Australians at War Film Archive

George Wainwright (Roger) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:46 **And thank you for joining us and sharing your story with the archive. If I may I'd just like to start the interview today with a brief summary of your service details?**

Yes certainly. I applied to enter the Royal Military College, Duntroon

01:00 and I entered there in January 1962 on Australia Day. I did the four-year course there and graduated in December '65. I went straight, was posted straight to the 5th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment and with that battalion I served for thirteen months in Vietnam. When I came home I was promoted to captain and was appointed as ADC [Aide de Camp] to the Chief of the General Staff

01:30 who was Sir Thomas Daley. I was in that position for eighteen months and then I joined the 1st Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment which had just returned from Vietnam and proceeded to Malaya and Singapore until the early '70's. At that stage infantry officers tended to do twelve months in Vietnam, back home for eighteen months and then back to Vietnam, so I was due to go back and I did all the training

02:00 to go as the senior Australian adviser at Da Nang with the Australian army training team. That did not eventuate because of the pullout of the war in early 1972, so I didn't go. I did a number of staff jobs as a captain. I was promoted to major and went to the 7th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment in Sydney and at the end of 1973

02:30 that linked with 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] who were our neighbour to form the 5/7 Battalion and I finished as the second in command of that battalion. Following that I spent two years at the recruit training battalion at Kapooka training recruits, followed in 1977 by a year at the Army Staff College at Queenscliff. Following that I did an instructional appointment at the

03:00 land warfare centre, instructing tactics at Canungra in Queensland. After two years in that I was promoted to lieutenant colonel and I became the senior personnel manager for the infantry corps here in Canberra after which I spent a year as the SO [Senior Officer] on operations at army headquarters in Canberra, planning the army side of operations for overseas.

03:30 I was then selected to go to the United States Armed Forces Staff College which is a six month course, equivalent to the joint services staff college that, or the equivalent course that's in Canberra here now and I then spent the next two and a half years as the assistant military attaché in the embassy in Washington. I came back from that position on promotion to colonel and became the director of

04:00 training operations for army. I did quite a bit on the training side in all these appointments. Following that I then spent the next two years, that was '88, '89, '90, as the deputy commandant and director of military out at the Royal Military College, conducting the training of officers there. I then spent, became Director Defence Force Housing which was

04:30 responsible for all the housing policies for the defence force and it was the height of the Defence Housing Authority's upgrading program for defence houses around the country and after that, in '94, I became the Director Joint Intelligence Staff in the Defence Intelligence Organisation in Canberra and that job was essentially responsible for the

05:00 intelligence support to operations and being involved in the planning of overseas commitments and crisis management for counter terrorism and short notice requirements. I did that for, up until April '97 at which time I left full time service. I did, as part of that I joined the reserves. I took a bit of time off and I did a few

05:30 jobs in a reserve capacity, conducting boards of inquiry and a few projects where my background particularly in training and personnel issues was being used. I also worked for a time for an IT [Information Technology] company which I didn't enjoy. I spent twelve months as the General Manager of Ainslie Football Club here in Canberra and I've been invited since to do occasional contract work for

defence which I'm finishing at the end of this month.

06:00 **And when along the way did you get married?**

Tina and I were married in Singapore in 1970, December 1970 when I was over there. That's a long story.

I'm sure we'll get to it when we talk about Singapore. What about children, when did they come along?

We've got three children. Sasha is our eldest. She was born in '72. Tori, who's in Perth, she was '74 and our son Andrew in '76.

06:30 **Great. Thank you very much for that. Thank you Roger. If I may I'd like to take you back to when and where you were born?**

Yeah, I was born on the 3rd of October 1944 in Alexandria, Egypt. The reason for that is that my parents were British. My father was in the textile industry in the north of England. They were actually from the Lancashire area outside Manchester and he went with an international

07:00 company to establish a textile factory in Alexandria. That was in the mid 1930s and they stayed there for twelve years and left there in 1947 just before Nasser replaced King Farouk, so my brother, sister and myself were all born there. As I say in 1944. I often say to people that my baptism of fire was the Battle of Alamein but in fact that was 1943,

07:30 so took a bit of a license on that but I was only eighteen months when we, my parents went back to the UK [United Kingdom] for a short period and then came out and my father was involved, one of the senior managers in Actil at Woodville in Adelaide and we lived nearby and that's why I was brought up in Adelaide.

Alexandria during the war would have been a very interesting time for them?

Yes it was

08:00 actually. My father was not in the military because he was actually providing uniforms, you know, for Montgomery and eighth army and people like that but he was also in the militia and was in one of the stay behind battalions as a sergeant major where they would blow things up if things got fairly nasty and my mother actually had visas to go to South Africa with we children if it got to that stage and she actually

08:30 carried a pistol over there and they did have to leave on a few occasions but it was never, you know, too much of a problem for them. I suppose in some ways they were lucky that they were there in married life in the same setting during the war when a lot of other people had to go away overseas.

Absolutely and you said that you had a brother and a sister who were also born there. What's the age difference?

My elder brother Michael is four years older than me and my sister Lorna is two years older.

09:00 **So you came, well they came out to Australia in 1947, so you were about three years old?**

Yeah just, yeah, two and a half, three, yeah.

And what early memories do you have of that time in Adelaide?

Not a lot at that stage. I do remember we first lived at Glenelg and apparently we all, we apparently arrived in Melbourne, came across by train and we all had chickenpox,

09:30 so I heard my mother talking about not having a very nice time there. I do remember having to go, when we actually moved to Woodville, having to go to the town hall and have inoculations every week and, you know, getting chocolate frogs if you didn't cry, you know, that sort of thing but I had a great life growing up in Adelaide with friends and I suppose continuity of schooling. I only went to two schools and, you know,

10:00 particularly as you see in later life when you've got children in military life having to move around a lot, so I'd had that stability and loved my sport very much and had a great time until I, well a great time when I joined RMC [Royal Military College] as well, but all my schooling days were very good, a lot of it cause I'm a very keen sportsperson, so I was very much involved in that.

So you said that you moved into a home in Woodville next to the actual factory?

Yeah.

What was that home like?

Well we, as I said,

10:30 briefly we moved into Glenelg, a place called Barin Street. We then moved into a, in fact there were houses actually built by Actil. It was called Actil Avenue right next to the factory. We lived in number

two. It was a small little, equivalent to the old government cottages and I would guess by now they would have been demolished and then we moved into Bofor Street, just off Woodville Road and that became our home. That was our main home and that's where

11:00 myself, my brother and my sister all left from. My parents subsequently retired to Westlakes, right on the lake, but they've both passed on now.

So that area, Woodville area at that time, was it very well developed?

Yes it was. There was the high school just across the road and I remember there was Minda home. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital had been built or was built at that time because my sister

11:30 was a nursing sister there and did her training and met her husband there. All the, you know, the railway line. I used to walk up Woodville road to the railway station to get the train into town to go to school and get a bus up to, I went to school at Prince Alfred College and yeah, it was all pretty well developed at that time. I used to play golf down on the Grange golf course and I do remember that actually being developed at that time but, and

12:00 also we were, everyone in our family were keen swimmers as well particularly my father so virtually every weekend we were down at Tennyson Beach, Grange Beach and that was really a lot of just sand hills there particularly the Tennyson side but it's certainly all developed now into Westlakes and that's why my parents went there and bought one of the very first houses right on the lake. They were, I think they bought the third block that was sold.

So at that time was Westlakes a very, was it swamp?

12:30 Yes it was, yeah. It was just a tributary of where, the flow through water actually comes from about a kilometre out to sea but that was really just a creek as I recall it and there were mangrove type swamps moving down to, you know, further north towards outer harbour and Port Adelaide area.

That's incredible to think what is there now and do you recall them clearing it and…?

Yes

13:00 and my parents house being built. Just up the road was Clive Cameron the politician as well. His house was about, sort of six along but they were, amongst, as I say, my parents house is right on the thousand metre mark of the Kings Cup rowing course on the lake and all our friends who were mainly from the other side of town, the eastern suburbs, thought my parents were crazy moving down to there but we've absolutely have no regrets because it's a fantastic spot.

13:30 **It's prime real estate now.**

Yeah and my sister just lives right on the beachfront in Hanley as well, so she was always, in later years she was always very well located to look after my parents as well.

So your father worked at Actil, what was his role there?

He was the manager of works. There were sort of two parts and he was actually involved in the printing and

14:00 the production of sheets, pillowcases and towels, that sort of thing. He was probably about number three in line of Actil I would think overall.

And what kind of character was your father?

Pretty strict fellow, you know, I say to me as a young person. Again a very keen sportsperson, a good father and

14:30 generous. He was always very proud and supportive of his three children and I used, things like sport, loved playing football, tennis, those sort of things and I played a reasonable standard and he was always there supporting and sometimes trying to give more advice than he needed to and I can become a bit bossy if you like and say I can look after myself but no but he was fine.

You mentioned that he was in the British

15:00 **militia in Alexandria. Did he share any of his experiences from being a part of the war?**

Not in a lot of detail but he did get involved in a lot of evacuation of casualties when they came in on ships, you know, from Tobruk or wherever it might have been and they brought them into the hospitals in Alexandria and he was involved in that and he had quite, you know, qualifications through St John's Ambulance and that sort of thing. We, in fact the house

15:30 we lived in was the, we had a common fence with an Italian prisoner of war cage as well, so we had thousands of Italians, prisoners, right next door and my young brother became a mascot but no, my father never really went into a lot of detail on that side. I, from having looked at records I don't, he never really got involved in any detailed fighting or anything like that, even though he was in this unit but you'd have a role of causing trouble as a stay behind battalion if

16:00 they needed to do so, but that never eventuated.

And your mother who was also a part of that experience you mentioned she carried a pistol and had the visa ready for any escape. Did she share much of her experience during that time?

No because it never actually really got down to it but they, well they both mentioned that they remember the start of the Battle of Alamein because you could just hear the gunfire when it started, so that was I think August '43,

16:30 you know, year before I was born but they say they can recall the actual gunfire and just the barrage of artillery going on at the start of the Battle of Alamein. Those sort of things. They were always worried about how far Rommel would, you know, how far east that he would get but as we know from history it never really got quite that close but the preparations were made for her to disappear if it got to that stage.

And how did your mother settle into life in Australia?

17:00 Loved it, yeah. They, I think from what I hear them going back in time that their family and her family was a bit reluctant about leaving their main families and that's on both sides and going across to this unknown place in the south Pacific but once they got there and settled in, established new friends, good lifestyle and they loved it and almost every year we'd have relatives coming out

17:30 from the UK and obviously in those days it was mainly done by sea, in the early days, so it was a long, you know, commitment to come out but both my parents, well my mother's father came out and my father's mother came out. My father's father, my grandfather was badly wounded in the First World War and died at a very young age.

So when you say they came out, did they come out to settle or did they just come out to visit?

No, they just came out for a visit, six to nine months and stayed with us

18:00 and then go back, so they came out for quite a period of time and aunties and uncles came out as well.

Was there much excitement when the relatives from the UK came?

Yeah, no my grandmother, my father's mother, I've still got it actually. She was a prolific knitter and she knitted this magnificent jumper for me which I've still got and I still wear.

And where did they stay.

18:30 **You said they stayed with you?**

Yes.

But did anyone have to give up their bed or anything like that?

Yeah, I did. In fact we, the house was large enough for, you know, we never had to share rooms or anything cause the, this is the house in Bofer Street, Woodville. That was quite a large house, huge back garden and everything but out in the back there was, it was a garden shed and we lined that and I stayed in, that was my bedroom for about two years.

19:00 I loved it, my own little apartment in the backyard, all set up and so I had no problem with that.

And how would you describe your mother's character?

Vivacious, fun loving, a determined lady who doesn't, you know, she'll put up a fight and I mentioned earlier my father was a bit of a disciplinarian but she wouldn't just say, "Yes" to him all the time or anything like that. She

19:30 was her own person. She just passed away last year aged 92.

That's a good age. What did she do when your father was working?

She never worked herself. She had a group of ladies who she would play bridge with and play tennis every Thursday and in fact we had a group of families would play tennis together as families every Saturday, who had this lawn tennis court on the other side of

20:00 Adelaide but again with three young children, that was really her main occupation but she never actually worked.

And you mentioned that you were quite a keen sportsman. What clubs did you belong to?

Well in my early days it was all through school. I played in a very strong Australian rules football team there I think from under thirteens right through until we

20:30 left. I think we lost one match in about four years and that was when most of the team was out with flu. I can remember we lost to Pulteney Grammar School but out of our, in the final year at school when we used to have the intercollegiate match on Adelaide Oval and that was against St Peter's College. I think out of that team of twenty of us, seventeen went on to play league football, so it was, you know, people

like Wayne Jackson who was the

21:00 Chief Executive of the AFL [Australian Football League] and Peter Darley who became a household name back in those days, Robert Day played for Hawthorn. There was Diamond Jim Tilbrook who played in the VFL as well, so it was a very strong team.

Did you think of going on to play professional football?

I would have loved to have done that but carrying on with sport in the army is very, very difficult. I think I could have gone on to that level and people have told me, so when I came back from

21:30 Vietnam I played first grade football here with Ainslie in Canberra and in fact as a cadet at Duntroon I represented the ACT [Australian Capital Territory] as well in an under twenty-one side. We played Richmond from the VFL [Victorian Football League].

So what schools did you go to? You mentioned you only had two which was quite fortunate?

Yeah, the primary school near home I went to Chela Gardens Primary School, just off Torrens Road and I spent all my secondary schooling at Prince Alfred College.

22:00 **PAC boy?**

PAC yeah.

What was your uniform like then?

The suit. The grey suit with a white or a striped shirt and the school tie with the badge setting there and the cap.

I was going to ask if there was a cap or a hat?

Yes, had to wear that in public.

And what was PAC like?

I enjoyed it.

22:30 As I say, my reports, I was not a brilliant academic student and I think all my reports right through said, "Did the minimum amount required and could do better" but I got some excellent results in sport, as I said and I think in my final year I would have liked to have gone back for another year and, you know, would have been the house captain and captain of the football team and the tennis team and all those sorts of things but yeah. No I really enjoyed school. My elder brother was there four years ahead of me. In fact we were only

23:00 there for one year to coincide. He was in his final year when I was in my first year there, so we had one year together and he was in the same class as Steve Gow who's the Director the War Memorial. He was, if you like, partly responsible for me joining the army from that. I was an under officer in school cadets as well.

Well before I ask you about the cadets and PAC was an all boys school, so how did

23:30 **you socialise with other girls?**

We had, there was a group of us close friends and it was really girls from the other schools. There was St Peter's Girls College. There was Methodist Ladies College. There was PGC. I took a girl out from Woodlands for a while. My sister went to Woodlands when I, you know, not through her but I met a few of them playing tennis at Memorial Drive, which I did most Saturdays,

24:00 so it was mainly girls from the other schools and each year you had the red and white ball which was, you know, a big occasion and go to someone's place for drinks beforehand and have a good night but in those days I suppose the worst thing is essentially most of the time your parents had to drive you to and from until you were old enough to get your license and big brother would lend me his car in the final few years.

What did you wear to the red and white ball?

It was going towards the,

24:30 think it was the school, it was black tie. Yeah I think it was a combination of school suit or black tie but black tie was preferred, yes it was because we had to, you know, borrow them from parents or rent them.

And were there any dancing lessons leading up to this?

Yeah, I went to this place in, it's one of the squares in Adelaide. The name of the lady who taught these dancing classes, she was very well known in those days and it seemed to be the done

25:00 thing that you go and learn how to do all the traditional dances, meet some, quite a few people there. I must admit I wasn't all that keen on doing that but I did it anyway and probably benefited down the track.

And you said that you weren't very academic but were there any subjects that you actually enjoyed?

Yeah I actually got to enjoy maths

25:30 because we had a very interesting teacher. I didn't like physics and chemistry and that flowed on even when we did the same similar subjects when I went to Duntroon because it was the academic work at Duntroon as well, tertiary work. I was more the English, the geography, the history side of it and I still enjoy history now, so it was certainly, languages. I did French as well. I was alright at French. I did Latin and hated it

26:00 but one was alright but I got through my intermediate and leaving there, you know, with solid passes but no brilliant results and didn't get any scholarships like my brother did and everything like that. I'm more the outdoors person.

Well what were your ambitions when you were at high school, what did you want to do when you left?

I really had nothing in mind.

26:30 I really wanted to pursue a sporting career. That was, I was a reasonable tennis player as well and I would have liked to have, you know, I even had ambitions of becoming a professional tennis player but there was obviously no money back in those days and as I said, I didn't have brilliant passes but I did have the qualifications to go to Adelaide University and then I probably would have gone there and done an arts course

27:00 which was just the basic degree course at the time and see what would have come out of that until the opportunity for Duntroon came along.

Well you were a part of cadets as well?

Yes.

How often would cadets meet?

Every week on Wednesdays. We would wear our uniform, on the public transport, our cadet uniforms to school and

27:30 do our cadet training. It was essentially once a week but there was an annual camp each year as well for about a week at Warradale or Woodside was the places normally went to and I did, in my final year, in the second final year I was a corporal and then in final year I did the under officer course with a number of colleagues. That was at Warradale and became an under officer. In fact two of my fellow officers and myself,

28:00 we all went to the same class at Duntroon.

So what was the uniform for cadets?

It was the old Second World War very thick trousers and they were horrible in the summer, even though there was a summer uniform but you wore them in hot weather. They were essentially the Second World War uniform, blouses that would come down, half way down your thigh with a belt, Blanco belt, a 1937 patterned belt with buckles on the back and you had to clean them with

28:30 Blanco and polish the brass and all that sort of thing. Then you'd get Brasso on the Blanco so you'd have to go back and do it again and that sort of thing but my brother, whose also been an under officer, and he taught me the tricks of the trade there and he was quite fastidious in making it absolutely immaculate, so I learnt the trade from him.

So what kind of training did you do with cadets?

Drill, weapon training with a variety of weapons. It was the

29:00 303. We had Bren guns. We did some training with hand grenades, very little live firing until later on. The obvious thing were parades and, you know, drill and marching, those types of things. There was some basic navigation was taught but a lot of it was just a developmental things as well, like, you know, I suppose the offshoots of it. Things like

29:30 discipline and learning that and working with groups, being team members as well.

What did you enjoy about cadets?

I suppose particularly in the last year or so having the authority or, you know, learning the leadership trade myself which, you know, followed later on. I think that was the main thing. You're doing something common with people when you went away on the camps. You all had something in common. You get dirty and wet and tired together and, you know, being part of a team. It was

30:00 a camaraderie.

And so you came to the end of your time at PAC and you made a mention that someone else was responsible for the application to Duntroon, what was the story there, what happened?

Well I mentioned I hadn't really made up my mind what I was going to do and the applications for Duntroon to start in 1962, most of the selection boards had been done but apparently they were looking for about another

30:30 dozen or so people and the applications came out and I actually applied in I think it was late November, early December '61 and part of the reason for that was that Steve Gow, who's now the Director of the Australian War Memorial, he went to school in the same class as my brother. They were fellow under officers as well and Steve being four years ahead of me, he was actually at Duntroon

31:00 at the time and he did brilliantly there. He was the top cadet. He won the Queen's Medal and the Sword of Honour and every leave he would come back to Adelaide and he'd come to our house, being friends with my brother but I think he also had an eye for my sister as well, so we'd see him and I thought, "Well if he can do it, so can I," and he, at the end of '61 when he graduated all the top prizes coincided with the time that this application came out, so I applied. I was interviewed at Keswick Barracks with the selection board of

31:30 I think there was twelve people on the selection board and three of us were selected to go, so I went there in January, so it was all pretty quick.

What did Steve tell you about Duntroon?

Not a lot, certainly about sporting life and the training and those sort of things but he was very forthright with it and obviously that he'd enjoyed it and, you know, he was a big sort of physical fellow

32:00 as well and that really had quite a large influence on me going. I still blame him now and I see him quite a lot.

Well how did, what did you father think of your application?

In some ways I think he was glad that I did something like that because I had no real vocation in mind except going back to school, having another year which would

32:30 have been all sport and a very joyous year for me. It would have been a fun year and it wasn't a cheap school to go to either, so I think he was quite glad when that came along and he was very, very encouraging for me to do that, almost to the extent of pushing.

And what about your mother?

She was supportive as well. I do remember in tears at Adelaide airport when, you know, this seventeen year old went away on the plane, essentially the first time being away for

33:00 what was obviously going to be an extended period of time but very supportive. They always came over but didn't think that a few years later that it was going to lead to going to a war.

Well that's an interesting observation, I mean at that time did you ever think that you would be called up or would have to go away to war?

Yes. Not so much

33:30 school cadet days. I don't think it was there and there was no war on the horizon anyway except for, you know, the confrontation in Malaya and those sorts of things but nothing big but certainly in the early sixties, yeah it certainly became a reality and certainly the training at Duntroon was, that's what you're there for, so it was certainly the expectation and people wanted to go.

And I mean

34:00 **we are talking post Korea as well, did that make much of an impact on you?**

No because, you know, that finished essentially early fifties and I was still pretty young. I remember very little about the Korean War as, you know, as a young child as well, so that had no impact but when you started training you had people wearing Korean ribbons. You were aware of it from that point of view that they'd been there.

34:30 **I'd also like to touch on the Malayan emergency, what did you know about that at that time?**

Just a general awareness of what was going on and came out, you know, it was covered to an extent in military history training at Duntroon and well there was that period of time when Australia was essentially in a combat situation from, you know, almost Second World War through Korea and right through until confrontation and then into Vietnam, so that very decades of

35:00 being in some form of contact, so was certainly aware of that and with training, young officers and NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] and warrant officers who were training you were wearing ribbons of those campaigns, so certainly aware of them.

And the interview at Keswick Barracks, how many were on that selection panel?

There was about twelve. It was conducted by the-

Did you say twelve?

Twelve people, twelve candidates yes and the selection

35:30 board was chaired by the commandant of Duntroon. There was a psychologist on it, Colonel Affleck I remember, and the adjutant of Duntroon who was essentially the secretary of the board, then there were other people there, a full day process. I know it well because I, later on in life when I was Deputy Commandant of Duntroon, I ran those same selection boards for three years.

Well what do you remember from your selection

36:00 **interview?**

Being very nervous, very young, not sure what all this is about. When you have to get up there and there's a whole range of indoor and outdoor type activities that people had and essentially what they were doing, they were looking for signs of leadership potential that can be developed, so there's a whole range of outdoor physical type activities, indoor discussions, group discussions, standing on your feet and talking about yourself, written tests.

36:30 It's a whole range of activities that have been set up and have been tried and proven over the years.

How did you feel about standing up and talking about yourself?

Pretty nervous back then, yeah. I can't even remember how I did, probably got up and said something and sat down and yeah. The group discussions as well, I mean it's not really people diving in. It doesn't mean the person who makes the loudest noise is going to be the best leader. It's sort of, there's a lot of, you know, logic

37:00 comes in and problem solving things where you can apply common sense and that's, you know, a lot of traits that you've got to have in leaders.

And the psych test, can you remember much about that?

That was actually done beforehand I'm pretty sure just to get, cross a base level but there is a psychologist on all these boards and they have access, I mean they have all your records from school as well, going back and referee reports were written and all those, so they do

37:30 have a file on you that is used and I know from later experience, and it didn't change significantly over the years, that we would have done, I don't actually recall it, but we would have filled out a test and they have a rating that relates to officer qualities and you had to be at a base level to do that, so they measure the size of your head.

Not literally do they?

No.

38:00 **And when you got accepted, how did you feel?**

Excited, yeah, a new adventure. I had something positive to do with my life. There was going to be a four-year commitment training there. I knew it wasn't easy cause the dropout rate at Duntroon was pretty high. I think our class entered with about seventy-eight people of which

38:30 forty, about forty six Australian and six New Zealanders graduated.

And what did you pack when you left?

Very little, just went there with one bag. I do remember it because you were provided with uniforms and everything there and we were told not to take a lot, just some basic civilian clothes, which wasn't even necessary because you didn't get leave for about the first ten weeks anyway and the size of your body was probably going to

39:00 change or grow and expand so we didn't go with a lot. You weren't allowed to take a lot of extra personal items because people coming from different families as well, everyone was even, so, and parents weren't allowed to provide money, or encouraged not to provide you with extra money, so everyone was equal, you know, kids coming from a poor background and all, different varieties of backgrounds, so you didn't want to see people with loads of money being there

39:30 and their friends who were going through the same training with next to nothing, so that was strictly controlled.

Did you take any personal items?

A few photographs, an alarm clock. My parents gave me a camera which I've still got. That was about it. No it was very, one bag.

And you said your mother was quite teary at the

40:00 **airport?**

Yeah.

So was it an emotional farewell?

Yeah it was because, you know, you're going into the unexpected. I was the first person in our family to follow a full time military career. I think also a loving mother losing, you know, her baby son as such and, you know, I was just seventeen.

Tape 2

00:38 **When you got onto that flight, what were you feeling?**

Very nervous. I think I might have even shed a little tear myself thinking, you know, leaving home. It was a direct flight Adelaide to Canberra and

01:00 the first thing I remember as we approached Canberra because I'd only seen photographs of it before and read booklets on Duntroon was seeing those white buildings with the red roof as we approached. I could actually see them and recognise, you know, that's the place with the parade ground and I can remember having, you know, "Did I make the right decision?" but anyway I was met at the airport by this senior cadet. In the class ahead of you, over four year

01:30 system, there's a class system. One of the next class above you becomes what is known essentially as your lord and master and he looks after you, so I was met by him and taken to Duntroon and thrown into it, didn't really see anyone. I was there by myself for a day and then joined the rest of my class and out in the field but this seven-week camp that is conducted at the beginning of every year to teach the basic training.

02:00 **And what did you do for that day on your own?**

I was issued, well on my own, I was sort of with this person who took me around the college. You're issued with all your equipment, that type of thing, so carrying all these things. You had to organise your room, make your bed. You were told how to fold clothes. You had to iron them to certain specifications. They were called piles of clothes and I think they had to be, everything had to be

02:30 nine inches wide in the old measurements and if they weren't good enough you had to do it again and you had to start polishing your boots and getting those immaculate by hand, none of this spray on stuff, so all of it was getting into that.

And what about your haircut, when did that happen?

Yeah, I had one before I went but I had to have another one, yeah. I think that happened to everyone and there's no, you can't request how you want it cut. It was sort of, it was straight up

03:00 and yeah.

And when you finally did meet the rest of your class, what did you think of the people that you were with?

People were feeling each other out, people coming from all states and New Zealand. We were actually organised into four companies and you tended to see a lot more of those people, the people you actually operated with or we had companies back at Duntroon proper but out in the field

03:30 there we had class A and class B and the two classes did the same training but because of the numbers they were essentially separate and a lot of those people you made friends with in those early days, stayed friends for life, certainly in my case.

And you did have a bit of experience with the cadets but did all your other classmates have that type of experience as well?

Yeah, I wouldn't say majority

04:00 but certainly quite a few and it was fairly common back in those days because there were cadet organisations in a lot of the schools around the country, so it was quite common for cadets going to Duntroon having had the earlier experience, not a lot. I couldn't give a percentage whereas thirty percent but, as I mentioned, three of my fellow under officers from Princes where I went, in the same class.

Was that comforting to have some other…?

Yes, but even though they were not in the same because even, you're

04:30 actually also divided into academic groups as well and I did the arts course at Duntroon and my two fellow schoolmates did the science course. They were both, became engineers, so I didn't see a lot of

them but it was comforting to have them there.

Why did you choose arts?

I really didn't have a choice. It was my school background and concentrating on getting better results in that area. As I said, I wasn't really keen on physics and chemistry even though my maths was fine

05:00 but I actually had the qualifications to do that which I'm glad I did. I would have preferred, if I had a choice I would have done that anyway but I didn't have the school grades to do the science type subjects at the level there, at the tertiary level.

And where were you, what were your barracks like?

When we came back from the initial training of about seven weeks we moved into

05:30 what was called Anzac Hall. As I mentioned we were split into four companies. I was in Kapyong Company and each of the companies has a grading system of the senior class, second class, third class and fourth class, fourth class being the junior class. Everyone had an individual room. It was just big enough to have a bed with a desk next to it, built in wardrobes

06:00 and a rack on your wall where you'd hang your, you'd have your rifle and your military equipment and probably enough room on the floor for about a five foot by two foot carpet, so they were fine and the standard back in those days was, you know, probably adequate. Apart from studying at night, you didn't spend a lot of time in them.

Did you feel any homesickness?

No I don't think I really did

06:30 to any large extent, not saying, you know, never to saying, "Oh I wish I'd never come here." I actually enjoyed it and over the years you hear all these things about bastardisation going on and that certainly occurred but I never let it get me down. I thought it was always quite humorous in some ways and it never had I don't think any great impact on me.

Well what kind of bastardisation did you experience?

07:00 Well in the class system it was always, the junior class were the ones who were the victims of it if you like. The class above that third class where you have what was called the lord and master, you know, the person who were not involved in any of that, they were there to assist and help you and guide you but not being a very close friend. They were fair and friendly if you like being one year ahead. The class ahead of that, second class, they were the ones who were given the responsibility for what was

07:30 called fourth class training and that was, if you like, the bastardisation that came in and the senior class who were about to graduate, they sat above that and all, even though they were, so it was mainly done with the second class. They would make sure that after you came in from training and you had to have meal parades, you know, six o'clock at night, so they wouldn't let, and you got into trouble and you got extra drills if you were late for training, so they wouldn't let you go and have a shower until about three minutes to six and,

08:00 you know, you could come back and find the knots in your trousers tied, you know, knots in your trouser legs. There was a lot of questions on history, part of what was deemed to be an education process. You had to recite, you had to know things like the inscription on General Bridges grave, which is on the top of Mount Pleasant, and you had to know that off by heart and if you didn't, you, during the meal, between the main course and dessert, you'd have to run up the hill just to revise it and

08:30 come back down and to prove that you'd been up there, there was all white pebbles around the gravesite, so you had to bring back one of those as evidence that you'd actually been up there. There was a lot of, the companies were all named after, cause I was in Kapyong Company, Battle of Kapyong. There was Alamein, Gallipoli and you had to know the history of all those campaigns as well, so that was taught, even though it was taught officially as well but you had to learn extra things and a lot of these people would have their own little

09:00 pet, things that they would like to inflict on you. You were put in your place but it probably got some people down but I don't think it ever, you know, I don't think it affected me. As I said, I almost enjoyed it.

What did you enjoy about it?

Well I think, you know, being with your friends and you build up friendships with them. You're going, in some ways I could argue that it's got some benefits because you're going through, you know,

09:30 it's pretty tough but you're doing it with your mates. They're in the same situation. In some ways you get through it and you laugh about it a week, I mean you've got a bit of time off and you've done it together, you know, you've achieved something.

Well when you say that some of your classmates didn't enjoy it, what kind of support could you give them if they were getting down about it?

Only moral support.

10:00 There was not really any escape system from it. The staff would be aware of it because some of them had been through it themselves and it was, you know, institutionalised to that extent. There were probably a couple of incidents that went over the top when it's getting, you know, physical and personally physical. I think those sort of things were stamped out.

10:30 Some people it really got to them and they left or they were discharged but a lot of those who did leave, I think it wasn't just a matter of the bastardisation. It's usually, you know, leadership qualities weren't there or they'd failed academically cause the academic part was actually, saw the demise of those people.

And when you say it got physical, what do you mean by that?

11:00 I don't mean in the terms of abuse or anything like that but, you know, do fifty push-ups and that type of thing. There was one thing that happened in our company that, in the nude you had to slide across this large bathroom floor where you, it was a fairly large bathroom. It had about twelve showers in it and with the soap and it's slippery and everything like that on the tiled floor

11:30 and they had these races and people pushing off a wall to one end on their backsides and first to the wall on the other end. I mean it was in the nude but everyone was in the nude having a shower and that with the senior class would organise this, almost like races, but don't let it get you down.

Was it fun at all?

Well yeah. I mean it's not, I don't think anyone was too worried about modesty or that sort of thing's

12:00 not certainly, didn't fuss me, as long as, you know, you weren't physically abused in a sexual way and that certainly never happened and I'm not aware of any instance like that at all.

And did it ever get to a point where it was harmful, like just slamming into a wall in that kind of situation, could

12:30 **actually be quite?**

No I don't remember any, not occurring from that. No, I don't, no physical harm that I can recall coming out of any of the bastardisation issues, no.

And did you, what did you, when you actually got to that level of the fourth class?

Yeah.

What kind of?

13:00 When I'm turning the tables?

Yeah, what did you do?

Well again, same sort of things but I always had this view that you don't demean people as well, so each class tended to have their, I mean I can remember two years ahead of us, this group of about five or six people and they were recognised, even today you're talking about it. These were the big bastardisers. They were the real ones who

13:30 put their all into that. Every class had them and some went almost to the limit of what it could do. I wasn't one of those. I tried to make it more fun and enjoyable. I mean the same thing would occur at the mealtime where you would have on a table of eight people, you'd have the senior class at one end sitting at the top and in sort of rank order and then second class, third class and about three of the junior class at the other end of the table

14:00 and this would occur in the bastardisation, would go on during meals as well, asking questions and you had to sit to attention when you're answering a question, all this sort of thing and Duntroon had its traditions as well and you actually had to pass a test relating to the history and origins of the college and its traditions and there was a little book on this and you had to know, you had to learn all these things.

14:30 **And was there any, you mentioned the lord master assistant but was there a mentoring system when you were there?**

No not with the cadets but even though there was the definite rank structure, there was certainly assistance provided by the senior cadets cause you might be in a section or a platoon and you'd have in the senior class and they could be quite helpful because if they had real problems

15:00 in their section or their platoon it sort of doesn't look good for them as well and I think, so apart from the hard issues of the bastardisation there were some very, very helpful things and good advice passed on and I suppose apart from the formal structure, when you played sport, I mean I can remember a good escape for me because a couple of the recognised serious bastardisers when I was in the junior class were in the same football team as me, so they let me go.

15:30 **And I've heard about a father lieutenant and a grandfather lieutenant system and a person, your number at Duntroon and then one hundred?**

Yeah a hundred below. Yeah my cadet number was 2156, so, you know, 2256 was my son and 2056 was

16:00 my father, that sort of thing.

Did you have a relationship with those cadets?

No not really. That was, to me that wasn't a really close one. In fact I think it wasn't actually, in my case, because of the numbers in it, they were actually two classes ahead of me and I wasn't there for a long time. It didn't automatically happen there'd be one in each class cause, as I said, we only had about fifty people in the class, so that was not really a, you know,

16:30 a close one to me.

And did you ever get into the role of that lord master?

Yes, in the third class I had a couple of cadets who I would guard and do the same sort of thing and that happens mainly in, probably in the first six months that really applies and then after that you're on your own because you know the ropes. It's really just to guide you how to set up your room, what the daily routine is, those sort of things but it was really only a system there for the first few months and once you, you know, once you grasped that, you're

17:00 on your own but you did keep a good relationship with that person. I can still remember the one who looked after me as well and he was good.

And the ones that you looked after, what were your first impressions of them? Did you have to go to the airport and collect them and?

No we didn't, no not in that. They were, the system was then they were normally picked up by members of the staff and brought in on buses as a group but the, I had two

17:30 that I looked after and I suppose I thought at the time how useless they were and there was I, you know, having had twelve months experience there and knew it all and I'd got out of the class that was being bastardised, so yeah. No I did the same sort of things with them.

And academically how did you fare?

I struggled in my first year. I think

18:00 I was probably very immature as well at the time and in fact the first eighteen months to the extent that I wasn't actually in danger of being discharged but I was certainly given a warning that I'd better do better and it wasn't because of that but I did and I think my results over the last year and a half or the last two years particularly, I just, I went up and improved my position in the class, you know,

18:30 quite well. Some of that relates to the more senior appointments you get in your final year because of the hierarchal structure there and got a reasonably senior position as a sergeant in my final year and if you're down at the bottom of the class academically or in other areas, you don't get that, so but I think it was a maturity thing in my case and as I matured I actually got better.

And what military

19:00 **training were you receiving?**

It's progressive. In broad terms the four years then you could say is about two years academic work, not sufficient to get a degree but a lot of people went on afterwards and completed it with credits at outside tertiary institutions and two years on military work, a graded system fairly basic in the first year and progressively get better and more sophisticated as you go through. There's the usual

19:30 aspects of the, you know, basic training, weapon handling, navigation, patrolling, all the physical aspects based on infantry, tactics being the, you know, the common ground for regards to what people were going to do later on, whether they were going to be pilots or engineers or artillery officers or whatever and it progressively developed to tactics instruction in a model room which would be practised out on the ground, an

20:00 annual camp at the end of every year and the graduating class obviously would take the senior positions and be scaled down, so you got progressive experience and more responsibility as each year developed. Things like staff duties, how to write in the military style, you know, operation orders, which are very important when you go into operations cause you follow that, it's second nature to you, military history,

20:30 a very wide range of activities. Even things like, artists tended to have more time, so they would get into other things like a bit of flying training was done as well. I actually was selected for flying training, for it in my final year but that was cancelled after I'd done about eight hours. We used to do it at Canberra airport because it was done on sports afternoons which

21:00 was Tuesdays and Thursdays and also Saturday mornings and I was deemed to be more important to the football team, so the adjutant of the day cancelled my pilot training.

How did you feel about that?

Disappointed. I would have liked to have done it but I think I also preferred the football side of it then and I did, as I mentioned, I represented the ACT [Australian Capital Territory] in that same year, so that

21:30 might not have happened if I'd done that and I was the captain of the football team, so no, and later on in life, even though I thought, "Well I could have become a pilot." No, I don't think so.

You said, yeah, you represented the ACT. How did that come about?

The RMC [Royal Military College] football side played in the Canberra competition and it used to vary between the top grade and reserve grade over the

22:00 time and we would get thrashed by up to twenty goals sometimes by bigger, older people from Canberra and the Canberra competition has always been a pretty good level, you know, probably one of the best ones outside the South Australian league and the Victorian league and Western Australia. It's probably one of the strongest, so it's not a bad regional competition. We would always maintain the fitness side and run rings about these people with the big bulk and, you know,

22:30 like at the end of the day in marking competitions, they would get the better of us but we did alright. In my first year, because I wasn't big, I was not allowed to play in the senior grade, so they put me in the reserves and I won the best and fairest in Canberra for that year. It used to, it really got up my nose, that I, cause I know I could have played it anyway but that was just for that first year and as we developed in

23:00 the final year I got selected in the ACT under twenty one's side. There were two of us and they made me captain of it and that was to play Richmond, a Richmond under twenty one side but it did include a lot of their league players from Melbourne. They beat us in that. A fellow called Alex Jesaulenko played in it for the ACT.

And what, how did you spend your leave?

23:30 **Quite often I'd go back to Adelaide with a group of us. We would drive across the Hay plains and I remember on one year that I arranged a house down at Port Noarlunga and about twelve of us went and used that house for the holidays. It was about a ten day break but I'd go there and usually it was more with your friends, you know, nice to go and see your family and everything like that but even though**

24:00 **you went home to see your family, you'd be wanting to be out on the town with your mates and make the most of, you know, time out of jail as such but on the shorter ones like Easter, one year we went down, a group of us went down to Lorne. We went surfing down near Lorne in Victoria and slept in the back of a churchyard, took our little tents. We were all experts at living outdoors in those days, so we'd rough it.**

Whose car would you drive down?

24:30 You weren't allowed to have a car until you were in your last year and you probably couldn't afford it anyway but in the first three years you weren't allowed to but come the third year, when you're in second class, in fact a friend of ours just lived over the hill in Campbell, the adjacent suburb to Canberra, and he happened to quite often have about six illegal cars in his backyard that were parked there. That was in

25:00 the second class but people managed to get their cars and I mean we'd drive across to Adelaide non stop, just change drivers and just keep going, just, you know, so you didn't waste time. In fact my parents bought me my first car in the senior year and it was a South Australian police car. It was a Holden, an FB Holden with a handcuff rail across the back seat and police cars used to be light blue back then and I had one of those.

25:30 **That would have been quite interesting to take?**

Yeah, the mind boggles.

Did it still have markings on it the police car?

No it wasn't. No, no markings at all. I think it was driven by a fairly senior person in the police force. It didn't have police down the side but they were light blue and with this steel rail across the back seat that people could be, I can just imagine it.

Did you ever use that handcuff rail?

No

26:00 but, you know, there was no seatbelts even probably in rear seats in those days. If you stopped suddenly I can imagine someone doing their teeth on it.

What were your instructors like?

At Duntroon?

Yeah?

Very professional, high quality. They were specially selected and they are for institutions like that, so if you go back and even today and I know having been there

26:30 as the deputy commandant there, that you look around. When I was a colonel and looking at the captains who were my instructors back then, that was ten years ago, a lot of those are well on the way to senior rank as well and the same applied back when we were, a lot of varying personalities and I think it's true to say that the corps within the army that people want to go to when they

27:00 graduate is very much determined by the impressions the role model of the people on the staff and that's why I wanted to go into infantry because there was a couple of young infantry officers there at the time who I thought, "I'd like to be like them", so they're very impressionable people then.

Well what qualities really stood out for you in these officers?

I think it's certainly the ability to make a decision. I think it's

27:30 the ability to relate to people that even though they have responsibilities and command an influence over you, that they just, that they can relate to you as well. I mean a lot of these people were also the sporting coaches of sporting teams, even though they might not have had the sporting background because they had that, you get to know them like that. Some officers would be distant and I said, "I don't want to be part of his organisation," so apart from the basic leadership thing

28:00 and back then when we were cadets there was not a lot who'd had recent, you know, operation experience. One did come back from the very early days of the training team with a military cross but a lot of them subsequently went on to places like Vietnam but yeah, but I think as a group, and they always have been at colleges like Duntroon, you get essentially the best quality officers going there, but I don't see, academically I think it's, to my way it's

28:30 personality.

You mentioned earlier that you did see some officers with Korea ribbons. Did they share much of their operational experience?

No they didn't, no. I think there's a, always has been a tendency in the military that if you're wearing ribbons you don't go talking about your experiences, you know, in a broad public view or, you know, it's almost like bragging I think

29:00 in a lot of cases and things get embellished and people don't really talk about it to any great degree.

I was just wondering if they actually were able to, whilst training you in their…?

Certainly draw on experiences but they don't say, "This is what I did" necessarily. I've done the same myself. I have, later on I spent a bit of time tutoring at the Defence Force Academy and I was asked to

29:30 talk to them about experiences and these people were all, you know, very keen, the early days of their, I could talk to them about experiences without relating personally what I did myself. A few things maybe, but, you know, certainly no embellishment, just use that experience to pass on what you know, to the people who are going to follow you.

And what did you learn about leadership at Duntroon?

Leadership

30:00 is, it's a thing that goes in all directions. Leadership is not just being responsible for people down below you in rank level. It's to your fellows and colleagues who are the same rank level to you. It's all part of this team work, just not at say platoon level but at company level and battalion level and also upwards. It's the loyalty

30:30 aspect comes into that as well to your seniors. I think certainly you've got to set an example, particularly with your subordinates. You've got to be prepared to get your hands dirty like your soldiers do and I mean they have simple traditions like officers always eat after their men when you're out in the field, make sure your soldiers are looked after and then do it and that's fine but, you know, those simple aspects of leadership. Those

31:00 type of things become second nature. I would think that the relationship that I've got with the soldiers I commanded in Vietnam is as close today as it was then and I, a week never goes by without one of them being in touch with me and this is talking over thirty years.

So when you were at Duntroon were you able to kind of develop the leadership style you felt comfortable with, I mean what kind of scope was given to you then to develop those

31:30 **skills?**

You were given positions of responsibility and again through the class structure and see even a simple thing starting off with this lord and master type system which is one or two people below you, that's a

leadership role and if you didn't get them sort of organised and in accordance with what the culture required, well that would look badly on you as well. You go to the next class and you've got greater responsibilities. You might become second in command of a section. Also things like cadet appointments in a lot of other areas,

32:00 people responsibility for quartermaster type aspects. Everyone, you had a daily company orderly who was responsible for roll calls and that sort of thing. The battalion orderly sergeant, the duty officer system, it was developed by making cadets captain and vice captains and presidents and managers of sporting teams right across the board. It was all run by the cadets with the overall guidance coming from the staff, so you learnt it all, you know, through all those different forms

32:30 of responsibility.

And what kind of leader did you want to be?

I wanted to be respected and show that I had the ability to command people in difficult situations where my subordinates could rely on me, trust me and

33:00 without being necessarily too close but you could have a good relationship with them, become a friend and a boss and there's a difference between the two, the circumstance of where you've got to be quite tough and ruthless if you want to get things done, but there are other circumstances where you go and play sport with them. I mean I would always, I always found that as a good outlet. My guys are going playing sport and I'd join in with them. I mean football teams in battalions later on in life

33:30 when I was a major, I was still playing football and I was playing football with my private soldiers, you know, no problem but really it's a matter of respect. People don't want to mess up and do the wrong thing and be seen to be an idiot and over your years you do see people in that situation. You said, you know, "Just follow that person out of curiosity."

And

34:00 **personally, did you have a girlfriend during these years?**

On and off, not for the whole four years. I mean the first couple of years I had virtually no one. In my third year there was a very nice lady I took out for about six or nine months. When I went back to Adelaide I had a friend from Woodlands so I used to take out

34:30 and there was another one in Adelaide as well. In your very first year at Duntroon they have this tradition. It's called the tennis party. When you come back in from your initial seven or eight weeks training it's the first time you are almost set loose on the social scene of Canberra and because people coming from all round the country don't know any local ladies they, the senior class who have got to know people, would invite these young ladies and they would be picked up

35:00 from around the suburbs of Canberra, which was a lot smaller in those days, and they'd be brought to Duntroon and introduced to, you know, this blind date and there were some shocking stories that came out of that but then some romances were created as well. I mean in mine, I got a shocker.

What was yours like?

I think it was, you know, she was imposed on me and I think that relationship lasted about two hours, so.

35:30 **When you say she was a shocker what do you mean by that?**

Like without being, she wasn't attractive to my eye, yeah. Probably, you know, a very nice lady but I never really took the, you know, took the time to get to know her better.

And what was the social even that you?

The tennis party? Well it would start around about midday and there was sort of get to know and it was, literally tennis was played. These ladies would come along and there'd be all sorts of games

36:00 and that's why it was essentially called the tennis party, using all the tennis courts there, whether you could play tennis or not and then in the afternoon, there'd be afternoon teas and that sort of thing and then there were changing places set aside for the ladies as well and they could get changed and they had essentially a dinner dance at night and then they were all escorted home, by bus. I think that tradition's gone.

Sounds all quite civil?

36:30 Yeah, the introduction to the Canberra social scene.

Well how did…?

Because it was, I mean interestingly there, because when I entered in 1962 the population of Canberra was about sixty two thousand and the only tertiary institutions in here were the Australian National University and Duntroon and it was all in the inner basin. None of the outer suburbs were there. There was no lake, so it was, everyone was known to everyone else in Canberra

37:00 back in those days.

How did you settle into the social scene here in Canberra?

Fine. I had six or eight close friends who are six or eight of my closest friends today, all stayed together and we would go out together as a group. We all got to know a group of nurses from Canberra Community Hospital as it was then and some of my friends, you know, married those

37:30 nurses, a few university students but there was a lot of, because we were tertiary, you know, the only two tertiary units, there was a lot of jealousy between them and in fact a few, it was a very willing contest on the football field between the university and Duntroon and both in union, in all the football codes, it was very, very willing and it got to the extent in 1964

38:00 when there was quite a famous raid on Bruce Hall. It coincided with bush week which was essentially the orientation week for the university and they would come out to Duntroon. They burnt a Volkswagen on the parade ground. We would retaliate. That was "The Day of the VW [Volkswagon]" and we would get them up on a road. We would fill Volkswagens with water. We would essentially capture these university students

38:30 and give them Mohawk haircuts and it was the days of long hair, so that it was actually, just get a Mohawk and then we'd send them off. It hit headlines in the paper. They came and did a raid one night on Anzac Hall where I lived and they threw flour and water over all the uniforms. There were about two hundred and forty cadets in the college and the senior cadet at the time, who was a New Zealander, decided that the

39:00 whole of the corps of staff cadets would go and raid Bruce Hall, which was the residential area of the university, so we did that, doors were broken, fire hoses were taken out, rooms were wrecked and peace was called the next day. The university students, I don't think much happened to them but for we cadets, we were given I think fourteen days confinement to barracks and fined about twenty pounds. We were still in pounds, shillings and pence, a

39:30 lot of money and the following year when we were in our final year, they had this armistice and said, "Well let's not," you know, the senior staff at both colleges got together and said, "There shouldn't be any repetition of this," so that in the 1965, our final year, was the first year of, it was called the Hatchet trophy, bury the hatchet and it's still played today as a rugby match but the first ones back in there, we went over to the, in '65, went over to the ANU [Australian National University] campus and had these games with them. There was catch the greasy pig.

40:00 There was a dirty joke telling competition, eating the pie competition, drinking competitions but it was all, a tug-of-war across a creek and with a ball that night and it just went on from there but it was pretty vicious in 1964.

I can imagine.

And the Hatchet trophy is still played for between the university and Duntroon.

Tape 3

00:31 **Well Roger after Duntroon where were you posted?**

I was posted straight to the 5th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment who, told to report there on the 5th of January '66.

And where did you join them?

At Holsworthy in Sydney, so we graduated on the 14th of December, a little bit of leave and had to be there on the 5th of January and there were only two members

01:00 of my class from Duntroon who went to 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. The rest, the majority of the infantry graduates went to the Pacific Islands Regiment, was where they were sent for their extra training.

And what were your impressions when you first arrived at 5RAR?

I suppose hesitant in a way. I mean here you were a brand new graduate from Duntroon,

01:30 well trained but you hadn't had the real practical experience of commanding regular soldiers and other officers and NCOs who might have some form of overseas experience, in fact I do remember that we were told, "When you go to your new battalion you will find that you've had, some of your NCOs who you're going to be responsible for, have probably served in the Malayan campaign, Confrontation [Between Indonesia and Malaysia] and some might have been to Korea."

02:00 Very few had. My platoon sergeant had actually been to Korea and Borneo but that wasn't really the

case.

And were you allocated a platoon straight away or?

Yes I went straight to Eight Platoon Charlie Company and that was the platoon that I trained and stayed with for the whole of the time in Vietnam and

02:30 still part of that platoon now, very close relationship. My platoon sergeant was running the platoon until I arrived. A platoon is organised essentially into three sections. The section commanders I had, I was not particularly impressed with. There was one of, and they all left for one reason, for another.

03:00 At that stage it had not been formally announced that we were going to go to Vietnam. It was also the stage where that battalion had the first intake of national service people. No one knew what they were like compared to the regular soldier, so it was very interesting times.

OK Roger sorry for that, so you were talking about joining

03:30 **Eight Platoon and just pick up the story where we left off?**

Yeah, when you first take over a platoon the obvious thing, I mean it's a bit two way. I've got to get to know them and I think they are more interested and say, "Hey, who's this bloke whose," you know, "Coming to be our boss?" Bit of uncertainty and trust on it. You interview everyone in your platoon and we were told that you develop what's called the platoon commanders and

04:00 you get to know everything you can about your soldiers, their personal life, married, if they are married, kids, what their hobbies are, any problems in life and you've got all this detail, date of birth, whatever it might be and who your next of kin is and then you have to name that. We were, we hit the ground running I suppose when we arrived there and at that stage we were only allowed to say that "If we go to Vietnam", not, "When we go to Vietnam," because the government hadn't

04:30 made an official announcement at that stage. We did a lot of mine warfare training. We used to go on a route march or in fact a run, used to be power lines in the Holsworthy area to the school of military engineering where we did mine warfare training and then on the way back we would do a route march with our heavy packs probably ten, twelve miles back to base, so the daily routine was starting at about five

05:00 am and finishing at about seven or eight pm at night. There were inevitable training exercises. Every battalion used to go up to the jungle training centre, as it was then known, at Canungra.

So this is now you're entering, you're talking about pre Vietnam training?

Yeah.

So when did you find out that you were going to go, like when was that on the cards?

There were rumours just before we graduated from

05:30 Duntroon. In fact I've still got the menu from our graduation dinner with comments on it that talk about, you know, "Go and kill Cong," you know, "Good luck, have fun, look after yourself in Vietnam," so it was essentially known then but it was not officially announced but we knew that 5RAR was the next battalion in line to go to Vietnam if that commitment continued. The official, when we were allowed to say, "When we go," was some time I think it was in

06:00 February '66. I had come back to Canberra to see the love of my life, who's now my wife and we went to the drive-in and there was a starlight drive-in just nearby and we were sitting there watching the movie but didn't have the little talk box on there. I had the radio and the Prime Minister made the announcement that the government had decided to send

06:30 the 5th battalion and an Australian taskforce to Vietnam, so that was when it was officially announced.

That must have been quite surreal for you listening to that at the drive-in?

Yeah, you know, saying, "Right, we're off to war," which was essentially weeks away, so the training tempo picked up and all the usual things of inoculations and we actually had pre embarkation leave.

07:00 I went back to Adelaide with a friend of mine and, you know, that was the, came back and I think after that we did one more exercise. We did some, I remember there was one exercise we did in sort of more practice in using helicopters and the like which obviously was the daily routine over there.

And what sort of briefing did you receive during that preparatory

07:30 **stage about what you might be facing?**

Yeah, we had intelligence people, operation staff, come and brief the battalion on what was going on there. We were certainly, did some training on Vietnamese customs, what Vietnam was like as a country and I think back then there wasn't really a lot known because the only people we had in Vietnam at that time was the training team which was about forty people at that stage and they were spread all over the

country in small groups and

08:00 1RAR, the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was at Bien Hoa under the operational command of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, so actually working with the Americans and in an area that we were not going to be in. We were going down to Phuc Tuy Province, so there was not a lot of detailed information on Phuoc Tuy Province at the time but certainly I think we got the best briefings we could on what we could expect at the time.

Well as you say it was a fairly rapid step up

08:30 **but did you feel prepared or ready?**

Yes. The training we'd had, I reckon I had moulded my Eight Platoon into a pretty good organisation and I felt comfortable. I had a couple of new section commanders that came in. These are, you know, the corporals and the three of them and I couldn't split them and say which was any better than the other. I would be

09:00 very happy as it turned out if we got into a nasty situation, I'd be comfortable with either one of them being up the front. They were all very, very good people and I was lucky enough to have them for the whole time over there. I suppose there's always that uncertainty that you would have about, you get over there and, "Alright, you're going to get in certain situations," and in my case, for myself, I think I would

09:30 be wondering how I would react if I was responsible for, you know, someone being killed on the other side, how you would react if you were in command and you lost your own soldiers being killed and how you would react if you got in a situation where you think, "Well you might not get out of this," and you probably, I think it's true to say that those three situations occurred over the coming next month, coming few months.

10:00 I would also, and I, the other two platoon commanders in my company were national service officers and I was looked upon, I was the senior officer of the three platoon commanders because I wore an extra pip. I was a first lieutenant and they were second lieutenants. I was looked upon as being the senior platoon commander in the company and I did have the extra training, not necessarily experience, but I had the training and I

10:30 could probably use that. The other two platoon commanders would come to me occasionally and ask for my advice on things like, "Can you just refresh me on how to coin an artillery," or, that actually happened with one of them, which, you know, you're glad to help. I think we did alright and I think the proof of that is the fact that the close relationship that I've got with these guys now.

And in your

11:00 **platoon, what was the mix of men?**

It was pretty well fifty/fifty, national servicemen and regular soldiers and the interesting thing about that is when we first set up the platoon and the three sections we had, you'd balance it fifty/fifty so they could learn the more experienced the soldiers. In fact they weren't necessarily more experienced because they might have just joined the regular army anyway and hadn't been there any longer than some of

11:30 the national servicemen but we did split them up. After a few months the only way I could differentiate between the regular soldier and the national serviceman was through their regimental number. I did know the national servicemen but it made absolutely no difference and those national service people were tremendous. In a lot of ways they were probably better than a lot of the regular soldiers. Generally they were probably

12:00 more highly educated, not that that's a, you know, sort of the be all and end all for being a good soldier but they were excellent and towards the end of our tour over there I was just looking at the balance of my platoon. We were losing people and I looked at it and one of my sections was entirely national servicemen except for one regular soldier. It just happened that way. I promoted two of them to lance corporal, as second in command of sections, very, very good.

12:30 **So you said you, before leaving Australia, you got some pre embarkation leave?**

Yeah.

And what did you have to do to put all your affairs in order?

I gave me father power of attorney. I didn't have a lot of possessions cause you leave Duntroon with couple of hundred bucks. I sold my car, my police car. I didn't have a lot

13:00 of possessions at the time. What I did have I left at home in Adelaide. You obviously had to make a will, all those sort of things. That was basically it. When we came back from pre embarkation leave the worldly possessions I had was a tin trunk with the stuff that was taken to Vietnam and what I could carry on my back and that's how we went, so it was all pretty simple.

And how did you travel over?

13:30 I went by air and the reason for that was I mentioned that the 1RAR was at Binh Ba and we were going to a brand new area, down near Cap Saint Jacques, Vung Tau, which became the major logistic base. I was the very first infantry platoon of the taskforce to arrive in Vietnam. The rest of my company went on HMAS Sydney

14:00 and the company commander, actually I remember it cause I thought, you know, "Well, people pay to make decisions," but we actually drew straws. I drew the short straw to go by air and the rest went on a ten, twelve day trip on HMAS Sydney, so I flew over with the commanding officer and we landed at Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon as it was then and he was going up to visit the advance party. We had

14:30 sent some officers and NCOs over to spend some time with 1RAR as an advance party and learn off their experiences, so at Tan Son Nhut, Lieutenant Colonel John Warr, who was the commanding officer, he said to me, "Roger, you get down to Vung Tau. You're in command. Put our your clearing patrols. Make sure everything is secure," and off he went and I said, "Yes sir." We got in a C123 United

15:00 States aircraft transport plane, flew us down to the Vung Tau airstrip and we got off there. We were loaded onto what was essentially a cattle truck. I didn't know what to do, so I told two of my machine gunners to load with ammunition on it as we drove through these sand hills, not knowing what to expect. We did know that we had part of our advance party down on what was called Back Beach and anyway

15:30 I had these people loaded and ready to go in case we were ambushed and didn't have any detailed briefing. When we turned around the corner eventually and got to Back Beach there was a friend of mine, Ralph Thompson, who was the assistant quarter master lieutenant and he said, "G'day guys, cold drinks over there. There's your tent lines." It was just wire we put our hoochies on and I thought, "Right, I'm in command here." No clearing patrols were retired or anything like that but it was, you know, it was just unknown

16:00 what to expect and from then on over the, almost every day more plane loads of the battalion would arrive but mine was essentially the first platoon to arrive, yeah.

So what did you think?

Strange. There was not much you could do initially

16:30 in training until they'd built up, so what we did, we actually built wire picket fences for the rest of the battalion when they come in. It became a little miniature tent city. There wasn't much we could do in the way of training. All we did, when the whole battalion arrived, we actually did a helicopter practise insertion with the Americans providing the helicopters.

And how long after you arrived did the rest of them arrive?

Over about two weeks, two and a half weeks

17:00 it was. My company commander decided to take us on a trip around what was called Cap Saint Jacque and actually in this area nearby there were Viet Cong supposedly in the hills around the area and I was pretty nervous when he drove us right around this area, with the three platoon commanders, the company sergeant major and himself and our driver and I wasn't too happy about that I can tell you and I think he got a bit of a reprimand over it

17:30 because I mean something could have happened, we didn't know.

Well as you say you were first to arrive and Operation Hardihood was to clear and establish the base at Nui Dat, so can you take us through what that involved?

Yeah. The orders were given down at the battalion location at Back Beach.

18:00 I never had the opportunity to do any air reconnaissance but I know some did and they didn't want to have a lot of aircraft flying over because obviously you give the game away. We were the second battalion into the area. I remember that I was the lead platoon in my company. We landed at, the LZ [Landing Zone] was called LZ Hudson and it was just across the road which the route to which was north, south

18:30 main arterial road in the province and it was just on the western side of that. That was LZ Hudson. It was actually protected by American troops from the 173rd Airborne Brigade and when we set up there, it was secured by the first company. Our company was the next one in and we were moving, I was told where we were going which was essentially in an easterly direction across the road and we went outside the perimeter and this American was there and he said, "Nothing out there,

19:00 don't need to worry." Two hundred yards later I had the first contact of the taskforce, so, you know, being on operations for, you know, about two hours, had the first run in with the other side and it was right on top of the, a small little knoll that eventually became the headquarters of the 5th Battalion for the rest of the tour and subsequent battalions that came in, in a small little graveyard that was there.

And do you remember what happened in that first contact?

19:30 We didn't get anything but we went through our deployment drills and in the next few days we had several contacts, in very small groups, just one or two people, Viet Cong being there firing rifles. We'd deploy and, but we never got anyone in those first few days. The main problem we had on the first day was when we lost the very first national serviceman, Private Noack. That was about five

20:00 hundred metres from where we were. He was in B Company and that sort of had an impact. He was the first one in the taskforce if you like and the very first national serviceman killed on that first day. The other thing on the first day, we were slow. We weren't practised. We got a lot quicker at it and we sort of manipulated our tactical skills to save time, so you could, you know, right because what they were doing, they were firing

20:30 and then moving back another two hundred metres and firing. We didn't have any casualties either but we sort of set up on that harbour position on that first night and then was some American artillery nearby and they would always fire at night-time while it was and H & I fire, harassing and interdiction fire and it landed about fifty metres outside our platoon position. It was a mistake but, with artillery shells going off and we were just

21:00 dug in about that deep, about twelve inches. It was a mistake but I do recall thinking that this might become fairly routine and "you're going to have to get used to it," but, you know, mistakes like that but that was day one. Each company over the ensuing days were given areas of responsibility and we gradually pushed out to secure the whole of the Nui Dat area which became the

21:30 base all during Hardihood and I would guess there was about three weeks after that, that the taskforce had headquarters moved from Vung Tau up to the Nui Dat position and 6RAR came and joined us.

So can you tell us, just as you've just mentioned the modus operandi was to be allocated at an area, you know, some terrain?

Yes.

So and they are sort of cordon and search?

22:00 Not cordon and search. It was really patrolling in areas of responsibility allocated to each of the companies where, and you had, you allocate areas of responsibility with just, as defined, you know, boundaries as you could, so you didn't run into each other and you didn't have friendly fire and we would just patrol in that area and we were given objectives to just to gradually pull out. There wasn't any

22:30 cordoning done in those days. It was just sort of patrolling in strength to push any enemy away from what was going to be developed as a taskforce position.

And how big were the, how many men in those patrols?

They were based on company size, so you're talking about a hundred and twenty people in that, probably a bit more because we took reinforcements with us first up as well. My platoon, the normal strength of an infantry platoon is one officer and thirty three.

23:00 I actually went in there with about forty people. We actually had some extra people with us initially as well, so they were part of us but the company commander would control it. We weren't, it would be changed on a daily basis if we had information coming through the intelligence process that something had been spotted in this area or that area, we would then sort of, you know, renegotiate, so it was a flexible plan to do it. I think virtually

23:30 every company did have contact with, not in great numbers but small contacts with Viet Cong during that period of time. I lost the first of my soldiers during that period as well.

And what happened there?

He was killed in an ambush position and it was accidental, yeah. We were in an ambush position at night and

24:00 one of the soldiers got up and moved and one of the members of my platoon opened fire and hit him and he was a regular soldier and it was about one am and that was the very first time that the Americans had done a night evacuation for the Australians over there, so it was sort of good and bad news but he died when he got back to the hospital at Vung Tau.

So he was evacuated?

24:30 Yeah I had to, cause Americans had never supported in this way before at night, so there was a paddy field nearby and I had some of my soldiers there lighting hexamine fires with a little cooking hexamine you had on the four corners of the paddy field to guide them in. It was all, but he was alive when he left us but we found out a few hours later that he'd died

25:00 just as the helicopter landed down at Vung Tau.

And did you counsel the soldier that had fired?

Yes. I mean everyone knew what had happened. He, for years later, felt very guilty. He now comes to

our reunions. It's all there. I mean people said it wasn't his fault. You could probably say it's my fault,

25:30 you know, I was in, I was the commander at the time and I think at one stage we probably got into some bad habits, not saying just me, but it was pretty intensive work and you're patrolling all day. People do get tired. Ambushing at night or harbouring at night is two different parts of an operation. An ambush is where you line a position and no-one moves, whereas a harbour is more of a rest up area where you have sentries and people can

26:00 get up and relieve sentries, where in an ambush you're expected to stay awake all night. Having patrolling and being, you know, having contacts during the day and we did on that day, they tend to get a bit blurred but that's actually what happened.

And where were you, were you sort of nearby or when it happened or?

I was about five metres away, yeah. The person

26:30 who fired was right next to me, so it was, you know, it was five metres, about that.

Did you know that he was going to fire or?

No not at the time, but anyway we, the helicopter went and I mean that's how time passes because it happened about midnight, one a.m. and by the time the helicopter came in and

27:00 I said we, cause all the noise of helicopters and thinking there might be other people around, I said to my platoon sergeant, I said, "OK, we'll move the platoon about five hundred metres away and wait until daylight," and he said, "Boss, it is daylight," you know, the sun was just coming up but pretty quick learning curve and this is all, because that happened in early June and I think it was the 8th of June

27:30 and Operation Hardihood started in about the 24th of May, so we'd lost two in the battalion at that stage. The first national serviceman and the first regular soldier.

So when it happened, I'll just stay with the incident because it is significant and it happened early on. Did you then, what did you do, how did you respond?

You have to

28:00 obviously write reports on what happened to it. We went back into, we went back to the base straight after that, so we got in there probably about nine o'clock in the morning. People knew what had happened. I was debriefed by my company commander. I spoke to the intelligence officer in the battalion to get the details because you have to provide reports, all the things that happened with casualty evacuation and, you know, notifying next of kin. That was already done, under way.

28:30 That's done immediately. We obviously had to pack up all the personal effects of that soldier. We, well we had his kit with them. There wasn't much there because we didn't have any established tent lines at Nui Dat because there was nothing developed at that stage. I wrote a letter to the next of kin, to the mother, describing in general terms what happened to him

29:00 and in that letter I said, "That I would like to call on her when we returned from Vietnam and pay my respects." I tried to do that about two months after we got home but I couldn't locate her. In fact I was trying recently to follow the family up because I subsequently discovered, even though I spent, later on I spent a lot of time in Holsworthy in other battalions later on in life and I just discovered about two weeks ago that he was actually

29:30 buried at the Warra [Wagga Wagga] Nora cemetery which is just down the road. I'd been there all that time and only discovered that a few years ago because obviously you carried on with operations. You don't really know after they leave you what happens to casualties unless you do make the effort to follow up.

So I'm just going to ask this question because I feel it's relevant. I mean when your soldier fired, do you think it was inexperience or was it just because everybody

30:00 **was a bit toey?**

A bit of both because it was very early. He shouldn't have got up and moved and I don't know why he did, unless it was to waken someone who'd fallen asleep because we were in an ambush position, so he essentially moved across the front in the direction of what is called the killing ground. Now this other person was on, you know, obviously there and awake and

30:30 it would be inexperience. He was, this person who fired that was not actually a full time member of my platoon. He was one of the supporting organisations that we had with us, so he wasn't a member of our platoon officially at the time.

And how did it affect morale?

Everyone was obviously very quiet about it and

31:00 or down, which is natural. Losing one of your friends like that and back in those days there was nothing

in any form of trauma counselling that happens automatically these days if there is a trauma, that's the first thing that happens. Nothing ever happened in those days, back at that time at all. You just went on and I mean we were still out on patrol and operations, so life went on but we spoke about it.

31:30 I mean it's still spoken about, not in a lot of detail, at our reunions. Down the track people talk about it, you know. The odd people have got photographs of him and this sort of thing. I see it, you know, I see his face and you see it occasionally in RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs where they have photographs of people who were killed and, you know, you look at it, so yeah, but, you know, we just had to get on with it.

32:00 **Well how difficult is it to maintain ambush position all night when…?**

It is difficult. As I say, in an ambush you don't move. You're there. You know that someone's going to say, "Move across a track." You define a killing ground. You have all your weapons pointing so they can concentrate fire in this area. You have to have people looking at early warning. You have to have great discipline on,

32:30 this comes to the commander, at what stage you have, you spring the ambush if someone comes into it. You don't eat. You don't smoke. You don't do all that sort of thing in an ambush but having, with that sort of discipline, there is a realistic time that you can spend in an ambush before people say, "Well," you know. I mean it used to be in our training that you don't even scratch yourself, that type of thing but, you know, the longer and if you're in there, and I think in the taskforce operations very early

33:00 on, in my view, ambushing was very important but you cannot ambush two or three or four nights in a row, you know. Your people do get tired and if you're patrolling all day in a hot, you know, or wet, damp climate and patrolling all day and then go and ambush at night, there's just, physically you can't do it and there has to be a balance and I think lessons were learnt on that but that's why we were there. People got better. If you are very tired you then go and hide in the jungle and you

33:30 establish a harbour and you let people sleep and you have sentries, so not everyone's awake and alert. You cannot combine an ambush with a harbour and that was one of the biggest lessons that I learnt and certainly applied, you know, down the track in training and it came through that one incident.

Well I'd like to spend a bit of time now just talking about the kind of gear that you had

34:00 **cause, as you say, it's still early days and you're sort of establishing yourself, so what sort of weaponry did you have?**

The main weapon carried by an infantry platoon was the self loading rifle, the FN, the Belgian weapon. Section commanders and platoon commanders had the old Second World War Owen gun. That was up until October '66

34:30 we had that. We also had M79 grenade launchers. It was a forty millimetre high explosive grenade and we carried, everyone carried two hand grenades, M26 hand grenades and we had so many claymore mines per section to be carried as well as smoke rounds, spare batteries for radios, just one radio in the platoon, market panels to,

35:00 for aircraft plus five or six days rations plus about four or five water bottles and of course the spare ammunition for your weapon, so a pretty hefty load that you carried.

Do you know how much your pack weighed?

Fifty pounds, something like that, yeah. We would, you'd try and manage your load before, later on when you,

35:30 cause you get resupplied usually be helicopter and the ration packs that came had a lot of extra stuff you didn't need, so to manage your load, what people commonly did was to throw out all the things they didn't like and get rid of it and you just sort of pack in what you need for it and people established their own personal ways in carrying their gear and, you know, became quite experienced at it but, you know, the priority being obviously to all the weapons and ammunition you had to carry.

36:00 I mentioned the Owen gun that we carried and I'm pretty sure that 5RAR was the last infantry battalion to carry that famous weapon on operational service. 6RAR had joined us and they were actually given the M16, the Armalites that 1RAR had had at Binh Ba, so even though they might have arrived with Owen guns, they got the

36:30 latest weapon before we did because there was actually, it was actually in October '66 when we, and it's just before we went out on Operation Canberra. We were told we were getting the M16. They came in and you looked at it and I can recall quite vividly, there was no weapon training. We looked at it and you pulled this thing out and said, "That's the

37:00 cocking lever." There was a little gadget on the side that's got A for automatic and R for repetition, so that's the, you know, the change lever. You press this button and the magazine comes off. Click it back on, there's a hole in the butt for your cleaning kit. We put on a magazine and we fired it into a test pit and went out on operations for it, so there was no formal training, not done by the book but it was a far more effective weapon in hitting power if you like than the

37:30 Owen gun which its use by date was well and truly up. The problem with the M16 was that unless you kept it immaculately clean, it would stop on you at the wrong time, so you had to make sure that it was properly maintained.

So did you have a preference? I mean you said that the Owen gun was, you know, on its last legs so to speak but did you, what did you prefer?

The M16 yeah. You could carry more ammunition

38:00 for weight as a five point five six millimetre round. You could carry more ammunition. It had a higher rate of fire, automatic. Its downside was that you had to make sure it was kept clean. We had an instant earlier with the Owen gun where I was going out to Reconnoitre, another ambush position, and we actually had a contact with a couple of Viet Cong as we just moved out and I

38:30 had an escort party with me and the forward scout hit a Viet Cong from probably about ten metres range and he wore about four or five bullets in there and he just kept running and the section commander with me was carrying an SLR [Self-Loading Rifle] and he just dropped him after that, so they were not, you know, a very famous weapon but

39:00 they just didn't have the hitting power.

So just going back then to Operation Hardihood, at the end of that sort of clearing time or establishing time, where had you set up base?

39:30 We set up base in the northern area of what became the taskforce area which was just on the eastern side of route two, just adjacent to a small little village that had been demolished which was called Ap Tan Phu and to our immediate north there was a little river. It's called the Song-kau that went across there. Our company position was the most northern in the taskforce area

40:00 and my platoon was the most northern of that company position and in fact if you look on the War Memorial site where they displayed the old taskforce base, there's a little pimple right at the northern end. That's my platoon position and each company was allocated their particular areas, the main defences bar the three rifle companies. In our case there was A company which was to the western side, route two, C company

40:30 which was the north and then B company to our, slightly to our north, north east and D Company was actually up on Nui Dat hill. They became the very first occupants of Nui Dat hill even though later on it became famously known as Sas Hill or SAS [Special Air Service] Hill but the SAS replaced our D Company up there. We coordinated all the defences. In hindsight I don't

41:00 think the, what is called the mutual support and defence of our area is what it could have been. It was probably a bit rushed. The fact also that you just don't stay there. Even though you're gradually developing the base, you're still going out on patrols and platoons are going out on patrols, out to what was called line alpha which is about four thousand metres circular out from the defensive position which is mortar range for the other side.

Tape 4

00:32 **So I'd just like to stay with Operation Hardihood for a bit longer because in those initial early days things were a little bit disorganised, if I might use that word. What was the command like?**

The command? Down through the commanding officer, I, yeah, excellent I think. I think obviously it takes time for a battalion, to use sort of a common

01:00 phrase, called to shake out and get to understand procedures and those sort of things. We even, I know there was some changes made to our standard operating procedures based on the experience of 1RAR. As a junior officer commanding a platoon you don't really get to see a lot of what happens at the battalion headquarters. You see it come down through the command structure, through your company commanders and he, you know, prepare orders in relation to our company. I would, but

01:30 even, you know, going back in time and, you know, with the hindsight of experience that I had in other areas later on, I think it was pretty good what we had, given the fact that we were the first there, you know. Subsequent battalions had all the benefits and the experience passed on. The intelligence picture had picked up. We were essentially isolated. The high command structure was under operational control of the Americans

02:00 for the second corps area that we were in, sorry third corps area and but I think from my level it was fine.

So there weren't any problems from your point of view?

No, just the one that I mentioned and again this is hindsight, that I would think that the coordination of

our actual defensive position at

02:30 Nui Dat could have been better, particularly in the mutual support between companies and, as I mentioned, part of that, we actually didn't even dig in our full position with overhead protection in the whole twelve, thirteen months we were there because of the period of, you know, the tempo of operations and patrolling and also the fact that our company spent the best part of two months living up at Binh Ba

03:00 about ten kilometres to the north as well, so the position was never fully developed to a properly coordinated defensive position.

And you mentioned that, just before we broke the tape, you mentioned where you set up your own platoon on the pimple area, well what was the terrain like there, was

03:30 **it, can you describe it?**

It was gently sloping forward down to the Song-kau River which was about three hundred metres north of us. It was rubber tree, tall rubber trees, mature rubber trees, you know. They were all in rows, very red mud that would get into everything when it rained but we cleared all fire lanes through, the

04:00 rubber trees hadn't been, when we first got there were, it was called dirty rubber which means a lot of undergrowth between them. They weren't clean, so, you know, to develop fire lanes we did that but essentially it was rubber plantation, gently sloping. Digging wasn't a problem to dig down but everyone will remember the red mud because it sticks to everything. Going a bit further throughout that there was quite a few small banana plantations.

04:30 You go to the west of route two out towards the Nui Dinh and Nui Thi Vai mountains and you get quite a bit of open space there but again it's very, very, it can range from paddy fields through to primary jungle to thick undergrowth, kunai grass areas and the inevitable rubber plantations as well.

So when you moved to the pimple area

05:00 **did you have, set up proper tents and things now?**

Eventually yes. They gradually came in over several months. We actually, we got them fairly late because I mentioned we actually were up at Binh Ba for a while, our company was up there.

When did that happen?

We did a cordon and search of Binh Ba. This is, we were up there at the time of, or the company was actually at Long

05:30 Tan, at Binh Ba at the time of Long Tan, so we were there probably for six weeks prior to that, so you're talking probably about September, September through, sorry going back.

Long Tan was August?

Yeah, sorry July, yeah.

Yeah?

Probably from July. We did a cordon and search of Binh Ba village and our company stayed up there.

OK so that's quite early on?

Yeah, but we didn't have tents. When we came back we were still living in our hoochies

06:00 at Nui Dat and it was fairly late into, it was even after Long Tan before we got tents for the whole of our company, you know, the proper tents that you see photographs of and I remember that people would get cheap lights that you could get to, you know, fluorescent lights and they were generally operated by spare batteries from the radios. The batteries that were no longer effective enough to operate the radio were used by just putting a few wires into them.

06:30 We used those. We didn't actually get electric light from generators and proper, you know, power until about late January '67, so it was all fairly basic and all the later battalions had the benefits of what we set up.

So you were living it fairly rough?

We were fairly primitive, yeah.

Well perhaps now then we can talk about moving up to Binh Wah

07:00 **and what was going on up there?**

Binh Ba?

Binh Ba, sorry?

Binh Ba was an area that operated a lot of the rubber trees, rubber plantations around the place and there was an old Frenchman. There was a local platoon of Viet Cong who used to operate out of that area and obviously not being privy to the, at the time, of the details of what was in there but

07:30 there was a cadre, like there were in all the villages, the Viet Cong trying to get in control of the villages and our battalion commander developed a, essentially what became the taskforce concept of how to conduct cordon and search operations and we did a lot of them. Binh Ba was not the first one but it's probably one of the biggest of the early ones we did.

Can you take us through a typical cordon and search?

Yeah.

08:00 Obviously based on the intelligence side there will be information of how many people from the other side are there and they would, Viet Cong would have the habit of coming into the village at night time to pick up supplies, some rice, see the families, that sort of thing, a bit of R&R [Rest and Recreation] for them and then they would go back out into their unit areas around the province.

08:30 Obviously from sympathise and people were captured we would get information of which villages had it and there was one just to the south of taskforce base that was, must have been cordoned and searched so many times I think we probably did it about four times. That was the village of Wah Long. The main thing about cordon and search operations is secrecy and security and getting in there without them knowing, so inevitably you would probably take a fairly long approach march by night to get in there and

09:00 establish a tight cordon around the village which would hopefully entrap the people that you were after on the inside of that cordon. Moving quietly and silently at night and navigating at night is not easy but we became very adept at that. I mean you can have ropes hanging onto people and obviously a lot of time you try and do it when there's no moon

09:30 because even with the moonlight you can have pretty good visibility, particularly if you're going across open ground like paddy fields. The usual routine was to establish the cordon around the village before first light and then when first light arrives or just before first light there would be loud hailers, probably from aircraft or whatever, advising the villagers of what's going on, that they're not going anywhere, to gather in the village square and then a company would be nominated to

10:00 advance through the village, still the security in place around it. Occasionally people would break out and run into the cordon and you'd have, so you could have some contacts there and you would find people resisting occasionally in some of the villages or hiding down in tunnel systems. Each one was different in a way. By the time you put the cordon in, whether you want to do it, you know, late at night but our concept was generally do it

10:30 before first light in the morning. While, after the village had been secured and you've got people there in the villages, our medical people would come up and, you know, provide some medical aid to them, food, that sort of thing, a bit of hearts and mind type organisations to hopefully get the local population onside and you would have the people who are responsible for interrogating any of the suspects that we might have obtained during the operation. They were generally short,

11:00 forty eight, seventy two hour type operations in there, out and do it but the main thing about it was that our battalion, when you look at people captured through cordon and search operations as against being killed in search and destroy type operations, it's overwhelmingly in support of capturing people that way and the benefit to us is that you're minimising your own casualties as well, so it's a very, very effective way of

11:30 conducting operations.

And like how, again, the question is how many men in each kind of?

Most of these were, the larger ones like Wah Long, just because of the sheer size of the village, you know, you might be talking about, could be a couple of grid squares, so you needed to have, most of them were done by the full battalion because you needed to have a

12:00 cordon right around it on four sides initially and then on three sides while one company will sweep through, so you needed a full battalion and sometimes more than a battalion to do them and in some of the larger ones we would also have the support of the company from 6RAR as well and likewise when they did one, we would provide a company in support. If it's a long, long away from the Nui Dat base, outside gun range, well they would probably go and

12:30 protect the fire support base till it was established for that operation but it was manpower intensive but they were short and they were generally successful in having the mission achieved and capturing people on the other side with minimal casualties to us.

And did your platoon take any prisoners?

Yes, on those, yes. We had varying roles, capturing people and suspects and handing them over. We never got into any

13:00 serious fire fights in the cordon and search operations we did but there was an occasion where people broke out and ran into us in the cordon and they were dealt with, yeah, so that was I think, that was one of the very early ones we did. There are stories about people moving cordons at night. Anyway there was a fellow in, I think was in D Company

13:30 who, going along the edge of a village into a cordon position, fell down a well and had to be pulled out by rope, so you get the light sides of it as well.

So what was, well I'm thinking particularly in relation to cordon and search, but what were your rules of engagement?

Rules of engagement there were, well actually, [UNCLEAR "I'd never say appease"]. They were fairly loosely

14:00 written but they were modified. For each one essentially you had to identify the person on the other side, positive identification but there again if they have got weapons and it's obvious that, you know, that they're, then I'll ask, well you can engage them. The difficulty in cordon and search operations is that if you open fire blandly you've got other people in other areas of the cordon, so you had to do that. A cordon was always set up,

14:30 even though you can imagine it as being a long extended line, it's not that way because people can come in from behind you as well, so you had to go through the usual principles of defence in a cordon of, you know, things like mutual support, providing the depth and the position all round defence. You just didn't face inwards. You had to make sure that you applied the normal principles.

And what were the problems in achieving a positive identification?

There weren't

15:00 usually any problems. People did that through experience because we're actually wearing, our uniform was jungle green and with the sweat and the wet in the monsoon period, those jungle greens looked very black as well and not all Viet Cong would wear black uniforms but a lot did, so you had to be careful with them and you had to make a positive identification of them.

15:30 It was particularly difficult at night but then again at night time there's a curfew in place and if you know where your own people are and people are outside or in the areas they shouldn't be, you can be reasonably positive that it's people who shouldn't be there. Your civilian, you know, civilians for example, if they moved at night, because they were well aware of the curfew during the hours of darkness,

16:00 there were occasions when civilians got caught up in the wrong place at the wrong time but essentially they shouldn't have been there.

Well I was also wondering like when you're doing these cordon and search into villages, you know, how did the civilians or how could you tell the difference between the civilians and?

You can't and once you go into a village and the villagers are there and, you know, you go into, and they've got their little huts, small houses, in these particular villages

16:30 and they're still there when you are essentially assaulting or going through, you have to apply the normal principles that you would do like with all your security and your machine guns and everything in place, so if you do have one little problem, you've got everything there ready to use but you can't tell, if there are males there, whether they are a genuine parent of a family or whether he's a VC [Viet Cong] sympathiser or a member of the VC himself. You can't always, and they're not going to tell you,

17:00 so that is why they're all sent to a central location for questioning and can be either identified or, you know, give something away that can be used but that was the nature of that war. I mean it's no fronts and flanks.

So how did you determine who to take prisoner?

Well we took essentially everyone in those villages and sent them, they went into the village square type situation and

17:30 they were interrogated. The males were particularly, the males of a particular age group as well because they were either in the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], the Vietnamese Army, or they were on the other side generally, unless they are very old people but it was very difficult to tell the difference but then that's what, you know, the interrogation teams would have the responsibility to determine.

Well I was just going to ask you who did the interrogating?

Yeah they had experts to come in there. We never

18:00 did any, at the platoon level, we never did any interrogation. We would pass them back straight away and it would be done initially under the control of the, usually under the battalion intelligence officer and there would be military police there to help as well. That's more a control aspect but there were people who were trained interrogators to talk to them and with interpreters as well. We didn't have

interpreters and probably couldn't even converse with them unless you, later on we

18:30 actually sent some soldiers away to learn Vietnamese as well.

And did you have any interpreters with you?

I had, yes I had, yes on some operations we would. We would have, we would generally have them for the cordon and search, for the companies going through. We would have an interpreter with us. It might be someone from the local force, the local South Vietnamese Army Force, their police, Con Carne as they were called,

19:00 or the White Mice, as they wore white hats. They would generally come with us for those operations, yeah.

And when you were doing this cordon and search in villages, I mean just wondering about I guess the local people's fear or what sort of response?

Yeah, that, very nervous, obviously didn't want us being there in most,

19:30 not in every case because I think that some of them wanted to be on our side and didn't want to be pestered by people coming there and taking their stores and killing village chiefs and that sort of thing to maintain control, so you got it both ways. There were some villagers were recognised as being totally Viet Cong sympathisers. There were a couple up in the north and certain villages, the original Long Tan village, before that was demolished and some of the others down to the south east of the

20:00 taskforce base were known that way but they were moved but there are other villages, you know. I think Binh Ba's an example where were usually friendly towards us, so it way each way but very difficult to determine who was who.

Well just going back to Binh Ba, you said you spent quite a few weeks up there?

Yeah, after the cordon, the first cordon and search there

20:30 of Binh Ba, Charlie Company stayed there astride the old airstrip that was there just out to the, not actually inside the village but just adjacent to the village and we patrolled mainly out to the north and to the west of Binh Ba village to provide security to it. The thing about cordon and search operations - that's why it's very difficult - you'll get in there and get an immediate result, but unless you stay there and provide a continuing presence

21:00 people from the other side are going to come back in there and that's why a village like Hoa Long was done so many times and later on, I mean we spent a lot of time at Binh Ba and that was, I think we did that probably twice when we were there, but then when 5RAR returned on its next trip to Vietnam about eighteen months later, two years later, they had the major battle of Binh Ba, same place, where we'd lived for several times, so unless you provided that continuing presence it was, you could never say that once been in there, you've done

21:30 a cordon and search. You captured these people, all these sympathisers, whatever. Two weeks later it can be back to where it was.

Well at this early stage, I mean we're still July, August of '66, what did you know of VC [Viet Cong] capabilities?

Just that they were operating in small groups. We never felt they had the potential to get into formed organisations of

22:00 say company level at that stage. They were mainly smaller groups at that time and, as I said, being the guinea pigs on the ground we gradually built up that expertise, you know, by patrolling. I mean I remember the day our battalion intelligence officer had a, it was essentially a notebook and it had a grid square, every page had a grid square and if you were patrolling into a particular area you could go up there and get the information of what previous patrol commands had been there. That grid reference

22:30 five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, there is a small bunker position or whatever it might be, so you can get that information and the information was gradually built up over time and passed off but certainly very scant when we first arrived there.

But you did have little maps too?

Yes, we had a whole range of, you know, various scale maps to use on

23:00 patrol and also had picture maps which are a combination of a map and an aerial photograph which were not a hundred percent accurate in the gridlines they had on them, so you couldn't use them to call in artillery fire but they were very, very helpful in using in conjunction with, you know, a proper map and also before we went out on patrol, we would have maps marked for us, or tracers provided where you could do it and in our company

23:30 we had a national serviceman who became our company intelligence NCO. He was a lance corporal, still in touch with him, who in civilian life was a graphic designer and he did these brilliant maps and tracers. I mean I've still got some, you know, a work of art. He did a lot of other painting and graphic

things around to make Nui Dat a little bit more like home, street signs and things like that, but the quality of what he produced for us to go out on operations

24:00 was excellent.

Was it easy to get lost?

Yeah, navigation is a trade that requires practice and the most experienced navigator can get lost or, as people say, temporarily misplaced. People say, “No not lost, I was just…” yeah.

A bit more kinder way of putting it.

But navigation,

24:30 particularly in close country, is a skill and everyone had their own procedures in place. I would make sure that, you know, if you’re moving through very thick country in a platoon situation, the point platoon, the forward platoon, you don’t want to give him the responsibility for navigating cause he’s got his mind on other things in case he runs into someone but he’s responsible for navigation in a set direction but to follow it on the map, I would do that all the time. That’s my responsibility being the platoon commander but I’d also have my platoon

25:00 sergeant check and that’s his job as well and maybe one of the reserve section commanders if you could do it. Also you’d nominate people to be pacers, so you could actually pace. You’re going on a particular bearing and you pace in a, you know, a hundred and sixty paces might equal a hundred metres or depending on whether you’re going uphill, downhill, whatever it might be and then every opportunity you take when you can see features, you use that to confirm your position and you

25:30 had to do that in case you needed to call on artillery fire cause that could happen at any time, unless you know where you are, so yeah. I used to take pride in my map reading.

Did you have a compass?

Yeah, a prismatic compass. No that’s an absolute necessity. I mean that’s what you need if you’re going on a bearing of, you know, due south three thousand two hundred mills. Your compass, you can set your

26:00 compass into it by day and by night you can do it because they’re illuminated as well but you cannot get by without a compass, a compass and a map. The compass is probably more vital than a map, if you had to make a choice.

And what about I guess developing either tricks of reading the terrain, like using, did you use the stars at all or?

The stars? No, where you could. I mean if there was,

26:30 you know, a particular star you’d recognise, I mean you can do that. The sun, I mean, you know, for basic east and west type navigation but no, the compass, the protractor and the map was the main one but I mean I don’t think, I never got to the situation where I was totally lost but there were other mechanisms to help you. You could actually call in artillery fire and because you can hear the sound, you know,

27:00 sound ranging, you can actually take a bearing on the shot and they would give you a good reference of where that round fell and then you can do a resection and identify your own position or the other way is you could get a helicopter into the air and you throw smoke and he says, “You’re at grid reference one, two, three, four, five, six,” so a number of ways in which it can be done and that leads on, within a very close country you can never be absolutely accurate, where when it’s generally

27:30 flat terrain and you don’t have visibility more than, you know, of a short distance so that is why that if you did need to call in artillery that you’d start well out and drop the artillery back in, gradually in towards you, so there are many procedures you can use to identify your position but then you don’t want to comprise security with artillery or having helicopters above you, so.

And what were your radios like?

The

28:00 ANPRC77 set, good radio, well pretty much, it was a pretty new radio when we went over there, so an American radio, very much essentially state of the art at that stage. You would always get into positions where you would have difficulty, line of sight, you know, particularly in mountainous areas where radio communications were difficult.

28:30 That was a priority that I always gave to my platoon sig [Signaller] when we stopped in a harbour position or wherever. The first thing before he has a brew or anything like that, you get your communications established, tell people where you are using the necessary codes and you might put a wire up a tree to extend the aerial but, as I say, there’s not much you can do. You feel very lonely if you don’t have communications. It’s like being, you know, out there

29:00 by yourself and no one around. Good communications is almost like a security blanket cause you can talk to the headquarters behind you. If you get into trouble you can call in artillery fire. You can call in

resupplies and ammunition if you need it, so wherever you went, you don't stop and say, "We can't get coms." We said, "Well get coms." It can be moving just ten metres and you can establish communications, so I was very particular about that.

And did you have a particular call sign or?

Yes,

29:30 my platoon is called sign three two. It's like A company's called sign one, bravo two, Charlie three, so the three platoons were three one, three two, three three and that's seven platoon, eight platoon, nine platoon and I still ring a friend of mine over in Perth, Dennis Rainer, who I showed you a photo of a little while ago and he had ten platoon D Company. His call sign was four one

30:00 and ring him in Mander [Mandurah] in Perth and I say, "Four one, this is three two sunray speaking," and that was, we still use it now and he says, "Oh g'day three two," cause that's who you, you know, you communicate, good simple procedure which everyone understands, so you don't have to, you know, identify yourself.

Well just going back to

30:30 **some specific operations, just how, we've talked about Hardihood and there were many operations in between Hardihood and Canberra?**

Yes.

But perhaps now we'll just talk about the specific operation of Canberra and what you recall. What was the brief of Canberra if you remember?

There were intelligence estimates that showed that the Nui Thi Vai and Nui Dinh hills to the west of the taskforce

31:00 base were supply areas, supplies coming in from further south and there were a lot of hides up there and I, there was even evidence of hospitals being up there and it was a base for elements of the regiments that operated in the 274, 275 regiment and the D445 battalion, that there were elements there. I can't remember the specific details of that but

31:30 there was a series of operations in the October timeframe, the first was Canberra and then that had its own problems. Then we went down onto route fifteen which is the road from Vung Tau to Saigon which was a lot of a, we went there to do a cordon and search down there. That was, wasn't Hayman. I'm just trying to think. There was a, because the two on the mountains were Operation

32:00 Canberra and Operation Queanbeyan, then we spent a short period of time down on the road. It was Canary or something like that I recall. It was certainly different, Operation Canberra, because for a start point, totally different terrain, pretty steep mountains, primary jungle, limited visibility and like in all those operations, the commanding officer gave each company an area of operations to

32:30 work in. We operated on the western side of the mountains in our area. We, I think virtually most of the companies had spasmodic contact with the enemy up there. I was leading my company. My platoon was leading up a track. We came across

33:00 a small defended position. We'd had a small contact and we came across what we identified as being, they looked like a bunker system. We had a contact as we went in there and I did the normal procedure of deploying my platoon and with a section going into assault from the left hand side with fire support and just as we were deploying a position we tripped a couple of booby traps and

33:30 I had eleven people wounded, including myself and no one killed but three of them serious enough to, had to come back to Australia. We went in and we actually secured our position when we got in there a short time later but there was nothing there. They'd gone but we had to evacuate the casualties as well and create a helicopter pad

34:00 out of some pretty thick country and a short period after that went on, one of our other platoons, Nine Platoon, had a similar incident. There were mines everywhere in there.

So can you just take us through step by step what happened on that day, you mentioned there was a, you tripped a…?

Yeah, we were moving up in single file because it was

34:30 pretty close terrain. I had a section in front. We had a contact on the other side. There was fire returned but we didn't get anyone and I presume that was a sentry. We moved on about another hundred metres and we saw what looked to be diggings and quite often, particularly if it's fresh, you can see them and you get to identify what they are, so I went, I put a

35:00 section, I sort of propped my platoon. I had a section around to the left to provide fire support, so we were at right angles to each other and I went around to, through this section to have a look to see if I could see what there was on the flank. I was going to, I'd told, obviously passed back the information to my company commander and he directed me to clear the position, so I was manoeuvring my troops. We

had another shot. We saw people moving there but it was only a

35:30 single shot. It wasn't, nothing like machine gun fire or anything like that, so I was moving around with a section to assault through the village with fire support. It's fairly standard procedure after you've done your reconnaissance and just as we were manoeuvring around there, two explosions and that's when it happened, so we actually did not put the assault into that area. After we'd evacuated the casualties we went back in [UNCLEAR "to them"].

Were you aware of how

36:00 **you'd actually tripped the explosions or...?**

I suspect it was a trip wire. Yeah, you don't really know but it feels, you know, it's a bit like a mortar bomb going off but what actually detonated I don't know. I suspect it was a trip wire cause that's what they were using quite a bit there.

36:30 **And how big was the explosion?**

Big enough to cause eleven people to wear shrapnel fragments and for two of them to be quite seriously wounded, losing part of the leg and this type of thing, to warrant evacuation. I mean obviously the closer you are to an explosion the worse damage you're obviously going to expect. I just wore a couple of minor bits of shrapnel. I was partially protected by my radio operator

37:00 as well, cause the radio wore a couple of pieces of shrapnel as well and then the handset. I just got a few minor things in the thigh and in the neck and in my equipment. In fact a magazine I had was, had a couple of bits of shrapnel in it and I've still got a couple of the old cartridge shells, not the actual bullet, but very badly dinted

37:30 which I've still got as souvenirs.

And do you remember feeling the impact?

Yeah, I actually stayed on. We did the evacuation and I didn't actually, cause I wasn't badly wounded. I didn't report my own injuries until about two hours later. In fact I found the proof of that in a log that's in the War Memorial. A soldier of mine did some research and sent it to me.

So what did you do when,

38:00 **you know, in that moment when you were hit or the explosion went off and you were hit, what did you do?**

In my role as a platoon commander? All you can really do is, because we weren't actually in the position to do the assault, so there's nothing really, we weren't in a position to do the assault so there was no way I was going to continue that and having, you know, obviously having some casualties around, so all you can do is consolidate the position and make sure you've got people facing where

38:30 we know this position was and then all you can really do is make arrangements to evacuate people, provide the security and do it, so at the same time you're, you know, you're probably asking for artillery fire support. You're asking for dust off or medical support to come and evacuate people.

So your radio wasn't damaged?

No the radio wasn't damaged. No, the radio still worked and the rest of the company was just behind us, so we actually, what we did, we arranged for people, whether they carried

39:00 or helped. One big bloke, David Rick, about six foot two, very badly damaged left ankle, had to come home but he was actually taken down with, we got two big blokes about the same size to help him down the track, a bit like you see photographs in the old days on the Kokoda Track as well. We got them back down probably two hundred metres and in that area developed, the other platoons in the company developed, had to knock down trees to

39:30 make a, for the helicopter to come in cause otherwise it would mean, cause we were a long way up into the hills. It was pretty thick vegetation, so we actually had to cut it for a helicopter to come in and they were all evacuated, those that had to be, and I went out myself a few hours later when I said, you know, "I've got a couple of things," and so I just went back to Nui Dat and just had those plucked out and a couple of stitches and

40:00 bandaids and I went back out the next morning.

Well was that a dangerous evacuation then, I mean you said, you know...?

No, what it's, the main thing about it is the, you can secure it and you obviously, you know, you don't sort of sit around the edge of this clearing that's been made. You have people several hundred metres away providing security so people can't come in close, you know, at small arms range. It's pretty tight and you've got to admire a lot of the helicopter pilots that came in a fairly flimsy place with

40:30 very, very tall thick trees and we did have an incident just after this where a helicopter actually, tail rotor clipped a tree and we had to get them out.

Tape 5

00:31 **We're still talking about Operation Canberra and being wounded. I mean you did delay your own evacuation?**

Yes.

How did you feel about leaving the platoon?

Not good. I mean they were my guys and you don't feel good like that at all and that's essentially why I did it. I was told to go out. I didn't necessarily want to because I wasn't really seriously wounded even though I suppose when they showed me when they did pluck things out of they said, "That could get worse," so it's probably just as well

01:00 but I, cause that was fairly late in the day and I went out. I didn't go down to Vung Tau. I went to the hospital at Nui Dat and I arranged to come back out the next morning and flew into the B Company area which, as I recall, on the day before, B Company, under Major Bruce McCaulter, had gone up in their operations up to the top of the mountains

01:30 and they came across this position that was, apparently had some hospital, was a supply place and there were certainly rice caches. When I came, and what actually happened, he put up an L shape ambush on very high rocks looking down this position but then some information came through and said there were more enemy in that area. That was an intelligence report that came in from the taskforce headquarters and he was told to withdraw because he was essentially there by himself and it would be very hard to get

02:00 reinforcements in there, so he was withdrawn down to the bottom of the mountain and air strikes were put in. When I came back in from Nui Dat I landed in the LZ in B Company's area and our company was coming over to join us and he gave me this very accurate description of what they had discovered, in minute detail, where he had machine guns and my platoon that I had left actually went back up there, led the way

02:30 and it was exactly as he described and it was a perfect position for an ambush but the air strike had missed to the north, so we found, you know, lots of equipment and medical equipment in there but there was no enemy there.

And was there a tunnel system involved in that?

Not in that one, no. No, it was very rocky actually there but it had very high rocks and he had this perfect visibility, in an L shaped position, down in

03:00 down to this, there were a lot of rocks there and he described to me that he actually had some of his members just looking down, peering and they were virtually a few metres away and these people were walking beneath them but he didn't open fire cause he was ordered to withdraw and he got out of there without them knowing.

So this hospital that was embedded in the rocks, was it an open air?

Yes essentially open air. There was a lot of

03:30 crags, sort of a few small buildings, bamboo huts, that type of thing there but generally open air, yeah.

And no one was there when…?

No one was there, no, not when we went up there.

And did you go and seize intelligence from the area?

Sorry, did I?

Did you go in and take intelligence out of…?

Yeah, what we did, we always did that and you search for documents and any information that can be passed on, yeah. There wasn't a lot in that. There was a lot of medical equipment which

04:00 we destroyed but, you know, the principle was during that operation we did find, in another area, we found another cache if you like that had quite some pretty useful training pamphlets that were being used as well and tactical type information but obviously that's all passed back to build up the picture.

So how far in that second lot where you came across the pamphlets, how far away was that from the hospital that you had just found?

04:30 Probably within a couple of kilometres, yeah. It wasn't in that actual position. In fact it was probably a few days later when we came across that, a few kilometres away.

So how many men were left in your platoon?

After that I would have had probably about eighteen, seventeen or eighteen after I'd lost those which was, I mean even though the proper strength of a platoon is one officer and thirty three

05:00 and we started off with, like our first line reinforcements but over time with people being wounded and reinforcements coming in and people being sick, lame or lazy, not lazy, but being wounded or people going away on R & R maybe two at a time, having a break, it was rare that you would have your full complement of men with you, yeah.

So how long after that before you got reinforcements?

05:30 You'd get one or two reinforcements coming in, in ones or twos when they're available but there was a reinforcement unit at Nui Dat where they, essentially a company of say a hundred, hundred and twenty people and they were training. They'd come in from Australia. They trained there and they'd reinforce the battalions as required but everyone needed reinforcements. If you lost ten you never got ten back, you know, the next day. You'd get a couple of guys coming in, in two weeks time and then another one,

06:00 that type of thing. It was dribs and…

And would you do anything to help them assimilate into the platoon?

Yes. I mean obviously I'd look at my own three sections and see, I think it was during that time when I looked at the balance and even though I hadn't really bothered so much about the balance between regular soldiers and regular servicemen but that's about the time when I discovered that one of my sections was essentially, had become all national service and it didn't make any difference but you'd

06:30 balance it to see which section actually needed, and treated them all equally in numbers of men and who's up the front as the lead section, share the joy with them and we always did that. I had absolutely no problem in putting any one of my three section commanders up front in a difficult situation.

And when you came back to the platoon, were you in a lot of discomfort?

No, physically?

07:00 **Yeah?**

No, wasn't bad, just a few scratches and they were just minor little pellets that I got. It wasn't major shrapnel. I think the largest piece hit my belt and hit the radio of my radio operator. I only got very minor little shrapnel, tin type things.

So essentially this happened in Operation Canberra and you made the point that they all just merged

Yeah.

07:30 **into one, so after going through, well how long did it take you to go through the Nui Thi Vai hills?**

I think that was a ten-day period that one, would be my estimate at this stage. It was about a ten day period and then we went down onto Route 15, conducted Operation Robin and that's the operation where a helicopter, we were on the

08:00 side of the road and a little Sioux helicopter landed in our position. The companies were spread along the road and several kilometres apart and again it was B Company which was further to the north of us and this helicopter had been up there to pick up the quarter master sergeant to do resupply things and came down the road and the next thing we knew there

08:30 was this helicopter bouncing along the road towards us and it apparently had been, received small arms fire and it stopped about twenty metres in front of my platoon position with the pilot and the CQMS [Company Quartermaster Sergeant] of B Company not in very good condition. The pilot actually was in a real problem and it just happened to be fortunate that Captain Tony Wyatt, who was the regimental medical officer, was visiting our company

09:00 and on the spot he made the decision when the helicopter came in to fly straight to Saigon because he needed neurosurgery, rather than the standard procedure of going to Vung Tau, so he owes his life to Tony Wyatt.

And what did you do when the helicopter crashed in front, did you…?

We went straight out there to see obviously what we could do for the two casualties inside and, you know, straight into the,

09:30 the bits of the helicopter spread over several hundred metres, yeah. It was a wreck but years later, in fact it was only last year I was looking on the 5RAR website and there was a letter from the pilot and I recognised the name and he said, "I haven't seen anyone since but," he said, "I was the pilot who crashed in your battalion position in October 1966

10:00 and would like to hear from someone," and I got back on the email to him and I said, "Mate, you landed

right in front of my platoon position," and he'd never spoken to Tony Wyatt the doctor, so I put them in contact and they have spoken since.

Is that an American or Australian pilot?

Australian, yeah. He lives up on the Gold Coast, yeah.

And this operation was to secure

10:30 **Route 15, just, I mean it was a supply route?**

Yeah, it was, we did quite a number of small operations along Route 15 because it was also a route for new American brigades coming in to reinforce up in the, you know, the area to Saigon and north and because of the harbour at Vung Tau, that's where they arrived and then went

11:00 straight by truck straight up the highway, so we secured it while the, you know, a couple, on several occasions when new American brigades would arrive. We also took the opportunity to do a few more cordon and search operations down there because Route 15 was essentially right on the edge of a swamp area leading down to Long Son Island as well, so we did a number of cordon and searches in that area as well.

And were they successful?

Yes they were.

Was that a,

11:30 **were the villages densely populated with VC?**

No, not down there but certainly because the mountains were being used as a base and a hideaway for them they were certainly down there going into these villages as well but again there were not any large contacts in those cordon and searches along Route 15. They were only fairly small villages as well.

And did you discover any tunnel systems or bunkers?

12:00 Not there. I did on the eastern side of the Nui Dinh Hills, found quite a complex and that was just, but that was not part of that operation. That was just on a routine patrol when I was out on a security patrol from the base and came across a fairly sizeable bunker tunnel system including wells and we lowered people down in the well and

12:30 we found a cache down there of, again training pamphlets, medical stores which is fairly standard, lots of rice. We found a Viet Cong flag, which I've still got, but the training stores we found were very, very good down there and very, very helpful in their tactics, everything like that and we subsequently destroyed that position.

With training information that you found

13:00 **were you able to absorb much of it yourself?**

No not personally but certainly it's useful for the intelligence world because, and not being able to speak Vietnamese, not at that stage anyway, you couldn't read a lot of it but it was obviously training information and tactics but what it did, it would support the overall picture because, you know, it would give some indication to the intelligence people when they're building up the picture of what actual units are there as well because, you know, they can link all these

13:30 things and that provides a basis for subsequent operations that there's obviously indicators that they were in the Nui Dinh or the Nui Thi Vai hills and it can be followed up with an appropriate operation.

And with Operation Robin when you were securing Route 15, were there a lot of contacts?

No except I lost one of my soldiers in a booby trap incident there, clearing a culvert along the road

14:00 and there was a booby trap in that and he had to be evacuated, came back to Australia. That happened on that one but that was about the only incident we had and apart from the helicopter one as well we didn't have any major contacts on that cause we went from that, we redeployed from that and then went back up into the mountains as part of Operation Queanbeyan.

Before we talk about Queanbeyan I'm just wondering what precautions could you take for booby traps

14:30 **and...?**

It's, well it's very difficult identifying them but standard procedure was that avoid tracks because that's an obvious place where they would be laid. If there are fresh signs of digging or earth and you haven't been in that area before, is a sign that there might be something there. They were about all the precautions you could take. There was also,

15:00 in those mountains there were a lot of United States CPUs', cluster bomb units, which is a big canister that drops and they would hang off trees. They come down and they've got a sort of a number of fins

that expand as they come down and they will catch on trees and they were everywhere in there as well as they bombed those places, so you had to look out for those as well.

So how do you keep your eyes on the ground and

15:30 **above?**

With difficulty?

And still move forward?

Yeah but a normal infantry section patrolling, everyone, from the forward scout right down, has their own arc of responsibility. The scouts would look ahead and above. People have got responsibilities to the left and right, that type of thing. Most of these would generally be at ground level or, you know, round about waist height but some of these cluster bomb units would actually catch in trees in thick vegetation, so there were some.

16:00 I did have one incident where one of my soldiers went off the track because he needed to relieve himself and he squatted down probably about five metres off the track, got in there carefully and was doing what nature does and saw one of these things about two feet away from him, sitting there.

So when, so how

16:30 **I'm just thinking how you could disturb them that they fell?**

They would and they wouldn't necessarily explode but you had to avoid them, you know. You could walk right next to them and they're not going to, you know, these CBUs wouldn't necessarily explode but you don't play with them. I mean it's there and they're dangerous and it's high explosive, so you don't do it. It's the ones that have been laid that might have the trip wires or, you know, been booby trapped with

17:00 a pressure situation when you walk on it. They were the worst ones.

So the soldier that got injured with Operation Robin, how was that booby trap set?

He was actually clearing the culvert and essentially that's the sort of thing you're looking for as well, mines, because being a road and convoys going through, you check culverts to see they're not being used as some sort of trap for the convoy coming through, so he was down there checking this and tripped it,

17:30 so he came home, yeah.

And then you mentioned Operation Queanbeyan?

Yes.

And what was the brief of Operation Queanbeyan?

It was from the information that was going on Operation Canberra, with the contacts information we had there. This provided more information to go into another part of the hills and follow on, so it essentially the same sort of operation. Now we

18:00 didn't have a lot on that one but that's the operation where others I think we were awarded three Military Crosses on that particular operation at the time and all within fairly, two of them were in fairly close proximity. In fact two of the platoons were supporting the battalion headquarters. That was Mike Deacon and John McAlaney and the other one was Dennis Rainer

18:30 who was in D Company and came across a camp of about, there were, I think there were twelve people in it and they killed eleven and captured one by sort of ambushing them and getting right in very close.

So what was your platoon's role with Queanbeyan?

We were actually searching another area and that instant with Dennis Rainer I just mentioned, we were pretty close with that, probably about five, seven hundred metres away

19:00 when that occurred, so we were in the same area but we just didn't run into anyone, anything dramatic on that particular operation. Others had the joy.

So you didn't have any contacts in that operation?

Yes, but only minor ones, only minor. There was nothing significant at all and I didn't have any casualties on that one. I just, you know, we had enough on Operation Canberra, the first bit of it, yeah.

And after Queanbeyan did the platoon go

19:30 **back to Nui Dat?**

Yes, we would have gone back because it had been a fairly extensive operation and when you're out on those operations as a complete battalion, there still have to be people protecting your area in the taskforce base and that normally goes to the, you know, some non infantry units to come in there on a

temporary basis and usually a company from the other battalion, so 6RAR would have done it. We spent, when 6RAR

20:00 were out on operations, we would spend time over in their, it's unfamiliar as well, so you've really got to familiarise yourself but it was a large base and you need to be protected and at times it was very, very thin on the ground, if they had mounted a major assault, which had been planned for August.

Well before we, that was just soon after the base was created

20:30 **wasn't it that the anticipation of an attack?**

Yeah, there was a common thing called the Binh Ba Ten Thousand and that was created by Captain Bob Milligan who would have a punt on the horses occasionally and Bob was unfortunately killed in Operation Beaumaris later on but in the very early days there was always the threat that

21:00 we were going to get attacked by a major force, as large a force as the enemy could get together and it always seems to be that they were going to come from the north from the Binh Ba area and come down the axis of Route two and that obviously would come straight into our company position, so quite often we would get these warnings about increased intensity and vigilance and all this sort of thing coming through, because of people up in villages to the north and so it got the nickname the Binh Ba Ten Thousand and, "the Binh Ba Ten Thousand's on tonight," became,

21:30 "OK you had to be on higher alert. There's some reports of people up to the north."

That must be so difficult, after coming off an operation like that, needing time to unwind but still having to stay on edge?

Yeah.

How did you allow the men to unwind?

Come back to base. A platoon commander would always have a debrief to conduct, particularly if they had contacts. You've got to write

22:00 the reports that go into, you know, all the diaries and everything like that. Normally when you come back in you'd get your platoon sergeant while you were doing that to get them to unwind, rest, relax, whatever, write letters home, clean their weapons and equipment and, you know, say, "Write home to Mum, Dad or the girlfriend", whatever. Regardless and particularly in that '66 timeframe when the company position was not fully developed

22:30 they also had to get there and continue digging and the company headquarters command post was a fairly big underground complex, size of a good sized room, underground and obviously platoons had to go and help dig on that. I'd been out for an extended period with my platoon. Following an operation we went straight out again, came back in and the good company sergeant major, I had to go and report up at the battalion headquarters and I'd told, directed my platoon to stand

23:00 down, take time off, do absolutely nothing and when I came back there was ten of them digging this hole in the ground, so I directed them to get back and lie down and do nothing and so it caused a few waves. I won out but they were my guys but yeah, I mean you come back in even from an operation like Canberra, Queanbeyan. You come back into the base but straight away someone has to go straight back out to provide the security out to, say on line alpha, three or four

23:30 thousand metres out in, so it was non stop. In figures, I did a, at one stage I did a rough calculation over the year or so we were there and it was something like two hundred and eighty plus days out on operations in a year, so even though, you know, in other wars you get a lot major, more, you know, larger battles,

24:00 ours was small but continuous and the thing about it is it's always the continuing threat on you, the stress and the strain and that sort of thing, cause it's ongoing and I think you see in operations these days that people tend to get deployed overseas to other wars for six months and then home.

Well you are able to debrief but would you debrief your men at all?

24:30 In stressful situations? Yeah.

I mean, you know, Canberra and Robin and Queanbeyan were quite stressful operations for your platoon so when you came back were you able to do that?

Yeah, you do provide a debrief. In fact, you know, I always did it on the way out and on the way back, lessons learnt, talk about things, how you can improve your own operations as a platoon, things you're not happy with, you think are getting slack. You do that out on the spot but you reinforce things. The only

25:00 way they can really unwind is that in the battalion area we did have an open air movie theatre. They can go and watch the odd movie. We had the company soldiers' canteen which was called the Mushroom Club, you know, the whole thing a lot of people have, "Kept in the dark and fed on bullshit," type thing but they had this big mushroom and they could go there and unwind and have a few beers, you know,

with their mates as well and the officers and sergeants, in our company area we had a combined, it was just a tent, a small marque

25:30 where we could unwind as well but there wasn't and the odd days of R & C [Rest and Convalescence] down in Vung Tau for twenty four hours or forty eight hours and then once during each tour everyone got a six day R & R to various locations around South East Asia. When we were there you couldn't come back to Australia for that week, so married people would bring their wives to Singapore or somewhere like that.

Well

26:00 **with men, with the platoon drinking, would you have to control the drinking?**

Yeah, it was usually two cans per man per day unless it was an occasion where they could have more but in the good old Australian soldier, two cans per man per day doesn't mean you just have two, you know, because Johnny will say, "I'm not having any today. You can have my ration," so there are ways around it but that was generally it. No drinking on operations.

26:30 That was just inside the perimeter but that's all. I don't recall any major problems in our side of people getting out of control with it. I'm sure it happened. People did get, you know, drunk occasionally, I know that but I suppose, you know, people would argue these days that there was no stress counselling back then but a lot of stress counselling and like, here's the amateur psychologist,

27:00 but say, you know, you talk about the events, well they did that. People did that. They did it over a couple of beers and that's what we did and then I'd go up to the officers' mess, that we had there, when we could and you'd talk to your mates about it and you'd have a few. That's sort of unwinding and you got it off your chest. It was the same sort of principles that applied.

And did you ever come across any men that after an operation you were, or even just after patrols or cordon and searches, you were really worried that

27:30 **they couldn't really be out there much longer?**

Yes, certainly. There was one particular one who I was very worried about, in tears, getting very, the unpredictable, becoming unpredictable. Sat down and had a chat to him and he had got a letter from his wife saying there were problems at home and he gave me the details.

28:00 His wife was playing up, just saying something like, "Missing you." I think she was a fairly simple lady from what I could gather but just saying that, "I'm missing you darling, but this man is here and he's always looking after me and he stays," and this sort of thing. So read into it what you will, so we sent him back to Australia to sort it out with all, and he was given leave to go back and came back two weeks later but the same thing happened and he essentially lost it one

28:30 day, so I had him removed.

Was that a hard decision to make?

No, cause there's no other real option because he would have become a danger to himself and to other members of the platoon, so no, it wasn't a hard decision to make. It was a necessary one.

You also said that when the men would come back from operations you would tell them to write to their family or their wives and their girlfriends?

Yeah.

Was it necessary to tell them?

No,

29:00 not really. They'd do it but again, you know, as a young leader you have to look after your people and you might ask them, "When did you last write home?" "Oh, ten days ago." Well, "Why?" you know. With my platoon sig she wrote a letter every day, on operations or not on operations, and keep them and when we sat down to have a break or a smoko out on operations or preparing a meal, he would write

29:30 another page or so and when the helicopters came in and they could be taken out and posted home, he would do that. It'd be a great book because he's still got all those letters.

It would be. Were you, how sensitive was the material that the men were writing, I mean?

They were given guidance not to write on operational, on, if like on the intelligence aspects of operations. There's, I know they all did say, "We're up in these

30:00 mountains," and I must admit I did it myself. I actually sent home a map to my parents in Adelaide and I would give them some detail, not a lot of detail, on where we were in this particular area and he had actually had this map of the province and my father would sort of mark up on this and when I came home he showed it to me of, you know, where we had contacts and things like that

30:30 but you didn't go into a lot of detail. I didn't, I wasn't a prolific writer of letters home. I did it once in a

while. I was busy but certainly kept in touch and I mean they got obviously worried when I was wounded because the notification procedures were not that flash at the time and all they got from the duty officer that telephoned from Keswick Barracks in Adelaide

31:00 to ring my parents and all they said that, "Just," you know, "Going to advise, wish to advise you that we've got information your son has been wounded in action in Vietnam. There is not really a lot of detail." Now what do you think they thought about that? They ended up getting about three telegrams and the end of the day was, you know, was no real drama but they were imagining all sorts of things, that I was without arms or legs or whatever in the first instance.

And would you follow up the men that had been sent home wounded, would you follow

31:30 **them up?**

I mentioned that with the first one killed that I wrote the letter. No, we didn't. Those who were killed, sorry not killed, wounded on Operation Canberra yes, I do. The chap whose photo I told you, David Rick, always in contact with him. There's only one who lives out in the Riverina area who is a bit reluctant.

32:00 He was badly wounded the same day and he likes to go fishing but has never come to any reunions but we're trying to get him to come to one we're having next year and there's a bit of hope there. We know where he is. I've phoned him. I phoned him about five months ago and said, "This is on," and he, I think the door is open.

But when you were in Vietnam did you follow up their progress?

No, didn't, didn't have the time really even though, you know, you knew

32:30 their address but, as I say, I didn't but some of the guys in their section did so.

And what about visiting them in hospital?

Certainly if you had the opportunity to go down to Vung Tau to the Australian hospital down there, there was an American hospital first up, 36 Evacuation Hospital and then the Australian Field Hospital was set up and yeah, I had some people down there,

33:00 out of the same operation essentially, who spent some time recovering there, yeah, I went to visit them. In fact on the odd R & C days where you could go and have, just for a break over twenty four or forty eights hours you'd, you know, you'd go into the hospital anyway to see people, not directly yours, but just to say, "G'day," if they were from the same battalion. We did that and, you know, on occasion when you had to go down and identify a body as well, positively identify a body.

33:30 **Was he killed?**

Yeah.

On leave?

We had a member of our company who was accidentally killed by friendly artillery fire near a hill site and the following day after he was evacuated, he was killed on the spot and we had a break the next day and my platoon sergeant and I went in there and

34:00 identified him cause we knew him, in the hospital, yeah.

With the leave that you would take in country, were you, well whereabouts did you spend that leave in country?

Well the only place was down at Vung Tau

34:30 which was pretty primitive at the time. There was the local bars down in the bar strip. There was sort of Back Beach and Front beach. The Front Beach had a whole series of bars down there. Eventually there was a swimming pool built and, Harold Holt swimming pool I think it was called and the Badcoe VC [Victoria Cross] Club but they weren't there when we were there. They were being developed, so you'd essentially stay on Back Beach

35:00 which was secure. You'd play games of volleyball or touch football and swim in a beach and go and have a drink at the bars in town and that type of thing. That's essentially all there was to do. Occasionally we had to send soldiers, two at a time, up to help with the guard platoon in Saigon which was looking after the, protecting the embassy in there but in country that was about all. I managed to, a few platoon commanders

35:30 who were seen to be having fairly busy times were given the job of going to paying the Australian Army Training Team which was spread throughout the country, so I did a leapfrog thing in an American aircraft to various northern cities, up to Hué in Da Nang, Qui Nhon, those sort of places, just to pay the training team over about a three day period, just to get away.

So did you, sorry play against?

To pay them.

Pay them?

To pay them there, yeah. That's how it was

36:00 done. It wasn't electronic, you go out there and just, that's how it was actually done.

Well how much money would you be carrying to go and pay the team?

They didn't, all they'd get was a, it wasn't their full salary because that's going into bank accounts. It's just their own sort of type of pocket money. I'm sure it could have been gotten other ways but it was, that was actually done and the end, the most northern point I went to was Da Nang and stayed with the senior adviser up there and

36:30 his two other Australian members who lived in this little place which they called Australia House and had a good night with them up there and flew back the next day and went back to normal business but it was a good break.

So this was the Australian Army Training Team?

Yeah.

And did you find that an interesting experience to see what they were doing?

Yes I did. I think you've got to admire them in what they do. Just, you know, the circumstances that they live in

37:00 working with the Vietnamese Army, providing the command structure with, you know, people who are not as well trained as Australian soldiers, pretty difficult and in some very hot areas and I know a lot of people who have served on that team and you have to admire them. I was actually posted to the training team myself to do a second trip to Vietnam when I came back from Singapore and I did all, that's where, I mentioned earlier that I

37:30 learnt to speak Vietnamese, so I did a Vietnamese course at Woodside in Adelaide and that's when the intelligence centre was there and you do a special weapons course and a six week course up at Canungra into the type of tactics that are used and I was actually posted to that same position where I visited as senior adviser at Da Nang.

So when you went up there to?

I didn't go. I didn't get, that posting didn't occur because it's when the pullout started and the change of governments and things like that. I got within ten days of going and it didn't actually

38:00 eventuate.

So when you went up and saw the team, the training teams, what challenges, did you talk about the problems that they were coming across in their work?

Yes, very much so and what they did and they were showing me around the units that they were involved with. I went to the Vietnamese brigade headquarters. We went, there was a marine brigade nearby as well that they spent, and a lot of off duty times

38:30 with as well, so we went to have a look at them but it is interesting talking to them about what they need to do and I admire them for what they did, just a small group of very professional soldiers.

What were their challenges?

Their particular challenges?

Mm?

Well it's leading Vietnamese soldiers in

39:00 difficult circumstances and quite often in against a strong organised enemy because I think the further north you went you tended to get those organisations and later you had the North Vietnamese elements, you know, gradually coming into the war. The fact that they are essentially on their lonesome, there's no Australian friends there and you had to be a well sorted out person to be in that sort of environment for extended

39:30 periods, you know. Some of them loved it and quite a few of the warrant officers and a few officers I know would go back there for two or three tours, so in fact they were there for about three, three and a half years some of them, working with the Montagnards. A friend of mine whose written a book separately on it worked with the Montagnards, Barry Peterson, and I got to know him quite well. I shared an office with him some years later, yeah. They were,

40:00 I know an RMC [Royal Military College] classmate of mine was with the training team as well and got very badly wounded as well. He was shot while doing a reconnaissance with a helicopter.

And did anything in particular strike you about the Montagnards?

I didn't see them myself, no. I was just talking to this chap who worked with them and was made a blood brother and all this sort of thing with them. No, but that was, my experience with the training team there was limited as such, yeah.

Tape 6

00:32 **OK Roger, as I mentioned, I'd just like to go back a bit chronologically, back to the Battle of Long Tan and just cover that for a moment?**

Yeah.

I understand you were duty officer in Nui Dat at the time?

Yeah, I mentioned that our company was actually up at Binh Ba at the time but in fact I was in Nui Dat and the reason for that is that I'd jumped off the back of an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier] and I rolled my ankle, so I had a badly swollen

01:00 ankle and I was at Nui Dat for about ten days. During that period of time I was the perpetual duty officer in the 5RAR command post, so I was there in the command post when Long Tan started, even though it was all to do with, mainly to do with 6RAR, I was there listening in the command post on the radio at the time it happened. The first thing that,

Sorry I'll just stop you for a minute,

01:30 **OK?**

The start of it was that on the night of the 16th and 17th of August, the taskforce base was mortared and again I was in the command post when that started. The mortars didn't actually fall in our location but they were in neighbouring units, the engineers and nearby but nevertheless the whole battalion had to stand to and a lot of the people were out. I mentioned

02:00 that C Company was up at Nui Dat on the rubber, sorry, up at Binh Ba and the other companies were out. When a battalion stood to you've got the commanding officer and the senior operations officer in the command post, so I was essentially spare. We had no communications with B Company and so I was sent down in dark, it was early hours of the morning, to try and locate B Company. I'd never been there before, so there I was with everyone touching,

02:30 quite touchy about what was going on and wandering down the road in the battalion base area to locate B Company people. I got there and they were light on for people and they were down in their dugout command post down below ground and they actually had some short term communication problems but that was the first part of it and

So how did you get there?

I walked. I just walked. It was about, you know, it was pitch

03:00 black but it was around about, well two hundred yards away I would guess but as there were mortars in the area it was an interesting experience. During the, when the actual Battle of Long Tan started on the afternoon of the 18th of August I was again the duty officer and went through listening in on the taskforce command net and the radio cause battalions

03:30 were on that and there were difficulties in getting radio communications with D Company 6RAR, so we weren't personally involved but just listening in to it, the artillery fire. It was the afternoon of, there was a concert there. Little Patty and others were singing in the taskforce base that afternoon. I think it was Col Joye and Little Patty and that was obviously stopped and they were moved. The whole taskforce went on high readiness status

04:00 and the heavens opened, the rain came down and the artillery was firing but just listening in to the whole build up of the battle from the command post was quite interesting on that.

What was it like listening, what sort of chatter could you?

Well you could, on one of the nets there was a lot of Vietnamese, you know, because they obviously had radios as well and there seemed to be a lot of cross chatter between them but

04:30 we obviously didn't get involved in that because it wasn't our province to do so but we did, and D Company, 6RAR initially had trouble getting onto frequencies to talk to D Company and there were a few frequencies swapped around but we were listening in on that, yeah. The following morning we sent one of our companies out there. That was D Company 5RAR, were sent out there as extra security while D Company Six cleared the battlefield and

05:00 as we know from history they found people still alive and those who were unfortunately killed in the battle, the following morning, because I can remember as the night, on the evening of the 18th when they were, secured the position and the A Company 6RAR went out on the APCs the reports that came

in, they were giving their casualties but, as I recall, I think it was still eleven missing, which they subsequently found the next day and a few of them alive

05:30 which was nice but the other thing about Long Tan is that all the bodies that were killed from the other side, we actually found some months later. We went out on a routine patrol, out to the east of the taskforce base and we found two bodies under a bush with weapons. They'd been there probably for six weeks after the battle, so there were a lot dragged away and went and hid,

06:00 yeah.

And what was the psychological impact from your vantage point back at base when you were listening to all of this?

Well it was the biggest battle the taskforce had undertaken at that time. The one thing I remember about it that the taskforce was a big area, only two infantry battalions at the time and

06:30 they, half of 6RAR were deployed and 5RAR had a few companies out as well, so were pretty thin on the ground and it just makes me wonder that if D Company Six hadn't run into that large force that, and they were on their way to the taskforce, I think the outcome might have been very different, so it's, and I do mean that because the taskforce base, the defences were very, very thin with so many people out on operations,

07:00 so it could, it might have been a totally different outcome if D Company hadn't come into contact with them and the battle took place only a few kilometres away from the eastern side of the base.

Well now moving forward a bit in time. We've covered the month of October pretty much with Canberra, Robin

07:30 **and Queanbeyan?**

Yeah.

But you also mentioned that Hayman which happened in early November stood out in your mind, can you tell us why?

Yeah, that was an interesting operation I remember and a nice location for a holiday I would think in better times. We, again, like a lot of those operations, it was the first time that, I understand that anyone had been on there. We, again the island was

08:00 split up into areas of operations for the various companies and we went in. We started off with a helicopter accident. We went in onto an LZ which is actually on a bit of an angle and the rotors of the aircraft actually hit the ground and so we had that problem to get in and part of my platoon was in that particular helicopter. The SAS were involved in that operation as well. They were out patrolling in boats in the swamp areas and the tributaries on

08:30 the flanks of the island and I think one thing that stands out in that for me is that the control of artillery fire because a friend of mine, then a second lieutenant, was out on patrol with the SAS and saw these troops on the far side of the island and called in artillery fire and when the grid reference came through for me for clearance, it happened to be my platoon that he saw, so he was endeavouring to bring an artillery fire onto my platoon but it shows that

09:00 our clearance procedures for artillery work and are very necessary.

Well just before we go on, just for the record, can you just tell us where Hayman was or the operation and how you got there, cause it's quite a way from base at Nui Dat?

Yeah, it's, Hayman is on the south western side of the Vung Tau peninsula. It's adjacent to Route 15 which goes from Vung Tau, north west up towards

09:30 Saigon. We actually deployed in there by helicopter as well. The whole battalion went. There was no other way to do it, so there was artillery fire called in on the LZ before we landed, to make sure that was as clear as it could be and yeah, sent straight in by helicopter assault.

And what was the task?

10:00 Again there was evidence of Viet Cong cadre being down there in the number of small villages that were on the island and it was to go and clear them. There was a, I wasn't involved in it but to try and persuade or get people like sympathisers down in Vung Tau, we actually sent two members of the battalion down and gave them some money out of regimental funds to go and have a few beers in

10:30 one of the bars down there to talk loosely about what the battalion was doing but it was more to do with getting them to believe that we were going to another area and not onto Long Son Island and I believe there is evidence to say that actually worked as well and those two very much enjoyed their time at everyone else's expense having a few beers down in one of the local bars.

So what was the terrain like in this area,

11:00 **was it, how different was it to what you'd been used to?**

Much the same. It had a few mountainous areas and there was a lot of, in the centre of the island, there was a lot of flat open paddy field type country and around, certainly on the southern side of it a lot of mangrove swamps as well which we had to go in and they were fairly difficult to move through obviously and pretty uncomfortable but I suppose the usual range but more mangroves in that area than you'd generally encounter elsewhere and

11:30 a few hilly areas but nothing too much. We only had a few contacts there. One of our platoons in our company had been very sparse in coming into contact with the other side and I think had their, almost their second contact there for the whole time which they were all overjoyed about, so.

That's actually something that I wanted to come back to, you mentioned much earlier in the day that one of the things

12:00 **that, one of the issues you worried about before you actually went to Vietnam was how would it feel, or what would it feel like to kill one of the enemy. By now you've got quite a bit of experience in country. Did, personally, you know, from your own experience, was it different to what you expected or?**

No and the reason I say that is I think there's an expectation things like that are going to happen and

12:30 I don't say you don't, you're not blasé about it because always you've got that same situation that it doesn't who you are. There's always that stress and those underlying things that happen when you come into contact. It's a pretty busy time, particularly if you're the commander. The very first one, person that we killed from the other side, I made sure that everyone in my platoon came forward and saw him, so they knew what to expect the next time around. It was almost like a bit of training cause it was the first time.

13:00 It was new to me as it was to them but I did, I do recall making sure that they all saw it and that very first one, again, had hand grenades with him and, cause I'm sending in the reports. It's generally the platoon sergeant's job to dispose of bodies if you like. They were buried and people from local villages would come and get them later on and give them

13:30 a more appropriate burial if you like, according to their custom, but I did find out

Would you mark where the grave was?

Yeah, we knew it from the grid reference where it was and yeah, we'd know if we had to go back there. In fact we did go back to this area and had a look and gone but on this particular occasion I recall that we actually, or my platoon sergeant at the time, actually buried

14:00 these two hand grenades with the body and to me that was sort of implications of booby traps and things like that because we wouldn't use those hand grenades ourselves. We would destroy them but when I, we'd moved on about a thousand metres and I, when we had a break I said, "OK that's all fixed up," and he told me that had happened. I turned the platoon around and went back and dug it up and got rid of the hand grenades. I just didn't feel it was appropriate that you would, you know, do that sort of thing.

In case somebody came along and dug up the body?

Well that's right, yeah. It's, yeah.

14:30 Even though you say they're on the other side, they are definitely the enemy and they're out to get us but, I mean it's not the same personal experience as when you lose someone on your own side. I mean you're a lot more closer to that situation but also over there, there's a difference that I, you know, sometimes in comparison because I said, when you go into a war zone there is an expectation

15:00 you're going to have casualties and casualties on both sides, particularly if you're, you know, in sort of the front area at platoon level. I, some years later, I had the occasion to be first on the scene of a head on accident on the Hume Highway with two people killed and even before ambulance and police arrived. That had far greater affect on me than seeing a body killed in action because it was unexpected

15:30 and the trauma on there and people, you know, sort of very, very badly hurt and not much you could do about it, with just two of us being there in the first instance and that had a far greater affect.

Cause I guess what I'm curious to explore in this question is how often would you, when you had contact and you fired your own weapon personally?

I didn't fire mine a lot

16:00 because it wasn't my job. My job was there to command, get the information back via radio, cordon, artillery if that was required. It's the soldiers in the section who were there, so there was rarely an occasion where I needed to fire a weapon and probably I would say I did twice, certainly once in an ambush and those sort of things but I'm not, I mean if I get to the situation where I've got to fire a lot of rounds myself, well

16:30 we're probably in fairly deep trouble. My job is to command and control in those circumstances.

Well given that, do you feel like you were able to understand how those, for those whose job it was and what they were going through?

Yeah, never really spoke about it to that extent. People talk about it more

17:00 at, you know, reunions later on but we never really followed it through and, as I say, there was very little counselling in that regard. We would have debriefs on operations when we were writing it but, you know, people who did have to get into that situation, I'm not aware of anyone who thought, "Well that's rotten, I can't live with it," at all. Certainly when you, I think there's always a thing in a soldier's life as well that if you lose your own people they can be quite vengeful on the other side, you know,

17:30 so it's a tit for tat type situation, you know, "You did one of my blokes in, I'll get six of you to make up for it," type of thing.

And again just staying with general themes, one of the iconic sort of images of Vietnam is the choppers and you've mentioned a few

18:00 **incidences where you would ride in choppers, what does the sound of choppers mean to you?**

Even today when you hear those and I say that, I think their use by date is just about up and I think it's just passed with the old Iroquois helicopters, it's very emotional for I think anyone who served in that war because they were your lifeblood. They were either taking you out on operations, bringing you back from operations, evacuating casualties,

18:30 bringing in bullets and beans or whatever or doing aerial reconnaissance and they were great machines and the welcome home parade, no it was the opening of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial here in Canberra, ten or so years ago, they flew Iroquois helicopters up and down Anzac Parade and you could see, you know, men crying all over the place. It was unexpected and just the,

19:00 I think anyone whose been over there and spent a lot of time there, they say, "Helicopters, recognise that sound anywhere," and it's still quite emotional to me too, you know, when you hear one of those helicopters coming in, to what it meant to you, you know. They were great machines.

Well moving on then operationally,

19:30 **there were quite a few operations after Hayman, I'm just wondering if any stand out in your mind before you got to Beaumaris in February?**

No, that period was fairly quiet I think over, towards the end of the year and over the Christmas period. I do remember spending Christmas on the banks of a creek in that year.

Where?

I was actually on one of the security patrols,

20:00 so someone had to be out there and again I got the short straw, so we were out on the, it was on the western side. In fact it was pretty close to the base of the Nui Thi Vai's, spent Christmas day out there having a ration pack Christmas lunch.

What was in your ration pack?

Probably pork and lima beans, some of those old favourites they had over there, American rations, nothing too flash but they did put, we had a delayed one when we got back but again, even though it was supposedly the, you know,

20:30 a truce over that period, you don't rely on that. You've still got to have your security out there. Someone had to do it but around about that Christmas, New Year time it was fairly quiet. I mean we, obviously there are breaks and the priority of operations would go on to 6RAR onto another battalion, so, you know, you do go through periods where there's, you know, minor operational requirements but the routine patrolling just continues and continues

21:00 as well. That was over that period and then it became quite busy again in February which one of those was Operation Beaumaris. Operation Beaumaris was you could say essentially a fairly routine cordon and search of the village of

21:30 Ap Nhut, about twelve kilometres south, south west, south east of the taskforce base and again there was evidence that there were Viet Cong moving into that area and VC cadres in that area. We had just had a change of company commander and the company commander we had for most of our tour over there, Major John Miller, was,

22:00 had actually brought over the battalion advance party, so he was going to take the battalion advance party back home, so he wasn't in there for an extraordinary long period of time and we got Major Don Bourne who came down from the SO2 [Staff Officer – Grade 2] operations on the taskforce headquarters to become our company commander. This was his very first operation and we left the Nui Dat area to get into the normal thing of securing your approach marches so you don't give the game away. We left about,

22:30 think it was a day, nearly two days before, to do an approach march and down we went into a jungle area and harboured overnight. That was on the 13th of February and early the next morning all the battalions, all the companies and battalions moved from different locations and hides in to provide the security of the perimeter all around the village of Ap Nhut. Our company approached from the south. It was very open paddy

23:00 field, so we had to move and we had, on those operations the company second in command quite often given the task of going to an ARVN, the Vietnamese Army compound, to, as liaison and essentially to keep them quiet and if they saw us moving not to fire on us if we were in their vicinity and not to give the game away, so Captain Bob Milligan, our company 2IC [Second in Command], went with his batman to undertake that role

23:30 in this village, about twelve hundred metres away. When we got, the cordon for the whole battalion was successfully put in and we were right on the southern edge and one of my sections went to get Bob Milligan and provide the security and to bring him back in. That was about eight thirty a.m. About nine o'clock or

24:00 just after nine o'clock the company commander Don Borne decided to have an orders group to coordinate the defences and what we were going to do when we moved into play our role in the search of the village or the security of the village and we sat down to have this O group just near a fence that was nearby and that was undertaken. One of the platoon commanders moved off back to his platoon. I moved off back to my platoon.

24:30 The third platoon was actually out on a security patrol, so weren't involved and just as we moved away, about twenty metres away, bang and this explosion killed Don Bourne, the company commander. It killed the company 2IC, Bob Milligan, and killed Captain Peter Williams, who was the New Zealand forward observer who was, his only operation with us. It was the 14th of February, St Valentine's

25:00 Day and it was Major Don Bourne's birthday, father of three, so in his first operation, so we were obviously devastated about that. I was the next senior officer in line, so I became the temporary company commander and arranged the evacuation of the helicopters at the time.

And do you know what caused the explosion or what was the explosion?

No, it's never been

25:30 confirmed to this day and even everything that's been written on it I've seen in histories and I suppose being on the spot, it was a large bang. It was larger than a M26 grenade and I wouldn't, couldn't put my finger to say exactly what it was except its location was right next to a steel picket that was there. Now there was talk of that was part of an old minefield fence. There were some minefields down there but the reality is that

26:00 where, there were two fences about twenty metres apart but the ground in between them was sloping ground. It was almost like a channel. You don't put minefields in there and I don't believe that was a minefield but certainly, you know, with the damage it did, even though they were all close but it was larger than a grenade type booby trap. The battalion doctor was nearby because it was

26:30 a battalion operation. He was only several hundred yards away so again, he was on the spot quite quickly and the helicopter evacuation was undertaken pretty smoothly.

And who called the helicopter?

I called the battalion headquarters as soon as it happened and we, cause the whole battalion was there and concentrated, the helicopters were called in by the battalion headquarters. The first initial, you know, reporting of what happens, came from me, being the, as I said,

27:00 taking over command briefly of the company. Yeah, there were several others wounded in that as well at the time but, as in all those things, the cordon and search operation continued.

So did you stay like until the helicopters had come and?

Yeah, we stayed there for the rest of the day and moved back after the operation. It was late that afternoon. We moved back

27:30 to Nui Dat and our original company commander came back to us for a short period of time, John Miller, cause there was obviously no one else available. He came back to us and then next day after that the commanding officer sent us off on another operation to the north of Nui Dat, you know, "Keep your, get on with it. Don't sit around and think about these rotten things that happen," so we went out on an operation up to a place called Ngai Giao, up to,

28:00 which is further north than Binh Ba.

Well when that incident happened and you had to stay there for the rest of the day, did you feel under, still under threat at all or...?

No because there was absolutely, in that whole cordon and search, there was no contact at all. There was no enemy action at all. It was just a booby trap incident that happened unfortunately at that stage

and there was nothing more, you know, you could really do. In fact we were in a security

28:30 role. We actually didn't, because of that we didn't actually, our part in that operation was not to do the sweep through the village at all, so we just stayed in the security situation on the perimeter.

And how many helicopters arrived and how quickly did they arrive?

They'd be there, in that situation, they helicopters are based at Vung Tau. They could have been there inside twenty minutes,

29:00 fifteen, twenty minutes. It'd be pretty quick. That's what it seemed at that stage because another officer did come back in to take over the company, so I could again be responsible for my own platoon but by the time, that was a captain, but by the time he arrived and that had happened, all the bodies and the wounded had been evacuated.

And whose job was it, or can you just take us through that sort of dust off, like how you

29:30 **got the bodies and the wounded onto helicopters?**

As soon as you know that you have casualties you immediately report it and if you've got a trained signaller or operator anyway they would do that and sort of indicate that you need a dust off. If you can, indicate the number of casualties you've got, so they would know how many helicopters that they will need, but that's all dependant on the size of the LZ as well and there is a procedure that we'll talk about, whether they are

30:00 walking wounded, you know, they are killed in action or whether they are stretcher cases, so they can arrange the helicopters and litters and how many there are. It's just, you know, I suppose it's the same sort of procedure you have for calling in artillery fire, anything like that and you get to know what's required, or a contact report. It becomes, well I wouldn't like to say routine, but it almost becomes second nature in doing that and you just get on the

30:30 command net and that's why I said earlier about the importance of having communications with you the whole time. It's your backup and as this is a battalion operation, I went to my superior headquarters, which is the battalion headquarters, and they do all that detailed arrangements through the operational staff there because you're only on a radio net to your company and the battalion is then on a radio net into the higher areas again and they've got more people to handle those.

So it was stretcher bearer's responsibilities to

31:00 **carry?**

Well yeah, when you have that, each platoon has people qualified, to varying degrees, in first aid and can provide the immediate on-site first aid requirements that are needed, whether it's, you know, dressings or whatever it might be, morphine, whatever has to be done to ease the situation as best you can. You need to secure the area because you could be in danger, depending on the circumstances, so you need to

31:30 secure the area as well and certainly before helicopters came in, it has to be secure as well or they won't come and then you, as quickly as you can, you arrange higher or greater qualified medical help, whether it's from the battalion. Each company has a qualified medic at corporal level but there's only one doctor in a battalion and he happened to be close by but in those cases there was nothing he could do.

32:00 **And were body bags being used or?**

Not then, no. Stretchers that the helicopters bring with them and put there and you just get, and your soldiers will carry them to the aircraft, so and then you obviously provide a briefing to the pilots if you can and just get them over there quickly and onto an operating table as quickly as possible.

And did you

32:30 **take the dog tags or who…?**

No they stay there, yeah. It's done down there at the hospital. I mean they have to be confirmed dead anyway and we can't do that necessarily. In that situation two, well I remember the doctor saying two were definitely dead but one of our officers was still alive when he went but died on route.

33:00 **And how did your company respond, I guess I mean that was very devastating?**

Yeah, Don Bourne the company commander, I mean what the company had essentially lost was its leadership team, the three most senior people in the company, so, you know, it loses the command structure. Don Bourne had only been with us for

33:30 essentially forty-eight hours, so he wasn't very well known and soldiers don't really get to know the company commander all that well, certainly not in two days. Over time you certainly do and you get to know each other. Bob Milligan was a hugely popular man, great sense of humour, engaged to be married, going home in two weeks time and that really, you know, devastated people because he was

such a popular and likeable bloke.

34:00 His batman, John Bilston, was very close to him. He's got a photograph of the incident, the one I showed you earlier. He's got that mounted at home. He gave a few personal items when Bob's gear was being packed up at Nui Dat. He kept a couple of personal items to give to his fiancé who happened to be standing on the steps of a,

34:30 in Sydney on the steps of a building as we marched past Sydney on our way home and she was there and knew where Bob should have been because we knew her before we went away.

And you said that the next day, well did you sleep that night out in the field?

I think we went back that night. We were back in Nui Dat in our tent lines. Yeah, I don't, I mean

35:00 the usual thing of reporting and getting on with life I suppose. I don't recall not sleeping, put it that way cause you're always pretty tired and, you know, people in the field don't have too much problem sleeping normally because of all the physical work, you know. You're generally doing long hours and, you know, moving at night to get into position, so you go off and, you know, you don't usually have problems sleeping on that one. I think the important thing was that to keep us busy and not sit and stew on it around Nui Dat

35:30 again and I think the commanding officer made the right decision to send, get us straight out in the bush again as well for several days. I think it was about four or five days.

But how difficult was it to get yourselves out there after something like that?

I don't think it was difficult. In fact I think the guys appreciated it. I do know that if we had run into anything on the other side up there that it would have been interesting and I think they would have liked to have done

36:00 that but it just, it didn't occur, yeah. You spend so many, you know, so much time on out in patrolling and on operations in that environment but you can go for long periods of time without having any contacts and that's the sort of situation where it can be more difficult in some circumstances for a young leader, it can be a lot harder in those circumstances controlling men, keeping their eyes

36:30 on the job, being on the ball, doing what they are supposed to do, than when you're in a contact because they said, "Oh we haven't had a contact for three weeks," or, four weeks, whatever it might be, constant patrolling so if you're not careful they can tend to get slack. They don't clean their weapons, this sort of thing. They're not vigilant in patrolling or watching their arcs of responsibility and that can be a harder time for a young commander to keep their eyes on the job or their minds on the job, than being in a contact, when obviously people are going to be vigilant

37:00 but that's what leaders are paid to do.

And what could you do, did you invent any sort of strategies?

Yeah, you've got to, yeah, I mean I always had situations. In fact I did it before every operation. We'd receive our orders from our company commander to go out. I'd pass those orders through the chain of command down to my section commanders, so they can pass it on to their soldiers. That's the normal way, but if we had time and certainly before we went out,

37:30 we got, you know, ideally you get the orders the day before and you leave the next day but I had a map of the area and what I would do before we went, I'd gather in the platoon as a whole and I'd just give them a broader overview of why we're doing this operation, what the larger enemy picture might have been, why, even what 6RAR were doing, so they could link the whole thing and it's more meaningful to them, but not taking away the prerogative of their corporal section commanders to do their job. I did have an occasion

38:00 getting towards the end of the tour where we were supporting an American brigade who were doing some road building and building a few bridges out to the east and we were out there, pretty quiet, nothing much going on. We were just providing security and two sections of my platoon, I had them spread probably about seven hundred metres to a kilometre apart, providing security in section groups and two of them were pretty

38:30 slack and idle in my view. They found a little village where they were getting all these little mementos and bringing them back and it looked like, you know, great pillage and murder almost. It wasn't that bad at all but it got right up my nose and I sorted that out when we got back to Nui Dat. I lined them all up and gave them one of the best rockets I've probably ever given about standards and responsibilities and all that sort of thing, to the extent that the company 2IC, this was obviously

39:00 just before February because Bob Milligan was there, company 2IC and he was walking down to my platoon lines to welcome us home and heard what I was saying and turned around and he said later, "I thought I'd better come back later," so.

Well did you actually mete out any punishment to anybody or?

We had a couple of section patrols to do and they got them, yeah, not punishment, no, not in the

39:30 form of fines or things like that, but it's just a reminder. If you're not in continual contact you probably don't have that problem but it's just that slackness when you have quiet periods of time to do it and that's what young commanders are paid to do, keep them on the ball, otherwise, you know, if it gets too bad you'll end up having casualties, people being careless, not watching and you have unnecessary casualties. That would be the worst thing that would happen.

And as you say you felt like there were occasions when

40:00 **people wouldn't take care of their weapon as well as they could?**

Yeah.

Do you know of any incidences where weapons suffered because of that or?

Yeah, that happens. People say, "Oh blow it, I'm not going to clean my rifle today," you know. You cleaned your weapon every day. You cleaned your ammunition every day because you're in a tropical climate like that, if you don't, you know, when you want it to operate it won't, particularly things with intricate parts if you like, like machineguns and those sort of things. If you're in a contact

40:30 and that fails, well you've got a problem.

And how often would you inspect?

Every day, section commander's responsibility to do that and I would go and pick up a rifle occasionally and just so they know that I'm doing it, so would my platoon sergeant but every day we had to be, you know, it had to be done. I mean that's what saves your life. I mean little things like with a machine-gun which has got belt ammunition and if you

41:00 leave the same belt on the machine-gun for too long the links stretch and you'll get a stoppage after about three or four rounds, so you had to change, even though you haven't used the ammunition, you change it over and, you know, you get to learn those things.

Tape 7

00:31 **We were talking before about securing Nui Dat and doing patrols but there was also a minefield placed around the base?**

Yeah.

Can you explain to me how your platoon was involved in securing that in the base with the minefield?

Yeah, in, think it was late February '67 it was decided

01:00 to establish a new position to the east of the taskforce base called the Horseshoe and that was, the first people to occupy that position was D Company 5RAR which I'd mentioned earlier had occupied Nui Dat Hill inside the base and when they moved out the SAS took over Nui Dat Hill. There was a small operation by one of our other companies, it was B Company,

01:30 to secure the immediate area while D Company deployed to the Horseshoe. I was attached to, as a fourth platoon, to D Company at the time and whilst they were digging in on the Horseshoe position, it's called a Horseshoe because it's actually shaped in a horseshoe position and hollow inside like a small volcanic thing but in a horseshoe shape. While they were digging in on that position, I provided the constant security for about a ten-day period

02:00 in the, what was called the Horseshoe area of operations to the immediate north, north east and north west of the Horseshoe position. After that, this would be getting into early March, the decision was made to build a fence from the Horseshoe down in a generally south east direction down towards the coast, with the aim of trying to [UNCLEAR "cop"] people from infiltrating down through the Long Hai Hill areas and down into the more populated areas.

02:30 There's been a lot of debate over that fence in subsequent times but my particular role in it was that on the very first day that that fence started, it started off with a fence and we actually called it a fence rather than a minefield initially because that's what it was and we built this, put in these pickets. I was actually given the direction or the bearing on which it was to take and I do recall standing back while one of my corporals on the back of an

03:00 APC with a steel picket and a dolly banging it into the ground and saying, "That's the direction the fence goes in." We spent several weeks building that. It was round about thirteen kilometres in length and we spent a lot of time putting in the two fence and the concertina wire about a hundred metres apart and then in time the engineers followed behind and laid the mines in the minefield. At the end of each day we would,

03:30 that wasn't just my platoon. The rest of my company came out as well, so we took it in turns. I mean the

platoon on one side and platoon on the other and one providing security and we would generally have a company harbour at the end of the, where we got to the open ends of the fence, to provide security and then go forward and secure the area because the minefield area had to be cleared by dozers as well. We had a few

04:00 security problems but there was, for a couple of days we noticed, because quite a few villages nearby and children and local population would come and watch what we were doing and seem quite friendly but then we noticed that they were flying kites in the vicinity of where we got to at the end of the day and this would happen for a few days and we just felt that this was an indication to brothers, uncles, cousins, whoever they are out in the countryside and

04:30 letting them know how far we'd got to that particular day, cause as it followed there were quite a few mine incidents that followed. When we were replaced on the fence and B Company took over from us and one of their officers stepped on a mine, right in the direction in which the fence was continuing to be built and he was killed as a result of that.

So you were clearing the minefield?

We were,

05:00 no, we weren't clearing the minefield. We were preparing the fences that the minefield was going to be laid between, so they were a hundred yards apart and the engineers, even though, and there were some other corps people who, qualified infantry can lay mines as well, but it's generally done by the engineers who followed behind and laid all the minefields in that particular area. We didn't clear them. We were providing the security and making sure

05:30 the direction in which we were advancing the fence was going, was clear ahead of us, so it was safe for the people with the bulldozer or laying mines, so they had a secure environment or a safe environment in which to work.

So was it the company commander that you said, sorry, who stepped on the landmines?

One, we were replaced, our company built approximately 50 percent of the length of the fence for the minefield. We were replaced by B Company and one of the platoon commanders in B Company,

06:00 right at the end of where the fence had actually got to, stepped on this mine and

So had that mine been moved?

Well that's what people were saying, that, one of the things, one of the principles of having minefields is they've got to be secured, you know, by observation and fire, otherwise anyone can come in and lift mines, you know, if they're the type of mines that can be lifted and they can be re-laid and there was a lot of evidence after my time over there. In fact we lost lots of casualties

06:30 in that and became a very controversial fence, minefield. I mean when I first heard about it and I've discussed it subsequently with people like my platoon sergeant and my training was that that minefield was being placed in a situation where all the principles of the laying minefields could not be followed and that is principally observation and fire. Now the intention was that

07:00 a lot of the protection of the minefield be undertaken by the South Vietnamese forces and at that stage we had been over there for pretty close to a year and we knew what they were like and there's no way I would believe that they had that capability to protect it as it should have been.

And the local villagers that were around, I mean was there any protection for them not to go near the minefield?

Yeah, they were all told and there were, as normal with a minefield, you have notices placed on there

07:30 in their language, bi-min, which I think was minefield, so that was there, so they know but it didn't necessarily stop them going through and were trying to clear paths, you know, to get through it.

Do you know approximately how many mines were laid in that area?

No I don't. No', I'd only be guessing cause it's not, I'm not an expert in laying mines.

08:00 **Well that's a good place to ask about what interaction you did have with local people. There was the cordon and search that you had?**

Yes.

But did you have any hearts and minds work?

Hearts and minds and looking after them, providing food and medical aid and assistance and that sort of thing was a normal part of cordon and search operations.

08:30 That was done more by those who were with those specialisations and more of the battalion headquarters areas who could provide that. At the company level and platoon level, even though you saw a lot of people on the other side and, you know, soldiers would have great delight in talking to local kids and villagers and things like that and, you know, taking up conversations with them and we were

pretty friendly

09:00 to them as well and I think they appreciated a lot of, you know, the help we'd give them. You had to be very careful of kids, pickpockets. You couldn't leave your weapons lying around. You'd stop in a village and people have known where, you know, kids would come and put their hand through the window and take a ration pack or that sort of thing if it was there, so you had to be vigilant and even though, you know, just young kids and part

09:30 of the population and families, you had to treat them with respect but you had to be firm with them as well.

And with, I mean the dilemma was not really knowing who your enemy was and were you able to build any relationships or trust with local villages?

Yeah, there were some villages where, I mean Binh Ba's probably an example where they had a chapel and when we lived up there our people would go to church

10:00 services there cause it was catholic, there were some, it was a catholic population up there, so people did go and do that but not a lot of examples. I mean there was no real time to get to know them except perhaps on the day of the cordon and search, you know, probably the number of times we did some villages like Wah Long you could probably think you'd get to know them on a first name basis almost but no, not like that.

And before

10:30 **we were talking about leave there was one question I didn't get to ask and that was did you ever advise your men about visiting brothels and what to be wary of?**

Yeah, that was very much part of them and provide them with the necessary protection and I suppose in, and it's just not there now and I think its happened in all wars and certainly going on R & R. Yeah, they were given briefings.

11:00 It was not considered nice to come back with a disease where you would essentially become a casualty yourself because you're letting your mates down and that means one person less on an operation, so we used to have inspections as well which was, you know, one of the least liked things that platoon commanders had to do, to check your guys out to make sure they were,

11:30 you know, clean, hygienically looked after themselves.

Did you ever have any real problems with it?

No. The odd occasion yes, but not a major problem.

And were they ever advised of clean brothels and, you know, ones to avoid?

I think the line taken down there, there weren't any clean ones. I mean it's not like, you know, we have here these days. No, I think general line is that you are at risk. If you

12:00 go to a brothel, you know, you are risking yourself and that's the line we took and I say they were certainly provided with condoms and that sort of thing and given briefings. The doctor, medical staff, would come round periodically and, you know, and raise that again. People went on R & R to other countries as part of their briefing as well.

So,

12:30 **not wanting to labour the point, with the inspections, was the doctor with you?**

No, platoon sergeant and myself. Do you want the detail?

Yeah I do, I want to know what you're looking out for, I mean if you're not medically qualified, what are you…?

It was called a short arm parade and it was generally held very early in the morning when, you know, you have the time people are going to get up

13:00 and so before people have got time to go to the latrine, to the toilet to relieve themselves, it was known that if you squeezed that part of your anatomy in a certain way that, you know, like whatever was discharged was evidence that you had caught something, so that was done periodically and the, you know, we were told how to, I didn't do it personally.

13:30 Your soldier would do it and they would get out just in a towel and they'd drop the towel and they would perform that little trick themselves and so the platoon sergeant and yourself could observe to see what happened and if you weren't satisfied they'd done it properly you do it again and if there was something, well they'd be off to the doctor to report it.

So would you look at the colour of the discharge or something?

Yeah, if they had, you know, something that just didn't seem to be normal and anything else that looked

like, you know, boils or whatever

14:00 it could be, that just didn't seem to be normal but it wasn't a sort after task to do that.

No I bet it wasn't?

Part of command, welfare of your troops.

And was it random without warning?

Yes, pretty much like drug testing this day and age in sporting.

Well

14:30 **you were over there serving with the US [United States] forces as well, did you have much interaction with the US?**

Periodically. We were totally under the command and control of the Australian Taskforce Headquarters but we did have some operations, we certainly, initially we did a lot of helicopter operations with the Americans, so they would take us in on operations before nine squadron,

15:00 our helicopter squadron, was fully operational. We initially had American dust-off helicopters. The Americans came through on brigades coming through as I mentioned on several occasions up through Route 15 but there was no intimate, they were just driving through while we provided the security. We did an operation out to the east of the taskforce base, well out into the eastern part of Phuoc Tuy province where they were upgrading roads and bridges and

15:30 we shared and occupied a fire support base to support that with them. They had huge numbers of tanks and armoured vehicles and engineer plant, so we worked, yes we did work pretty close with them. Generally when they were supporting a major operation we wouldn't see them on a day to day basis. They'd be in a, you know, they'd be several, ten kilometres away or whatever it was but working for the same overall objective but not intimately together.

And what impressions

16:00 **did you have of the US service?**

The ones that were with 173rd Brigade I believe were pretty good troops and I mean a lot of that to me would be second hand. I spent a bit of time up there with them but we had a battalion operating, Three Battalion Brigade and I think the, even though there are always inevitably problems in that.

16:30 I went up to Da Nang once, as I mentioned, and saw a bit of the marines. I was not overly impressed then. Now this is early days and I think the American situation got worse as the war went on and more and more people came in because they started fairly small and then built up and they had problems and a lot of that would, in my view, be due to junior leadership and I think we were streets ahead of them in that sort of area and in,

17:00 and certainly in low level tactics, which is really what a war like that is all about but I would say that they had some real problems, as we all know, during that time and following the Vietnam War but I spent three years in the United States in the mid '80's and they were very, very good and certainly built up over that, their low point which was probably, you know, in the '70s. They were very, very good. In fact I'd say that the United States Marine

17:30 Corps is more akin with the Australian Army than the United States Army is in the way of tactics, particularly at the lower level but at that stage they were very, very good.

And we talked about your own leadership role and leading your men but did you, how did you feel about your leaders?

18:00 I, first up, with the very first company commander I had, I was extremely disappointed, not the leadership that I was expecting, being straight out of a four year training course at Duntroon and as time was proven, or was proven by time, that he did not stay with us very long

18:30 and he left during, towards the end of Operation Hardihood. A number of incidences to do with that but I'm not really sure I should go into them but I wasn't sorry to see him go.

Well can I just ask how he disappointed you or, you know, how he let you down as a leader?

I would say

19:00 almost in some instances, got to being a bit irrational, giving directions at the top of his voice in a harbour situation, when what you want is what is paramount, is quietness. There was another major instance where I think that if we got into a decent scrap that I would not be confident in his leadership

19:30 and that was proven to be the case.

And his replacement?

A very good, solid officer who stayed with us for the majority of the tour, nice fella and very, very reliable, not gung-ho or anything like that but good soldier, reliable and you thought that you could rely upon him, so it was chalk and cheese.

Well as you

20:00 **came towards the end of the tour, was it a very edgy situation?**

Yeah, it sort of, we spoke, people talking things like, "Two months to go, tippee toe." Now that coincided in February with a lot of mine incidents, the one we've already referred to on Op [Operation] Beaumaris.

20:30 At the end of that month there was another incident when B Company lost its company commander and a platoon commander and five others killed as well when an APC was blown up and there were the rescue parties coming forward and the medics and everything ran into booby traps along the side of the tracks. They'd been deliberately set up and we went out into that instrument, into the same area and the soldiers were particularly

21:00 wary, not wanting and that's all this unknown thing about mines because you can't control them, you don't know where they are. They're likely to appear anywhere and there's very little you can do and they cause very nasty casualties and so that was a pretty difficult time there. That was getting pretty well our last operational experience in that because we came home. We came out of operations I think at the end of April and, well I then went back, left on the 12th

21:30 of May on the Sydney to come home but certainly and that's where, again where young leaders are paid to go out and get their blokes to do it. It's not nice but sometimes you've got to get out the front a little bit and do it yourself as well.

Did anyone become superstitious or…?

No, of mines? No.

Or just in general, you're coming so close to the end of your tour and?

22:00 No, I don't think so. I think everyone I suppose, you know, there was a rise in vigilance, even on the routine patrols which we still had to do up until the very last moment. They were very, very, very, very careful and I'm glad over those last, the last month, five weeks or so there was very, very little, if any contact with the other side, so it's just as well but I mean if it had happened, the job still had to be done.

And when you did come to that last

22:30 **day, how did you feel about leaving?**

I think there were a lot of smiles around. We packed up our belongings at Nui Dat. We had a last parade. I lined up my whole platoon there. We had a photograph taken, or two, and we went down to the helicopter pad or the airstrip as it was then and went onboard Chinooks and flew straight out of Nui Dat on to

23:00 board HMAS Sydney, yeah, and people were pretty pleased.

How long was the journey home on the Sydney?

About twelve days, yeah, came across the, escorted by another navy vessel and straight down. We were actually onboard the Sydney. I do have photographs of it, of showing Vietnam disappearing to the background. You can see the mountains, the Nui Thi Vais.

23:30 You can see the Vung Tau Peninsula and very, very clear still waters and beautiful shots of that land mass just disappearing and no one was sad about that.

Was it emotional?

Yeah, it was. We, you know, obviously we had a few beers onboard. Navy ships don't, you know, have a dry policy but the wardroom which is the, you know, the

24:00 navy's equivalent to an officers' mess, they had a welcome cocktail party essentially for us and the few officers on duty were down there with us and then they, with our officers, soldiers were doing other things, they essentially locked us in, so we had a few, yeah, but it was a good trip home. We came back across the top of New Guinea, through Manus Island and quarantine and customs people can onboard opposite Townsville

24:30 and did routine inspections of everything as we went down, sailed down to Sydney.

You were able to get locked in and have yourself a bit of a cocktail party but what about your men, were they able to?

They got their two cans per man per day but these were the big ones. These were the big cans that they got, yeah, they got that and again, just happy to wind down, you know. I think it was a good way to come home that way rather than getting on a plane that, you know,

25:00 going up to Saigon, Tan Son Nhut or getting on an aircraft and flying straight back and not getting a very nice welcome back here.

So what was the first thing you saw of Australia?

We actually saw land coming down the coast but then, you know, essentially closer to land coming into Sydney Harbour to Garden Island and relatives and friends were there. I had no one visiting me but

25:30 we, you know, a lot of friends there. My first platoon sergeant was there. His wife was there and I think it was fairly early, about ten o'clock and she came with like a picnic hamper but it was actually with a little tea cloth over it but underneath was about a six-pack of cold beer as well and we formed up and marched through Sydney.

And what was that march like?

Great, yeah, ticker tape, coming home. We marched through Sydney on the way,

26:00 going and on the way back. I did mention that instance about the fiancé of our company 2IC being there as well but no, that was, we were given a huge welcome home. It was, the problems with the moratorium and things like that that, you know, came in subsequent years when, you know, going back for a second time.

What was the feeling like, being home after going through that experience?

26:30 Relief, good to get back in a normal environment. Looking forward to going out and buying some clothes, we didn't have any. Seeing friends, going from Sydney up to Canberra to see, you know, the lady of my life, who is still the lady in my life, so yeah, pretty special and, you know, for the next

27:00 few weeks having a bit of leave, going to Adelaide, picking up a new car, you know, all these things and get on with a normal life for as long as you could.

And where did the love of your life meet you when you came to Canberra?

At the airport, yeah, met me at the airport with a friend of mine and his girlfriend who, not girlfriend really but a good friend who was in Sydney at the time

27:30 and we dropped them off in Campbell and we met them the next night and, you know, went out together, so.

And how long was it before you got back down to Adelaide to see your family?

I went after about two days because Tina my wife told me when she picked me up at the airport, we weren't engaged or anything, just, we hadn't known each other long. She told me on the way

28:00 back from the airport that she was leaving in two weeks time to go on a twelve month working holiday to the UK and Europe with two other girls, so I said, "That's the end of that." I didn't say that but I thought, "That will be the end of that," so I stayed at her place here for a few days. Then went to Adelaide, picked up the car, said, "Hi" to Mum and Dad, then drove back to Canberra.

And then you had to say goodbye to her?

I said goodbye to her, drove her to Sydney airport, saw her off and

28:30 she came back six months later at which time I was off to Malaya.

Quite a unique courtship?

Yeah, took a few years.

And how was your homecoming with your family?

That was good. They were I think proud, relieved.

29:00 They had put on a few parties at home with, you know, friends and couple of school mates. I was asked to go and give a few talks to various organisations like Lions Clubs and RSLs and those sorts of things. I think I did three of those in the few days I was there, because it was I mean we were the first, essentially the first people to go in 1966. It became more routine after that but we were the very first group to go there, to set up the taskforce base and do what we did, so it was still, you know,

29:30 fairly unique.

And when you saw the map that you sent your family and your father's marking on it, did that stir any emotion?

Yeah, it brings back, you know, a lot of memories and probably how keen they were to follow what I was doing given, you know, the limitations on what I could probably tell them, but it's great to feel that, you know, you've got that support behind you at,

30:00 you know, family level.

And so after Vietnam, your first posting was a desk job?

Yeah.

How did you settle down?

It was a very busy job. We came, as I said, we came back in May. I had most of June off. In fact when I came back just before I went to Adelaide and came back I was actually called in to have an interview to become

30:30 ADC to the Chief of the General Staff who was then Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daley and the person who was in the job, we happened to be in a hotel having a drink and myself and this other friend who came back and just said that, "You're on the panel for this job." I was being posted to another position in Sydney and, "While you're in Canberra, come and have the interview," and I said, "Well I don't even have a suit or anything like that," so he said, "That'll do," so we came in and I ended up being selected for the position

31:00 and I started in July and I spent eighteen months in that, so what Sir Thomas Daley wanted at the time was a young officer who had had the experience in Vietnam cause there weren't a lot of people around at that time and I found it a very, very valuable experience and working for a very fine man. I went, I suppose going from being a platoon commander at one

31:30 level out on operations and coming back and working for the most senior person in the army who was responsible for, overall, for the preparation of people to go there. During that period of time the decision was made to send, to increase the taskforce to the, with the addition of a third battalion and that was taken with him. In fact it was very simple. I remember that because

32:00 going back to the initial level, you have platoon commanders giving orders groups to your section commanders and it's pretty basic orders and you just say, you know, "Four section do that, Five Section, you're responsibility is, Six Section," whatever it is, coordinating instructions. Well General Daley did much the same thing at the, if you like, the strategic level. He asked me to get all the senior generals in the army, members of the military board, into his office and in those days they had names like quartermaster general, master

32:30 general of the ordnance. There was a deputy chief of the general staff, an adjutant general looking, all those sort of things and he got them all into his office and he said something along the lines that, "Gentlemen, the government has decided to send a third battalion to Vietnam. It's leaving in six weeks time. I'll inspect it before it goes. Adjutant General, give them priority for personnel and Master General of the Ordnance, make sure they're fully kitted out," and he just went on and gave these very, very simple things and that's the way it occurs,

33:00 just like a platoon commander's orders group, very, very simple. Mind you work had been happening behind the scenes, so it was really giving, you know, confirmatory type orders but it happened.

Was that a, for yourself personally for your career, was that a great learning curve for you in that position?

Yes. It was, just going say, having an understanding of what happened in a war situation and then coming back and seeing the planning and what went on behind it. I found it extremely useful and a valuable experience that,

33:30 you know, stayed with me for the rest of my career. I mean also those days you had a lot to do with ministers because there were separate ministers for the army, navy and air force back then as well and, you know, an expanding army at the time. It was also, apart from the third battalion, it was also during that time that the decision was made to send a squadron of tanks to Vietnam and that's the only time I had

34:00 seen a top secret flash message being sent. Top secret being the highest level of security you could give to a message and flash being the quickest way or everything out to make sure this message gets out with all stops pulled out to its destination and it was from General Davey to Major General Vincent, who was the Commander Forces in Vietnam, seeking his advice on whether

34:30 he thought tanks should be sent there. At that particular time General Vincent happened to be in London briefing the United Kingdom Chief of General Staff's annual exercise, so this flash top secret message was dispatched about six p.m. on that day and we had an answer back with his views at eight o'clock the following morning and they had to find him over there, so it worked and the tanks went to Vietnam the following January.

35:00 **Was that a controversial decision?**

Not in my mind, no but I think there were a lot of people suggesting the tanks couldn't operate in that environment. Well they did and they were proven to do so and very valuable in bunkers and village fighting. The Battle of Binh Ba was a typical example. They saved lives with a, you know, their armament and what they could carry.

The US had tanks there when you were there though?

Yes, very,

35:30 not a lot on our area. Yes there were some there. The marines had them a lot further north, I know that. Yeah, we had some down, but they came, there was a large base called Black Hawk, 11 Armoured Cavalry Regiment were up there in the neighbouring province and we did some work with them. In fact we had a full time liaison officer with them up there, so they had tanks, so we did some work with them.

And as ADC what was your daily routine, what was your daily job description

36:00 **really?**

Yeah, it was a very small office. There was only two officers on his direct staff, even though he had the support from wider but essentially looking after his personal side, his social diary as such, a lot of events he had to do and look after his calendar, you know. I'd be essentially a speechwriter as well, organise all his visits and travels, being a very busy person. He would go back to Vietnam every probably three or four months

36:30 to visit the troops. I never went on one of those. The more senior person on his immediate staff went, but he, every Monday morning and every Thursday morning when we were in Canberra, he would get me to brief him on low level operations of the taskforce in Vietnam and I had this map that was set up on a board facing him and I would get all the intelligence reports and the situation reports that came on a daily basis and I'd pick out the key elements

37:00 of those and I'd place these, just in numbers, numbers one, two, three, etcetera, on the map and I'd just say, "Sir at point number two, Seven Platoon Charlie Company 9RAR had a contact with," you know, the figures of the casualties, and he would ask me things: "And what's the country and what's the vegetation like there?" Right down, cause he wanted that understanding because when he went back there I think he used that but he also got at the more senior level the more strategic intelligence

37:30 briefings naturally, but he just wanted this little short summary once or twice a week, yeah. I really enjoyed that job and, as I say, I learnt a lot from him. He was a very fine man.

And how did you feel when he was asking you questions about Vietnam like that?

No problem. Knowledge is power. I knew, you know, I'd been there and had the experience, so he made you feel at home anyway. He was a very, you know, personal gentleman and

38:00 I mean a great leader, so I had no problem with that at all and I don't think he, he's not the type of person who wouldn't want someone to speak their mind or say what was going on. He would ask my opinion on a few things occasionally but yeah, great experience.

That's quite a compliment, and were you keenly watching how the war was unfolding?

Yes

38:30 and, you know, tactically and operationally, because I was in a position to see what was going on, apart from what was in the papers but no, I was, I think over that period of time having been myself there, until I left General Daley, which was in February '69 when I went back to, I went to join 1RAR to go overseas again, but over that period of time

39:00 I think I had as good a knowledge as anyone, both in practical terms and being in a position to absorb the politics of it as well and the, you know, the increases and what was happening across the Australian Army that had the major input into Vietnam.

And did you ever, while you were getting these briefings think, "I wouldn't mind going back and.."?

Yeah, I mean as a professional young officer with, I mean the best thing you can have is operational experience

39:30 and I knew that I would be going back for a second trip. I had no doubt about that because it seemed to be, for the infantry, young infantry officers, you were having twelve months in Vietnam, back home for about eighteen months and then back again and a lot of people, my friends, did two tours. When I left, I mentioned I went to 1RAR after I left General Daley and 1RAR was going up to

40:00 Malaya and the officers and in fact the whole of the battalion that went to 1RAR that time were going there on the proviso that we were only going to be there initially for about fifteen months, come back, train in Australia and go back to Vietnam again and everyone knew that and every officer in that battalion except for some young national service officers, had been to Vietnam before, so it was a very, very experienced

40:30 battalion.

Tape 8

00:33 **So Roger was there anything else from that time working with?**

General Daley?

With General Daley that stands out in your mind?

As I say, the two major ones, it was obviously a very hectic period and I think the two things particularly related to Vietnam was the third battalion going there which

01:00 I think I indicated earlier on, we were particularly providing proper defences to the base, so you could actually have two full battalions out on operations rather than bits. I think that was essential. The one I mentioned about the introduction of tanks. General Daley always made a point of visiting the next battalion, and other units as well but mainly the battalions, and inspecting them to give them essentially his tick of approval before they went away

01:30 and he was quite tough on them and there was one occasion when a number of officers were actually removed from one battalion because a commanding officer felt they weren't up to scratch and so they were moved and on one occasion he, we were coming back from Adelaide visiting a battalion on its final exercise at Kultana, right up in the Port Augusta area and the commanding officer, there were a few problems with the battalion, in the command structure, so the

02:00 commanding officer spoke to the CGS [Chief of the General Staff], General Daley, and he said, "No, I just want to talk privately to him," and General Daley said to me, he said, "No, Roger comes to all my meetings to take notes and things like that," and the commanding officer, so we went in the tent and the commanding officer said, "I want to remove that company commander and that company commander and this mortar platoon commander and a couple of platoon commanders," and gave him reasons why and we'd actually observed one of them during the exercises were on to see

02:30 that there probably was a problem there. When we got back to Canberra, got off the plane that night, it was about nine thirty. He said to me, "Roger, would you ask the military secretary to come and see me at nine o'clock in the morning?" The military secretary is responsible for all officer postings, so I phoned him at home to let him know and I told him what I thought it might be about, so he got his staff in during the night and when he went to see General Daley in the morning he had all replacement

03:00 officers nominated, you know, it just happened, so he got things done, but a very fine and respected man to work for.

Do you think he was, was his style overly strict or…?

No, he's one of those people who had presence. He didn't have to be like that and, as I say, totally respected and the major generals at the level below him were

03:30 absolutely totally supportive of him and knew that he was the boss. He didn't have to, I think that was one thing that came across with him as well is that he was very concerned about casualties and I've heard subsequently that he has, you know, given commanding officers advice and I think ours was one of them, that he said, "If you think that you are in a situation with your battalion where you are going to suffer a lot of casualties, pull

04:00 back and look at other options." He was very strong in that and he also did things like when people got awards for gallantry, he would personally write to every one of them. I'd draft the letters for him and he'd write to every one when the honours and awards list came out, little things like that that, you know, that count.

That was going to be one of my questions, was what did you learn from him in terms of strategy or tactics and…?

04:30 Not so much in strategy, or certainly not in tactics at the lower level because that wasn't appropriate. I think more in the way that he could organise the army in very difficult times and very political times, even though I wasn't with him at the time when the moratoriums were going and, you know, we were heading towards a change of government and there was the conscription problem and all of those and then he subsequently had

05:00 some differences with Malcolm Fraser and others like that. I wasn't actually privy to that detail but to this day if anyone said to me, "Who was the most", in thirty-five years in uniform, "Who was the most, who's the person that you have the most respect for?" I'd say, "General Tom Daley."

From a military point of view or from a…?

From a military point of view, you know, essentially but

05:30 also from a personal point of view. I mean I could confide in a person like that at that level. I travelled with him on many, many occasions right around the country. I got to know him extremely well, you know. We'd live together in the same hotels, sit together on aircraft. He talked to me about general things when he was a young man and all this sort of thing, so yeah, a very fine person,

06:00 had a big influence on my life and what I hope are standards that I carried on in my own career.

In what way do you think?

Well just in the way you treat things. I think it's that command, the ability to command people, being fair with people, getting involved with people but not to the extent where you're, getting to know your subordinates.

06:30 He'd asked me like all sorts of, without getting into sort of any intimate details but he knew what was happening between Tina and myself back in those days and things like that. We went and had lunch at his home. When I left he invited us both to have lunch at his home, myself and Lady Daley, cause we see them a lot at functions as well. I mean I'd go on the cocktail circuit with him and it was a great relationship.

07:00 **Well how did that or even indeed why did that eighteen months come to an end for you?**

Normally in ADC you would only stay in a position for about twelve months and then move on. I was asked where I would like to go after I left. I suppose in a position you don't often get that cause normally you go where you're told but I essentially said, "I'd like to go overseas again and if I", you know,

07:30 "I'm happy to go back to Vietnam for another tour," so I ended up going to 1RAR which was programmed to go back later on but instead of having just fifteen months in Malaya, we moved down to Singapore and we were overseas essentially for almost two and a half years cause as the withdrawal gradually started, so at that stage we were not overly familiar with what was happening in Australia at the time on the, particularly on the political scene

08:00 as well and because it was decided 1RAR wasn't going back for what would have been their third tour of Vietnam, that's why I came back slightly early to start training to go as the, on the Australian Army Training Team.

And so why 1RAR instead of back to 5RAR, did you get a choice or…?

No, I had a choice of going to 1RAR because I know at that stage they needed

08:30 captains and I was, when I came back from Vietnam I was promoted to captain to undertake this job and they needed captains, so that was why and 5RAR had, at that stage was doing its second tour in Vietnam as well. You didn't always return to the same battalion. It's not standard to return to the same battalion. A lot of soldiers and NCOs do but officers not as much, even though it would be nice to go back to it.

And where did you join 1RAR?

Back in

09:00 Holsworthy in February '69 and myself and another officer arranged the return from Vietnam for them. They came home in the Sydney and marched through Sydney. We actually arranged that and then when they all went away on leave, I was part of the organising team to get 1RAR up to leave to fly over to Malaya for that, so I did all the organisation for that as well and then

09:30 I did a mortar course cause I was going to be the mortar platoon commander and I did that and then flew over myself.

So can you just tell us about that home parade for 1RAR that you organised back in Sydney?

What, with paint and things like that? Yeah, I didn't actually witness all of that because we were doing other things back in the Garden Island area, which was the main administrative area, so we didn't actually witness the same

10:00 march but yeah, like other battalions they formed up and marched through Sydney, a lot of ticker tape. There were the demonstrations and there was that incident where Lieutenant Colonel Bennett got the paint thrown over him as a commanding officer but during that time and later on, as the moratorium built up, it, I think a lot

10:30 of, and the opposition to the war built up, you had to, a lot of people I think had to make up their mind and say, "Well, do I really want to go back for another thing?" They were obviously saying, "Yeah, we do," you know, "Soldiers do what they're told," and that'd be the case if you went back and, as I've indicated, I was going but at the same time, in fact I was engaged, or in fact I was actually married in Singapore but when I came back to do those training courses, my

11:00 sister-in-law was a student at Monash University in Melbourne and Monash was right at the top in the moratorium process and demonstrations, so we had a bit of a difference in the family and when you get to that and you're going away to a war it's not, I know it's nice to go without public support, and I think that's why politicians and leaders these days show unity very much, you know, despite what their political persuasion is, you know. You'll see the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition,

11:30 Chief of the Defence Force and others, always at these welcome home parades and things like that, so they're just showing their public support. It certainly wasn't there back in those days.

And what was it like having that difference of opinion within your own family?

Not nice. I didn't see a lot of her and I mean she's a very talented and, you know, intellectual lady but it was just there that, you know, there am I

12:00 married to her sister and she knows that, knows I've been to Vietnam and going back and very much involved in that process but we agreed to disagree over it I suppose. It had no long term effects or anything like that but at the same time Tina was pregnant with our first child as well, so I would have been in Vietnam for a second tour when she was born, which, you know, would not have been

12:30 nice.

And how did 1RAR deal with the turn in public opinion?

Well after that welcome home parade, it was February '69, a few months later, I mean we went on leave and straight over to Malaya, so we were sort of separate from it and had a very good period of time training and for them getting over their tour of Vietnam, so even

13:00 though we were aware of it just through the media, it didn't really have a direct effect on 1RAR. What it really meant is because of the change in the political climate, that 1RAR did not go on that third trip to Vietnam, which I would have been in and all my friends would have been in.

Were you disappointed?

No, personally at that stage I wasn't and I think when I was back in Australia I actually

13:30 studied political science at the ANU as well, so you tend to form some different views on it and I really think, you know, probably enough was enough at that stage and so I think even though it was a change of government that ended that and conscription, I think in the climate at that time it was, yeah, the right thing to do.

So the whole battalion was sent to Malaya?

To Malaya yes and-

14:00 **What was your brief or your reason for going?**

Well it was a bit of, essentially it was a bit of rest and recuperation for a long period of time. There were, in fact I don't think there were even sufficient barracks in Australia and there was part of the, we always had a battalion as part of the 28 Commonwealth Brigade, which was based at Terendak on the west coast of Malaya and that had a New Zealand battalion, an Australian battalion, British

14:30 battalion and supporting arms and services, so that was the arrangement at that time, so we had a commitment to provide that battalion but what it essentially, we replaced, 1RAR replaced 8RAR who came back to Australia, trained and went to do their turn in Vietnam. At the end of '69 with the change in the British Far East policy, we then moved down, or the withdraw the majority of British forces from

15:00 their far east, our near west. With the change of government in the UK we then moved down to Singapore and they became, you know, the [UNCLEAR] force in Singapore, so we actually moved down there and lived in the Selarang garrison which is right adjacent to Changi prison, which has obviously got origins, historical meaning to Australians.

It does indeed. What was in like being in Selarang?

15:30 When you see photographs of tens of thousands of prisoners on the Selarang garrison parade ground and the building that became our home, it was a garrison built and each company had a building around it and you see the photographs that were still, no we had and arranged to hang on the wall, it was quite incredible going to have a visit to Changi prison as well, so that part of history. We used the time there to look at a lot of the Malayan

16:00 campaign as well, you know, doing studies and looking, learning lessons from the tactics that were performed as the Japanese came down the peninsular. We used to have the debates and things like that, so yeah, pretty interesting time, you know, with the Changi chapel now resides at Duntroon as well. That was built when I was working at Duntroon, with the parts being brought over. I went back some years later.

16:30 It was in the, you know, it was in the early, about '89, '90, I went on a few trips over into that part of the world and I was probably one of the last people to see Selarang garrison before it was demolished. It'd be on the National Trust if it was here but they actually demolished the garrison and built new buildings.

Well what sort of condition was it in when you got there?

When we lived there? It was

17:00 pretty basic but open air styled accommodation. Looked very nice and palatial because it's all white buildings and it looked quite smart but it was certainly serviceable when we were there and the houses

nearby were quite magnificent. The only building they kept after they demolished it was the officers' mess which again was a huge palatial building but it's just sad to see, you know, the barracks were absolutely barren and I was there

17:30 probably about weeks before the bulldozers came in and they built a new, it stayed with the Singaporean Armed Forces as a new brigade headquarters or division headquarters.

Well on this posting you mentioned that you'd been promoted to captain, so what were your responsibilities when you were in Singapore?

In Singapore I had three positions in the battalion. I started off, I spent most of the time as the mortar platoon commander and

18:00 that's why I did that course before I went there and then trained reinforcements in mortar duties. I spent a period of time as the adjutant of the battalion which is essentially the senior administrator, working closely with the commanding officer and the headquarters and the third job I had, I became the operations officer for the battalion. It's normally a major's position but it was a newly created position on the establishment of all battalions and it was

18:30 in fact the Vietnam experience proved that you need to have a dedicated position to manage the operations of a battalion on behalf of the CO [Commanding Officer], so as a captain I became the first one in that job in 1RAR. There had been another major doing it but he was also a company commander, so they were three excellent jobs to have in a battalion.

And so can you give

19:00 **us some examples of the type of work that you were doing or?**

We, as I said, we weren't there on a holiday but it was a wind down period and then a build up period, start training. The training was right. We, the training was right as far as climate and everything is concerned because it was in the tropics and we had quite a few young officers who came up and they trained with us because, as I mentioned, we were a very experienced organisation and with the

19:30 exercises there, they could learn from us and then they would go as reinforcement platoon commanders to Vietnam. One of those was General Peter Cosgrove, who's Chief of the Defence Force. He came up to us in Malaya and then went across to Vietnam as a reinforcement officer and yeah. We had another one in a national service officer, didn't go to Vietnam but was over there with us for a period of time, was Jeffrey Kennett, the ex-Premier of Victoria, interesting

20:00 character.

So these juniors that would come to you, I mean it's interesting that they came to Malaya to do their training rather than doing it in Australia and then going straight to Vietnam. What was the advantage of going to Malaya and…?

It wasn't a lot of people. It was just, cause we still had to maintain the correct number of officers in the battalion but if they hadn't had that experience, you know, it filled positions in 1RAR at the time.

20:30 It gave them the benefit of learning from people who'd been to Vietnam, officers and NCOs. As I say virtually the whole battalion had been there. It was in the right sort of climate as well and the type of exercises we did there and conducted there were based on Vietnam, so it was a pretty good place to learn. Wasn't a large number of people but, you know, six, eight, ten people probably did it that way. One of them unfortunately who worked for me as my mortar platoon 2IC

21:00 who was an ex-reserve officer and changed to full time service, he left us and went over to Vietnam and was unfortunately killed about two weeks later.

And what were your impressions of the young Peter Cosgrove?

A great bloke, like he is now. I've known him very well. I've served in another battalion with him as well, so I've known Peter

21:30 for many, many years, good friend, as is his wife and Peter's a good, jovial sort of person, soldier's soldier you hear but he's good fun and very, very competent and he was good in the battalion, you know, a breath of fresh air in a lot of ways. He gets involved and, you know, enjoys a party and a beer and gets on and works hard and, you know, used to play a decent game of

22:00 rugby as well.

And the young Jeff Kennett?

Yeah, Jeff was different. Jeff was a character. He was a platoon commander in A Company 1RAR and I think he gave his company commander a fairly hard time on a few occasions. Jeff was known to wear the Sam Brown a fair bit, which means he had done something, some misdemeanour.

22:30 Wearing the Sam Brown means you're the duty officer for the week, so he quite often, we've got lots of photos of Jeff wearing the Sam Brown on it, yeah, but smart fella and he provided another side to the

battalion and the range of people you get.

Very diplomatically put?

Yeah.

23:00 **So from an operational point of view, this period was really focussed on training?**

Yes it was, yeah and come back and we were actually going to be coming back to Townsville and do some serious work up training. We would have got a new commanding officer at that time and it was essentially just going to be fifteen months, meet the requirement and

23:30 the obligations that we had in that part of the world from a government perspective, come back and train up again, so we did a major exercise with the Malaysian Army. We used to rotate companies through Rifle Company Butterworth, which still happens. That's when we moved down to Singapore and we did, you know, a large fire power exercise with, called exercise Passado Padu which was conducted and controlled by the Malaysians.

24:00 **What, can you just…?**

It was a counter revolutionary warfare type exercise, again using the background and the strategies used in Vietnam, you know. A whole range of cordon and search type operations, search and destroy, fire support bases, all this sort of thing and it was done there because, you know, we didn't go far away because that was the doctrine that we were using in Vietnam, so those opportunities were taken to practise as well.

24:30 **I was going to ask you, what sort of terrain did you select to do those?**

It was all in a way that part of the world, rubber plantations, jungle. A lot of it's similar type country and the same climate as well, you know, the tropical humidity and the regular four p.m. downfall of rain, so yeah, so it's the ideal climate in which to train and we even went up on, you know, when we moved down to Singapore, we actually continued to operate

25:00 in Johor Bahru on major training exercises, well major training bases and exercise areas there, yeah, but, as I said, it never came to fruition because in the early '70's when the withdraw proceedings started.

And what was the relationship with the Malayans?

Very good. We didn't have a lot

25:30 to do with them up in Malaya but after the British pulled out, that's when we had more to do with them. We would use their training ranges and facilities in Johor. I think, you know, we always get on pretty well with the Malaysians. We've got, I mean through if you like the British Empire going back type heritage, we do have some similarities there. Their organisations are very, very similarly structured to ours even though, you know,

26:00 they're a lot larger in numbers but yeah, the exercises we cooperated with them and I think they also had the benefit of learning from us because of the experience that ourselves and the New Zealanders at the time had had in Vietnam.

And so how often would you

26:30 **get over to Butterworth or…?**

We used to rotate. When we moved down to Singapore at the end of '69, we started sending companies down there from early 1970. It'd be a company going up there to, it's part of the arrangement we had with Malaya and the British under the Fire Power Defence arrangements, provide an element of security to the Butterworth base up there, which still happens today

27:00 but it was a break away. I mean we went there without families and that sort of thing and it was usually a three month deployment up there to do that.

Family's an interesting point because you mentioned that you were married in Singapore, so obviously your wife was there with you?

At the end, yeah. When I went up there in early, well it was about mid '69

27:30 when I went up there, having done the mortar course. We still had this arrangement and I went up there. We'd talked about getting married before we went up there but we decided not to rush it, so I was up there in Malaya and I came back to Australia to do a course, a joint warfare course at Williamtown near Newcastle and we were corresponding and everything, so I was doing this course for a month and Tina came and met me in

28:00 Sydney. I went to Williamtown. She came back to Canberra. We stayed weekends at her sister's place in Sydney who was there at the time and I went back to Singapore. We corresponded and she decided to come over and we moved into a very nice little unit overlooking the, down towards Indonesia, on the southern side of Singapore and we eventually got married in the High Commission there,

28:30 so it was a very nice place to have a honeymoon.

But your family couldn't attend the wedding?

No, in fact my parents were in Europe at the time on a visit and her parents didn't come over either, so we were, yeah. We were married in the High Commission with all the friends we had over there, yeah.

So this is a shift for you to have a partner

29:00 **while you're out of country and then you were living in married quarters or?**

Yeah.

How did it change for you, I mean did it change things for you?

No longer being single and going out with the boys so much, but everyone was very close over there. I think I was lucky that I never had a long

29:30 period away on operational service. I do feel for those people who've got young family and young kids and have to go, you know, a lot of people did on say two trips to Vietnam, twelve months each time. I think that can place a lot of stress on families. I was lucky enough where I was, during that time, I was single but I certainly had many of my friends, you know, who were married and I admire the wives and partners and the families who stayed behind because it's not

30:00 easy for them, you know, with the worry that goes on. It's certainly not easy and you might be back in Australia at a place where you don't have any of your extended family as well, which can happen with, you know, defence families moving around, so there's a lot of, you know, stress and strain. Malaysia and Singapore was great because that was where families accompanied, you know, members of the battalion overseas and that happened for many years and there was only one other battalion

30:30 after us that did that and it was a sort after posting, to live in, you know, live in that style with servants and that sort of thing, great climate.

And where did you go for your honeymoon?

We went up the east coast of Malaysia, just along the beaches there and stayed up there, just about, bit over ten days and then came back, moved into a

31:00 army married quarter at the time in a little village on the south east coast, down near Bedok Corner, don't know if you know Singapore or not but there were sort of a lot of tea trees right on the beach. We only lived about, the house, we actually had three houses there, the one we had initially and then two married quarters. The second one was only about a hundred and fifty yards from the beach and a lot of little beach stores and chilly crab places and hundred and fifty yards away on the beach. It's now about three

31:30 miles inland, all the reclamation, you know. We went back on a visit a few years ago and had a look at the places we lived in.

And is that a fond time for you?

Yes it is, yeah, quality of life, good people, you know. We were all pretty young and fit and with a lot of people with, you know, a lot of people there are very close friends of ours now, still see a lot of them when we can even though they're spread around the country but you can just ring them up and say,

32:00 "We're coming through." They'll offer you a bed, so yeah, no it was great coming back but then, you know, you had the expectation that I would come back a young married and when we came home Tina was actually just pregnant with our eldest daughter and I had in front of me all the courses that I was doing to prepare to go back on the training team, so there was a lot of absence on that when she was pregnant, you know, a seven week course up in Queensland and that type of thing.

32:30 **So where did you set up house when you came back to Australia?**

Here in Canberra. Her parents were here at the time and that was normal then. You'd say, "Alright, you go back to Vietnam, where do you want to be posted to when you come back?" So I said Canberra, so she could be here and have the support of her family but in the end it didn't eventuate.

Well just tell us about after the Malaya experience, coming back and then

33:00 **the stepping up again for preparation for Vietnam?**

Yeah, I did all the training. I won't say I was reluctant to do it but I, you know, I knew that if that was my career I had to go and not complain, though the difficult was, there was two things. One, that just being married and with a wife in the early stages of pregnancy and the second one was,

33:30 was the growing, you know, dissent with the war in Vietnam, as I mentioned, with a member of our close family being firmly opposed and organising, being organised in moratoriums and things like that. It wasn't easy. I did the language course at the School of Military Intelligence at Woodside as well which was about, that was a five week course and then up to Canungra and you did a special weapons course

as well

34:00 to use, to understand the Vietnamese weapons, so I was all ready to go and got within ten days. This is in early ’72 and got within about ten days of going and they said, “You’re not going,” but put me on notice to go again in three months time, so we had that uncertainty about, and the second time it was decided that I would be going.

And well as you know

34:30 **the public tide had really significantly shifted. Did you stop wearing uniform out on the street?**

Yes, we were told not to, not to wear uniform in public and I think when, you know, a country gets to that stage, there are some real problems. Yeah, I never had any physical or, you know, close involvement

35:00 or incidences involved in that, you know. You tend to keep away from them. You get on with what you’re doing, regardless of what your thoughts might have been about it at the time but I suppose the, you know, there was no decision. The decision was actually made for me because I had made up my mind and we were all prepared for me to go back to Vietnam but I suppose in hindsight I’m glad it didn’t happen and I was going right up to the north to Da Nang as a senior adviser, it was where I was being

35:30 posted and as history tells you, it was not a very nice place to be at that particular time.

And how did you feel, I mean did it affect you when you couldn’t wear your uniform out and about in Australia?

It did. To me it just felt foreign if you like that we were in a situation where you’ve got the defence force committed on operations and you come back and you’re told,

36:00 “Don’t wear it in public.” There’s something wrong when that happens, when you would hope that I think as now, you know, I’m pretty sure that the population is very supportive of what our soldiers, sailors and airmen do and there they are in public all the time, as they are in many other countries like the United States or the UK, just a normal thing. That only lasted for, you know, a short period of time

36:30 but I do remember being told, “No, you will not wear uniform. Put it on when you get to work.”

And I’m just wondering when you met new people, did you tell them that you were in the army or…?

Yeah, I had no problem with that at all. I mean I had some relations who were very much opposed to Vietnam and, you know, a couple of people in fairly high places.

37:00 One was the first ambassador to China, Dr Steve Fitzgerald, and I used to see a lot of him and he knew what I was doing and he was opposed and, but we got on, no problem.

And do you think your own ideas started to change at all?

I don’t,

37:30 no, because it was a relatively short term thing because, you know, when the labour government came in, immediate decisions were made, you know, conscription was cancelled, troops were withdrawn from Vietnam, even though that decision had already been made and the pullout was already starting under the previous coalition government, but, and it was fairly short term

38:00 and even though it’s a thing that is always with me, I think it’s more the moratorium aspects, the fact that you’re not accepted in public. Because of that there was never any welcome home from Vietnam, people arrived at midnight at Richmond air force base and disappeared onto the streets, all of that type of thing was not fair. Now I didn’t get a lot of that myself because, as you know, I came home early and

38:30 welcomed with a ticker tape march through Sydney, so I didn’t really see that, but knowing people later on, it certainly had an affect on them, yeah, hiding and getting away and that’s why I mentioned coming back on a ten day cruise as such on the Sydney is a fairly good way to wind down, rather than coming back and arrive in the middle of the night at an air force base and just disappearing. I even feel going back when we marched through Sydney that

39:00 probably in hindsight, even though I said a farewell to my guys about what we’d achieve in Vietnam before we actually left, but when we marched through Sydney we went back and friends and relatives, who could make it, were there, hand in the weapons and they just disappeared to the four winds. I’d never had that time just to say, “See you later guys, thanks for being great” even though, you know, I did compliment them before we came home. It was just very sudden cause people had their,

39:30 you know, changing priorities and wives, whatever to welcome them home and just went to the four winds.

And again how did you deal with that, you’re going one minute, then you’re not going in ’71?

Yeah, very hard. I mean it built up and, as I say, with Tina being pregnant and, you know, having Sasha born when we were overseas, when I was overseas, not being there but it was,

40:00 I think we could have lived with that with, “Yes I’m going on that date and I’m going to be away for another twelve months and then come back,” but it wasn’t that. It would stop start, stop start and that was the worst aspect about it and you know, get within eight days and couple of farewell parties with friends and this sort of thing and then, “Hey, I’m not going,” yeah.

It would have been a bit of a roller coaster?

It was, yeah.

Tape 9

00:31 **Just on that phasing out period of Vietnam how did, I mean do you think it was the time for Australia to pull out of Vietnam?**

Yes I do. I don’t think we were going to go anywhere politically. Public opinion is probably one of the biggest reasons why a country will commit itself to war

01:00 and that had been lost and lost for quite a period of time and I think that reason alone is reason not to do it. The United States were also pulling out as well. They had some real problems, both in, I think in their standards of the military. History has proven that they had those problems and yeah, I think it was the right decision at the time, but my understanding

01:30 is it wasn’t just a Labor decision at the time. When they came in the plans were already in place for a withdrawal to occur and indeed it was already underway.

Well there was the policy of Vietnamisation, did you think that was going to be effective?

No and I think the writing was on the wall that after, you know, the major nations pulled out it was really probably

02:00 just a matter of time, which turned out to be the case as well. I couldn’t see it happening at all and same with the French, you know, in the fifties as well.

And so after not, after being told, “You’re not going to Vietnam now,” what was your next posting?

I stayed here

02:30 in Canberra for a while. I did a staff job in the personnel area and then I went, I was promoted to major and I went to the 7th Battalion, back to an infantry battalion and again at Holsworthy, stayed there for a year. At that particular time that battalion was given the responsibility to develop new training courses for NCO training for the army. They were

03:00 called the subject one courses for promotion to corporal and sergeant and there was a new training doctrine called the Systems Approach to Training, was coming into being and we actually spent about nine months preparing and conducting the first of those courses and they’re still in place today. At the end of that year, that was ’73, we, because that was the downsizing and battalions returning from Vietnam were going back to a

03:30 six battalion structure as against nine and a number of the battalions linked, so I was with 7RAR but then our neighbouring battalion was my original one, 5RAR, based at Holsworthy and the two battalions linked to form the 5/7 Battalion, so I was there back with my original one and another one as well, so I spent a year with the 5/7RAR as well but that, at that stage we did training back to, as a normal battalion as well.

Well now that

04:00 **Australia is out of Vietnam and no longer at war so to speak, who, with the training that you were being involved with the battalions, what was the focus of the training?**

It doesn’t, I mean the role is to be ready, to, you know, the government direction to go and do what is required. It doesn’t mean because a war starts or there’s no conflict on the horizon, it doesn’t mean you let standards

04:30 drop. It was a good time to sit back, look at what had come out of Vietnam. The army in particular was downsizing quite considerably, conscription had gone and you had to look at sort of base level and it’s rotational. You’ve really got to get back to the basics and training still occurred. Using the experiences of Vietnam, a lot of the training went back into,

05:00 with a little bit more emphasis as against the jungle, the counter revolutionary type warfare. A lot of the emphasis went back onto the other aspects of formation training as well, you know, more of the Korean, second war type situation just to get back and not forget that other requirement, which we were

required under government policy to be able to commit to, so it didn't really get any quieter in

05:30 tempo.

But you did say that the defence force was downsizing and was there, were you losing resources as well?

Yes, there was a lot of that and a lot on the equipment side as well but the directions were, you know, "Back to basics, we've been so busy and it wouldn't matter to have a couple of years of fairly quiet tempo and start again," and that's really what occurred. It doesn't mean that you don't spend

06:00 any emphasis on training but a lot of it was, on the infantry side that I was still involved, a lot of it was getting back to basic skills and that is one reason why we got involved in developing courses, so you could, I mean a lot of people had this operational experience but a lot of the basics that, you know, provide them to be good soldiers and providing the basis for those soldiers and junior people with experience, let them use that experience and get them to be better people and give them the background so they can be promoted up through the ranks and subsequently

06:30 provide their experience later on, so a lot of it went into that.

So what were some of the training courses you were involved in developing?

The first one was the subject one courses for corporal and sergeant and that is a promotion requirements where they do a lot of field training. They do military law. There's a lot of administrative work and paperwork type issues, leadership training, was really the essential parts of all of that. After I left

07:00 that battalion and the 5/7 Battalion I was, because I had the background in this new army training system, I went there to redevelop the training program for recruits at Kapooka, the first recruit training battalion. That's where all the new recruits come in off the street, so I was, became the training officer there, then for a six-month period the chief instructor and redesigned that training course, basic training for recruits.

07:30 I then, I did that for two years, very, very interesting, so I'd done the NCO level and I'd done the most basic level with recruits. I then had a twelve months sabbatical at staff college at Queenscliff which was a good year.

What did you find so interesting about the recruit training at Kapooka?

The most, converting a civilian

08:00 who is willing to become a soldier into a good professional soldier, just giving them the basic skills. They had to go on subsequently to that to get their trade training, whether they were going to be cooks or infantrymen or engineers or whatever it might be, but very satisfying to see how those people work and implementing a new training system for it and revising the syllabus to meet the current

08:30 requirements. We had to make some changes in various things and that was based on experience of Vietnam and other things as well.

Could you see a comparison between the civilian turning into soldiers and training your national servicemen?

When we got the national servicemen they were already trained to that same level and even in our case, trained to be a rifleman, so they had already received that training. What essentially would happen with the national servicemen is they would

09:00 get say nine months training, recruit and trade training and then if they were going to go to Vietnam, that would be in their second year of their two year obligation, so they're coming home with only a month or so to go, so they're getting as much training before they actually went to Vietnam and that's what happened, so I never saw national servicemen at that civilian entry level like I saw with these other recruits but people from all walks of life, very interesting to

09:30 see and how they blend together and, you know, they worked very hard and had very long days as well.

And then after Kapooka you had your sabbatical and was back into training again?

Yeah, I left there. After each year at staff college they select people to go up to the land warfare centre as it was then named, to teach tactics and it's an officer promotion

10:00 requirement in the ranks of captain, major and up to lieutenant colonel, so we taught those using our own experience and our staff college training, had two years there, very satisfying. That's where you're getting involved in sort of formation level, you know, deploying, pretending to deploy divisions and brigades and things like that and all the reasons why, so it's planning, very, very enjoyable

10:30 work when you get, because every officer in the army, and you get overseas officers and navy and air force elements of navy and air force coming through, so you become actually fairly well known because you've been involved in, you know, training people for their promotion requirements, a lot of them the same rank as you or senior as well.

And did you bring a lot of your operational experience to this role?

Very much so, yeah, very much so. In fact it's really

11:00 mandatory to have some experience like that to go and teach it. It's a credibility thing in a way but it's also, you know, the way you impart it. A lot of it is classroom work and sitting in front of big models but then also getting out in the hills and doing tutorials out there actually on the ground and discussing how you would deploy tanks or engineers, so you had to have that wide ranging knowledge to do it, so it was a very, very good, for me, you know,

11:30 I got some good experience about that on the operational planning aspects of the army and the wider defence force which I did use later on as well.

And you then were promoted to lieutenant colonel and was it from there that you went to senior manager of the infantry corps?

Yeah, it was called, the SO [Senior Officer] in personnel

12:00 was a senior manager in the infantry corps, having I suppose served in four infantry battalions I knew a fair bit about it and in those days they had a director of infantry and director of all the arms and services here in Canberra, so this was a job where I was involved in the day to day management of officers and senior warrant officers and sergeants down to sergeant, so you're talking several thousand people and making decisions on where they're posted to

12:30 and in relation to their desires, their family needs and their career development, so you couldn't please everyone but I used to travel the country a lot and interview people. You'd have to make assessments on the annual reports that their commanding officers had filled out on them and grade those, so you're really getting involved in detailed personnel. It's career and future stuff, so you had to have a good eye for

13:00 detail and not, you know, not miss things but again, very enjoyable.

Did it ever become frustrating not being out in the field?

Yes, every, I think with my background everyone likes to get out there but there comes a time and you've to accept that, that the higher you go up the chain the less that opportunity occurs and once you get to lieutenant colonel the chances become far more limited to do that unless you're actually going to command a

13:30 battalion or a regiment, whatever it might be and unfortunately I did not have that opportunity.

And how difficult was it to keep soldiers occupied during peacetime when nothing's happening?

Yeah, that's a challenge. In a training institution it's not the same but in a battalion you still have to do the things because you've still got the obligation to be ready and, you know,

14:00 in 7RAR before we took up the training role and also in 5/7, we still went on exercises. You put people on promotion courses. There's all ways in which you can develop things. If you think there's a, you can talk to artillery and engineers to, I mean if you think your battalion is losing expertise in mine warfare training. You can arrange training to maintain that expertise in case you need to deploy somewhere quickly and it always seems to be the case like that,

14:30 so it's the responsibility of a leader and commanding officers to make sure that they do have interesting training programs and it can be done, given that there's always a problem of resources and money and whether you've got sufficient bullets to be able to conduct proper rifle training or you've got sufficient mortar rounds to conduct a mortar shoot. That's the usual problem with it, but there are certainly ways in which you can, and these days with simulation

15:00 and what's happening these days, it's easily to, the worst thing you can do, in old terminology, is that when you back to barracks you paint the rocks white, to give them something to do, yeah. That's, you know, that's not leadership. There's always something you can do and the other thing is don't do it yourself and provide direction from above. You've got, and our army has always had very, very good junior leaders. Give them the responsibility to conduct their own training. You provide the guidance but let them

15:30 get on to do with it. To me, you know, company goals and then unit goals, so if you spend a lot of time in doing that it's quite achievable. Training never has to be boring.

Well that's a very valid point and when you went to become an instructor at Duntroon how much responsibility did you give to the juniors that were there?

A lot. At that stage I was a colonel and I actually didn't

16:00 get involved in the day to day training because I had wider responsibilities. I had, you know, like I had a chief instructor who was a lieutenant colonel and a commanding officer of the cadets was a lieutenant colonel and under them there were five, six, seven majors, who were all responsible for various

elements, so if you give the proper direction, they got on and did the detail, which I would approve but it was within the overall policy guidelines and

16:30 what the goals and the training curriculum were being devised for young officer cadets . I would get involved in, myself and the commandant, who was a major general, who at that stage, he won a Military Cross in Vietnam and he and I would spend a lot of time visiting training, out in the field when they're doing that. Every day we were running into each other and we would, at the end of a training

17:00 session, we would invariably get up and pass on the benefit of our wisdom and highlight the key points and bad points or whatever it might be and pass on that experience, so it was more guidance from the top within a curriculum that had been devised. You can always in some way link it back to when I went there in 1962, the wheel turns.

Was there much of, "When I was here in

17:30 **my day?"**

Yes, a bit of that. No, the cadets as well, they find out that, for example, I used to be in Kapyong Company when I was a cadet and so one day in my office a t-shirt of Kapyong Company arrived thinking that I would wear that, so it shows where my loyalties lie, but yeah, no that's a good, I mean smart young people there and when I was there as well it was, the structure had changed. There was, people had been,

18:00 spent three years in the defence force academy getting their degrees coming across as well, so you had those direct enlistments who straight out of civilian life and those who had already had three years training at the defence force academy.

Well what did you notice, what difference did you notice with these cadets as to the cadets that were in your year?

My time against theirs? I really don't think there's a lot in the ability to, on a purely military

18:30 side. The level of, the standard of education, because you had the percentage that came from ADFA [Australian Defence Force Academy], from the academy, had their degree, so you could say on average they were probably academically smarter if you like or there's more of them, but in the ability to train them to be junior leaders, I don't think there was a lot of difference in it.

And did you have any problems with bastardisation

19:00 **when you were there?**

No. We had, we wrote a very clear directive, which was one of the things the commandant got me to do. We discussed and I wrote this directive which he signed and we made sure it was carried out about what responsibilities were. When I first arrived there, I did find there was a major training syllabus and then there was another training syllabus off the side that was being conducted in the barracks. Now to meet my requirements, I

19:30 banned that and they said, "There will be only one training syllabus for this college." I implemented that in my first month. When I found out that I turned up some training, I said, "That's not on the program," so we controlled that and this was also the stage when there were female cadets there as well coming from, you know, the academy or from civilian life as well.

Did you notice any change in the culture with the female cadets there

20:00 **now?**

No. We totally integrated the female cadets. We did it in a couple of ways. On some occasions we, you know, you're doing some training out in the field and you'd have an all female section of eight or ten people and on other occasions we'd fully integrate them with a male section and obviously I saw a lot more males there. We would never have one

20:30 female by herself. There'd be at least two but they respected each other. We had to put in place things like fraternisation policies and we didn't have any major concerns but there were a few incidences of where, you know, cadets didn't abide by the policy. Essentially what that got down to is there won't be any

21:00 fraternisation, sexual fraternisation within the confines of Duntroon. Now to be realistic, you're not going to stop intelligent, young, healthy people establishing a relationship or a liaison. I mean that's what life's all about but our thing was you do not do it at Duntroon because you can control what happens in a place like that and you can't give directions in situations where you don't have the ability to control it.

21:30 There's nothing so, we couldn't stop Staff Cadet Mary Jones and Staff Cadet Bill Brown getting together at the weekend or in their leave breaks going away together because they'd got to know each other but if anything, and you can't, I mean they're going to, those sort of things happen in this day and age but for them to get together and live in the same room at Duntroon was not on cause we could control that environment and

22:00 there were a couple of occasions when people were caught and they paid the penalty.

What was the penalty?

A couple of them got moved, out, and it didn't happen again, so, but I mean there's some, the physical aspects again was, you know, we're playing around with the best way to, because, you know, my view is that we were made

22:30 differently and I don't, with certainly exceptions, the male can carry heavier loads, so we made some compensations in that regard but mind you there's some very, very physically adept ladies as well, so we didn't overdo the heavy loads and carrying the machine guns and huge amounts of ammunition, that type of thing cause they weren't going

23:00 to do that in real life anyway but they experienced, because they could be in a position where their subordinates might do it, so they were certainly confronted with it but it wasn't done, cause we were there to train leaders and develop them. We're not sort of building, you know, physically super people, even though they've got to be very, very fit but they fitted in extremely well.

And that mould of leadership that you're training them for

23:30 **really doesn't end does it, I'm just thinking about the relationship that you've mentioned throughout the day that you have with your platoon, still to this day you have a very strong duty of care?**

Yeah, with my original platoon, sure do, yeah. I'm looking forward to seeing probably about thirty of them in February next year. I mentioned earlier on today that

24:00 hardly a week goes by. Well I got a phone call from one today as well, so it's there. I'm proud of it because I think from my own point of view to me it just means that I must have been a reasonable sort of guy as a young leader when they were relying on me.

So how did it happen that at the end, at the march in Sydney, they all went their separate ways and you didn't really have a chance to say goodbye?

No, not as a group, no.

24:30 **So how did you find them again?**

At the time of the opening of the Vietnam Memorial, no sorry, it was before that. It was the welcome home parade in Sydney that was held in 1988. I had been on a trip as part of my responsibilities for training for the whole of army, I'd been

25:00 on a trip to the ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] nations with a group of people and I knew this was on and the welcome home parade was on the 3rd of October, which is my birthday as well, and we arrived back from Bangkok into Sydney and I had a suit with me. I'd taken my medals. I gave this major who was with me, I said, "Would you take my case back to Canberra?" and I went from the airport, I changed in the airport.

25:30 I went to the domain in Sydney knowing that this was on, looked around and all the battalions, they had signs of 1RAR, 2RAR, 3RAR. I looked for the 5RAR one and then low and behold I saw that mushroom sign of Charlie Company and I had hardly seen anyone since, got them all together. We welcomed each other. When we marched through Sydney my platoon sergeant was there and I said,

26:00 "Sergeant Hindmarsh, line the platoon up, we're marching together," and we did. We went to the Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel afterwards to have the odd few beers. I handed around a piece of paper and everyone wrote down their names and addresses and telephone numbers and it just developed from there. Now most of us are on email contact and we've had many, many reunions. We have an Eight Platoon reunion just about every second year. We've had them last year in Adelaide, the year before down at Sunbury.

26:30 Quite a few come from the western suburbs of Melbourne and we had another one in Melbourne, so we get together, don't overdo it. I think as people are getting older they'll probably get few and far between but a lot of them do use it as a contact sounding board. I've done that, "Should my son join the army?" and when I was at Duntroon, "Can my son enter?" I provide a lot of advice for them on that side.

And what was it like that march, I mean your platoon were quite fortunate

27:00 **in that you had a ticker tape parade but a lot of veterans didn't?**

No, the welcome home parade I think for those particularly who had not had that opportunity to be welcomed home, very, very emotional. It was a great day and people who I knew said, "Oh no, I'm not going to bother. That was," you know, sort of, "I came back ten, fifteen years before that, too late," but all those people now that I've spoken to regret it because it became so well known and books produced on it and it was really

27:30 an emotional day and catching up, you know, the people who you've been with, with that experience,

you know, shared some fun times and some pretty ordinary times as well in various circumstances, I mean it's just great to, you know, catch up with them and maintain the contact over the years. I've only got a few who don't want to be fully involved. They've got their own reasons for doing that and there's no way I'm going to force them

28:00 but they know that if they want to contact me, a lot of their mates do keep in contact and they say, "Oh no, thanks for letting me know but I really don't wish to do that," and that's their decision.

Well throughout today we've heard what yourself and your platoon experienced and it was some quite traumatic stuff in there. How are they coping?

Some good, some not so good. I don't know what percentage, but I do know

28:30 a lot of them are now pensioners, you know, totally permanently incapacitated, some fully justified, you know, knowing them and particularly, you know, those who were maimed in one way or another. That seems to be a growing thing and I think a lot of it is based on how people deal with it. I was, I mean for those who came back and those national servicemen who suddenly

29:00 they're out of uniform, back in the street and where a lot of them, where their jobs were meant to be held for them while they did their two years national service and their jobs weren't held and one friend of mine did that, in fact one who was badly wounded and came home, now lives at Byron Bay. He was in the Post Office shop at Grafton and that was the job he had before he was conscripted. He didn't get that job back when he came back badly wounded, but still lived in Grafton. He eventually did get back into it but it wasn't there and that was part of, you know, the guarantee of employment

29:30 for those people. Others, between jobs, and it is a, he was a, they didn't want to probably go to Vietnam in a lot of ways, even though a lot of national servicemen did volunteer to go to Vietnam. They said, "If I'm going to be up for two years I may as well go." I was, for those who stayed in full time service, I think it's probably a bit easier because you're still part of that structure. You're with people who've done it

30:00 and, as I say, there was never any formal counselling but the counselling is sort of inherent and being able to talk about it with people who come from a common background and the people going out back into civilian life never had that. Yeah, I don't think too many of my ex guys are working these days.

Have you suffered from that experience with nightmares or anything?

30:30 Sometimes, yeah, you do think back and then I'm also involved in the 5RAR Association organising reunions and a few other things I've been doing with that and I seem to be a bit of a point of contact on that at the moment and, you know, my wife sort of says to me sometimes that, "Hang on, that's in the past, shouldn't you drop that?" but things do come up. You can get

31:00 emotional about it. I sort of, you know, tend to do that in my own time if I do but I don't personally think I have a major problem but, you know, there are ways and means around that.

Well your men call on you when they need support now, do you call on them?

Not for that, no I don't. I'll ring them occasionally just to say, "G'day," if I'm at home on a,

31:30 you know, I know a bloke's not travelling too well. I'll just give him a ring, have a chat and see how they're going cause the network's pretty good and two of my old platoon are actually involved in counselling, in a veterans network and they seem to keep tabs on it and they keep me informed about it. I will provide, you know, when they do things like claims, and I've got a number of friends of mine who verify

32:00 claims, that, "Would I write a statement?" so they do have a group of people and I get contacted particularly with things that happened around the Long Tan timeframe, what we were actually doing or one soldier asked me, "Look I'm trying to give some evidence because they're querying the fact that I claimed that I saw some people senior to me killed." "Well," I said, "You did. 14th of February 1976. Do you want me to write a statement?"

32:30 or, "Look it up in the official history, on this page." I do that sort of thing, which verifies their claims and I know he was with me on that day, so you can help in that way but long term effects, yeah I suppose it's, I find keeping busy is the best way and I think people who retire too soon have got more time if you like to harp on those. I prefer to keep it

33:00 ticking over.

Well I mean during the time, around that time of the welcome home march, Vietnam was entering into popular culture again, how did you, there was a lot of films out that were depicting what it was like and that, how did you respond to that, did you watch any of those films?

Yeah, I saw them but put them into reality. They were movies made in Hollywood or wherever. The reality in a lot of them was a little

33:30 bit far fetched. The basic message might have been there in some of them but I didn't go out of my way

to watch them. If the opportunity was there or they were on a video we got or they happened to be on TV I'd do it but I'd never go necessarily to a movie and say, "That's a must see." If I get feedback from people I might do that but yeah, no, didn't really have any effect on me at all.

Well

34:00 **you've noted how the Vietnam experience has changed a lot of your men but how did it change you?**

I, being put through that situation particularly as a, you know, a young person, putting into effect the training you've been,

34:30 done, the responsibility that you have for people who are the same age and we were all the same age. I just happened to have the authority. Having those responsibilities and the experiences you went through, you grow up pretty quickly and you tend to think, you know, "Well you're lucky to be here going through that," because you're a lot better off than many other people. I think also the experience or the

35:00 opportunities that I had to pass on my experience of that time in training environments or whatever, so you can give something back into it and hopefully if you give them, provide them with a little bit of wisdom and experience down the track, you're going to help save some lives. Certainly being through that experience as well, it makes you realise that life is worth living and, you know,

35:30 you go to other areas and people in the same, I think all my friends have generally been the type of people who have, you know, sort of work hard and play pretty hard as well because you know you've been lucky for it.

Well we've made a record today, a historical record, of your experience in Vietnam and Eight Platoon in 5RAR, how would you like the men of that platoon to be remembered?

36:00 I'd, from my perspective, yeah. I'd like them to be remembered as a platoon of diggers who came from all walks of life, different backgrounds, different parts of the country and came together to form a pretty formidable team, very reliant upon each other, great team work as been proven over the years.

36:30 It just didn't happen over that period of time and people that I believe I couldn't have been successful with if I didn't have them to back me up because it's not me. There's no way I could be an effective or a reasonable platoon commander without having those guys and having their support and essentially laying their lives on the line when they needed to do so.

And when you look back on your full military career

37:00 **that you've had, what would you say is one of the high points?**

That, my very first job. I've never, it's probably why I stayed in thirty-five years because I was looking for something better to happen in a way. I had some great postings around the world and that's why I stayed in for a long time but even when I left the army in '97, in April '97, and I was interviewed by the army newspaper, I said that

37:30 and it's because of the camaraderie and that first job when you had the ability to command great Australian soldiers in a combat situation. I haven't had anything to beat that.

And as we said before, we've made a historical record for future generations to look at and learn from. What words would you like to leave on the record for those

38:00 **future generations?**

If future generations get in a situation that they've got to go and do something nasty on behalf of this country, that they should get out and do it. There's a great heritage there, going right back to Gallipoli and before that with Boer wars and things like that and I think they should all, if the time comes, hopefully be prepared to put their life on the line and

38:30 put what they have to do in protecting this heritage that we have in this great country.

And as we come to the end today, was there any last thoughts that you'd like to leave?

I've enjoyed the day. It's seeing a lot of your life pass before you or reminding, without doing any homework and it's good and I hope really what I've contributed today, with your help thanks very much, is

39:00 going to be useful for historians or whoever wishes to use the information down the track and hopefully it will verify, expand or confirm other parts of history that's there and I think it's a great project that maybe should have been done, started some time ago.

Well thank you very much Roger.

Thanks.

INTERVIEW ENDS