why doesn't anyone want that job?

Its dangerous from a court martial point of view, you know things that go wrong it is your fault, it is as simple as that.

25:30 **Why is it dangerous from a court martial point of view?**

Well, lose a payroll, fill in the wrong documents for a payroll gee whiz, I am just joking but it was a fair amount of responsibility and quite frankly I would prefer to be with a platoon in the field but you can't always have everything you want. I was happy to be in a battalion that was the first point. First of all I was acting adjutant until the

26:00 real adjutant arrived and when he came I became the assistant adjutant. And I stayed there until I became the adjutant and the big promise was that when we got to Vietnam I could go to a rifle company and give the job to another chap, who worked his heart out for the battalion. He stayed behind to look after the handing back of all of the material and all of the Q, a real nerve racking job and he had been there almost from day one, worked his heart out and he was

26:30 going to replace me and he came across and I think the second day he was there he ended up in intensive care and was shipped back to Australia again. You think after all of the work he done and mind you the job he was going to wasn't exactly good for the nerves, anyway these things happen so I was stuck there for the rest of the year.

How did he end up in intensive care?

He got a very bad attack of asthma.

27:00 I was in the same tent as him, we had a tent sandbagged, wooden floor, two steel beds, mattress, mosquito net and he is no more than from me to that table away and every morning I would go down to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] or ring up the doctor and say, "What happened last night?" And he said, "We have got" Robbie wasn't there when I got up and I thought oh he has gone for a run, he had only been in country for a couple of days. And so I thought he had gone for a run or a wander around to have a look or whatever and

27:30 I went to the RAP and they said, "Robbie is all right he is in intensive care." And I said, "Robbie who?" and they said, "Robbie Kafka." And I said, "You must be joking, I went to bed with him last night, we were in the same tent." Sure enough he had had this tremendous attack of asthma and crawled, he didn't wake me, crawled down to the RAP and reported sick and they

28:00 brought a helicopter in to take him down to intensive care. So yeah things happen don't they.

How did you prepare personally and with your family to leave the country?

There wasn't a great deal to do, we had been through that sort of thing before, we had discussed it. I guess the discussion takes place over a long time. The biggest difficulty was that with the battalion I was practically never home. We had a married quarter in camp eventually but I think

28:30 the battalion started at six or seven o'clock in the morning and finished at seven at night, and they were the lucky ones, there were people working much longer hours than that. and so you sort of miss out on family and children a bit and in the initial stages they were living down in Chelsea in Melbourne, that was the only accommodation we could get anywhere near Puckapunyal. So I would only come down on weekends and we got a married quarter and things got better I got home each night but by the time I got home I probably wasn't in a good humour

29:00 and the kids were probably tucked up in bed anyway and I would probably have a quick meal, read a book, we would talk about a few things and off to bed and the whole thing started again. Some people just didn't stop to get this whole thing going. It really is a good experience to go through this because then you have got some idea of how these people were just chucked together in the Second World War and the problems they faced.

29:30 **How did Chris deal with you going to Vietnam?**

No problem. Not happy, but we always knew what I was doing for a career. How I was going to keep the family together and while nobody ever raised any objections to that I just assumed or we both assumed it was okay. If the money question came in or kids education or something family orientated

30:00 arose where there is a conflict then you might have to look seriously at giving the army away, I would certainly never sacrifice the family for the army, there was never any chance of that and of course that did happen. people just got so worked up and involved and inspired things sort of moved around them and the family took a second place or they thought the family should take a second place.

Did you enjoy becoming a father?

Oh yeah.

30:30 Well I think the only thing at issue was whether we were going to have three or four children, there was never any problem with when they arrived, but oh yes. In fact I was so sure the second one was going to be a boy too I already had his name painted on the highchair and the daughter was born Sandra, and we had hells

31:00 own job thinking of a name. This was one of the real traumas of the family, we just couldn't come to a conclusion. I wanted Jade, overseas experiences, and Chris wanted, I forget, but whatever it was that wasn't for me and Jade wasn't for her. So my future brother-in-law who was in 1st battalion at the time he was a pioneer sergeant

31:30 and we went to lift some old Second World War mine fields in Darwin, they had been putting in a suburb and turning out mines so the pioneers from 3RAR and some out of 1RAR came into Sydney and we trucked up to Darwin to over the space six weeks to look for these mine fields and on the way. And on the way up there we stopped in Cloncurry,

32:00 not a real good truck trip up there, not in those days anyway. just for something to do. And the races were on in Cloncurry, they weren't Melbourne Cup style, just the odd horse here and there and we are down to about our last ten or twenty dollars and we put it all on a horse called Sandra Girl and this thing romped home and so I think I sent a telegram which I didn't do very often, 'How about Sandra?' So Sandra it is. So that was the big compromise and a few dollars in my pocket too.

What did you like about being a father?

32:30 I just like kids. I have never been a real protect them from everything type of father, I have been more if you're going to fall down the stairs then let it be the bottom two when I am standing over here, that sort of thing. I never race to a child if it hurts itself, let it get up and dust itself off. Unless it was, John in fact he was

33:00 very cool, I can remember on one occasion where a snake crawled up his leg and across his stomach, bare stomach and he just said to his mother, "Look mummy a snake." We had never taught them to fear a snake so that wasn't an issue, but he was only five or six it was so cool about it. And several other occasions when he got lost in Malaya one night he caught the wrong tram or something

33:30 he was missing for about three hours and I thought what do you do? But he sat down worked out on the wrong thing and worked out where he caught it and where it went and asked a few people and he got back home again no trouble. And we were mucking around one day another example, this was in Malaysia and we were chucking water at each other and I had a bucket but I clipped the louvre

34:00 and the louvre snapped in the middle and it speared into the back of his kidney down here and we got the glass out and the car out but he wasn't distressed, we packed it up. We didn't show any distress ourselves, we were probably white but we didn't show it was any big problem. He just went down to the doctor and the doctor gave him an injection and might have kept him overnight and stitched him up, always very cool. And the girls were the same. I remember Sandra

34:30 had a broken collarbone, every time you picked her up she would sort of wince, never say anything. We were probably bad parents and then later a lump appeared and we took her to the doctor and she had broken her collarbone. We even knew the incident, she fell off her bike into a tree. And the youngest

one she just wouldn't cry, you could give her a good towelling, a good hiding and she wouldn't cry. So somewhere along the line they all learnt

- 35:00 they had to look after themselves we were always there but life was theirs and they had to live it themselves and they just had that temperament where it fitted in quite nicely. But yeah kids were great.

So did you have a different approach, some people adopt their military style into their family, did you have a different approach?

Not really discipline was very strict, Chris wasn't soft but I was the main disciplinarian and

- 35:30 you know some of the big offences like giving cheek to your mother that was not on. They could probably get away with things so long as they were not told not to. If they were told not to that was the borderline and that was quite strict. And then there would be some form of corporal punishment or something like that. These days when you hear about smacking a child you imagine of a child who is beaten blue

- 36:00 in my view a child that has been badly treated is bruised, we never bruised our kids but if they didn't do what they were told they knew what the penalty was and they expected it and they just accepted it.

So how did you come to leave for Vietnam, what was the trip over and how did the rest of the battalion get there?

We flew over, I was in the strangely enough the rear party which got there before the main body but they left by boat. They

- 36:30 left on the aircraft carrier, the advance party went in early April, they went in mid April and we went in late April and sort of beat the boat in. There was no problems with the fly in. we took over a camp from 5th Battalion, the Tiger battalion and as far as I could see we took it over in very good condition. They really put in the

- 37:00 work to make sure we were well received. When we got there people went to their companies and the place was neat clean tidy and very well looked after and so we were grateful for that.

You were based in Nui Dat were you?

We were in a place called Ap Tan Phu which is on the eastern side I think of the airfield. And we sort of covered that area with patrolling, we had patrol every day and pickets every night.

- 37:30 You do have problems, things you just can't foresee. I remember one chap, he might have been a bit later than when the battalion arrived but he went on duty as a picket. The pickets orders are that if anybody moves on the fence they are to be shot. There is no, and everyone else is told do not go there of a night time and things like urinals

- 38:00 and that are in the middle, but of a day time the urinals are on the wire for the smell hygiene, and one lad came in. it might have been after the company arrived there and everything was established. But he must have come in and used the urinal of a day time and not being aware that there was one in the centre or he had been told and he had forgotten or he hadn't been properly briefed and of

- 38:30 course he wandered to the wire and when he was given the, "Halt who goes there?" he developed stress stutter and couldn't speak. And so he got shot. This is most unfortunate not only for him but the picket, he is not real pleased about it. All you can do is explain the situation to both of them, I don't think he was badly hurt. But the thing this causes in the back of your mind, just

- 39:00 how many of these little events are about to happen? And just from that you can see that you could have a very bad day on not that particular issue but many other ones and that played on your mind a bit.

Did everyone settle in okay initially?

Quicker than I expected actually. They seemed to accept the situation that they had been told about and I think it was pretty clear as a perception.

- 39:30 I think they knew where to go and what to do, the routines and things like that. There were just the odd things that didn't pan out and I am not sure if you can ever cover all of those.

What was the situation with regard to conflict when you got there?

Most of our operations were conducted in the province, generally between the camp and, see after Long Tan Day

- 40:00 where the camp was actually mortared and the company force patrol went out to see what was going on, then they got ambushed, there had been a lot pf patrolling to keep the enemy in force well away from the camp. And then there was the odd operation started to move further and further out. As the base got stronger and when the third battalion went across there in December 1967 and

- 40:30 you had armour that made the base even more secure, especially with the armour and so then the brigade or the task force as it was called then, was able to act as a task force it could actually leave the base and go to other places. So when Tet arrived I had just come back from Saigon. When I left the

camp everything was okay they were back from operations and I can't recall anything that was imminent. And I had been away for

41:00 four or five days and I came back and the place was deserted, there was not many people around the airfield. I got to the battalion and they said, "The battalion is out." And 2nd Battalion was out and I thought what's going on here? And this was about the late 24th or 25th of January and I thought not bad for an ad hoc move they have done

41:30 very well. But of course there was supposed to be a truce for Tet on the 31st of January for about thirty or forty hours and then all hell broke loose. So I have never known whether the battalions were moved up to Bien Hoa to the big airfield up there to protect it because people were reasonably sure, they knew something was going to happen but not necessarily Tet I don't think but,

I am going to pause you there.

41:59 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:30 **You were sort of saying about the Tet Offensive?**

It is a bit vague to me now because everything happened at once. I came back expecting the battalion to be there, I can't recall any operation even being talked about. So when I came back and found the two battalions had gone and left 3RAR who had only just arrived, looking after the camp basically.

01:00 There is no airfield, I think some of the guns had gone the battalion said, "Oh they're on operations at Bien Hoa." And I thought Bien Hoa? Because that's way away from home, forty kilometres or something, and I thought this is odd. I think I got a call from the CO, they had to sort out something to do with the American administration and ours. So I flew up and saw him and

01:30 he was telling me their main task there was to prevent main force units using the area there to launch rockets against Bien Hoa or to prevent infiltration. As I say I don't know how the conversation went now but I just thought to myself, we have gone from everything being nice and easy to almost open warfare. So I sorted the problem out and I stayed out in the field with one of the

02:00 companies for a week or so. As far as I am aware both battalions were in contact every day for a fortnight. 7RAR were eventually relieved by 3RAR and they set up a fire support base with guns and protection around the guns and helipads and that. and that was attacked by a Viet Cong battalion I think and half overrun, that's where Peter Phillips won his military cross, so it was certainly

02:30 on for young and old. I just can't remember now if they had warning about Tet and it was all about Tet. Because you read in the books that no one knew about it but as I say there was certainly an inkling that something was going on. Well certainly I felt, everyone has left me, here I am. There weren't many people around at all in the Task Force base and 3RAR were just arrived there and of course nearly every town in the country exploded,

03:00 certainly every city. 3RAR, one of their companies was involved in the street to street fighting in the local town over there, I think Burea, you know we hadn't done street to street fighting since the Second World War, if we did it then. And so it was different, it was every part of the country was aflame. We had soldiers coming back from

03:30 leave in Saigon firing from the hotel where they were spending the night before they came back just in protection. The embassy was over run, it was a big deal.

What did you see of those battle that were going on during the Tet offensive?

I didn't see much at all, in fact I didn't see any.

Could you hear any of it?

Well we always had the radio on because we were responsible for making sure casualties were looked after and

04:00 things like that, so we knew what was happening because that was our job, the medical side of it.

So you weren't close enough to hear any of it?

No only over the radio, you could certainly hear it over there. You could hear the helicopters taking fire trying to get the casualties out. Our doctor in fact who suffered from vertigo they had a bad contact one night and it was a blistering night of storms

04:30 and thick jungle and they had a few casualties. It was so bad that they wanted the doctor to go in and have a look at them on the ground before they started taking them out. And he didn't tell the pilot that

he suffered from vertigo and the time came where he was being lowered through the canopy and of course the helicopter is being thrown around and there is lightening and thunder and black clouds and he is being thrust into the jungle and out of the jungle as the helicopter

05:00 moved up and down and he wasn't quite sure when he got down there whose side he was on, exactly where the enemy was. It is pretty brave for a doctor not normally in that environment. That would send any experienced person white, but he got down there and patched them up and hoisted them out. But you just never know what's going to befall you next is probably what I was trying to say.

05:30 **What did you see of the casualties coming back?**

I saw all of them.

So can you tell us a bit about that?

During Tet it was a bit more difficult because the hospitals overflowed. There was an ambulance at Nui Dat where they had to try and store people there, and I think by the time you could work out where you could put people, not me the medical people, we looked at the administration

06:00 side of it, who they are and what happened to them, everything was chock a block, there was people everywhere waiting for surgery, having surgery, recuperation, trying to get people out a little bit earlier to get more beds. That was the worst I ever seen, I never expected to see anything like that. The only thing I can add is that

06:30 I think that no one would disagree with the fact that our people were very well looked after by our medical staff. Vung Tau was outstanding, I don't think they wanted for anything, apart from blood and things like that which they would have gotten. And then those that had to go home, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] laid on the Hercules back to Butterworth and don't forget it was the RAAF who did a lot of our casualty evacuation through dust off. And I think

07:00 if there was one group of people in Vietnam, Australian or American that did the bravest job of all I think the dust off people, they were everywhere, they were there as soon as they could be, and they did everything in their power to get casualties out, they were great.

In terms of actually injuries what were you seeing?

A lot of shrapnel wounds from the rocket

07:30 projector grenades. They're really for tanks but they use them for anti-personnel. When they explode their casing is quite thin and I think it must split into a lot of tiny bits of metal, that just sear through the air and cut the flesh, a lot of slashes, gun shot wounds of course. A few blast cases and a few burns. But mainly shrapnel wounds, we didn't see the wounds

08:00 actually because by the time we saw them they had been patched up. I don't think the hospital would have let you near them, they would have taken them into the op. We were there within hours of them arriving, finding out who they were, what they were and if they needed anything. And there was some strange cases. I spoke about Sutherland he was an extremely brave fellow, and [General] Westmoreland who was just so taken by him.

08:30 But there was so many others. I can remember again from the radio, you know what's going on, I can remember a badly wounded section commander refusing to get onto a dust off helicopter which is bad enough, until all of his wounded were on there before him. And another case where a chap who was always in trouble, one of those good

09:00 soldiers but don't let him out, a disciplinary nightmare. And I think that he got onto the turps [alcohol] just once too often for the CO and so the CO gave him a real hard time in the orderly room and he put him on the dry and told him he couldn't have

09:30 another beer until the CO said so. And there was a few other caveats and penalties too but I can't recall what they were. And he got wounded, badly wounded. And the CO used to try and come down whenever he could but he certainly came down I think most Sundays and we went into see these people and he saw this bloke and he said, "How are you?" and he said, "Oh good." And he said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" and he said, "Take me off the bloody dry."

10:00 He is in hospital bandaged up and that's the only thing on his mind, drinking - funny man.

Do you remember any other significant conversations or incidents?

One of the big ones we had, we had an incident on the 6th of August 1967 at a place called Suwich, Alpha which is A Company and I think we had six killed.

10:30 And it was a very bloody battle, went on most of the afternoon and when it was all over and the company was back and we packed everything up for these people that were killed and all of the administration was complete. One of the people that was killed was a chap called Gabby Hayes, he was a private soldier and I was a private soldier with him in 3RAR, but he was the original

11:00 Australian stirrer, he started a ministerial back in the late 1950's, early 1960s, you know how officers

have batmen? People who run errands and answer telephones and radio and iron greens and what have you. Well he was made a batman one day and he took great umbrage at this. This was not for him, and I am not quite sure what happened there but he wrote a ministerial to the

- 11:30 minister of the army I guess saying that the manual for military law stated that officers could not have servants and he reckoned a batman was a servant and that was not on. That's the sort of thing he was. I used to put out a weekly newsletter, well the battalion put out a newsletter called Smiths Weekly, the CO was called Smith so it was Smith's Weekly. And he was always in there, stirring, I think he used to sign off with, 'Fight you bastards, fight'
- 12:00 something like that. he was just a real character. He came across from 3 to 7RAR but they run short of reinforcements and we had to reinforce the two battalions over in Vietnam I think was the way it went. And he was one of the first that wanted to go, and I think he went over there and he either got sick or he got wounded and he ended up back in Australia after he might have done the whole year, I don't know, six or seven months. and
- 12:30 it was just before we left and I think it might have been only weeks before the commanding officer left in the advance party for Vietnam. Anyway he found his way from wherever he was to Puckapunyal where we were, where he had left from, and he sat on the COs doorstep. I think the CO was up at the snow or something for the weekend. He sat there all the weekend until the CO turned up and pleaded with him to get him to go to Vietnam with the
- 13:00 battalion. And the CO checked around, yeah he is section commander I am short of a section commander so he could fit him in somewhere and he went. He was one of the ones that was killed at Suwich Alpha. But the interesting part was some time later we had notification from a solicitor that he had left a will and in the will he had left one hundred dollars to the sergeants mess for the sergeants mess to
- 13:30 collectively, with all the junior NCOs in the battalion on one day of the year to toast the infantry soldier. This sort of came out of the blue. So what they did in fact the soldiers mess bought a big silver tray and they engraved all of this on the tray, and I think it is a tradition there now. I have never heard of anything like this before. You often
- 14:00 get people in operations will say, "If I do get killed you can have my TV or radio." But nothing formal as a rule but that was Gabby Hayes.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that battle in which he was killed?

Well I wasn't there, but it was A company there was three military crosses, at least three, company commander or Platoon Commander Ross and

- 14:30 the forward observer from the artillery he done a tremendous job. I think Sergeant Sutherland received the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Award]. In a book I was reading recently there was comment there about Gabby Hayes the section commander who just through fear and discretion was walking around trying to calm people down when he was shot.
- 15:00 Sutherland I told you was very badly hurt. He was a real seasoned soldier, he had been around a long time. The chap who was the radio operator for the artillery, he got a military medal I think. I think he wrapped himself around the radio set so it couldn't get damaged. I think there was six killed, there was a dozen injured,
- 15:30 the battle raged for two or three hours. It was a pretty big force I can't recall what it was, my guess is battalion size or bigger. We listened to the radio all the time to hear what the casualties were and I can tell you there weren't too many people in the battalion headquarters area that weren't listening to the radio. It was very intense.

And afterwards you were dealing with the

- 16:00 **administration of have to deal with the dead bodies I think you said?**

No the bodies were normally taken to the mortuary where they were looked after and from memory at that stage of the game I think they were coming home. We did all of the paperwork, the legal part of making sure that his partner or wife got whatever they were entitled to, made sure all of his effects, you just couldn't go to

- 16:30 his locker and clean all of that out because you had to go around and ask if there was anything that he was owed or lent or whatever from somebody else. So there may be other things that had to come into it and so that was all packaged up and sent to the next of kin. They would all get a letter from the battalion, but their friends to would write to them
- 17:00 and tell them probably the circumstances, and in a lot of cases they would go and visit them, I do now.

Was there special ceremonies held for those men?

No there wasn't time. There would be some sort of commemoration at the Sunday church, I am sure the company where they came from would have some sort of observance, but there just wasn't time. You're

out in the field, the body has left and gone to the mortuary and the operation might go on for

- 17:30 another fortnight and in that time you might fight two or three more battles with two or three more men and get back. There just wasn't time for the battalion, well the battalion wasn't there all of the time anyway because you had companies out doing other things.

What impact did it have on the battalion when there was a battle like that with a high casualty rate?

Pretty solemn.

- 18:00 There would be a debrief in the situation, the commanding officer would debrief each of the major contacts. Lay it down, what happened, bring out any mistakes if they occurred, any new tactics that were being used. Who had been killed. And this would be also passed out in paper and read in orders or something so that everyone knew exactly what happened. I know it sounds a bit callous.

- 18:30 but there just isn't time, you would like to do more, you would like to reflect but the time just isn't there.

How hard was it for you to do the administration work where you were tidying up the effects of these people?

For people you knew it was hard, people you had been friend with for several years and it is a bit hard in those cases, and I guess you never quite get used to those cases.

- 19:00 Again you just get on and do it that's all you can do. In fact another interesting thing that happened around that time, might have been the next day. A lad got lost. If there is one thing you always do in infantry is make sure that the bloke in front of you is always in front of you. Now this bloke must have had a lapse or something because he just dropped off

- 19:30 and got lost. And they had a tremendous search for him, did everything we possibly could. But it is not easy when you have got enemy out there between friendly companies and you have got your own people out there and you could have a friendly clash, friendly contact or a contact with the enemy and you could lose more men if you search too far. So that decision must weigh heavily on the commanding officer because he is the one that has got to make it.

- 20:00 He flew, got the helicopter back to the task force to speak to the brigadier to say, "Look I don't want to take the chance of losing more men for the sake of one, it is a difficult decision but there really is no option." And the brigadier agreed obviously. And flying back to headquarters they saw this lone figure down in a clearing and of course these are very small reconnaissance helicopters, there is only seats for two. And he got down there and

- 20:30 told this chap to get aboard and he had to sit on the COs lap and of course in getting aboard he smacked the CO across the head with his rifle, so the CO wasn't having a good day. But you still had to see the lad, and they took him back, but gee whiz he was lucky and in fact he said later in a letter that he must have been the only digger in the battalion that had sat on the COs lap. It turned out well but it could have been a real sad case.

- 21:00 **So the reality of war is not how we see it in the movies? The Saving Private Ryan scenario where everybody saves one man?**

I don't think so I really don't watch that many of those sorts of movies. But from what I have seen, I guess the pathos is always there, certainly the hard work but I don't think it often gets close

- 21:30 to the very strong bonds that exist. And that's, whether it is up and down rank wise or peer groups wise, it is a very strong bond. When we were in Puckapunyal 7RAR, there is a Goulburn River there which is a bit of an outlet for entertainment for the soldiers fishing or

- 22:00 canoeing whatever they did. And one night several went fishing and woke up in the morning and one was missing. And they amongst themselves decided, because there was drink involved, decided he must have drowned, he must have fallen in the river. And of course when they contacted the battalion, the area headquarters we are saying, "This bloke is just as likely to have walked home."

- 22:30 But they were absolutely convinced that he wouldn't do that. The difference was that they knew he wouldn't do that, we assumed he came back. So they persisted and we got the police and search and sure enough he had drowned. They have this bond, this knowledge. And in most cases it can't be faulted, they know how their friends feel.

- 23:00 **What were the greatest challenges for you in terms of getting your job done during that first tour of Vietnam?**

Time is always a factor. Tying to get the routine stuff out of the way which has to be done in amongst the priorities that have to happen. I was called away for several days to take

- 23:30 evidence in a murder case. You have to do it and do it properly but for seven days there is a vacancy there and decisions aren't being made because there is no assistant adjutant to step in there and do it. There was a chief clerk and they were great. But some things require a commissioned officer to sign it,

it is not that they couldn't do it, they could do it better than I could, just that they didn't have the authority. And casualties happening any time and you're called out to go and

- 24:00 see how they were, and you certainly wouldn't do your routine work to begrudge them that. You would go down and see them. you know there were times when things got slack, but that's what I remember. In fact the most famous drama I had was General MacDonald, A L MacDonald. He was the Commander of Armed Forces Vietnam. And he was a real tiger this fellow, tough as nails, Second World
- 24:30 War, he was adjutant of a battalion in the Middle East, went to New Guinea, Korea, he had been everywhere and he was ruthless. And he was visiting the unit which Com AVs [Commander Armed Forces Vietnam] did you didn't want them to but they did. And so they had the Com AV and his staff and I think it was, might have been Deputy Dustan who was to end up the governor of South Australia. He was the
- 25:00 representative of the brigadier I think. And then there was my CO and that gaggle, but nobody wanted me so I didn't volunteer. And sometime in the morning I got a call from the CO and he said, "Oh Barry tell me, how many people in the battalion wear glasses?" And I thought he must want to know, I had no idea and I went through
- 25:30 my head and I worked out how many people n my platoon wore glasses and I multiplied it by the number of platoons in the battalion and said whatever it was, forty-five or fifty. And he said, "Oh thanks very much." and I thought strange request, but I hung up and forgot about it. And about half an hour or an hour later there is all of this noise out in the orderly room in the headquarters and I thought, well that's strange, it is normally a pretty silent place. And I went out there and they're all there and they are all pouring over our filing system.
- 26:00 Before we left Australia we bought a colour coded filing system to keep track of the different intakes of national servicemen that have to come home and those who were on leave or sick so you could do a quick count just by colours. And the CO had assumed that I had worked out how many people wore glasses because of this system, that I had actually put it in there. It didn't even occur to me. And he said, "Barry show the general how you could work out so quickly that we had forty-five people in the battalion wore glasses."
- 26:30 I said, "I just took a punt sir." Well Al MacDonald gave me a very cold up and down and turned around just walked out and I thought well there goes a good career. And when it was all over and the CO was back I went in and apologised and said, "I thought you just wanted a rough idea." He said, "Barry I blew it, I rang up and asked how many, told him how you knew and I would
- 27:00 insist on taking you up there and showing him how you got it." Can I wipe my nose?

Sure.

Later on I think I might have mentioned he was the VCGS [Vice Chief of the General Staff] who took me on as his assistant. I never knew if he knew who I was, I suspect he did and I think he was just waiting for me to ask him.

Did you ever find out why he wanted to know how many people were wearing glasses?

He was just an old time commander who asked those questions. Down there when he was going through the battalion he also asked the

- 27:30 storeman down in the transport compound how many carburettor idling spring he had for the jeeps in the battalion, and I think the bloke had a box of them, about a hundred, they were just a little spring. And he said, "How many do you use?" and he said, "We have been here about six months we have only used one." And he said, "Well you have got about fifty years supply of them don't you think you're overstocked?" This sort of thing you know. That's what old time generals did.
- 28:00 **When you first got to Vietnam you said it was a bit of a shock, it was so full on, so much going on, to what extent before you got there did you realise Vietnam would be an entirely different scenario to the ones you had been involved in previously?**
- We were pretty well briefed. It was matter of matching up the perception you got from reading and information received
- 28:30 in Australia, newspapers, any magazine you could get was on Vietnam. But it, that's the perception. When you get there and you get in amongst the heat and the dust and things moving and people moving and the mass of it. And the weapons of war that you had never seen before, armed gunships that fired rockets. All of this is completely new,
- 29:00 you had read about it and you might have seen it in the pictures, but when you're actually there it is quite different. When you're watching it on the TV there is no emotion, there is no fear. When you're there the heart pumps a little bit quicker and you realise then that things aren't going to be as easy as what they were going to be.

And what message do you develop to deal with that? What personal ways did you have to deal with that tension?

- 29:30 I just did my job and I think most did. I know some didn't cope but then there are some that don't cope with everything in life, and some had a much harder time than others, much harder than I did. But most people who were trained in those days, they were trained to kill, they had an expectation
- 30:00 of being wounded, they had wills made out, they had authority in their posting to take out extra insurance if they wanted to. All of these things were all around you, it was there all of the time. There was no deception at all, but when you're there it is reality and it is quite different. When you hear that a company has just had six killed and
- 30:30 you're going out to help them or to go to another area, that's when the doubt starts creeping into the mind. And that level of tension is probably helpful for people to remain alert. But when something happens generally speaking everyone will just react in the way they have been trained, and generally if they do everything will work out just fine. If they just carry out the drills they have been taught it gives them that four or five seconds
- 31:00 to sort of think it out quickly and do something. The last thing you can have is people on the ground and no one prepared to make a decision, it had to be made and people were going to be hurt but you have no alternative it just has to happen.

Had you discussed with Chris the possibility of you being killed or wounded?

I don't think so, we had wills made out because we had to do it before we went overseas. I don't think it is a healthy

- 31:30 subject to dwell on quite frankly. Not that we couldn't have that discussion but I am not sure that it does anything.

And you said there were men in there that didn't quite cope so well, can you remember any incidents with men who didn't quite cope?

We had a few instances of murder. Obviously from people who can't cope, that's one extreme,

- 32:00 on the other extreme you have got people who came back to Australia who did not settle well back in at all. And I think most of us had some kind of, not problem, but, for example if there is anything that will send me off today it is someone slamming a door. That will set me right on edge, I know of one officer who had all of the doors in his house removed for this very same reason. It just did
- 32:30 things to you you didn't want to have happen so, that's taking it to the extreme but eventually it decreases over time. A helicopter, that will put a shiver through you and things like that, everyone suffered that. But there were some that came back and just couldn't fit back in again. And the ones that I know, I don't think any of them ever really got over it, it is still there lurking in the background.
- 33:00 they do different things, some people took up[drink which didn't help, marriages broke up. You had people who took up religion, maybe they would have taken it up anyhow but that was just in my view something that may have been casual. These things happened and they certainly happened through service in Vietnam, there is no question. How that played on their mind, suicides. I had a
- 33:30 friend a very close friend who was an excellent soldier suicide last year and I just could not believe it. He had served with me overseas and he was a very seasoned soldier. I guess you have got to ask yourself was it a result of Vietnam and service in the army or something else. I know the family, the family is fine it wasn't that, you just don't know. But I can think of two or three in
- 34:00 that category, and it just doesn't make sense. And you put it down, in my view if you want to make a quick decision on why it happened; because he was in Vietnam. I guess you read so much about it and that's what happens to them, it happened to a few of them.

You mentioned being called away to give evidence in a murder trial?

No, there was a lad charged with murdering his officer

- 34:30 and he was placed under arrest and I was asked to do the summary of evidence which is just calling the evidence from everybody, what happened, that's processed through the legal office. It is done by the regimental officer, processed by the legal officer and if there is enough evidence there a court martial is held and the person is tried.

And you said there was in fact a few murders, can you tell us about those?

- 35:00 That's the only one I know of, there was certainly none in the battalion, again people are people. As far as I am aware the statistics for crime within that age range of people in the battalion whether they are overseas or somewhere else is much the same as the population. I think down Vung Tau when I was back in Australia there was a case of a lad who shot two or three sergeants in the sergeants mess. I am not sure how many
- 35:30 other cases there were, but these things happen. These were the little cannons around the place waiting to go off, the sentry who has stress stutter, can't talk. People who don't pass on a message, little lapses of mind which end up causing people to suffer. In the case of murder well murder is murder and there is no excuse for it.

36:00 **What were the most difficult moments for you during the first tour?**

I suspect if I really wanted to think about it, it would be people that I knew getting killed.

And did you actually go out on patrols?

Very rarely, during Tet I went with one of the companies for three or four days or a week or something. There wasn't much to do back where I came from but then I had to get

36:30 back there because the casualties started coming in and I had to get back and do my job. There again you're the odd man out, it wasn't too bad there because I could play the part of company 2 IC because if that option wasn't open I wouldn't go anywhere near it because you just don't need another officer floating around making inane comments it was just not on.

And how were the patrols in Vietnam different to the patrols in Indonesia?

37:00 Size, company patrols, platoon patrols. Company ambushes, platoon ambushes, we never got down to two or three man ambushes or patrols, you just didn't do that there. If you found something you couldn't do much with it you were going to get a hiding. The task force was very heavily protected, as I say in December armour came across,

37:30 and we had heavy artillery there heavy, medium and light in the task force area. It was a very fortified camp and I don't think the main force Viet Cong or the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] were much interested in our base after Long Tan. They got such a hiding that they weren't prepared to take on more than the company that they took on and I think they regret doing that.

38:00 **And were you involved in any contacts on those patrols you did in Vietnam?**

No I was only on the one, the platoons did but I was virtually looking after the radio in the headquarters. During Tet is just wasn't unusual, it was it would have been unusual if nothing happened, it just blew up everywhere.

How satisfied were you with the job you had been asked to do?

Not very happy at all. I was promised to go to a company and

38:30 the reason why I didn't go was so obvious I couldn't complain. If I complained they would say, "Okay fair enough I will take so and so out of there and you can replace him." I have made an enemy for my life. So you have just got to roll with the punches, I wasn't real happy but well the bloke who was going to replace me was very sick so he wasn't

39:00 happy either. And he had spent as much time with the battalion in the lead up to going overseas with what he was doing, and certainly wrapping up the battalion up back there, he didn't get a great deal of grace out of it. All he got was a great deal of hard work and very little glory, he got very sick. I wasn't happy, but that's what happens.

And when you came back to Australia after that first tour of duty, do you remember your first impressions of being back in Australia?

39:30 I think the environment once again, nice clean cities and parks and people going about their daily business, there is no weapons around and everything functioning normally and nothing blown up. Just life you know. Europeans rather than Asians everywhere, you get used to the environment and you come

40:00 into the streets, Europeans everywhere. Well I came back, because you drive vehicles on the wrong side of the road over there and I drove around one of the roundabouts in Canberra the wrong way, these things are in the back of your mind and they are hard to get out. And people are waving at me and I though oh they are very pleasant you know. And if you ever want a real fun trip trying going around one of those circuits the wrong way and try and get off it, all of the turn outs go the wrong way.

40:30 Don't ask me how I got on there I don't know.

Tell us how you go off.

The median strip you know the grassy verges? I drove around and found my way out. I didn't touch the car for a while.

40:49 End of tape

Tape 9

00:30 **So what happened in a brief summary of your time leading up to your second tour?**

When I came back from Vietnam the battalion arrived in Holsworthy and we got our colours and I was off to a posting in Canberra, the Director of Military Training, it was a staff job. I didn't like staff jobs, I

don't like being inside. And that was a real eye opener

01:00 from where I was, I was the adjutant of the battalion, in the adjutants view a very important person in the battalion. The commanding officers personal staff always say, "You reckon you're something see?" You talk to the RSM and give all of the subalterns a hard time and people snap to attention, it is a big deal. You go to Canberra and start getting cups of tea, and get the photocopying

01:30 and you have to go and find your own references. It is a whole new world and in fact for a while there I wasn't sure if this was getting onto a groundhog day [daily repetition and tedium], going back to being a private soldier again.

Did you try and get out of that?

You don't do that, you take the good with the bad, you have to do staff jobs and I agree with that principle for everybody but me. Then you start working with civilians for the

02:00 first time and you don't know how you inter-relate. Because in the army you work in a very structured society you know who is above and below you, although that mightn't matter, when the time comes for decisions to be made and orders to be given and carried out you have got to know exactly where you are. What do you do with civilians. This was a loose ranking.

02:30 This bloke over here who works the machine is equivalent to a captain and you can't see the relationship, so there is a period where you walk around with your eyes open trying to understand all of this and it is very difficult. The only sanity is you can still see people there wearing uniform and you know what rank they are and you know instantly how to relate. Even that was different. I worked for a charming chap called

03:00 Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Stewart, Military Cross and he had a sort of a friendly enemy, an old mate down the road who was a full colonel and they were always at each other, friendly way. And Jimmy decided to give up smoking, he was a heavy smoker and at that time the way to give up smoking was you do everything differently,

03:30 change your in trays and your out trays and you would lock your door at morning tea time so no one could come in with a cigarette and you did everything to break up the pattern and of course this is pretty unnerving for the people under him because in tray is the out tray and he wants to know why the stuff is in here and you can't get in to see him and he won't answer the phone and this is all happening, and not only was it starting to affect us but it was affecting the more senior ones.

04:00 And the colonel was getting a bit sick of this with his little mate down below and I heard this yelling out in the corridor which is a bit unusual for army headquarters and so I got up to have a look and here is a full colonel in uniform peering through the keyhole and he is yelling through the keyhole, "I know you're in there you little broken nose bastard, come out I want to talk to you."

04:30 And I thought I have got to have a rest, it was just too much for me. It was a very strange place.

Did you settle into it?

It became a routine thing you just put your mind to it and you get in there and do it. Not a great deal of interesting stuff. I was looking after recruit training syllabus and corps training syllabus and all of those sorts of things. And civil education budget for army officers and

05:00 getting cups of tea and collating papers. I didn't enjoy it at all but you had to start somewhere. It was just coming from a regular battalion, I had been in battalion for twelve years, and it was just different. people who were a little bit younger than me were probably introduced to this earlier on, it was just that I was to regimental

05:30 to accept this first up and ultimately it didn't mean anything but it was difficult.

Did you miss the battalion?

Oh yes. Well it was a two year posting and I only lasted out about I think eighteen months, I volunteered for AATTV and having done that it broke the posting cycle there and I

06:00 was out of phase a bit. And he was a minister in 4RAR David Thomson he was a science minister in the Fraser government I think, he was a brigadier, director of infantry before I left. And just before I left Malcolm Fraser wanted Duntroon moved from Duntroon to somewhere else in Australia and that was going to be overtaken by ADFA [Australian Defence Force Academy] and

06:30 so Thompson was put in charge of a working party to work out the best place to put it. The people that were there that weren't real convinced about this I must admit, they thought it was a terrible thing because poor old General Bridges was buried up there at Duntroon and it had been there for yonks and it wasn't going down real well.

What was the governments reasoning for it?

Well I suppose save money. If you put ADFA into Duntroon and

- 07:00 expand Duntroon and find some other place to do your infantry training for officers I guess it is money saved. It was a pretty expensive operation so I think they were trying everything. This is what was given to us, Thompson was told, "Look this is what is going to happen, you're going to move. So have a look at it and pick the best place because you're going to be stuck with it, don't make a mistake." So we travelled around the countryside looking at
- 07:30 different sites and we had engineers and architects and all sorts of people giving different opinions and that's where I spent the last four or five months before I went off and did training for AATTV. That was a bit more interesting. It was a funny one too. I wasn't really used to senior officers I suppose, I used to do silly things like if I was pulling out

08:00 the name of all of the members of the working party and the most senior only had one initial, I liked things being neat and tidy so I gave them all one initial. And they objected to that, two initials. And if you try to move them anywhere, before I realised I used to just book a plane and book accommodation and that's that. Oh no. Some don't like TAA and some didn't like Ansett and some didn't like this hotel and always stay there. And I thought how on earth can people tour the countryside looking after all of these little quirks ?

08:30 We got over that.

I guess coming from a real war situation that stuff must have seemed really ridiculous?

It would have seemed pretty ridiculous anyhow I think, I don't think war made it any worse but you have got to ask yourself what else do you do? This is how the machine works. It won't work more efficiently as long as people do as they're told and I expect senior officers do that, than what you're doing.

09:00 But when these sort of little quibbles arise you say well fair enough, it is no big deal there is other things to worry about and I thought moving Duntroon was a horrendous thought. If they were going to have ADFA, then build ADFA where it is, if you're going to train officers for the army and they need more training put them into Duntroon, don't give away on Duntroon just on some

09:30 political quirk to save money.

Was it hard for you to adjust to family life after being in Vietnam the first time?

Slamming doors, helicopters, kids screaming, things like that put you on edge.

Had your family got into a routine that you found difficult to adjust to?

Not really, interestingly enough Annette had, my youngest daughter had got into the habit of sleeping in the double bed with

10:00 Chris of a night time, Chris said she used to have nightmares or something and she said this is interesting he is home now I can't see this lasting too long. And apparently the first night I was there she opened the door saw I was there and never ever rose again. Kids might be kids but they know what reality is. They probably were saying all along, "When Dad comes home that's the end of that."

10:30 but you may as well try it while you can. It might have been more of a problem for the kids than for me, getting used to have me back again yelling and shouting, not that there was a big disciplinary problem, but these things happen and Mum might have been a bit softer, I don't think so. She might have let them get away with more than I did over time.

I suppose there was all of a sudden a different voice in the house?

11:00 A different voice in the house and things were done differently. Driving around with Mum and stopping off for an ice-cream became quick whip down to the school to watch the football, things just changed. I was just glad to be home it was great to have three cooked meals and a warm bed and someone to talk to. Forget about casualties

11:30 and weapon states and ammunition levels and all of those things that had been happening for the last year. But there was those little things that happened that put you on edge, screaming kids.

Before you talked about when the reality of the job you're are doing in a conflict situation has very little time to sink in because you're busy, when you come home do things start to register more?

12:00 Yes a lot of things come out that you hadn't thought about. That had happened, you knew they had happened, you stuck them in a compartment somewhere and all of a sudden these things started popping up, things to think about. No big deal. The biggest thing I found was why didn't I think of this before? But before, there was no before,

12:30 and things you wish you had have done when you think back you know things that happened around you and just got away from you and you know you should have penned a letter to somebody or wished somebody good luck or people who have been decorated and done a good job. All of a sudden you realise you could have found that extra minute or two to pen a quick letter or make a quick call or go down and see them.

13:00 All of these things mount up a bit and it takes a while for it all to settle back down again and you don't revisit it again you just let it go.

Were you dreaming about your experiences in Vietnam?

Every now and then I suppose most do, a bit of a scream drives Chris up the wall every now and then, about once a year but again whether that's related to any active service or just you, or the TV or

13:30 something you heard on the radio. I can't remember dreams. I do have the odd night where I tend to give a bit of a yell, probably being posted back to a staff job or something.

Did Chris notice any change in you at all?

She never mentioned it. We just talked,

14:00 if she said, "Look you have got a problem." then I would take note but she never raised anything. I guess things were probably a bit tense there for a while because simple things that happened would put you on edge and you may have been unreasonable with the kids or something for that reason. But not to the extent of bruising someone but to the extent of being extremely annoyed, extremely quickly and letting people know that's

14:30 the situation you're in and sort it out you know.

So were you keen to get back?

Well you always are, you're keen to get there and you're keen to get back, you're sort of keen to get back the day after you get there. Again I suspect that most people generally speaking you're too busy on operations and things like that, it certainly happens and God willing he has got his mates there

15:00 to realise there is a bit of a change and they sort of get him out of it. But you know.

I mean were you keen to go back to Vietnam the second time?

I volunteered yes.

So what happened with the lead up to that?

I finished the, I applied for AATTV very quickly after I got in the staff job.

Can you describe what AATTV?

Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

15:30 It arrived in Vietnam in 1962, it left in 1972 or 3 it is the longest serving operational unit in Australians history and I think it is one of the most decorated, it had a high casualty rate. It was initially sent there to train Vietnamese. When things got a little more difficult they actually started taking on

16:00 command positions with special forces, advisors to Vietnamese battalions, advisors to artillery, cavalry, a whole host of things. And down the Delta, the Delta is a terrible place, I think most of it is only a metre above sea level, and living down there you are just living in water. You have got a mound of dirt where

16:30 live and the rest is just water, it is a terrible place. Australians were all over there from the bottom to the top. I think there were initially thirty and it grew to a hundred and then later it grew to two hundred. I think in total just under a thousand served there,

17:00 six hundred and fifty warrant officers, two hundred and fifty officers, a hundred and fifty corporals and I think there might have been one private. So it was a very small unit, and it was just everywhere and only in ones and twos. My time in I corps was myself and one warrant officer and we had one American who was there with us and that was for a battalion. Some of the other battalions had more and

17:30 some of the very big fire fights that 1st Division were involved in, the voices you heard on the radio were Australian, the just seemed to be everywhere getting wounded, coming back, going out, calling down fire. There was some very close moments down there, when I arrived there I had a very good feel for AATTV.

18:00 What do you mean by that?

Well I had read about it I had spoke to people about it grilled them about it. I read the sit reps [situation reports] practically every day I kept a real finger on it and I went to a training course where they harped on what was happening there and how it happened and how you could get yourself into trouble. And there were people mixed up in the political wing and people mixed up in the provinces you know the districts on the headquarters of provinces. You wouldn't be

18:30 able to go that far anywhere in Vietnam and not find somebody in the team. They seemed to be everywhere and they did a tremendous job, they did so well even the Americans complimented them and that takes a bit. So when I arrived there I went to the top corps, I corps which is up on the DMZ

[de-militarized zone], that portion of Vietnam near the DMZ, and we went to a base just south of Hue the old capital city.

- 19:00 There is an old imperial citadel just across the Perfume River where the kings or one of the lines of kings have their imperial palace I think, quite interesting. And I was to relieve a bloke who was a real good soldier, he had been in AATTV for a year, he got into one of the first big battles over there when these fire support bases were being put up, a place called Tun Tavern where they were just starting to from
- 19:30 these fire support bases which is artillery fire support surrounded by enough infantry to protect them and where the infantry can work out of it is a very solid base. They used to bring in bulldozers and take the top off hills and helipads and a lot of work. I can't recall the exact circumstances but I think half way through getting this one put
- 20:00 in palace the enemy attacked and he was, there was only one of him and he was busy with casualties, helicopters, artillery fire, trying to get this bulldozer out. So he had a lot of experience and that happened a month before I arrived there. And then the Americans decided to go ahead with the plan to put more in there. There was one called Rip Cord which I think was a 101st Division, O'Rielly which was a 101st Division
- 20:30 and then there was the 1st Division the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], the goodies, they had a couple of regiments in the area. What happened was after Tun Tavern, bit of a worry there because if you couldn't get them up before you were attacked you were in a bit of trouble and so a lot of them sort of went in consecutively.
- 21:00 Rip Cord was the one closest to Laos and the enemy was starting to build a road from Laos into the northern reaches of I Corps. So the first fire support base which had been completed, well operational, was Rip Cord and that last about, I am only guessing here, about two or three weeks before it was overrun. It was it was very quick.
- 21:30 My battalion was to take over O'Rielly which was a smaller fire support base, but they decided the force was too big that was coming from this road and so they put in the first one or two regiments of the 1st Division, a very good division, and as I say they were full of Australians, people I knew from their battalion they were proud of their battalion and they wore all of the bits and pieces, red scarves or patches and that was their battalion.
- 22:00 The warrant officers were down to company level which is really down to where the fighting gets done. In a battalion if there was four companies in one or two of them you had four Australian warrant officers plus people on the headquarters, so they were very heavy on Australians. And once Rip Cord went they all headed for O'Rielly. And rather than sit on the base the regiments of the 1st Division settled some on the
- 22:30 fire support base and some around the base to actually meet the oncoming enemy forces, which was quite large, as I say it had already knocked out a divisional outpost of the 101st Division with a lot of casualties. And then it started, whereas the Americans were starting to take mortar fire and seemed to accept it, any sign of mortar fire would immediately have the companies out and trying
- 23:00 to push these heavy weapons back, and they achieved that. Of course they had the usual air support.

What did you see of that conflict?

I could see the bombs going off, our fire support base was supporting them, our guns were just firing all of the time and the armoured vehicles there could fire. I think they had a range of three or four kilometres, I can't remember exactly now. But we were certainly in the middle of the

- 23:30 support part, but we never got involved at that point in time with this battle that raged on, it became a battle for O'Reillys and they didn't get there, they got a real hiding. But on the radio from where I was there was helicopters being shot and down and advisors being wounded and staying on the job and people trying to get them out and ammunition supply by helicopter and moving battalions around.
- 24:00 It was a real war.

So what sort of things would you hear on the radio, I know you just described a little bit but what was the tone of the communication?

Quite calm. We were only on the advisor net, the advisor net spoke to aircraft, artillery, all of the support and he spoke to his counterpart, his company commander or battalion commander. See the battalion commander would ask for what he wanted and the advisor would say, "Wrong kind of fire I think you should use this." But

- 24:30 ultimately he made the decision on what the commander got he didn't command he just advised. And from what we could hear, because we could tune into the advisor net we hear all the support they were calling for and then you could hear it firing from where we were. You could hear them calling for aircraft, armed helicopters, gunship, change the ammunition from high explosive to smoke, to white phosphorous,

- 25:00 napalm, whatever it was. You could hear all of this going on and then of course you could hear the request for dust off helicopters to take out casualties. So you get a very good picture you don't have to be there that's for sure. That raged on for several days and those people down there did a remarkable job, just for stamina. There was not that many of them and yet every time you listen they were always there, always talking,
- 25:30 always doing something. Moving people, getting more artillery or arranging for fire where they thought it might be needed. Always busy never sitting back waiting. Always doing something.

How many casualties in that situation?

I don't know, we moved out before they pulled out but considerable. But there were several wounded. I think one of them ended up in a helicopter

- 26:00 being casevaced [casualty evacuation] out and the helicopter got shot down and he and the pilot ended up in bed next to each other in hospital when the next one took them out. So it really was almost full blown warfare from where I was and I can assure you I was a darn sight happier and safer than they were.

How difficult was it to adjust again from an office environment

- 26:30 **to this pretty intense environment?**

There was a lot more in it, a lot more thinking to do, you have got to get rid of the cobwebs and start all over again a I guess. But again the training you got before you go, if you can just hang on to that and react in the way you have been trained to react, you have then got that six or seven seconds to think about it and react and then get on with it.

- 27:00 That's all you need to stay alive. I never found a situation that we weren't prepared for and I think that would be the usual comment from those who served there.

Was it more tactical training?

In the team it was a fair amount of tactical training but that was more related to people who were commanding special forces, Montagnards or Vietnamese special forces, mercenaries.

- 27:30 Our case as advisors to battalion and company commanders was more about fire support; being able to deliver the right support to the right place with the right resources. For example we had access to American naval gunfire, but no one in their right mind would ask for it. It was just not worth the risk.

You said you had an American with you, how was it working with an American?

My commander, my immediate

- 28:00 boss was an American, he was a Lieutenant Colonel Infantry and he was quite good. But it was a bit difficult, they were a bit wary of Australians. Although you were nominally under their command they didn't really try and tell you what to do. You might discuss it but they didn't tell you what to do. Initially we had a marine with us, with my team and he was excellent and they never seemed to go home,

- 28:30 they would just go from South Africa to Africa to Vietnam to somewhere else. The chap who replaced him was a regular army and I don't think he had done as much infantry work as the marine, but he was pretty good, we had no complaints with any of them. We were pretty light on the ground, normally they would like to advise us to go together but we never had that luxury,

- 29:00 we normally operated with one advisor with the company and we just rotated as best we could.

And what was the role of the team that you were part of?

The team I had was battalion advisory team. There was myself a warrant officer class one, Australian advisor and a top American sergeant, he was an advisor and the company that was most likely to strike trouble to an advisor and the advisor could then liase with

- 29:30 aircraft, artillery or with us for anything he wanted. And if he couldn't get it then he would ring us and we would make sure he got it, it was that sort of a situation. Generally speaking there was always an advisor with the company that was most likely to be in trouble.

So when did you reach a kind of, was that the most volatile situation you had been in or where did you go?

Yes I think so. With the companies we

- 30:00 went with we were frequently in contact. You would be fired at or every now and then you would get the odd rocket or maybe a mortar or something. There is only one occasion I can think there was a platoon attack on one of the companies. Generally speaking if you can get the fire support down in quick enough and you get that into position the enemy left, by the time any attack went in they weren't there. The initial period I was there between Tun Tavern, Rip Cord,

- 30:30 O'Reilly, then there was Barbara and Anne and we spent about four weeks on Barbara. It is just funny

how things can change. The chap I replaced was a great, not practical joker, but joker anyway. He was an ex-British Army, he was in the Hong Kong police and he joined the Australian Army, he was a very funny fellow.

31:00 He carried everything on his back. Now I am an Infantryman, I carry the least to survive. He carried, he had a big pack and the first time we went out together he said, "Gee." He handed me a cup of coffee and he said, "Gee it would be nice to have a rum in that." And I said, "Yeah it would be actually." And he said, "I have got a bottle of rum." And so he pulled out a bottle of rum and then he said, "Would you like a chair?" And you know those little fold up things? I kid you not he had one in this big pack. He was a fit man,

31:30 a very good soldier. So this went on with a few things, books, papers and I thought oh he is setting me up. And when we arrived on Barbara before all of this started there was a big bunker and we were down in the bowels of this thing and he went into the room that was set aside for us, just a wooden room with a little light and a bunk and when we put the light on there was a nine crosses

32:00 with a line through it and nine crosses with a line through it, like you do when you're playing cricket or something. And he called them to my attention and he said, "What do you reckon that is?" And I said, "It has got to be a calendar." And he said, "Well why don't they count them off in sevens rather than tens?" And I said, "That's strange, I have no idea." And he said, "I know what it is it is rats, it is how many rats they have killed here." And I am not fond of rats, and I said, "Strewth I wonder if we can get any poison in here?"

32:30 He said, "Don't worry about it I have got a couple of rat traps in my pack." And I said, "You're joking?" and he went over and pulled out six rat traps and I just gave up then, I just thought this bloke is too good. But I found out later on, he didn't tell me, he got down there first see and he worked it all out and he got the six rat traps and put them in his pack, so for stupid to come down and ask all of these simple questions but after that I just thought this bloke was magic,

33:00 it relieved the tension at time.

So you were underground there?

All of those fire support bases were well and truly under ground yes.

Can you describe that one?

Generally they all took the same form, it was the top of the hill cut off with bulldozers. Generally one end was a helicopter pad to bring people in and take people out, quite large, you could probably land two or three

33:30 there at a time in different places the artillery was in heavily sandbagged, just have the barrels sticking out to stop and shrapnel from rockets or mortars. All of the command posts were well underground except that that were needed above ground, but everything was dug well into the hill. The ammunition for the guns and there was tons of it was

34:00 dug well into the ground and covered quite heavily with sand bags and thick posts, the Americans don't use timber you get out of the scrub, it is all eight by eight and twelve by twelve very solid structures. In fact the ammunition place was where we used to hold mass on Sundays for the Christians that were there. Away from there a little bit you would have battalion headquarters with an OP [Observation Post] on top with the main headquarters dug well into the bowels of this hill.

34:30 Barbed wire covering all of that, the LZs [landing zones] the guns. they were real good at patrolling around that perimeter which we normally did as a matter of routine always, which made you a little bit wary at time. Exactly where people were. But they tried to do that by sending companies out further away but I am not sure that was a good solution to the problem. Water and food was

35:00 generally either flown in or brought up by road if you had one. We had a bit of a road which if you wanted to use it you had to clear it and then you had to picket it so air was better. And if anything happened of course everyone just phew down in their tranches and just waited until they got orders. But they were quite large.

35:30 The one we had I think would hold about a thousand men in bunkers and dugouts and thing like that. if you came under fire of course you lost the use of air. And in Rip Cord with the Americans I think an enemy round might have landed in their magazine and blew half of the hill away so it was abandoned.

36:00 Prior to that the Australians and Americans had operated separately, this is a more integrated operation?

They operated separately but in the team we were often blended together, not really in any strict command organization. I am not sure how it arose, but we were happy for the help actually, it just gave us a little bit more to play around with. As I say they were quite good

36:30 in fact, if we were going to take a few days off we would go down to Hue there was a military base down there. And if you got a new advisor in, depending on what rank he was, if he was a warrant officer they would get all of the warrant officers they could amongst all of the regiments and take him out for a beer

and try and acclimatise him to the Australian way.

- 37:00 And of course with the Americans it was a bit of a problem because although their military police, again Breaker Morant, had no authority over the Australians with their military police are tough and Americans, even a warrant officer would be worried about the military police. They can arrest an officer, they have enormous powers. I went down to
- 37:30 Hue once for a couple of days off and I got woken at two o'clock in the morning and it is one of the warrant officers and he said, "Look you have got to help we have got a real problem." And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "One of the American sergeants has been arrested." and I said, "What for?" and he said, "He was in a brothel." And I said, "What's the problem? That's what military police do." And he said, "Yes but we dressed him up as an Australian and took him there."
- 38:00 What they did, to they took him into town and they all had a bit of a binge drinking bit and they decided well here you are fellow and they got him over to the brothel. And he had no problems having a drink with them while he was in uniform so long as he didn't open his mouth too much. But when he went into the brothel
- 38:30 and they raided, of course when they heard his accent they knew he wasn't Australia. Well he tried to say he was an American in the Australian Army but that didn't wash so they found out who he was and arrested him. That's one person you're down whoever he belonged to, that's one person down and so you just lost thirty-three and a third percent of your strength. So they wanted me to go and talk to the military police or the commander to get, warrant officers don't really need officers, warrant
- 39:00 officers can do everything for themselves, except when they get into trouble, officers just get in their way. So I went down to this compound and there was a PFC [Private First Class] sitting at one end of the room and this top sergeant I think he was a top sergeant RSM type standing strictly to attention in the middle of this room and being totally ignored, only two people in the room. And I just went in and said, "What's going on?" and he said, "Well he has been arrested." And I said, "Well you can't do that, he is going out tomorrow to the
- 39:30 Ashau Valley." One of those good Australian tales that no one can let up on. And he sort of thought about it for a while and I said, "Look would you like me to contact the General?" Which I was quite prepared to do if I had to, it didn't worry me. And he thought about it and made a telephone call and eventually let this bloke off. And he thought I was the greatest thing and of course all of the warrant officers are all out in the jeep waiting for this fellow to take him home.
- 40:00 So I said, "Okay fellows you owe me a favour, I am going to bed again." Yeah they're a pretty strict people when it comes to that. They weren't allowed in town anywhere, if you were found somewhere in town it would be an Australia, and as far as I know and I should know I was there for six months, no one ever got in trouble with the civilian police and as I say the Americans couldn't touch them. They couldn't certainly report it. But I think the Americans liked to get away from the yoke every now and then
- 40:30 and they were in serious trouble if they got caught.
- 40:33 End of tape

Tape 10

- 00:30 **So where did you go from there?**
- I spent about six months in I [Intelligence] corps doing that sort of thing, battalion advisor and I had different periods at the Imperial, the citadel I think. There was guard duty and it just sort of faded away and then I was posted down to Plaku
- 01:00 which is in the central highlands the centre of the different groups of Montagnards that live in the Piedmont. There are Negrito and Indonesians, most of the tribes are Negrito but some of the tribes are Indonesian ones that somehow got up there, so they tell us. And up there we run we were asked for. General Zhu who was the Vietnamese commander of 2 Corps
- 01:30 he asked the Australia commander to send down a not operational training team which he had seen down in the Delta and he wanted one up there to do the same thing that they did which was mainly training the regional and provincial forces, which was militia, paramilitary, night operations, night ambushing, night patrolling. Different techniques, using mines and different ways to
- 02:00 use weapons. I think the course lasted for two weeks and then went back to different parts of military region 2. There wasn't any action there at all. We took out ambushes and that but after I think about four months of this I sent all of the warrant officer instructors I had they were a new bunch, very good instructors, back to where these people had been sent back out to to look at what they were doing

- 02:30 if they were doing it properly and if it was of any use to them and should we change the syllabus? They came back with their reports and we had a look at the syllabus again and changed it. One of our biggest problems was that it was so cold up there in the winter the people who came up from the coast, most of the Vietnamese couldn't handle night patrolling in the cold, you could hear the teeth
- 03:00 chattering no matter where you were. And so we asked eventually to go down to the coast and we went down to Qui Nhon and did the same thing down there but I was getting very close to my time. It basically was an instructional posting. It had gone from the original course that myself and three warrant officers started and by the time it got to Qui Nhon it had gone to two officers and about ten warrant officers, quite a big concern and they started to put many more people than we did.

03:30 And I went home.

So how did you enjoy that experience of doing that?

Very good, from an infantryman point of view, a separate command, all of the men around you are very responsible, warrant officers, tons of years of experience and you can learn a lot from any group of people like that and I learnt a lot. Learnt a lot about starting off your own

04:00 course and getting students and feeding them. The whole lot, nothing was done for you you had to do the whole lot yourself. The only thing we didn't do was pay them you know. Some of them were just like ordinary students, very keen and learnt quickly. And we had interpreters of course and we had a bit of a problem there making sure the interpreters were saying what we were saying, so every now and then we would slip someone in there from some other

04:30 place who was Vietnamese but who knew what was being said and he could go back and compare notes and we got rid of one I think interpreter who wasn't doing a real good job and got another. So trying to keep quality assurance in that situation was not easy. You do know in the end when they are doing tests that some things are not coming out right. Even basic things, like claymore mines. They are specially shaped, and if you do it back to front the thing is facing you rather than them and so the warrant officers were saying, "Look

05:00 this is how you do it pick it out of the box and it had to fit around your stomach and then you take it and you stick it straight in the ground. Don't turn it around, stick it straight in the ground. "And all of these childish things that they worked out and they worked well. As I say we were always worried if they misunderstood the instruction they would do something wrong and cause casualties to their own people. And apparently with the way this warrant officer worked it out this

05:30 never occurred.

While you were in Vietnam both on the first and second tour did you develop any close relationship with any Vietnamese people?

Well the first time the Vietnamese weren't allowed in our camps for obvious reason. I know it was put down at the time as being racially suspect but it was just the simplest way for all. The only people we had in there were Vietnamese and they were our interpreters. And they were in intelligence section. But to have Vietnamese wandering through the unit doing chores and things like that was a

06:00 very dangerous situation. Between ideology and blackmail and things like that it just wasn't worthwhile so there were no Vietnamese essentially in the takes force itself. In AATTV it was a bit different because you became close to whoever your counterpart was. My counterpart was a

06:30 Vietnamese battalion commander, Major Car. And you just have to get on, you have differences of opinion on tactics and so forth but that's not my job. My job was to provide fire support in the appropriate form wherever he wanted it. I decided on the appropriate form because he could ask for something that was not good for his lads let alone the enemy. Yes, when we were in the second phase during the turning phase I had a captain there

07:00 who was the same rank as I was and he was my go between between General Zhu and his staff and what we did. Not that General Zhu bothered with us too much but if we had a problem we could take it to him and I think he did call down on us a couple of times. He was very keen to keep us there. He was totally determined to keep the Australians there and we worked almost directly,

07:30 not through the Americans, we worked almost directly through General Zhu. He had an American staff who facilitated all of this but he was the one who decided what we would do and where we would be and how we would do it.

So did you know what sort of reputation the Australian had with the Vietnamese?

Very good, no matter which group of Vietnamese. In fact generally speaking very much in demand, how could they get more Australians? Because they were very much a professional body,

08:00 some of the people were over there advising were in the Second World War, Australian advisors. They had been around a long time. You at least four who were in the Battle of Kapyong and probably Maryang Sang too, who had seen a lot of service. They really were getting top quality

08:30 goods at a bargain price so yes very much in demand.

So when you look back on your time in Vietnam what is the overriding impression now, what's the image you have in your mind?

I think just a sort of devastated landscape. Craters and burnt buildings,

09:00 old French villas, more so than Malaya or anywhere else, the countryside, just the flatness of it. When we went from Plaku down to Qui Nhon that area there, that's where the French group Mobile 100, the whole thing was destroyed just in that area and there is still remnants of it now, well when I was there.

09:30 Just the devastation that had taken place there and all of the misery, I suppose that happens in any war zone. Apart from the landscape not a great deal. People, we were close to some of our staff families, our drivers and people like that, we knew the wives and the children and we might have given them presents or things like that but generally speaking you didn't come in close contact with any of the

10:00 family side, the civilian side of it. even the two people I was closest to, the battalion commander and my counterpart down in Plaku I never met any of their families because their families were somewhere else, you just didn't go home of a night time and that was a problem. So you never really got that close to any Vietnamese family. You bought bread from some and had

10:30 meals in a café and that's about as close as you got to them.

Were you able to observe the impact the war had on the civilian population at all?

If you got talking to somebody who could speak English at all it was sort of a litany of death and destruction over a long period of time. Especially in that northern area which the Viet Minh had operated in the Street without joy area up in

11:00 north of Hue. They had suffered quite a lot. The Montagnards who we were pretty much involved with down in Plaku. Although we weren't teaching them we adopted a village and got slates and pencils and pads, we stole stuff from all over the place and tried to fit the school out as best we could. We just went along there and tried to help out as best we could whenever we could

11:30 no explosives or anything like that. But they were very badly treated by the Vietnamese of course. Their land was taken off them they were sort of settled down, they were a bit nomadic at times. The communists were on one side, and if there was going to be a battle between the Laotians and the Vietnamese in history it always took place on the tablelands. And So I felt sorry for them of all of the people there because they had suffered centuries of it.

12:00 They had really never seen peace and it was being slowly eroded while the Keys and Diems of this world were in power down there too. But they were nice people, they had become great gardeners and they grew great gardens full of crop. The big problem with them was rice wine. They had a ceremony and I am quite sure everybody in

12:30 AATTV in that area would have fallen for it. They used to have great big earthenware jugs and they would have a neck on them a foot across. And it would be a big jug, you could sort of sit down and it was just below your head, and it would be full to the brim of rice wine. They would have a piece of bamboo going across the top of

13:00 the mouth and then in that stick there would be a small hole where they would push down another piece of bamboo which would be, have you heard this one have you? Whatever they decided. So we all fell for this, we weren't that unaware of it, just had to be careful. But our Brigadier Leary who was the commander of AATTV he and the RSM used to often come around and visit and he was interested

13:30 in this project so he decided to go up there. And I said to the Montagnards, "This bloke does not drink, no rice wine." And of course when he got there they made him, he had to it was one of them cultural things that he just had to go through and it doesn't sound much but this foot diameter and this inch or half an inch to get to the bottom of the pipe before you're allowed to get up.

14:00 It was a lot of fluid and it was pretty potent stuff. He went along with it but he wasn't that impressed, but he went along with it and that's all he had to do. Later on I said, "I thought we agreed on this?" and, "Oh no no, if he is the boss he has to drink." I was very careful with that one in future.

So when you came to leave the second time what was the situation in terms of the conflict?

14:30 It was still building up. Vietnamisation hadn't quite occurred although the Americans were pulling back from some areas. There was a bit of a conflict there, General Zhu in military region 2 had a new advisor, he in actual fact had been in the American Army and served in the Delta, a chap called John Paul Van. And he became his advisor

15:00 as a civilian, but he left the Delta in 1965, he is back there in 1975 or six years later and he is something like a two star general, the civilian equivalent, he now works for the diplomatic side one of those corps, I can't think of what the acronym stands for now, but he had gone from a lieutenant colonel to this very high rank and he was well thought of as an army officer and he thought they were all doing it wrong and so he came back to prove his point. And whereas they had been pulling people

- 15:30 out from the tablelands he started to push them back to where they came from again to make sure the rice harvest was secured and they knew roughly where the stuff was going and all of this. Unfortunately he was killed not long after in a helicopter but he was a real go getter and I think he had the right idea. Things were changing and I don't think he could even change the tide but they were slowly moving out of areas. So to answer your question
- 16:00 the level of conflict was being passed more and more onto the Vietnamese, that's not to say there weren't some big battles that the Americans continued to fight along with the Australians but it was getting into a real big forces getting ready to take over Vietnam. They knew the American resolve had gone, then you had the Nixon doctrine, Vietnamisation and it was all over.
- 16:30 **What was your view when you left in terms of the success of what you and the Australians and the Americans had been doing there?**
- Well you know I hoped that it would still come off. Again just on reading you couldn't be happy with the massacres that occurred in North Vietnam and the re-education camps and the shades of Cambodia the killing fields and all of that. South Vietnam as bad as it was was
- 17:00 never as bad as that. And ultimately a North Vietnamese victory would return it to exactly that. So as bad as South Vietnam was it was a damn sight better than being under the North Vietnamese and I think history has proven that. I think on a strategic plane it all helped. Whether you think the Russian Empire was a good thing or a bad thing it ultimately fell because it could no longer contain all of these wars, Angola, Vietnam
- 17:30 Korea, things happening all over the place and it slowly bled Russia dry and Afghanistan was the last straw and it just folded up. And so from that view I suppose in a global sense I would prefer to see the Americans where they are than to have the Russians in the same position. I could never ever go along with the fact
- 18:00 that the civil war was going to be over and be good for South Vietnam. If you look at the boat people, they didn't suffer weeks in leaky boats coming to Australia because the North Vietnamese were over endowed with generosity and kindness.
- So when you returned to Australia what was the public feeling that you faced when you returned?**
- 18:30 I only struck three incidents, I never saw any mass rallies because that's not the place I go to. A friend and I were going down Elizabeth Walk in Brisbane to a café that a friend of ours had set up, we were going to have lunch there and we were spat on on the way there. Somebody just ran out and spat at us and yelled out, "Cong killers!" We were in uniform of course, and spat at us and went on his way. We thought that was rather strange behaviour. The second time was my
- 19:00 son being taken out of school by Chris because of politics being seen as fair game to ten year old kids in school which I don't agree with. And the only other time I went to Parliament House to watch a debate on something or other and I was sitting in the gallery and people gathered around me and then when question time started they dropped banners all over the place, 'Free Zaab.' And they all yelled out and chanted and I thought God this is going to look good in the papers, army officer removed from Parliament House,
- 19:30 but the attendants came and took them all out. That's as close as I came to it. I can't recall losing any civilian friends over it. People asked me my view and I gave it. I think that it is a lot of nonsense blaming soldiers or sailors or airmen for conflict. Heaven only knows what they think, but everyone seems to have tarred them with the
- 20:00 political brush, this is what they believe and this is what they support. This is what they do, this is what they are paid to do and if they don't do it they go to gaol, and they do it because it is their profession. In a democracy and quite frankly in the Vietnam War every election was run on the Vietnam platform, no matter how many people they turned out in the street it was still for pro-Vietnam policy.
- 20:30 And if that's what the people want and what the government says that's what you do. I just can't see how a society can work any other way. Dissidents, most certain in a democracy, but dissident in a proper way and don't annoy everybody else. Don't have sit down in the middle of town and slow down fire trucks and ambulances and things like that. Have your protest and get on with life.
- 21:00 **How did those protests affect you if at all?**
- If they were done properly and they were done without upsetting everybody else I was quite in favour of them and I am in favour of them. I think it is a great thing to get it out of their system, but to go against the law and make a complete and utter nuisance of themselves when the majority of people clearly, although not happy with Vietnam could see the problem there
- 21:30 and was prepared for government policy to go that way.
- What about the situation when you were actually spat on by somebody how did that make you feel?**

Well instantly disgusted but after a while you feel sorry for him. If that's the best argument they could put up, there is not a great deal of depth in it so don't worry about it. And we didn't. We didn't look at him or chase him or anything at all we just thought how stupid can you be?

22:00 **In some respects that second tour of duty was a lot more intense in terms of being under fire and in the thick of it a bit how did you find adjusting to Australia after you came back after that tour?**

I think easier than the first time. I can't recall having real problems, just slamming doors. I think I just got used to the routine of it. I can't think of anything at all I just got on with it, I even drove on the right side of the road even.

22:30 **Earlier in the day you gave us a great summary of your life and career in the years following Vietnam can you give us an hour do you think of the highlights of your career?**

An hour? I don't think my whole career is worth an hour quite frankly but I don't make the decisions. I was lucky in a sense in that that was about the last time I was

23:00 on active service. I was back in Malaysia in 1974, whenever, went to Malaysian Staff College which was a real revelation. It had just started up and there was tremendous expectations of having their own staff course and instructors from all around the world. It was in an old disused government building up on top of a place called Highgate, between the Ministry of Defence

23:30 a very pleasant spot in Kayal [Kayal-Pattanam]. They lent over backwards to look after us. Even though Australia had a White Australia Policy and you were incessantly quizzed on that and of course it wasn't much better in Malaya as I pointed out, I think you had to be a ten year resident or something to get a citizenship. And I know doctors that were trying to do that, it was not easy. So we sort of

24:00 skated over that. we had some tremendous times. They went to the trouble of giving us an audience with the King and Queen, big regal affair and you can't wear Windsor yellow, that's the only thing I can remember. A funny one on that one of the mess presidents in one of the battalions in Malaya, I can't remember the time, the mess president of course is the chief of protocol,

24:30 he knows all of the bits and pieces that goes into mess life. And they had the King and Queen visiting the area and their mess, they were going to have lunch there, so all of the mess was going to be assembled, all of their wives and he went to particular care to teach all of the wives how to courtesy and how it had to be done right. And this went on, a few periods and it was compulsory. And watch out.

25:00 So they all did properly, and guess what happened the day the King and Queen arrived? He went out and curtsied. It was just a, he had been doing it so often and it must have slipped over from the left side of the brain to the right side of the brain this is how you do it.

How did people react?

I don't know it was just a story, I am pretty sure it is a true story. But they really did, we

25:30 visited most of the places the Australians. That's where it is hard for Europeans, I have spent a lot of time in Southeast Asia, I have had Muslims living in my house for a year I have had lived with them I can recall when I first went to staff college my first room mate was a Malay and we just opened the door and had a chat and I just jumped on my bed. And he came over and said,

26:00 "Do you mind if I say my prayers?" and I said, "No do you want me to do something?" and he said, "No." and he just went in the corner and got his mat out and said his prayers, just not to upset me. Of course I am saying, "What should I do?" it was difficult, but every possible thing they could do to make us welcome despite Australia and politics and all of that. At the lower level it was very good.

26:30 Even then there were people who were looked upon as being a bit extreme religiously and even the general group would comment on this. So it was a bit different to them too. They can't drink, and some of them did but they always worried that one of these people was around and they might get dobbed in to some religious police. We had a tremendous time travelling around

27:00 study. They all treated us greatly. And there was a Singaporean, a Brit, a New Zealander, a Thai and an Indonesian who interestingly enough had the anti-aircraft battery in Maidan which is not far off Turenda camp or Malacca when confrontation was on. So we could exchange a few notes there.

27:30 What goes around comes around I guess.

Did you discuss what had happened?

Oh yes. We were in two different areas, he was in artillery looking for aircraft and he went crook about they were using a Russian anti-aircraft and the guidance system kept breaking down and they couldn't get spare parts, that was their main whinge and yeah they were concerned that we were going to attack them. That was the story they had been given and they weren't impressed by the western press,

28:00 this has all been set off by Sukarno. You know just PR [public relations] and propaganda in their own country.

Were your family with you in Malaysia?

Yes for the college they were all there. That's where the Norwegian girl was, that's where she came along. I had to find my own accommodation being the first student and that wasn't easy

- 28:30 because it had to be approved by the deputy high commissioner, which I thought was a bit extreme I could pick my own house. And we looked around which was close and schools and all of that, he would say, "No, no." They wanted me in the diplomatic area a house there and that's the last place I was going to go. I think that's where the Brit was, but you could see it being frowned upon so
- 29:00 we stuck it out and finally, the one we actually lived in he said, "Oh no this is not appropriate it is too far here and too close to this." And I said, "This is great. Where were you when battalion was on operation service living in swamps? There was no one around then." So he said, "Do you what you want." And it was palatial. It was owned by a Malay, when I drove Chris there from the airport, she stayed home because John was finishing off the scout jamboree
- 29:30 it was in South Australia at the time and so they stayed home and then came over, and she thought we were pulling into a hotel, it was magnificent. Again we had a guard and an amah and gardeners and just about, you could call your own roll each day.

And how did the children enjoy that experience?

Very much.

- 30:00 I can't recall them being ill or anything. The other thing we did there too, the only time we got crook overseas was eating in the big hotels. So I had my own theory about eating on the local economy, if it is nice and clean and full of people, and it is usually full of people you mightn't be able to speak the language but I am sure you can get a meal. So along those terms we picked ourselves one Chinese place
- 30:30 and we used to amaze the Malays with the amount of food we could eat in their shops. But that's generally how we survived and I can't recall once being sick doing that as they were in big hotels. I thought there has got to be something wrong with the system.

So following Malaysia in the lead up to commanding 1RAR were there any particularly significant positions for you?

- 31:00 Well of course once again it is the top of the infantry profession, to become a commanding officer regimental sergeant major, that's about as far as you can go in infantry life. And apart from training soldiers and being as tough as you can to make sure they survive you know training continued on much as usual as in any other battalion.
- 31:30 I was very fortunate there because near the end of my tour my son joined the battalion under my command as a young lieutenant platoon commander. And he stayed there when I left of course, under Peter Cosgrove and then he was posted back to 1RAR on two or three occasions and ultimately a couple of years ago he became the battalion commander and took them over to East Timor and brought them home again in
- 32:00 good shape. So it's a tremendous experience being battalion commander, you're on the downward slide after that no matter which rank you reach, and to have your own son there, which is I can't understand how the army, they must have made a mistake because normally they do not do that. They try and keep relatives apart who are in uniform and I know the brigade commander
- 32:30 didn't want it, he was opposed to John being there when the posting order arrived, but it happened. I was very pleased and so to have that happen on that posting was poignant, it just topped it off before it started going downhill. And then of course to have him become the battalion commander of the same battalion which has never ever happened, father and son, and to take the battalion away to operational service which I
- 33:00 never had the chance to do, it was terrific.

talking about the lead up to becoming battalion commander, as you say that is the sort of pinnacle if you like, that doesn't happen to everybody you don't just automatically get promoted, how did that happen for you and why do you think that happened?

They must have had a bad day at the office or something I have no idea. Nobody expected

- 33:30 it least than I. Being the first person to come through the ranks to battalion commander since the Second World War was just an odd possibility, it never entered my head, I could see a lot of jobs that I could do but that never occurred to me. And when the posting order came out I thought it was the wrong name or the wrong posting, I was ecstatic over it but I just couldn't believe it.
- 34:00 I had quite a few calls from different people I had worked for saying, "Great job." And I was saying, "But is it true?" And the first time I could get my hands on the military secretary to confirm it, because I thought someone had bodgied it up or put in a fake one but it was all fair dinkum. And I couldn't believe it, it took me week to accept that it had actually happened. I can't recall now how many people graduated from Duntroon and OCS [Officer Cadet School], but infantry wise

- 34:30 there would have to be a dozen every years, that's twenty-four every two years and see you do a two year posting. So at that time there was six every two years out of an available twenty-four infantry people. So a lot of people get out at that stage, if they don't make battalion commander
- 35:00 it was never an option with me I had no intention of getting out if they could find me something interesting to do. But people who aspire to become battalion commanders and when the draw is cut they don't make it, they say, "That's about it I can't be battalion commander and I certainly don't want to do anything else around the place." And they drift away. And unfortunately that happens a bit with people who become battalion commanders you realise there is not a lot more infantry work you want to do, you can't get
- 35:30 instructional type job and they tend to drift away too.

Did you in fact aspire to be in that position?

Battalion commander? No it never entered my head. It was I could have been in my view probably made governor general as a corporal or sergeant as a head of battalion. It just did not enter my head. Nobody even hinted at it. I had worked for a couple of generals and there was no indication from them.

- 36:00 In fact they said to me, "That's a good posting." And I always thought they were the people that made the postings, so I had no idea. Apart from the fact that they had made a mistake, tough I was happy with that.

And you talked a bit about what it is like to be in that position how did you enjoy it when you took on that?

It is just tremendous. You have got a lot of power,

- 36:30 you have got a lot of people to look after. You have got to train them so that they come out as people at the other end who can survive in battle. You have got all of the administrative problems, civil debts, police investigations, drugs becoming more and more of an issue these days. Vehicle accidents, motorbike accidents, mothers ringing up and wanting to know why
- 37:00 their children, this has happened to them or that has happened to them, orderly rooms. It is a very complex organization. I was lucky enough to have an excellent staff, I had excellent RSMs the 2 IC of the battalion is very important, he is the person who does everything, good company commanders all of the way down to section commanders, so I was well looked after. And
- 37:30 particular highlights we had Drover Dick Marsden come back from Tasmania, Drover Dick was a battalion commander in the Second World War, he won several MID's [Mentioned in Dispatches], and an OBE [Order of the British Empire] and he was the original battalion commander of 1RAR even though formed in Borneo and he was still alive down in Tasmania, I think he was well into his seventies and he came up to review the
- 38:00 parade. And I had an inkling that given the first CO you must have donated something to the battalion so I got everyone looking around the mess and that and we found a big solid silver punch bowl. Units in those days had a lot of silver and it wasn't always possible to keep track of who gave it. And so we had that on the day he arrived and we told the press that he was coming up and
- 38:30 no one seemed terribly interested but one radio station which interviewed him in the morning. And they heard him talk and he spoke very well, a lot of experience and the next day we had press and TV and everyone there trying to interview him and we are trying to do a rehearsal for a parade. Of all of the things that I did there, parade wise that would be probably one of the best. And the other one was General Dustan who was also a
- 39:00 commanding officer of the battalion and he was CGS at the time and he was just about to leave the service I think, he was about to become governor of South Australia. He was the last Second World War officer to actually become CGS and he was the last one. He had quite a remarkable history. The highest award won by the Royal Australian Regiment was the George Cross which was won by Lance Corporal Marsden in
- 39:30 North Korean prisoner of war camp. He died, he was neglected and he died. But it was all of the people from time went by and the people who saw what happened there and left, Americans, Turks, wrote letters to the Australian forces saying, "This bloke really did not give an inch at any time to the North Koreans.
- 40:00 He should be decorated." And so from all of these citations he got he wrote the actual citation that got the award which was, couldn't have been easy and as I say it is the highest award in the regiment, tremendous.
- 40:15 End of tape

00:30 **I actually want to go back a bit further with your son, you told us earlier today I think it was off camera about his decision to join that you had no influence, can you tell us about what happened there?**

Again my family just seems to flow on, there is no great decisions or planning goes with a lot of it. Of course I am chuffed with the decision he made. He was prepared for it,

01:00 he was in boy scouts, he was very good at swimming he had to play football. They all had an individual and a team sport, it didn't matter what it was but they had to do it, it was up to them. A lot of his friends who were at Marist with him at the time I think five of them got the scholarship to Duntroon, four or five and it just went that way. I don't think he told me he was thinking about it.

01:30 He just said, "I am going to try and get a scholarship for Duntroon." And I said, "Well off you go and sort it out." And he said, "Will you approve it?" And I said, "You do all of the hard work and I will agree with it." and so he got all of the references and got all of the paperwork done and I think I just signed it and away he went.

Why was it important to you that he did all of the paperwork and everything himself?

So he was totally sure in his own mind, it is a miserable place

02:00 if you can't see the point of it, and I am trying to get it through, well I have got it through to my grandson now; you have to really want it. The system is built to irk you, it is built to annoy you as much as you possibly can to lower your threshold for emotion. You just can't get angry over some of the small stuff that goes on. And if people are continually bombarded with it and you get used to it,

02:30 you get used to separating the chaff from the wheat and you start worrying about the bigger stuff. That's my theory of what happens anyhow. So instead of saying to him, "Look it is a great idea to go to Duntroon because it a good career, you get a university degree and you get paid all of the time." What is the good of doing that if after six months of being in there, after the horrific getting used to it, he chucks it in.

03:00 You're at fault because you suggested it and he is stupid because he went along with it. He just lost six months of his life and he feels like a failure before he has started in life. So it is not a good idea to push someone along a path that they are ultimately not going to follow. They have to make their own decisions and they have to make it certainly in their own mind. If I had any doubt he wouldn't make it I would never have signed it and I would have told him so.

How did you feel when you first saw him in uniform?

03:30 Very proud. I saw him a few times he probably didn't see me all of the time, I was over there on a number of occasions, I worked at Duntroon I worked at Russel and yes, he looked real good. As I say he is a very cool customer and he doesn't get fazed at everything. He didn't do great at Duntroon or anything, he reminds me of something Peter Cosgrove said, he only got into Duntroon in the

04:00 first place by the casting vote of the president. So there were half against him, half for him and it was the president that threw it. And he admits that he was lazy there and just sort of coasted through it, and I think a lot do that and I am not sure that's a bad approach. I had the theory that if you run with the pack, you have got people around you and you know their position and you're not that fussed about the three or four that are really out in front and busting everything to get there.

04:30 If you don't get there for reasons of exhaustion or boredom or something then you may as well come with the pack. I am not a high achiever. I can't see the point of it.

Well you're a cool customer too from what I can gather even from the short time I have known you today, do you think your son approached his military career differently?

I don't think I can answer that. He approached it, in the way he approached it. I never gave him much advice,

05:00 if he asked me for advice I was pretty scarce with what I gave him because you can get the wrong impression on somebody else's experience, it doesn't work that way. I gave him a lot of advice on career progression, what he should do. Not so much for promotion, but to enjoy himself and be a well rounded well trained officer so that when the time came

05:30 and they were looking around they could say. "Well he has done everything, he has done it well he has got to be the go." These people who strive too hard quite often get locked into one segment, one part and they are not well rounded and I think ultimately it tells its tells against them, again just my theory.

So were you apprehensive when he first came to 1RAR?

No not at all.

06:00 I couldn't think of any reason at all to be apprehensive. He was well trained, he was trained well enough to train men that he was ultimately going to take to war in Somalia or somewhere else and he did that. That's the system and I think if you come through the system reasonably well balanced and you have had the training you can pass it on. Again the big difference between he and I is that I

06:30 am probably a bit, I think the word is harsher than the way he does things. I just feel the harder you can be on people when you are training the better they will learn and when it comes time and they have to use that information or that fitness or expertise or whatever they are more ready for it. If that causes a bit of blood and tears, bear it.

So in a situation

07:00 **like that how do you divide the father and the officer?**

It is pretty simple and I am quite sure that there was no doubt in his mind that he was going to be the one that missed out. If he was under my command and a plum job came up he would not be considered just for the morale of the battalion. You give him the job, there is a good job and give it to him and you have got the battalion off side straight away they say, "Oh he is the CO's son he is being looked after."

07:30 He has lost traction straight away. He is better off being seen as being the underdog, they say, "Strewth he does that to his own son, where are the rest of us going to end up?" We're not talking about big deals here, we are just talking about attitude and I would never ever do anything at all that made him look as though he was getting a benefit so he would always have to be the underdog, so he was very happy when I left. Not that he was there that long. That's the way it

08:00 would have been if I had been there for six months or six years it wouldn't have mattered.

So did you discuss that beforehand?

I think he had a fair idea that's how it would happen anyway, that's how he had been raised.

So did the other guys rib him about that?

I am sure they did but they had no cause to because there was certainly nothing I did that gave him any look of having benefit at all for having your father as the CO. They would be all looking for that, that's the thing that can get you a bad name, that's where as I say you start to lose traction.

08:30 and no doubt the soldiers were saying, "He will be all right his old man is the CO he will be looked after." But these things happen, it is a very foolish move.

Outside of work did you revert to the father?

More or less, by this stage of the game he was a grown man. He did his own thing.

09:00 We get along very well together, not in a close father son relationship it is more on an adult basis. He knows we are always there for him and do as you wish.

Did you get to know him in a different way him being that close to you working under you?

In some ways but no different from other officers. Some of the things they do you look at them and say, "This is a very poor conclusion."

09:30 And you probably get a surprise that this is your son. I think this happened once, but everyone makes those sorts of mistakes and you are just a little bit surprised that your son is human not superhuman like you, I don't know. But there was a bit of a difference there yes.

And possibly the opposite for him with you?

No I don't think he had much doubt about where I was coming from because he had been around there a long time. He had been around army camps a long time and he had been talking to people

10:00 that I was either senior to or junior to and I don't think he had much doubt about it.

How did your peers view it?

Well with absolute amazement I think generally. Mostly I think a great deal of pride you know in that this sort of thing can be done,

10:30 anyone can do it if they put their mind to it. So there were no sour grapes there I don't think, if there were I never heard about them. Most of the people I knew would tell me, they wouldn't horse around about it. But generally speaking most of them took it well. I can imagine some frustration of officers who sort of looking at the list to see who could become the best battalion commander and me come up, and I can't blame them for that.

11:00 I think they could quite rightly feel they were cheated, it was just one of those things, because historically it just wasn't possible.

Over the course of your army career how much did the army change for you?

Massively, from a period where there was about three cars in a company of a hundred people, belonged to the OC, the CSM and the sergeant cook to parade ground full of vehicles today.

11:30 You wouldn't see a motorbike now where in my time motorbikes were my biggest nightmare for accidents and loss of people to hospital. Technology today from my time is mind boggling, computers.

We had some of the basic stuff in Vietnam, night vision and sensors and things like that, they are archaeological finds now compared to modern stuff. Manpower

- 12:00 has been replaced by technology and I think they are going to come unstuck in a lot of areas, a bit like September 11, not enough people on the ground to get enough of intelligence. Technology can't beat a couple of eyes, people who are trained in observation can tell you what, who, when and what, and give you now information. Not statistics,
- 12:30 what's happening now. And you replace that with a sensor that tells you that I something is warmer, it has been picked up by infrared, it is a living thing therefore it is organic. Metal detector will tell you that it carrying a weapon and you have got all of these little insights which goes to build the intelligence picture but it doesn't tell you much when you boil it down. You can take a punt on it, but the two eye balls will tell you exactly what it is. although it probably
- 13:00 risks peoples lives initially getting that information, I think ultimately when you have the right information you can do a darn sight more with it. I just get the feeling that all of the information you get today, information overload makes it difficult for decision making because you have got to categorise information, you have to try and distil it, come up with some plan to meet all occasions, but that's not the old army.
- 13:30 The old army had an objective and had people to go and have a look at the objective told you what was on the objective, came back and reported and you tailored your force to do just that. So how they are going to overcome that I don't know.

What do you think in the currently deployments?

I fully agree with those around Australia, I think that New Guinea is a basket case and I think that the people up there are going to have a very hard time, I admire them for what they are doing. The people in Bougainville I

- 14:00 admire their fortitude. Even though I ma not quite sure I would be happy to be put into a situation like that without a weapon, I think they are very brave. The operation in the Solomon's I think was brilliant and pulled off very well. Hard to believe something like that can happen. I personally think East Timor is a mistake, I think it is in the Indonesian sea of influence.
- 14:30 I think the decision made by the president caused all sorts of problems for Australia and for the people over there; they didn't expect independence they expected autonomy. When they got it of course they had hells own job trying to get their mind around what they had been giving. The people who were pushed out of there and caused all of the trouble of course were East Timorese and not Indonesian, who with a lot of help from special forces and Indonesian TNI [army] who didn't want this to happen.
- 15:00 As I say the decision to give it independence is what caused all of the problems.

So is it frustrating that your son, when there, when you feel this way?

Not at all it is his job, I accept that. No matter how I felt I would go too, I wouldn't complain I would just do. It is not a democracy, you do as you're told. The people decide what they want and you carry out whatever the people want. I can't see any problem with that at all.

Were you worried when he went to Timor?

Yes you

- 15:30 always have that bit of a worry, accident and more so than if he was somewhere else in a training job or something like that. But you would never say anything to deny it to him because he was itching as much to get to Somalia, which I think was a more dangerous place or East Timor, as you were to get to Malaya or wherever. East Timor I think is going to be a problem,
- 16:00 not a big problem we just don't want any more, we have got enough problems around us now. As far as Iraq is concerned there must have been a mental block somewhere along the line. It is outside our sphere of influence, we are allies of America, does that mean we go everywhere? There is European NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] allies of American who didn't go near the place. The people who have been there have performed magnificently, especially SASR [Special Air Service Regiment]
- 16:30 in Afghanistan and Iraq but nothing of what they are telling us makes sense. I don't get any special attention as far as intelligence is concerned, but I see no sign of Al Quaeda in Iraq. The only thing Iraq has done is caused a terrorist magnet, it has dragged them in there in great numbers. And as far as supporting American Alliance. Well America will act in American interests when the time comes.
- 17:00 They keep on quoting the ANZUS [Australia, New Zealand and the United States security treaty.] Alliance, the Treaty but I don't think anyone has read it, it is eight hundred words it doesn't include Western Australia on the Atlantic, it doesn't include New York, its about the Pacific. And then it talks about each country can commit itself if it thinks it wants to under its constitutional processes. What does that mean? I think there was a problem when confrontation was on, one of the foreign
- 17:30 ministers, Street? Mentioned that this could provide a trigger for America to be involved in confrontation. Where did they get that from? That doesn't say that at all. NATO provides a trigger but

the ANZUS pact does not. In fact it is not even ANZUS, not because New Zealand have the audacity to ban nuclear weapons and all of a sudden they are no longer wanted by the Americans in the alliance.

18:00 Things are a bit rugged out there but when you look at it, it doesn't make a great deal of logic. So I think people have done well over there, I will be glad to see them out of there, I think they have got to finish the job now that they are there, but I don't think we should have been there in the first place. I think the Australian population has been massively duped over it all. When you have got terrorists in Indonesia that need attending to and the Philippines that need attending to and

18:30 we have got forces going over there. It is not as though we have got a lot of forces, we haven't. Our forces are very small.

It seems like you have kept in touch with, well I don't know about people, but the current events that are happening, do you miss the army very much?

Aspects of it I do. I miss the discussion the thorough discussion a subject got. Where people could say what they thought and felt, it probably

19:00 happens today I don't know. But when the time came somebody made a decision and that's what you all said, "Okay we will go and do it." Whether that was a discussion on tactics or strategy or how to decorate the mess, that's how things went along and you miss that pretty thorough peer group thrash at every community type

19:30 problem you had. Which I found very enlightening to sit back people and hear people who knew what they were talking about.

When you look back, this might be a bit hard for you because you are so humble, what are you most proud of in your military career?

Making battalion commander and having a son who commanded the same battalion. If you round it off, you have got your own career but to see all of your children

20:00 doing well, continuing with their education and keeping up to date and getting along if they want to. Frankly it would not bother me whatever they wanted to be. Probably some things I would prefer they weren't but it wouldn't bother me. But they are doing very well and proud of what they are doing and I am proud of what they have done.

20:30 But that has never been my great goal in life to see my kids climb to the top. So long as they are happy is the main thing. And I think they are.

And you have enjoyed becoming a grandfather?

Well there is nine now. It is just funny the sort of things that rise, I never encouraged John to join the army, and I was just as surprised

21:00 when my grandson wanted to become an architect, I had a rush of blood to the head, good grief. And, maybe he has got a voodoo doll that he sticks pins in maybe that's why I have got a few creaky bones. I am not sorry I did it but it was out of character for me to try and influence him to do something it just came out.

And he has gone to join?

He is in ADFA, he is

21:30 well and truly half way through his first year. He survived all of the acclimatisation. Of course his family lives in Canberra which is a great asset. He is getting along with it, he can find some of the remarks made by drill sergeants funny which is an asset, I never quite came at that. His family is proud of him, he is proud of himself. Yeah for those people who can get in there

22:00 and they want an interesting life and they are prepared to sweat blood and tears for it then it is a great place to be. No matter what they become, when a person has done their degree and they have done three years they might see things differently. They do whatever their return service is, five years or whatever it is. And then they go off and become something else, some become politicians,

22:30 no I don't think many do. I don't think service people can stand the disloyalty of politics. I knew a few did, Peter White who was a commander of 1RAR I think he lasted one term. I can name a few, I don't know why they got out, my guess is you just can't trust anyone in there. At least in a unit in the army you have to have a great deal of trust in juniors and seniors, but over there, couldn't handle that.

23:00 **After an extensive career and life experience do have a final comment that you would like to put on record for people who might view your interview in the future?**

I am not really good at philosophy. When you look at some of the statements about success, how important is success? To some people it is and that's fine

23:30 but I don't think everyone should be pushed down the path of success. I don't think people should be pushed into tertiary studies if they want to become a carpenter. I have met more millionaires who were

tradesmen than I have met academics who are millionaires and there is a lot of fun out there in the trades. But everything today seems to be, you have to get a degree and everything is so intense, there doesn't seem to be time to relax.

- 24:00 I can recall a time when the best entertainment we could afford was a weekend, somebody would turn up with a bottle of beer and a couple of kids and you would have a sandwich and a bottle of beer and then you would decide to pack up and go somewhere else, and so all of the families and all of the kids walked or got a taxi, no one could afford a car. And by eight o'clock that night you might have seven or eight couples and kids everywhere
- 24:30 and trying to make waffles or something with what bread you could. That was a real good day. Now everything is slick and technological and kids and their computers and computer games, they seemed to be isolating themselves it is hard for me to make. I don't understand all of that, it is not that I ignore it, we have a computer and put up with the rotten thing.
- 25:00 But I can't understand computer games, I can't understand kids wanting to stay inside all day long and play computer games. Mind you parents these days with abductions and cars I know why kids no longer play cricket out in the street. It is probably deadlier than Iraq. But the intense pace of things these days people just need to slow down and
- 25:30 look at their life and see what they really want to do. I am not sure success is, it is a great thing if you get there, but I am not sure it is a big disaster if you can't make it and you just try and find something else. I think the Dalai Lama said the best of life experience is be useful and be happy and I think that's about as close as you can get
- 26:00 to it. Young people today I am amazed at their stamina, at their persistence at doing some of the jobs they do, the striving they do, all of that intensity, does it ever end? There has got to be periods of intensity and periods of, but I suppose that's the new generation.
- 26:30 I think there was hieroglyphics on the wall in Egypt saying the biggest disaster in Egypt was the attitude of young people in Egypt and I think we have been saying it ever since. Just like warfare no matter when or where what century the young people always come good, they have always been optimistic, they have always been trained they have always carried out whatever they had to carry out for the nation. And I can't see that changing.
- 27:00 I think they are going to be soft it is going to be hard work, but the material is there. And I think next time around you might have a few more wogs I suppose, a few more Asians but that's not going to hurt anyone. Recruiting is difficult, people don't want to join the army and for the life of me I can't understand why. I don't know what the army does these days, maybe there is a good reason for it. But the thought of packing groceries and going out to a rifle range
- 27:30 or playing football and getting in a punch up or something, at least you're doing something. The world has changed and I am obviously not changing quick enough for it.

Well I know you were coerced into doing this interview today,

It has been an absolute pleasure, I can assure you.

It has been a pleasure for us too.

You have no idea how enjoyable it has been. But I have got to go, I have got to go and face my wife.

She is patiently waiting outside. Thankyou for talking for us today.

It has been a great pleasure, thankyou for

- 28:00 putting up with for many hours, I don't know how you did it most people don't listen to me. I have a few friends who do.

28:09 **INTERVIEW ENDS**