Australians at War Film Archive

Bernard Maxwell (Bernie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Father, thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. The first thing I want to ask you to do is give a very brief summary of just the main points in your life.**

Cathy [interviewer], I was born in Liverpool, New South Wales, 1930 and grew up there. It was very much a rural town, hit by the Depression.

01:00 I went to school at the local convent and then to the Patrician Brothers at Granville. I left school intermediate [certificate], that's all we could do in those days, and I joined the PMG [Post Master General] Department as the JPO, a Junior Person Officer, a telegram messenger, I went on to be a technician. I went back to night school when I was twenty-three, to do my leaving, and at that stage I'd decided about the

01:30 priesthood, and I needed a Leaving Certificate, and horror or horrors, Leaving Latin, which I had to study Latin of course in secondary school. I joined the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers we're called, OP, in Melbourne in 1955, I was twenty-five then so we were considered late vocations, bit suspicious these blokes waiting all these years, and studied in Melbourne. I

02:00 I came back to Sydney to do theology, I was ordained in Sydney, then posted to Adelaide, then to Canberra, back to Sydney, and at that stage I was invited to join the military vicarial, that the beginning of four interesting years in the army. First six months was difficult, the rest were really formative years. I had to postpone

02:30 study to do that, that was one of the problems, and after the army, I took up studies again in Israel and into Rome and Ireland and then back to Australia. And worked in Melbourne, Perth, New Zealand, and then took Wahroonga, Sydney again, and to Canberra, where I am now.

That's fantastic, thank you.

03:00 **I might just ask you, when you served in the army, could you just explain where you served?**

Yes. I was posted to Liverpool headquarters, which is really Ingleburn, and detached, in army parlance, to Infantry Centre, which is in Ingleburn. And that took in, not just Infantry Centre but the C Regiment, all the subsidiary units around Ingleburn. Put it this way, it's the

03:30 western side of the Georges River, in one sense it was Georges River to the Blue Mountains, via Scheyville near Windsor, Officer Training Unit there, and to Goulburn even. It was a rather large area. I had two years there, and at the end of those two years, I was posted to Vietnam. I didn't have to go, we were quite free to go if we wanted to, or pull out, I chose to go.

04:00 And again posted to Saigon, Free World Centre, detached to Vung Tau, and in Vung Tau I had the MAC teams in Phuoc Tuy province, the Training Team, the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] for all of Vietnam, from the DMZ [demilitarized zone] to the delta, I had our air force in Vung Tau. My main care and concern was the field hospital in Vung Tau. At one stage the Americans had no Catholic

04:30 chaplain, so I went to the Americans for about three or four months, which was another interesting experience. I suddenly had an American specialist, driver, and a Jeep, which changed life considerably. I was the last chaplain really in Vietnam, literally the last, because the other two men had gone home a little earlier. I had the, it was the emotional thing of closing the place up, before we pulled out of Vung Tau.

05:00 Father Williams went up the following Anzac Day, for Anzac Day services, but I was the last posted chaplain to Vietnam. It was heart breaking, leaving the Vietnamese behind, they couldn't really understand what was happening, that we were leaving. It was very difficult. I flew out of Vung Tau to Saigon, Free World Centre, and I was there for another week or so in Saigon before I returned

05:30 to Singapore and then to Australia. And I was at Ingleburn again for about three months and then

posted to Kapooka in 1RTB [Recruit Training Battalion], and that was my last full time posting. My four years were up; I was very tempted to take another three years. I'd come to like the life, I made a lot of friends, but I thought after seven years it'd be very difficult to get back to my monastic life,

06:00 so I chose to stay part time but to get back to the normal, regular life of the monastery.

Thank you very much for that, that's fantastic. What I'm going to do now is just go back and talk about your childhood. Could you tell me about your mother and father and their background?

Yes. My mother was born in Liverpool, the only daughter of an Irish family. Her father was a labourer on the local council,

06:30 Liverpool Council, it was called in those days, who couldn't read or write. As a lad he had to work in the fields in Ireland. Her mother could read and write, they were determined that my mother would get education. She was quite good at school but she was a milliner and she was a seamstress, a tailoress, very good in... and that's what she chose to do, and worked for Gowings [clothing store] for many, many years. Gowings in town, still there in Sydney.

07:00 Liverpool in that stage was very, very much a country place, a very small country town. My father met my mother during the First World War, he was in the 6th Light Horse, and they encamped at Liverpool. If you drive through Liverpool on the bypass, you go past the Liverpool Swimming Pool, that was the old common where the Light Horse were encamped, believe it or not. So there's a memory there always

07:30 Liverpool common, that was where the camp was for the Light Horse. He was then of course transferred overseas with the Light Horse, went go Gallipoli as reinforcements, not as the regional group at all. And then when Gallipoli was evacuated to Egypt and they hated Egypt, they wanted to go to France where it was cool and green and, you know, and they had no idea of the slaughter, the terrible warfare

08:00 on the Western Front. They hated the heat, they hated the sand, they hated the flies, they hated the whole place. And eventually of course, end of the war, he was demobbed [demobilised], went back to the P&O [cruise ship line], he'd been on the P&O. As a young man he came to Australia in 1910, and paid off, and went jackarooing [mustering on cattle stations] and became a crack horseman. And joined the 6th Light Horse which is really a northern rivers group

08:30 around Gunnedah area, Ballina, Grafton. And, I mean, it's ironical to think the, as the common term, as the Pommie [British] sailor who becomes a crack horseman, as in the Australian Light Horse. His life, compared to mine was, you know, full of adventure. As a lad of fourteen or fifteen, or maybe a bit younger than that, he ran away from home, stowed away, of course got caught within twenty-four hours of being

09:00 out at sea, and worked their way, all the way from England to Southampton, ah to South Africa scrubbing decks. And of course kicked off there, and he joined the Cape Town Highlanders as a bugle boy. So literally he came back to England at the end of the South African war as a returned soldier, at fourteen or fifteen. His father apprenticed him to the P&O, as a midshipman, that's where he stayed.

09:30 When he came back from the First World War, back to the P&O, I think the life kind of got him down, boredom. Paid off in Australia again and joined the old light house service, because he read Morse [code] through the flags, served in places like Bermagui, Seal Rocks and Norah Head as assistant light keeper. Which was interesting, and then accidentally ran into Mum in Sydney, about 1928/29. The romance started

10:00 again, and they married and he stayed with the, again, with the old Harbour Trust which became the Maritime Services Board, but it was the Harbour Trust in those days. And his whole life in, as I remember, as a child was on the waterfront in that sense, he loved the harbour, he was a sea bees[?] there, you know. I had no adventurous desire at all to go to sea or run away from home. A few times you feel like running away from home,

10:30 and can't get your own way, 'I'm gonna run away,' you know. 'I'll wait til tomorrow.' So, but he had a very adventurous life.

What stories did he tell you about his experiences as a bugle boy in the South African wars?

He was, how could I put it? He got on very well with the Boers, which was rather a bit of a problem in one sense. He was the young Englishman, young English lad really,

11:00 away from home, away from family, and camp life must've been fairly tough. There's a couple of photos there of camp, (UNCLEAR) store, and he got to know Boer families, and was kind of, 'Be careful.' But it was a thing, I think, of a family life, you're away from home, all the adventure part is really nice in storybooks, but as I found out later in my own life, living in a camp is another thing altogether,

11:30 it's not the adventure of a story book, you know. There's pretty, kind of, well, authoritarian, discipline, and to be able to go and talk to a family, have a meal with a family, changes things quite a bit, so he had a great love for South Africa and for the Boers themselves. He never bought into any fights about unjust treatment, or anything like that. He never came close to criticising the British system of

12:00 prisoner of war camps, which was a fairly terrible ingredient. But there was that sense of almost a second country, South Africa. He spoke of it with great affection, and the people he'd met there, the Boer families he'd met there, with great affection. So maybe again it was Australia, that appealed to him to go, as I say, jackarooing and become a crack horse

12:30 man. The freedom was most probably there too, and a sense of adventure. And a Pommie sailor doing well.

And what did he tell you about his experiences in the First World War?

Not a great deal. The trench warfare, as they knew, on Gallipoli was fairly, kind of, terrible. People beside them killed, sniper fire.

13:00 He was, I suppose, in admiration of the withdrawal, which was accomplished very, very skilfully, no-one killed, the Turks didn't even know they were gone. When you think about it, you know, they got everyone off safely before the Turks woke up, 'They're now gone.' His, perhaps you could say, his bias was against the Egyptians, being in Egypt,

13:30 and the way they treated their animals. A light horsemen and his horse were inseparable and they were very, very chagrined when they had to give their horses to the Egyptians when they left, they couldn't bring them back to Australia, that was a very sour point with Dad, you know. A matter of fact I inherited that bias, I didn't realise it, years later when I was studying in Israel in Jerusalem, I categorised the Palestinians

14:00 as the Egyptians that my father had no time for, which I, course I was, I found out I was very, very wrong. But that was in the back of my mind, the, 'Mmm,' you know? Different again of course, but it's just the western attitude towards people of the east. I thought I'd lost it in Vietnam with the Asians, but I kept it in the back of my mind there, these 'Gyppos' [slang term for Egyptians],

14:30 Palestinians are not Gyppos of course, but the same thing was there, 'They'll take you down, don't trust em,' you know. Which was, I found out, you know, I was very, very wrong. So but he didn't speak a great deal about... he caught malaria, that was another problem too in Egypt, he caught malaria, which came against him from time to time, you know. So that was another gripe about the Middle East, the

15:00 mosquitoes. So there it is, you know. I remember how thoroughly we were vetted, inoculated, before we came to Vietnam, for everything, plague, everything, malaria, the lot, and malaria tablets every day. It was a chargeable offence to catch malaria in Vietnam, so there was no reason why you should catch it. We had a couple of cases where it was not just malaria, it was something else that

15:30 the people got hold of, looked like malaria. So, but no, his recollection, his big thing was Anzac Day and they would have him along to the Gallipoli Legion. They have their place in Loftus Street in Sydney; I don't know whether it's still there or not. And they would have their night out before Anzac Day, there's some fantastic nights out, a few drinks (UNCLEAR). Living at Liverpool, I think the last train home

16:00 was about ten thirty at night, miss that, the next one was the next morning. But we always went to the Anzac Day march, and again, we were very poor people, my father had been out of work for almost four years, in those Depression years, '32 to about '36. But Anzac Day we went in by train, it was a picnic for us, my sister and myself, and Dad would march with the 6th Light Horse and we would watch

16:30 Daddy marching. And he'd have a couple of beers with the boys and we'd go down to the Botanical Gardens for a picnic, that was the big day out, you know. Anzac Day, that was the big memory, Anzac Day, there was always something about Anzac Day. Years and years later I was in for an Anzac Day march, just as a spectator, and it was before I was in the army, and the 6th Light Horse and there was just a banner, with maybe a dozen blokes there. You know, it was the kind of feeling that, 'Pity.'

Tell me about

17:00 **those Anzac Days as a child, what the atmosphere was like on the marches, compared to, say, what it's like today?**

The thing for us, Cathy, because coming from Liverpool, this quasi country town, which was out the back of beyond almost, the metropolitan area finished at Canning Vale, we were country service, for government jobs.

17:30 We were surrounded by poultry farms, gardens, the whole lot, it was really rural. And so to be going to the big city, that was the first thing, and to see these men marching. And there'd be regular soldiers, what was left of the regular army then, military bands, police band, pipe bands, that was another big thing, the pipe band; we were very strong on pipes. It was a, almost entering back into another era. I've put it, now I'm thinking that as

18:00 an adult most probably, as a kid there, trying to get back to dance era, you know. And here they were again, these men had fought together, here it is twenty years later, literally twenty years later, in '37, '38 and they're still marching together. There's the comradeship there, that was the thing, the comradeship struck me, you know, they were all ex diggers these men, ex light horsemen. And they had the, light horsemen had a

18:30 certain amount of, oh, gallantry most probably is the wrong word... cut about them. They were just, weren't cavalry, they were really mounted infantry, but they were just that cut above the normal foot soldier, the 'slogger', the 'crunchy', you know, they were light horsemen. And they figured in some rather spectacular things in the First World War, you know. The Charge of Beersheba, when I was studying in Israel I went to Beersheba,

19:00 and my father wasn't involved in that, the 6th Light Horse were not involved in the Charge of Beersheba, see this place. And the school house is still there, the commandant's house, one of the wells is preserved as a memorial and the war cemetery. Only thirty-seven killed in that charge, eight hundred light horsemen charged, and they were lucky, just thirty-seven, they could've been cut to pieces, you know. I think, you know, here in

19:30 1917, '18, whenever it was, this turned the course of the war in the Middle East, the Charge of Beersheba, you know. Towards the evening, sundown, horses mounted first, couldn't control them, it was that kind of thing of the Light Horse, you know. There's a movie made on the Light Horse, for the light horsemen, the Charge at Beersheba features in that, you know. I mean it's a movie version of it, but the sense of these bush

20:00 men, in a foreign land, in the Middle East, Palestine in those days, should accomplish a thing like that against... against the advice of the Brits [British]. 'You can't do it, we protest,' you know, and they did it. There's a kind of sense the Light Horse had a, say, a mystique of their own, you know, a sort of mystique rather than anything else, they were light horsemen, were a bit more than the normal, you know,

20:30 foot soldier.

Tell me about the home that you grew up in at Liverpool?

Okay. The home, Cathy, was the home of my maternal grandparents. It was two slab rooms my grandfather had bought in 1893, something like that, and when I say slab rooms, just the slab rooms. It did have a board floor,

21:00 and a tin roof and a fire place, the old fireplace was out from the wall, and he built another two rooms on the back of it, which was a kitchen and dining room and another spare, another bedroom, which was my mother's bedroom. But just the flagstone floors, one tap at the back door, the toilet, a dunny in those days, a mile up the backyard. When it rained, these two rooms leaked.

21:30 And the stove was the old colonial oven, with the fire on top and the oven had burned through, so you couldn't use it. That's my memory. We lived in that home; we had lived next door to it, another more sophisticated humble home though. When my grandmother died in 1932, my Dad was out of work and they moved into my grandmother's house, that's what I grew up in, that's my memories. My memory is my father

22:00 out of work, looking for work, trying to get work. They sold everything they had, it's very sad, we lived very poorly. Bread and milk, breakfast, you know. The things that, take for today, I can't believe it sometimes, you know, I think, 'My God,' you know. I, here I am, really a monk in one sense, with a vow of poverty and, you know, the way I can live, what my parents lived, the way I lived as a kid, we were

22:30 extremely poor. So my mother was a tailoress, she could do anything with clothes, give her a thing and she could transform it, she was fantastic really. So I lived with hand-me-downs, my sister and myself, she'd re-model dresses, (UNCLEAR) another hole, it was really tremendous. My father got back to work about 1936, he was out about four and a half years, back to the Maritime Services Board, the old Harbour Trust, back I think three days a week, four days a week, and then they got their normal, it was really

23:00 five and a half days a week, because Saturday morning was a work day. And they kept a list of all their debts they accrued during that period he was out of work. My grandmother died, they couldn't pay for the funeral, you know, you can't believe it these days, wood coffin, buried her, no, no... They paid off those debts one at a time five shillings a week, you know, it was a matter of honour. And that kind of stubbornness, pride call it, pride most

23:30 probably, until were debt free, that was the thing, were down to be debt free. They'd hung on to a block of land which they'd bought when they were first married in the same street, hoping to build, of course it never happened. The council didn't foreclose on it so they paid off the rates that had accrued. And then in 1938 they were debt free, and they made the big purchase, a Metters number two stove, and the guy next door to my father spent the whole weekend pulling the old colonial oven out and putting

24:00 this number two stove in. Suddenly there was no more smoke in the kitchen, we had an oven that you could use, the flue, the whole thing, we could make toast. There was a firebox, you took the cinders out. It was a transformation, and it kept the place warm, incredible part about it, you know, when I think back. The old kettle on the stove which my grandmother's kettle, a big black kettle, we called Suki, and that was always there, whistling away, because they sing, there was always hot water on there.

24:30 Bath, bath night was once a week, big tub with a few kettles of water, and it was our bath night, my sister first and myself afterwards, you know. No such thing as a washing machine, the old tub again and my mother washed in the tub on the old scrubbing board. There was a copper in the back yard, which of

course when it rained, you couldn't use. And the clothes line, the old strung line, and the branches,

25:00 or not branches, the trees, they were really clothes props, they were sold by a local bloke, clothes props, going round and selling clothes, and rabbits. A rabbit was nine-pence, had a good meal out of a rabbit, I can tell you, my mother was a good cook, oh, Dad was better though, you know, clean the rabbit, stuff it, and we'd have baked rabbit for tea, we thought we were made, you know. And then the war happened, and of course everyone was back in full employment, and at the end of the war my parents decided they would build at long last,

25:30 they'd waited for almost twenty years. And they borrowed through the Housing Commission, again there were restrictions, we built this house off the street, completely fibro, inside and outside. Dad and myself painted it, I was sixteen, just finishing school, finished school at fifteen, in the PMG [Postmaster General], telegram messenger. And we had one power point in the home, but we had a gas copper and we had a gas stove. There was no more cutting wood, wet wood,

26:00 you know, a gas stove! One problem we struck, we moved in, in the February, summer time, winter was freezing, just a fibro home, and the old slab home was warm, the slabs, the ivy growing over it was warmer, and the stove. So that was our big transfer, and electricity, that was the other thing, electricity, no more kerosene lamps. I did my homework and a kerosene lamp night after night after night, you know,

26:30 the old hurricane lamp to go up to the toilet at night. So it was a very poor childhood, not unhappy though. We had very few things in the way of toys, but what we had, had to be kept and looked after, there was no, kind of smashing toys up.

What do you remember having as toys? What do you remember having as toys and play things?

I kept a teddy bear for years,

27:00 and I'd worn the fur off it from taking it to bed with me, my teddy bear, you know, I can't believe it now, you know. I would've loved to have had a bike, we couldn't afford bikes, you know, but I learned to ride a bike. Some of my school mates had bikes and I'd ride their bikes. A group of us built a canoe, Liverpool, as I say, was very rural, what is now housing estates, there were creeks,

27:30 and we built this wretched canoe, and made it waterproof, and we had our canoe. We learned to swim in the Georges River, if you think about it now you wouldn't go near it, but there it is. And our prop was a bag full of cork, that was our lifebuoy, to dog paddle out with this bag full of cork, you know, so very simple. Toys, one thing, yes,

28:00 a couple of boxes of lead soldiers, you know, and they were my pride and joy. Eventually there were highlanders, and (UNCLEAR) we had Cape Town Highlanders, and a couple of light horsemen. My father was disgusted, because they were carrying shotguns and not rifles. Manufactured stuff. They are the toys I really remember. Books,

28:30 my aunty would send us some books, English books, and they were really treasured things, up to the beginning of the war. They're very simple toys, you know, when I think about it. We played cowboys and Indians and things, I had a cowboy suit that I, you know, that was a big present, and when I was eight or nine my big birthday present was a Brownie camera, a six twenty camera, which cost

29:00 two and sixpence. I kept it for years, when I say years, I mean almost forty years, this Brownie camera. I had it when I went to Vietnam and it was useless taking that to Vietnam, that camera, I bought a five dollar Instamatic in a PX [American military canteen]. But it's all I had, a Brownie camera, you know, into my thirties. It was sentimentality there, Cathy, you know. But they were the treasured toys, Brownie camera, my teddy bear,

29:30 God knows why my teddy bear, and my soldiers, that was it.

What do you remember of war time, of the Second World War?

I remember the restrictions, Cathy. I remember troop movement, as I say, Liverpool was an army town, not a military town the same as a garrison town, it was an army town. We had Moorebank across the river, army there, Holsworthy, the remount,

30:00 which had been light horsemen, and then Ingleburn. Ingleburn came into existence, really, Second World War, and we were always conscious of soldiers marching. You'd hear the cattle trucks going, and you would... the top of the street and see this, you know, couple of platoons of soldiers marching, we thought it was great. Then we heard at night, this is now getting to 1940, '41 or so now, maybe '40, '41, you'd hear the lorries at night. And we knew troops were being moved from

30:30 Ingleburn, cutting into the back of Liverpool, street close to us, and they were going to be embarked to go overseas. That's the sad thing, you know. First casualties; John Edmondson, Edmondson VC [Victoria Cross]; first VC, was a Liverpool boy, Liverpool, Casula, that was a big thing John Edmondson being killed, you know, in Crete. It was really an army town,

31:00 always soldiers around. And then in 1942 when I was at secondary school at this stage going to

Patrician Brothers at Randwick, the Americans moved in, to Warwick Farm Racecourse, they called it Camp Warwick, used to laugh at them. And they'd come to mass on Sunday. Now they were so well turned out, I mean, our poor guys in their tunics and sloppy stuff, the Yanks [Americans] in their Ivy League shirt, oh ironed

31:30 shirts with ties and they had all that, caps, you know, and always very, very respectful, you know, polished shoes, the lot. They were sort of, 'Oh if I join the army I would join the American Army,' you know, the way they were turned out. They were very, you know, great guys and I look back and think, you know, those men died to keep us free, going to the islands later on. So there was always that, Liverpool was the army thing. And even at the end of the war, 1946, the foundation of the John Edmondson

32:00 RSL [Returned & Services League] Club. What was it? An Ingleburn hut, an army hut from Ingleburn. I don't know if you know Liverpool now, but where the Edmondson Club is, it was on Macquarie Street was the post office, and the hut was set up Anzac Day 1946. This is the beginning, you know, this is our heritage, Liverpool, you know, Edmondson. Interesting thing there. And all the people I worked with were mainly, were all ex servicemen, in 1946, '47,

32:30 '48, the majority were ex servicemen. And Liverpool, well many people were lost, there were people killed, people in Changi. Another memory of Mr Petchmore had been a Changi prisoner, and as my mother would say, he never got over it, it was true, the treatment they received, you know, there was that kind of memory of the war days. Yeah, it was an army town, you couldn't avoid the army

33:00 in Liverpool. And we'd see the, even in those days, the first peace time years, the army coming in to draw their money from the Commonwealth Bank on pay day, you know. The couple of, in those days, well worked American Jeeps, and the army were military police outside the bank, you know, stand at attention while they went and got their money. It was that kind of sense of, you know, this is Liverpool. Liverpool, in those pre war years, on a Friday night,

33:30 it was Friday night shopping, that was one of the big social things. The shops were open Friday night, the town band played in the main street, the Liverpool band played in the main street. There was no traffic, I mean, who had cars, not too many people. Horse and sulkies, things like that, the horse and dray, very few cars. Even in 1946, as the telegram messenger, there's still a forty-four hour week by the way, for three

34:00 pound nineteen and nine a fortnight. I wasn't overpaid, I enjoyed it though. Post offices closed at five thirty, the line didn't close til six thirty, and sure enough, twenty-five past six the line'd come on, a telegram, 'You can do a delivery.' It might be down at Warwick Farm, it might be up to Casula. And the old heavy PMG bike, with a torch battery on the front of it, wet weather, you'd be soaked from the knees down, no overtime. But it was a job that we

34:30 enjoyed. The staff that worked at the old post office, post master, Mr. Walsh, Harry Fern, ex soldier, 'Arty' Hill, ex soldier, First World War, had been a, I think he'd been a light horseman, First World War. The post man, Bill Ferguson, Arthur Bill, all ex soldiers, from the First, Second World War. And there was that kind of, a friendly place to work. Mrs Cruickshank, the cleaner from the post office, she'd be there cleaning

35:00 in the morning. There are people I remember very, very clearly, and I enjoyed it, I enjoyed my work. I never had a situation where I didn't enjoy what I did. I can really, honestly say that, as a technician in training, going to Alexandria those first couple of years, going to Johnson Street, Annandale, that was the big place, going to Parker Street behind the gas company in town and then city south exchange in Castlereagh

35:30 next to the old fire station. I enjoyed it. I can't say I was unhappy at work. And I left it with a lot of, oh, I'd say misgiving. The staff at City South gave me a farewell lunch, a day or two before I went to Melbourne. I still have the card, 1955, they gave me a pen and pencil set and I still kept that card in my breviary.

36:00 Memories. They're all dead now. But they were happy years. I can't say I was unhappy.

Could you tell me about your schooling Father, and what your schools were like?

Well I began at the Sisters of Charity, Liverpool, primary school. It was the same building my mother had been in, you know, way back in 1902 or 1905 or something, hadn't changed a bit, still the old convent. Liverpool hadn't

36:30 changed, it was a country town. It was very primitive, none of the amenities that children have today in school. Very much, you know, one sister [nun] teaching two classes or so. I was good at maths, believe it or not, and history, even then, and history in a funny way. And there was one sister in particular, Sister Deloraise, who

37:00 pushed me. And I spent about, I would've spent a few months in what we call kindy [kindergarten] today and then I was in grade one for a year, and in grade two she pushed me to grade three, jumped to here that way, because of maths and history, what turned out to be history. And that was the normal schooling, fifth grade, with the sisters and then sixth

37:30 grade to Granville to the Patrician Brothers. Now it was a new school opening, I most probably would've gone to Lidcombe, to the Marist Brothers or Parramatta Marist Brothers. The brothers came round looking for students in the Christmas holidays and, okay, they appealed to me the years I got to know them. They did very poorly, they had no car, they had lived on a condemned house in Granville, the floor

38:00 patched with flat iron, places like that, only three brothers. We started off with a hundred boys, the three brothers teaching a hundred boys. The school money was a shilling a week, shilling a week, you know, some of us kids couldn't afford it, that's the interesting thing about those years. That area around Granville, Clyde, very hard hit by the Depression, that was the old loco [locomotive] yards, the Clyde works, the whole thing, they suffered a lot, the same as we did at Liverpool.

38:30 I remember the brothers, they were tough, there was no arguing the point, put your hand out and got your couple of slaps and cane, cuts we used to call them. Brother Joseph was the superior. But they were generous. If he'd find out, for example, some kid'd come late, you know, you got your two cuts first, the way, like. "The old man's sick." "You mean your father's sick?" "Yes brah." We used to

39:00 call them brah, not brother, "Yes, brah," wouldn't dare say it today. "Yes brah." "Has he seen the doctor?" "We can't afford a doctor." Now Brother Joseph would get a doctor to go and see him, and pay the doctor. Those three men lived on less than five pounds a week, when you think about it, you know, there's a... they were, as I say, they were like ourselves, they were working class people. The Patrician Brothers had the poor schools round Sydney, Waterloo, Redfern, Forest Lodge, Granville. Eventually they came to Fairfield and Liverpool, way after

39:30 I left school, then Holy Cross College, Ryde, which was their main school really. Ironically they were in the west in Bathurst, Orange, places like that. There was some falling out with the bishop and he asked them to leave the diocese. This is the material politics in the Catholic Church. He thought he'd just click his fingers and another order would come, but they refused. And the brothers who are now surplus went to India,

40:00 and began in India. Only this year their superior general, world wide, is an Indian. Isn't it ironic, a brother from Australia, the Indian mission really progressed, so there we are. Now I admire them very much, kept up con... interesting enough, many of us kept up those contacts after we left school. We'd go and visit Brother Joseph at Redfern; I'd go out and see Brother Alphonsus at Wooroongoo[?],

40:30 that was my first contact with the Dominicans really, or Holy Cross, Ryde. And there was great loyalty to the brothers who'd taught us because they were like ourselves, working class people, you know, and brilliant teachers. The primary finals of the exam, in sixth grade, they ran special tutoring classes on a Saturday, free, to come and help you

41:00 for your primary final. The brother who taught us the intermediate, Brother Austin, an Irishman, another genius, and an all rounder. He taught English, he taught maths and he taught history. And I think about that, you know, that one man teaching three subjects, you know, in intermediate school, you know. And this is their very simple

41:30 system. In the first year we began our rehearsals of Shakespeare. Whatever the novel was, the play was that year, we all did it together, first, second and third year, in the first term. Second term the first years dropped out, the second years stayed there and the third term is just the third years doing it. So by the time I got to third year, I had covered three Shakespearean plays. It's a great introduction to literature.

Tape 2

00:32 **Father, I just wanted to ask you about what sort of an active role the church had in people's lives during World War II, during that hardship?**

Yes. I think, Vanessa[Interviewer] one of the things again, is through the chaplaincies. We, the padres are called by the way, which interesting, it's a, it comes from the British Army,

01:00 the chaplain is called 'the padre', not an English word. And it came from the Peninsula Wars [1808-1814], Napoleon's time, 1810, whatever it was, the Iberian Peninsula, Spain, Portugal. And the Brits had gone ashore there, there's a famous Brit. general, Sir Thomas, not Thomas Moore [Sir John Moore, commanded the British Army in Portugal from 1808 until his death during the retreat to Corunna in 1809], think of his name in a minute, doesn't matter. Yeah, the English soldiers and Spaniards working

01:30 together, and the Spaniards called their chaplain padre, it's father, that's all it is. And it caught onto the British Army, and they were called padre because of the Spaniards in the Peninsula War way back then so, chaplains, padres. Also back up in the sense of trying to look after families, that was the very conscious thing. I wasn't so much

02:00 aware of that during the Second World War, as I was, of course, during Vietnam, that was another thing altogether, but there was that back up, and also providing what was called CUSA, C-U-S-A, Catholic United Social Amenities. And they would provide a hut in every camp, for soldiers to go and write letters home and get a cup of coffee or cup of tea

02:30 in those days, tea and bickies or maybe a, magazines, it was a kind of a, social outreach really, but always someone to talk to. So CUSA, C-U-S-A, was a very much prominent thing in the Catholic Church, in the Second World War. The other churches had the same thing; you had Every Man, Salvation Army. My father had great respect for the Salvation Army because of his experience with them

03:00 in the First World War, particularly Gallipoli and the desert campaigns, tremendous respect for the Salvation Army. He wouldn't hear a thing said against the Salvation Army. Interesting, you know. It was that kind of, I suppose in one sense, I grew up in an ecumenical, we say the ecumenical household, we were Catholics, inverted commas. Most of our friends were non Catholics,

03:30 close friends were non Catholics. There's a certain cynicism about the church, in my home, it's interesting really, in there I went to a Catholic school. My people weren't very practical Catholics, until I went to school again. My dad's church, the parish church, didn't have much time for what they call parish priest. Dad's church was Saint Patrick's in Grosvenor Street.

04:00 Interesting, Saint Pat's. And they were married, they'd been married there in Saint Pat's, not at Liverpool. Fascinating thing when I think back on it, you know, that was his church, not the local All Saints church, but Saint Pat's, Grosvenor Street. We weren't what you'd call... if people said, 'Look, you know, now can you tell us the top Catholic families in the parish in Liverpool?' Maxwell's would not have been in it, I can assure you of that, you know, I really mean that, we wouldn't have been in it. It was,

04:30 we were just ordinary people, no great pretension. I was, how can I put it, keen to be an altar server when I went to the brothers school, we all learned the Latin to reply at mass, 'cause it was the Latin mass in those days. And, now my parents were very opposed to me being an altar server, they weren't happy about it at all, that was getting a bit too far from the

05:00 hierarchy. And they eventually gave in and it meant getting a red satin and a white surplice, that was expensive, and they picked up one from ex altar servers around Liverpool, you know. But it was rather, 'Look, you know, 'I'm not happy about it,' that sort of... I mean, I know if (UNCLEAR) the priesthood at all, I can assure you. But I wanted to be an altar server.

Why do you think they were unhappy about that?

It was too much hierarchy, you know. It was the, that Irish thing, there's a strange Irish,

05:30 Irish, maybe Scot also, reaction against hierarchy, power, clergy, clericalism, you know. Although the parish priest of Liverpool had been a very popular man, a Father Walsh, Irishman, great horse rider, in those days they rode for miles. I remember reading, only last year, Father Terry, one of the early priests here in Australia, Sunday, riding from

06:00 Parramatta to Liverpool for mass, and then Liverpool to Campbelltown for mass, all in the one morning. Riding. Now that was a fairly long day's work, you know. So that they were tough guys, they were very much a part of the people I think. But then you'd find a place, like Liverpool, the big house, in George Street next to the church, was the presbytery where the priest lived. That was a sense of hierarchy. At least I think it was, you know. We were poor people, no electricity, and the

06:30 priest lived in a very nice house, or the two priests, you know. Don't know what it was, you know, maybe a bit of bolshevism.

I was going to ask you, where did your parents sit politically?

Labor, oh Labor, yeah. To be in Liverpool, you were Labor. And it's always synonymous, Labor and Catholic, you know. I mean, there was no Liberal party in those days, there was, National [Party] is what it may be, no they were Labor. So it was a

07:00 strong... still is, Liverpool's still a Labor stronghold. Mr Whitlam [Gough Whitlam, former Labor Prime Minister of Australia] was our member [of parliament]. My mother adored Gough Whitlam. Now literally, I'm maybe exaggerating, in the front room of the home we eventually built, mother being a pious, second generation Irish Catholic, there was the picture of the Sacred Heart, Jesus, below him was Gough Whitlam. That was the hierarchy. And when my father died, Gough Whitlam wrote to me in Melbourne.

07:30 I'll never forget that, he was the member for Werriwa, we were nobodies. To get a letter from the member from Werriwa, I was just a student, a clerical student in Melbourne, it was that kind of loyalty, you know, we only thought Labor. It's my own way of thinking for many, many years, you know, we were Laborites. So, it's almost Liverpoolites, Labor, Catholic. Synonymous, you know, so.

During World War II, in church, how would a sermon be influenced by World

08:00 **War II, or if someone in the parish had lost a son or they'd been injured, how did it sort of affect the religious teachings, do you think?**

I was never aware of it, Vanessa, to be honest. Except the curate of Liverpool was part time army, that was the one thing that struck us. There was never, we prayed for peace, every Sunday we prayed for peace, that was one of the things introduced

08:30 into the Catholic church at the Second World War, praying for peace. Now we, by peace we meant we

were gonna win of course, there was no question of who was gonna win. Peace on our terms. But the local curate was part time army, he joined the part time army, and then the occasional presence of one of the regular chaplains from Ingleburn or Moorebank or Holsworthy. That was our connection there with church and army as such,

09:00 you know. And ask, “Where’s Father Gale?” “He’s just gone overseas to,” you know, “To the Middle East,” or something like that, “With the army.” But there was no, there was no stance, except that we were right, we were gonna win, that was our peace. When I look back, a bit strange in one sense when we... there was the Irish element in Liverpool still, the old Irish element, who didn’t have much time for Britain, they were still thinking of 1916 and

09:30 the Troubles, but that never came to the fore. But there was a, you could say there was antipathy from some of the older Irish people, towards Britain, and the war. They weren’t pro German, but they were cynical about Britain, and I can understand it. Years later, after being in Ireland you can kind of grasp the hurt that’s still there. Like the people in the Middle East, what happened a

10:00 hundred years ago is just yesterday, what happened in Ireland, way back in 1916 was just yesterday, the Troubles. Now we haven’t got that kind of, how can I put it, stilted memory. Yesterday, well that’s yesterday. But it was still there in their minds, you know, ‘My cousin was hung in 1916.’ One of the men I was in Rome with, Father Houston, his young brother was hung in 1916, now he was taken to see him the night before his execution,

10:30 as a young student. Now John Houston had little time for the Brits I can tell you, you know. But that is his memory of his young brother being hung in the 1916 uprising in Dublin. And unfortunately the commanding English general was a General Maxwell, so John Houston used to look at me with kind of, you know, ‘Mmm...’ I belonged to the enemy at one stage, you know. But that memory was there. I suppose it’s very hard

11:00 when you have family people executed by an occupying power, those hurts go very deep. So, but it wasn’t evident, as I say, in Liverpool, the church would’ve been patriotic, that we’re going to win, but no more than, not much more than that. There was no, how can I put it, no drives or anything like that, but we are going to win,

11:30 that’s all there is to it, you know.

Would there be prayers for local soldiers?

Oh yes, yes, yeah. And particularly I think in the case of the Edmondsons, that was very much a conscious Liverpool, you know, sadness there. Again, see it’s only a small town in those days and everyone knew everybody else. There was another lad killed, a Tulley, Catholic family again. Two or three Catholic families lost sons

12:00 in those years, 1941-42, and there was very conscious outreach by the local families to them, you know, very much so, because it’s a small country area, you know. I wouldn’t say it was specifically Catholic, in the sense that they were Catholics was almost accidental, you know. But there was that concern, you know, that’s a... There wasn’t the death toll that most

12:30 probably pre-existed in the First World War, I think we were spared that. I can even remember my mother talking in the 1930s of a number of people killed from Liverpool in the First World War, you know, they all knew people being killed in the First World War. Not so much in the Second World War, it was a different type of thing altogether. As I say, a couple of prisoners of war, the Japanese,

13:00 but over and above that, no, it was a, there were no rabble rousing, you know, ‘We’re gonna get those so-and-sos,’ or anything like that. There was a, oh, an apprehension, Vanessa, when the Japanese came into the war, December 1940-41, with Pearl Harbor, and the advent of the Americans coming into the Liverpool area.

13:30 The midget submarines in Sydney Harbour, my father was on watch that night. And our first apprehension was that the... Bankstown, which today seems miles away from Liverpool, the Americans, the fighter squadrons at Bankstown, and one of their planes crashed taking off. Well we heard the explosion in Liverpool, believe it or not, and the, you could see the sky lit up. ‘Is it

14:00 the Japs [Japanese]? Are they bombing us?’ You know, that was the thought there. And, ‘Is Dad gonna come home?’ You know, we were on pins and needles whether Dad would come home from the... and of course, as I say, it was the night of the midget submarines, Sydney Harbour. They were the only, perhaps moments of apprehension. All houses dug trenches for possible air raids, Dad and the guy next door said, “Well, we’ll share a trench,” you know, the

14:30 two men there and we kids, you know, carting bucket loads of dirt. And of course the first we knew the trenches became full of water, then there was the danger of mosquitoes, that was ironic in many ways, you know, we never used the trenches, thank God. But the evidence around the town of preparation for air raids, very much so.

15:00 Dad was an air raid warden, plaque on the wall, front of the house, nation... ah, air raid warden. Had his gas mask, things like that. I don't think, as children, we had any sense of what could happen, we didn’t, there’s no doubt, we didn’t, you know. That was all kind of, you know, soldiers and, but there was no

sense of what was gonna happen if we were ever invaded,

15:30 you know. We were very lucky that we weren't, we were very lucky. You read history now you think, 'My God, how lucky we were,' you know, I mean, there was nothing between us. The Battle of the Coral Sea, the Battle of Midway, they were the two decisive naval battles. I think that destroyed Japan's sea powers as far as coming further south. The hundreds of Americans that died in those battles. Last year

16:00 I was in the Solomon Islands, on Guadalcanal, and I had no idea of the extent of the Battle of Guadalcanal. And they fought for the airfield, Henderson Airfield, which is very close to where we are living now, and that was the key to the invasion of Australia, Guadalcanal. And the Yanks knew it, and they took the Japanese on there, and they'd go, fly from Henderson to Queensland. And we flew from Brisbane to Henderson, and I thought, 'My God,

16:30 you know, three hours flight, it's all it is.' But we had no idea of the nearness of invasion to Australia, you know. How do you grasp those things as a child. Most probably our parents did, I'd say particularly Dad. But we saw soldiers as though it was fun, than anything else, playing soldiers, like playing cowboys and Indians. It changed the name of the game, it was now, we soldiers

17:00 and those Germans, so (UNCLEAR) where to put all the Japs. It just changed the name of the game from cowboys and Indians to ourselves and the enemy, that was it. The older people would've been much more conscious than we were as kids, Vanessa. We were very conscious of course of rationing shortages, we all had ration cards, suddenly you'd get so much butter a day. That went into the 19-, 1946.

17:30 Clothing, clothing was rationed, you just couldn't go into a shop, you had to take your ration book with you, which you could buy. There was a lot of the... you know. The petrol, they introduced the gas tanks for cars, they had the great big gas tanks on top of the car, and they'd paint the bag (UNCLEAR), you'd get gas not petrol. They were much conscious about shortage. For example all trains were painted khaki, all the PMG red vans became khaki.

18:00 That's since, I, what use it was, I'm blowed if I know. If you think about it, it was a waste of good paint most probably, but it was saying this is war time. Restriction of lights and things like that. There are a whole... that Friday night shopping in Liverpool went, that was finished, the war was on now, war years. Austerity. There were little things like that, but as far as

18:30 living in fear, no, that wasn't so.

What, at ten, eleven years old, what was your concept of the Japanese?

Racist. Terrible thing to say. This stage there were a lot of Japanese toys available in shops, before the war, and we all knew they were inferior quality. Isn't it terrible? You know, 'Oh don't buy Japanese stuff, don't buy that'. And the fact of the, I mean, the propaganda was

19:00 superb, when you think about it, in one way, this cowardly attack on the Americans at Pearl Harbor. And then a sense of atrocities came through, it'd begun before that with the Japanese atrocities in China, that was the history we knew. And the prevalence of Japanese businessmen round Sydney, we thought all were spies, all take good cameras, you know. This is before

19:30 the war, so we were racist, no doubt about that. And there were some atrocities became public, that made us worse, 'The only good Jap's a dead one'. And of course the films of Hollywood stuck, blew it up too, the Japs were all treacherous, they'd cut you down behind your back. Be the, you know, John Wayne at Wake Island and Lord knows what, all those, the propaganda

20:00 was really strong, very racist. I'll tell you a story and a thing that is only after the war that I found, only in the last few years came to me, about Japanese, Changi, the prison camp. Last couple of years; since I've been here, I've been in contact with a group of ex POWs [Prisoners of War] from Changi and the Burma/Thai Railway.

20:30 My interest is there with one of my fellow priests was a chaplain, a Father Corrie in Changi on the Burma/Thai Railway, that was where the interest began. This story, this is a true story, told by one of the men who was active in it. One of the chaplains in Changi was Father Con Sexton, an Irishman, who'd been curate at Rose Bardia, and

21:00 joined the army as a chaplain. And he and Father Marsden, Lionel Marsden, went back to Japan after the war to be in the Marist mission in Japan. Lionel Marsden, Con Sexton, Brendan Rogers, Frank Corrie and one or two others, another, a Redemptorist, another man, all dead now, all dead. But the Fall of Singapore absolutely astounded the Japs, they took something like twenty, over twenty thousand, thirty thousand prisoners, didn't,

21:30 couldn't believe it, all (UNCLEAR). Now by December, that's February 1942, by December '42 of course the whole horror, I mean, was there. By the way there was a TV [television] series on Changi about two years ago, now these POWs I'm in contact with have no time for it whatsoever. That's interesting. However, Christmas 1942,

22:00 Father Sexton got permission to have a midnight mass, Christmas Eve. Now how he wrangled it, I don't

know. His name was Con, we used to say, “Con by name and con by nature.” He’s a guy who’d get you, in the Sahara Desert, “What would you like to drink? KB? I’ll get you a... would you like it cold?” He was a real con man, kidding. Got permission to have this midnight mass. Suddenly everyone wanted to go to it, they had it outside the camp, outside the old Changi prison on the padang [open square], and everyone wanted to go to midnight

22:30 mass, Catholic, non Catholic, it was just the thing. Now Con Sexton got onto, there’s a concert party in amongst the prisoners, and the man who was the pianist had one of these little portable harmoniums. This is a man I know pretty well. And Con said to him, “Look, Jack, I know you’re not a Catholic, but would you like and come just to play for our midnight mass?”

23:00 And he said, “I don't know any hymns.” He said, “Oh, just play some gentle music.” So he set up his harmonium and they were ringed by Japanese guards, and the priests were hearing confessions before mass. And this particular man was playing on his organ, and a big Jap soldier, and they’re not, you know, big men, detached himself from the circle of guards and came towards the organ. ‘Oh my

23:30 God no, this so-and-so is gonna confiscate this and there’ll be bloodshed, these men’ll go mad,’ they’re on the edge now already. And the Japanese soldier took off his rifle, put it down in front of the organ, took off his pack and put it down in front of there and went and joined the prisoners for midnight mass. He was a Catholic. Now he didn’t, I mean, all the legal cannonballs are standing with the soldiers there, he would’ve heard, as they said, he would’ve heard mass quite legally.

24:00 But he did it by himself, with the prisoners. Prisoners were despised, they were dirt. Imagine how he was treated by his fellow Japanese, afterwards. And we most probably would’ve killed him during the war, most probably did kill him. I often used to say, “If I was ever Pope, I’d go to no end of trouble to find out who that guy was, and I’d beatify him,” you know, “Blessed so-and-so,” or whatever his name was, you know. There were good Japanese, but we didn’t believe it in 1941-42. Now

24:30 here’s this man, he would’ve been ridiculed, he would’ve been ill-treated by his fellow Japanese, identifying as a Christian and identifying with these despised prisoners. Don’t even know his name, don’t know what became of him. This other man, Father Corrie was also prisoner of war and a chaplain, sitting there a few times; he very seldom spoke about his experiences as a prisoner of war. We were in Adelaide together in 1964, there

25:00 was a series, The World at War, on TV, and we used to watch it on a Sunday afternoon. It got round to the war in the Pacific, and a couple of times Father Corrie said, “You sometimes met a Japanese who was a gentleman, but never a Korean.” Interesting, the Korean guards were just as savage as the Japanese. But we hated the Japanese, Koreans, we never knew they existed. When Father Corrie died,

25:30 Rohan Rivett, the famous author, I think it’s, Behind Bamboo, his book, wrote a beautiful obituary of Father Corrie for The Australian [newspaper]. We didn’t even know he knew Rohan Rivett, but he was a prisoner with him. So, you know, we categorised the Japanese as the evil ones... there were good Japanese. The whole culture that we don’t understand, you know, the bushido culture, we don’t understand that as westerners. So

26:00 I, like everyone else as a kid, they were all ‘baddies’, they were like ‘Indians’ part of the war, they were baddies. You know, Cowboys and Indians [children’s game], cowboys are ‘goodies’, Indians are ‘baddies’, that’s the thing, yeah. So that’s a bit off the point there, but the Japanese soldier, I never, I’ve used it a few times in preaching against racism, here was a man, the victorious Japanese... as far as they were concerned, the war was ended, it was just a matter of time before they took Australia. To identify yourself

26:30 with the despised prisoners, take a lot of guts to do that. Same as this Ambrose Lufton, and I’ll talk to later on, one of his New Zealand mates, went out of his way to help the despised German prisoners or Italian prisoners in this case, there we are. They’re extraordinary people.

It’s a wonderful story, yeah. It’s a wonderful story.

It’s true. And Jack, the pianist, they’re living at Narrara,

27:00 he’s well into his eighties now, I go and see him when I come to Willoughby, I go and see him when I’m at Wahroonga, (UNCLEAR) and check on Barbara. And, you know, the thing that struck me also Vanessa, interesting, I met three or four other prisoners, ex prisoners with them, none of them have any hatred towards the Japanese. They went through the hell of Changi, the Burma/Thai Railway, they saw people executed, none of them have any hatred towards the Japanese. Interesting.

27:30 And they’re prisoners of war. I mean, I could say, you know, “Those so-and-sos, what the, how they treated us,” you know, forty years later. They don’t have any hatred towards the Japanese. There’s a certain amount of goodness in human nature.

Sure is. Father, when you were at school, what sort of career ambitions did you have?

I wanted to be a draftsman. Interesting isn’t it, a draftsman. Why? I don’t know. A draftsman, that was the big thing. And

28:00 it meant getting a Leaving Certificate, that was the hurdle. The Patricians at Granville didn’t get past

Intermediate, and we had to leave school, we had to get a job. There was no two ways to it. None of us would've got on for the Leaving Certificate, not one of us, you know. And with my parents, 'Get a government job, so you can't be sacked, get permanent.' My father lost his job in the Depression years, 'Get a government

28:30 job where you can't be... get permanent.' So I hit out for the PMG department. As I say, a telegram messenger, sat for the open examination, you're permanent, and you can't be sacked. It was a real working class mentality, it really was. And we all joined the union, we're all unionists, right, you know, 'Not getting trodden on by these, the capitalists up the top there, the third division people.' And it was then, I mean, one has to be a technician, which I enjoyed very

29:00 much, it'sI like technical stuff. When I say technician, compared to electronics today, and telecommunications today, what we were doing was the equivalent of smoke signals. Today. We thought we were marv... we were just on the beginning of the era of transistors, there was a big breakthrough in telecommunications, what we call the 'jay' systems. Years ago,

29:30 1940s, after the war years, and the '50s, if you wanted to call Melbourne from Sydney, you had to call trunks and you were put on to suspense, 'Oh yes, we can put the call through, call in three hours time.' Between capital cities, you just couldn't pick up a telephone and dial. And then the jay system came in where they used the one pair of wires to broadcast thirty-eight different frequencies on, so instead of having twenty pairs going to Melbourne you now had

30:00 twenty by thirty-eight. Instant calling. This is big back then. And the carrier exchange was at Ashfield, I had a time at Ashfield which I had a very enjoyable time. Great senior tech [technician] or supervising tech. Henry Edward Dwyer, and Henry Edward Dwyer and the boys there, their big thing was to go fishing at Cabarita. Do you know Cabarita these days? It's called Cabarita Cove, it's very much up-market units, Lord knows what. Cabarita was just a couple of free wharves,

30:30 where you got whiting or good flathead, whatever it was, you'd go fishing at night. Now it's... you know, another world, Cabarita. That's where they went fishing at night, you know. They'd come back, "How'd you go last night Mr Dwyer?" "Oh, bloody awful," you know, or, "Had a good night last night," you know, "Twenty leather jackets," something like that, you know. Today Cabarita is very up-market, if you're living in Cabarita, you've made it kid. There we are

What did PMG stand for?

Post Master General's department.

31:00 To we, even Liverpudlians, 'Pigs Must Grunt'. Used to throw up Pigs Must Grunt, you know. Post Master General's Department, yeah. So took anything, post, telegrams. Good, steady, government job.

And what were your day to day tasks in that job?

Well I began as a technician in training, going to tech [technical college] for one full year. Learning very basic things, like how to use tools, how to

31:30 solder, how to strip wires, how to run a cable round a room, very basic things. What's a telephone like? Well, the old magneto telephones, battery telephones. Liverpool was, there was no automatic exchange, it was all switchboard. And then we went to automatic equipment, BPO, British Post Office equipment and there was a whole lot of explosion, people wanting telephones.

32:00 They brought American equipment which was well, not all that hot, I went back to our manager at (UNCLEAR), then into this sophisticated broadcasting. One of the big breakthroughs, we had two years running, devastating bush fires on the south coast, the first year all the lines were burned out between Sydney and Wollongong, on the south coast.

32:30 You've seen the great telephone poles, of hundreds of pairs of wires on them, all burned out, so to replace them was an incredible job. And they were burned out the second year, two years running. So they devised this carrier equipment, all done by broadcasting, from race building in York Street to Maddens Plains to Wollongong, not a pair of wires involved anywhere. So I was involved in the installation of that. This was twenty-first century stuff, away

33:00 from wires, you can have all the bush fires you want, won't affect us. So that was fascinating, in those days, fascinating technology, or telecommunication technology. As I say, compared to today, and your computers and Lord knows what, it was smoke signals. Really, I look back now, but we were happy about our smoke signals, Vanessa. We thought we were pretty, kind of, up and coming technicians and

33:30 technical age. And at third year, as a technician training, we could specialise, stayed at the PMG department in telecommunication, or go to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] in broadcasting, or go out as an electrician. So we had experimental months with these place, people. The ABC I found too, I have to say, snobby, let me put it that way if you don't mind me putting it that way.

34:00 The ABC studios in the old Broadcast House on the corner of, not quite on the corner, in Pitt Street. On the corner was the Criterion Hotel, then Broadcast House, and then the congregational church, and that was one of their studios. The other was in city east, William Street, and then in Market Street, but we were very much the lower orders, as technicians, the ABC was... you know.

34:30 What were the great radio things and the great radio plays in those days? The Lawsons, people like that. They were, as I say, they were different, we were just workers. I thought, 'Blow it, I'll go back to my working class if you don't mind, I'll stay as a technician with the PMG Department'. So, electrician didn't really appeal to me, because we did first, the first three years of electrical science, we did that,

35:00 wasn't much we didn't learn, in those days. So, but technician, the development of communication, the carrier system, the broadcasting system, this brand new equipment from Sweden. York Exchange was the most modern exchange in Australia, it was a privilege to be there. We thought it was.

What was the new equipment that came from Sweden?

It was Swedish Ericcson. And Ericcson held the field in Europe

35:30 for telecommunication, not just sophisticated but reliable equipment. It was called two thousand equipment, it surpassed British Post Office. Surpassed anything we could make here in Australia, we could copy it but we couldn't get ahead of it. And it gave so many advantages, for example, testing equipment, it'd take you hours to test a bank of all selectors. All you had to do, dial it up,

36:00 set it off and it was all automatic, went through (UNCLEAR). One man could test a whole floor of an exchange in a matter of half an hour, not twenty men spending all morning. So it was exciting, well at least we thought it was. And also I was involved mainly in 'subs' maintenance, this (UNCLEAR) maintenance, you had an area, we had our own area and my area was

36:30 Park Street to King Street. Park to Market, to King Street, bounded by Elizabeth Street and Castlereagh Street. And then I crossed at Market Street, opposite David Jones, the Elizabeth Street store, and I went down into Pitt Street and back up King Street, between Angus & Robertsons [book store], people like that. So that was my area. You got to know people, you took

37:00 a pride in it, making sure everything's working alright. Until it rained, or something like that, then you had it, cables flooded, there'd be problems then. But no, it was really enjoyable, I enjoyed it.

How did you feel about a lifetime working for the PMG?

I would've been quite happy. I would've, most probably, Vanessa... There's another friend of mine, he was also, he was a couple of years ahead of me, Jimmy Doyle, and he was an excellent technician. We were great friends together, you had

37:30 problems sometimes that, when they bring in new equipment, you get new problems, 'How the hell do you fill this thing?' And he and I had a lot of experience and taking things, getting circuitry working, what causes this. And we had a couple of, when I say, 'technical coups,' up our sleeve, find out what cause was going wrong here. And he was a great lover of classical music,

38:00 and my music background was my parents, Beethoven, Bach, Brahms were unknown to me. It was the musical, it was the Viennese operetta, I loved, France Le Harve, Strauss, Carmen, those beautiful operettas. I still love them, Merry Widow, (UNCLEAR) of Blue, you know. But Jimmy had other thing, going up to more classical music, Tchaikovsky

38:30 etcetera. And we used to have lunch together, yak [talk] away together, problems, and he said to me, "Look, I'm going to go to the third division, I'm going to have a crack at it," which meant getting a Leaving Certificate, which he did eventually. In the third division you're no longer your Christian name, you're now Mr. Maxwell, or Mr. Doyle in this case. And he did after I went into the priesthood, I did my Leaving before him, although he

39:00 was the first motivator about it and I think the fact that I did the Leaving and got it, pushed him on to do his. I would've gone to the third division, there's no doubt about that now. And even though it's non technical, you still do your technical people and technical problems. It's the kind of brains trust behind the technology, that would've been my thing, I would've gone onto that. Jimmy, he's dead now, died a few years ago, retired at sixty,

39:30 oh, sixty-five, I should say. If I look at it, I would've gone on to that, yeah, I wouldn't have remained a technician all my life, I'm sure of that now. And it was also the, the background there of this introduction years ago to literature with the brothers at Granville. And this particular brother, as I say, we had three Shakespeare up our sleeve, and six novels. So then we got to third year as working class kids,

40:00 we had to study three Shakespeares, and we had six novels, which was a big chunk in those days. I mean, our school library was about the size of that bookcase there, that's all we had, not the magnificent libraries of today. So what we had, we had to use very, very judiciously and not much time.

40:30 A chequered background.

It's very interesting.

Tape 3

00:33 **Father could you tell me how you became interested in joining the priesthood and what, what prompted that decision?**

I'm on the air all the time am I, so I better be careful what I say. I had this old friend, this Patrician Brother, Brother Alphonsus at Waroongah, and I used to go see him once every couple of months. That meant

01:00 catching the train Liverpool to Waroongah, walking all the way down, river (UNCLEAR) at, Burns Road, and I used to go past the Dominican Church in Bidder Avenue, and at that stage it was just a house and a chapel. And I became interested in a devotion called the rosary, there's fifteen mysteries in the rosary,

01:30 all around the life of Christ, each mystery is one Lord's Prayer, Our Father, and ten Hail Marys and Glory Be To The Father, and I thought, 'I'll join the Confraternity of the Rosary.' So I called into Waroongah one time, going down, and met this young, Irish Dominican, Father Louie Whelan, one of these outgoing guys, you know, and we became quite friendly. And one... oh be twelve months

02:00 down the track, I called in again, he was away , I just went into the chapel, say a prayer or two, and there was a little leaflet on the seat about the Dominican third order. I thought, 'Oh, I'll read this up,' which I did. Now we're one of the mediaeval orders, matter of fact, we'll be eight hundred years old in 2016, not a bad effort, we're still going, you know, struggling along. And they were in three layers really, what they call

02:30 the first order were the priests, the men, the brothers, the second order were the nuns, the sisters, and the third order were lay people who wanted to follow the ideal of the order but didn't want to be a priest or a nun, married people, the whole lot. So I thought, 'Oh yes, interesting thing,' and, you know, another asset or aspect to Christianity, and that was the beginning of the end. From beginning reading the history of the order, and coming along to these third order meetings and meeting some interesting people there, I began to think about the priesthood

03:00 seriously. Most probably had been in the back of my mind for a long time I think, Cathy[Interviewer] but this romance put it out and that romance put it out, let's be honest, you know, 'Who wants to be a priest?' you know. Matter of fact there was a romance going on at the time when I eventually made up my mind and a lovely girl really, and the place I used to go to as the technician,

03:30 she was Sir Colin Roderick's secretary. So she, in those days they were fairly big jobs, 1953 or something like that, and we were, as we used to say in those days, almost going steady. She had a great sense of humour, like myself she was a smoker, liked to drink. Anyhow when I thought about priesthood, 'How the heck...

04:00 what am I gonna do here now?' you know. So it happened that I took my holidays and she took her holidays later, so there was a big break there and we lost contact and I didn't try to follow it through, most probably a bit of a dirty thing to do. But then I'd heard she'd left the job, so I didn't make any more enquiries, you know. And one of the chaps doing Latin with me, doing his Leaving Certificate Latin, was the deputy register in bankruptcy, Supreme

04:30 Court. He was thinking of the priesthood too but he had no Latin, no leaving Latin. So Les, Les was a very nice guy. I rang him one day and his secretary answered the phone, he was away, and I said who I was, and I thought, 'Mmm, I think I know her voice,' ...come back. So when he came back from lunch she told him who it was and he said, "Oh yes, he's thinking of going into the priesthood,' this ex girlfriend, of mine. I ran into her in the old Royal

05:00 Arcade about a week later, she said, "You won't stay in six weeks." I said, "Okay Eileen, if I don't stay in for six weeks, I owe you a meal." She wrote to me every year, for about three or four years, Christmas card, we could write home, after Christmas, and then it stopped, so I presumed she got married. I often wondered, working round Sydney would I ever run into her, it'd be fascinating, you know. You know, look at me now. So I had normal girlfriends and Lord knows what those days,

05:30 it was a pretty kind of normal social life. Placed at Liverpool you were fairly kind of confined, we didn't have cars, you know, and by the time I'd taken you home from the pictures, my mother would know. It was a very small world, I can tell you, or she'd know the next morning anyhow. So, the priesthood thing I, came, but Leaving is the key to it, 'I'll go back and do the Leaving,

06:00 and then see how I go.' And I applied for the, into the novitiate in 1955, and that's a whole spiritual year, spirituality, and then you begin philosophy, and philosophy was not my cup of tea, I can tell you. Greek philosophy, the whole lot, you know, but you get used to it eventually, and all things, ethics, and all, logic.

06:30 History again, I took church history for myself, excellent church history. And some of the more practical things like canon law and then scripture, scripture I really took to, that's how I ended, finished up going to the Holy Land for scripture, so yeah. So I had the philosophy in Melbourne and theology in Sydney, altogether eight years. It's a long haul, so I was thirty-two, thirty-three

07:00 when I finished the studies. And a lot of the professors, he was a Melbourne lawyer really, wanted me to go and do a BA [Bachelor of Arts] in history through Unley University, external student, I thought, 'No way, I've had eight years of this.' I regret I didn't do that now, you know. At that stage your mind is acclimatised to study, you're systematised for doing things, you know, essays and Lord knows what. That was the time to cash in on that

07:30 preparation. I didn't do it, Cathy.

What was it that appealed to you about the Dominicans in particular?

It was the rightness of their apostolate, you know. We had parishes, we had schools, we had missions, you could teach, you could do a dozen different things. It wasn't just like, say, a priest, say, in Melbourne diocese or Sydney diocese, where you are a parish priest, that's in any outreach. Now our age, which was the right area, you know, the missions appealed to me, although I never went to them, school appealed

08:00 to me, although I never taught there, thank goodness, I would've been a pretty cranky school teacher. But parish work, I wanted to do it, youth work and retreat work, yeah, working with young people, there was this whole spectrum of things. This is how in one sense the army fell into place, was part of all that, you know, and because the army apostolate is very broad, it's not just the one thing, particularly at Ingleburn. There's a parish

08:30 there, the married quarters, hospital work, the soldiers you deal with, you know, all there, yeah, so it was the broadness of it, Cathy, really, yeah. So, otherwise we were same as Franciscans, Carmelites, except I knew the Dominicans, that was the thing. It's what you know, and these couple of friends I'd made, this Father Louie Whelan, Father Bernard Curran, Brother Pius, he wasn't a priest he was a labourer, an old Lancashire man,

09:00 great guy. And they influenced me, not consciously as far as they were concerned, but just observing them, you know. These men living in community, they have a common ideal, they're so different. Louie Whelan was extroverted young Irishman, Brother Curran the very solemn professor and doctor of theology and, you know, erudite, and 'Pi', Brother Pius,

09:30 the Lancashire labourer, who could do anything practically, you know.

Why do you think religion was so important to you, that you made that decision to enter it?

I think at that stage, Cathy, it was after Korea, after the Korean War, and that war really touched me in one way, or in some ways more than the Second World War did.

10:00 The Second World War, I was fifteen when it finished, 1945, Korea I'm in my early twenties, you know, and there were soldiers who came back from Korea. Again, the sacrifice they had made so far away, 'Why are we even bothered with this?' you know. Or is it that Australia has to think now in terms of south east Asia? What are our principles for being involved in a war? How

10:30 do you justify going to another country? You know, you're gonna lose lives. What justification is there for a war outside of your own country? Now what principles have we got, you know. Do we reach out to people? Are we bound, not bound, but are we bound, certainly challenged that people may be as free as we are? You know, it was the beginning of that

11:00 first comprehension of what it was to be free in my own country, only this doesn't exist elsewhere. You can read about the things of the Second World War, the First World War, we came up behold the iron curtain, behind the iron curtain, but suddenly south east Asia and Korea, is not so far away, you know. Same sort of thing, an idealism, an idealism again.

11:30 I don't, there was no political motive, I'm sure of that, but, and I... I can help people, you know. Maybe by being in a position where you can advise and sympathise with and support, you can do more that way than being practically enrolled, you know. Does that sound reasonable, or unreasonable?

Given that you had a girlfriend and you were a young

12:00 **man, what kind of sacrifices did you feel you would have to make, to make that your life?**

I would have loved to have had a family and a home, and a loving wife. So yeah, I mean, a loving wife, a loving relationship. I suppose because we were both Catholics, that was the other point, and a problem in a sense, that we had the same ideals and God knows what. As my mother would say, "She was a nice, Catholic girl," you know, and she was too, she was a nice young woman really.

12:30 May have been too good for me, for all I know. There was that idealism of sharing love with another person, and we would've been certainly a different bracket to my parents beginning. At that stage, we wouldn't have lived at Liverpool, most probably moved down the line a bit, Fairfield, Guildford, something like that, you know. South of the... wouldn't have been North Shore I can assure you. But it was that kind of sense of, again, fulfilment,

13:00 to walk through life with somebody else who loves you, and whom you love, you know, it's a... I honestly say there's still nothing like it, you know, I gotta be quite honest there. Two people sharing life together,

sharing their ideals together, maybe in one sense being idealistic and not conscious of the things that can happen, the things that can go wrong, you know. I think back in my life as a priest and burying a young mother,

13:30 and to see her absolutely shattered husband, a young life wrecked there, dies of cancer in her early thirties, leaves two children, you know. If it was me, how would I react, you know, that kind of thing that's there. We don't think of it when we're twenty, you know, you see life as a continuation, but I suppose it was the, we were still under the influence of the post war world,

14:00 1946, 1952-53 is not so long really. Now both of us had been kids during the war years, teenagers in those latter war years, both had gone to work. Our parents were working class parents, her parents had never gone through what my parents went through, but still they were working class parents. There is that kind

14:30 of thing, 'This'd be a marvellous person to share life with,' and you fall in love, let's be honest, you know, there's nothing like it. Here am I telling you, you know. That sense of, this person you can turn to, you know, you can be yourself, you don't have to pretend, I don't have to pretend with you. You know me. You know my bad days, you know my good days, you know I feel awful, discipline, whatever it may be. And there's someone will listen to you, just take your hand,

15:00 that touch thing, that, 'Okay, it's alright'. It's a pretty great value in life, you can't buy it. You could have all the money in the world, you could live, in North Shore, have all the affluence, but if you don't have love, or someone who loves you, and you love in return, what is there? Now I'm preaching to you. I don't mean to do that, Cathy. But I felt that way as a young bloke,

15:30 this is something you can't buy. I think I was sort of getting the example of my parents sticking together in those Depression years, awful years. Mum, it got Mum down at times, I can assure you of that. I remember saying to a professor I knew well years ago, 'My father was an optimist.' He said, "No, he was a man of hope." I think it was true, Dad had great hope, and wouldn't give up.

16:00 **So how did knowledge of the fact that you wouldn't have a family and wouldn't have a wife impact on you at that age when you were making that decision?**

Not as much as it had afterwards, I can assure you of that. In parish schools, you always come across kids, youngsters, you say, 'Oh, that's the type of son I wanted or son and daughter I wanted.' They're not necessarily the nicest kids either.

16:30 I had one little monster of a boy, I would've loved to have had him as a son, a real, you know, feisty little kid. A girl at the same school again, and she was the gentle, lovely type, she would've been a lovely daughter. This is idealism I suppose. Teenagers, a teenage lad, teenage girl, in their late twenties, or late teenage years, early twenties, you come across the idealistic ones. You think, 'Oh, I wonder whether my son or daughter would've been like that, I would've loved them'.

17:00 And yeah, I miss that, I miss that. And then the wife, the wife desired. Who do I talk to at night time? 'I had a lousy day today'. 'Okay, God, you made it hard today with me,' you 'go up and talk to you in the church, but you don't answer me,' kind of... I mean, I have friends I can talk to, get to and talk to and some I can really open my heart to, and that's really important. But

17:30 the person who is, I suppose, in one sense, again, under the idealistic thing in marriage is, a half of yourself. There's a lovely line, Cathy, in Aristotle the philosopher, when he teaches on love, this is part of our philosophy, and it's the Latin, 'Amicus, amico, amicus.' Amicus is friend. Friend of friend is friend. God, how do you translate that?

18:00 And this lawyer professor, teaching us in theology really, picked up the same line, he said, "It's in Shakespeare, one of the sonnets." And he gave us a sonnet, and Shakespeare's equivalent is, 'Each is the other's own.' Now that's pretty kind of... someone loves you so much and you love them so much, each is the

18:30 other's own. And yet each is individual, it is yourself, and your better half, or your better, as we say our better half, my other self, each is the other's own. They're so close there, yet neither swamps the other, a love that swamps is not love, that's possessing, love is free. If you love a person you free them to be themselves, really, and they know that. If loving you means I've got you in my hand, you can't do a thing,

19:00 that's not right, I posses you.. That's not loving, that's crippling a person. So I think, even at that stage of the game, those early twenties, I had, at least, that amount of comprehension. Love wasn't owning, it wasn't possessing, the other person had to be free and be themselves, the same for myself. Sometimes you have,

19:30 I've heard a girl say, 'When I marry him, I'll change him.' I think, 'Oh, that's dangerous ground, and I'd be wary about that one'. And I am, really am, it might be said only jokingly, 'When I marry him, I'll change him,' and I think, 'Oh, take it easy lady'. So, there's we are. It's a long way round your question, I'm sorry.

That's okay, you answered it very well, Father. I just wanted to ask, you mentioned the Korean

War and the world politics of that time. How influential was that in

20:00 **in your religious learnings and spiritual learnings?**

Yeah. I think the thing that rocked me on the Korean War, Cathy, was the advent of the Chinese volunteers, so-called Chinese volunteers, who crossed into Korea. And it meant that there was this immense power above us, China, unlimited manpower, doesn't matter how many thousands of men are killed, there's more to come on.

20:30 That was a bit of a fearful thing or fearsome thing really, to think there is a power there, 'wrong or right, we're gonna go in.' Now I suppose my reading then would've said the South Koreans or the whole Korean thing, or South Korean particularly, had a right to their independence and what was north was then imposed by

21:00 China. And it could've come further south, I mean, the Korean War could've blown up over south east Asia, 'cause at the same stage you had that insurrection in Malaysia, that was a pretty kind of desperate thing too. Oh, the Brits handled that very differently to the Americans in Vietnam. When Vietnam fell in 1975

21:30 Time magazine had a special issue on Vietnam, and they interviewed the two English generals who were the, well, 'kingpins' in Malaya, in the uprising in Malaya and General Templar was one, I can't remember the other man's name. And one of the questions put to General Templar was the very last thing, "How do you think Asian nations feel about America now?"

22:00 1975. And he said, "No Asian nation, in this century, would ever trust America again." Which was true. And, you know, '75 Vietnam falls, I mean if, I have a lot of, to do with the Yanks, forty thousand men killed, for what, in south east Asia. They go back to America, 'We'll never go to south east Asia again.' What happens in December '75,

22:30 Indonesia walks into East Timor. Who would oppose them? No Americans, no Australians. That was one of the, I think, one of the flow overs from the Vietnam War, was the subjugation of East Timor by the Indonesians. There's no doubt. We couldn't defend Tasmania, in 1975, we were finished, and the Americans would never come again to south east Asia. We have to go on, hopping on to other parts of the world, I find very

23:00 disturbing, because they're repeating their mistakes they made in Vietnam. That's another side of it.

So when you first started training for the priesthood, did you believe at that time that you were interested in military pastoring?

No, no. No, no, no, no. There's a strange phenomena in the church, Cathy, of the 'warrior priest'. Goes back to the Middle Ages, the

23:30 Templars [the Knights Templar], the warrior orders, the Templars, the knights of the holy sepulchre, medieval material, but the warrior priest has, kind of, kept through. For example one great man over the years is Charles de Foucauld, a Frenchman, who's a count, brilliant man, absolutely moral. When he graduated, he was transferred to

24:00 Algeria, he sent his current mistress on ahead as the Viscountess De Foucauld. And of course he was found out when he got there and they said, "Okay, send her home or resign," so he resigned. And then he got exploring in Morocco, and the desert country, and he came back to France a changed man. And there was some incident, I think it was his nephew making first communion, he came back to religion. And he was a viscount,

24:30 Charles de Foucauld, and then he went to the Holy Land, to Palestine, and worked as a gardener for the sisters in Nazareth. You can still go to the convent today, the Poor Clares Convent there where Charles de Foucauld was the gardener, the well, we draw from every day. And he eventually finished up being ordained and working in the Sahara [desert] for sixteen years, he was murdered by the Tuaregs [nomadic tribe], 1916, never made a convert, wasn't about that,

25:00 but this is the warrior priest. Now I've read his life, his book called, 'Desert Calling and (UNCLEAR)', in 1950 I think I wrote it. It was just the kind of strange combination between religion and the military, whatever they call it, mystique. He was a personal friend of Petain [Henri Philippe Petain, French general and marshal of France], Lyautey [Louis Lyautey, colonial administrator and marshal of France], people like this, these are great names from the First World War.

25:30 And that's a strange thing, the warrior priest. After the Second World War the Trappist Monks in America just expanded, Cistercians, the Trappists, brought about by their famous member, Thomas Merton. You may have heard of Thomas Merton, they wrote a number of books, and I read a couple of them, before I entered, but by the ex servicemen, after the Second World War

26:00 who went to monasteries. It's is a strange phen... and they just expanded. Not so much after Vietnam, after Korea, yes. Again, people seeing slaughter, and terrible things they went through, and during the rest of their life to, well, reparation, what they did themselves, to try to bring about a better world. It's idealism there, you know. So, but over and above that I was not influenced

26:30 by the military, you know. If military was not to exist in Australia I would not have been interested, I can assure you. Dominicans, you know, we were a different bunch altogether. Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustines, all the same brood from the Middle Ages, always had chaplains. One of our famous Dominicans is Bartolomeo de las Casas. You might see a movie called The Mission,

27:00 a big movie of a few years ago, centred around Spain and Portugal in South America, and the Portuguese, still into slavery, going into what is an enclave of Spanish territory, to get the slaves, and they're opposed by two people. I think it's Robert de Niro plays the Jesuit, they're both Jesuits, I think.

27:30 He kills his brother in a duel over his current mistress, I think, if I remember rightly, goes through the whole thing of, you know, life of penance, but he goes to this mission. Now, and they're both killed of course in the end, the 'man of peace' and the 'man of war' are both killed. I would've been proud to be a Jesuit but that incident, when we were involved in, as a Dominican order, in Hispaniola, speaking out against slavery, the governor of Hispaniola

28:00 was Columbus's son, this is, how long ago it was, so 1500s. The man who... Pedro de Cordoba was the man who preached against it in Hispaniola, defied the governor, and they all walked out on him. Now there is in the United Nations compound in New York the bust of Pedro de Cordoba, the first 'Bill of Human Rights', Dominicans. Their great advocate

28:30 was Bartolomeo de las Casas, a lawyer, who went to Spain. Now you imagine sailing from Hispaniola to Spain in those days, like you see the Captain Bligh on Sydney Harbour, cross the Atlantic on that, three or four times to oppose slavery. And eventually won. So slavery was outlawed in Spanish possessions, that was the argument in the mission. Now we're, I say, we're Dominicans, I claim a responsibility for that,

29:00 of de las Casas, maybe not great men, their fathers not so great either, but that was in the modern times.

So tell me Father, how you ended up joining the army and how that came about?

Well the only touches over the army, as I said earlier, Cathy, was the sub prior in North Adelaide, Father Francis Corrie, who was Changi and Burma/Thai railway.

29:30 The next man down was a Father Hinkston, in the 50s when I was a student who was navy. And at Waroongah, when I went to Waroongah in 1966, the prior there Father Tom Fitzgerald, was chaplain of the University Regiment, New England, and he'd been chaplain of New England for many years as a university (UNCLEAR). Each order, religious order, has to give a number

30:00 of men to the military vicary, not a number of men, your turn comes round. 'Okay Dominicans, we need a chaplain from you,' so it was our turn. And I was asked by the provincial would I take it on, a navy chaplaincy, and the other thing I knew was gonna happen, I was gonna be asked to be his secretary. Now I didn't become a priest to be a provincial secretary, it was like being a bishop's secretary. Okay, people love the job, get to know all the goss, [gossip] what's going on, I'm not interested in that, Cathy, you know. I didn't become a priest

30:30 for all that stuff, you know. I mean I'm knocking it in a way, but others'd love to be, you know, where it all happens. So I thought, 'No, blow it, I'll take the military vicary,' so I said I'd do it. And Alan Morgan or 'Senior' Morgan was the acting chaplain general in Canberra and I knew him from working in Canberra, so I had to go and see him, and he said, "Now Bernie, I'm assigning you to Ingleburn." I said, "But Ingleburn's a camp, that's not a ship!" he said, "I know, you're in the army."

31:00 I said, "But I volunteered for the navy!" He said, "I'm sorry, you're provincial, you're application was too late, you're in the army." 'Oh my God, what have I done this time?' you know. The navy kind of appealed to me, that kind of life and the ocean way, it was idealism really. Maybe it was my father's background, P&O, you know, things like that, could've been, I'm not too sure. The stories he told us as kids, you know, storms at sea, things like that, it was the... you know. Anyhow so I had to report out to ECPD at Watsons Bay,

31:30 Eastern Command Personnel Depot, and got examined, medical examination. And then we, the chaplains, the Catholic chaplains, on retreat at Manly and John Hazel was the senior chaplain, now dead, and I was assigned to Ingleburn. So next thing is to meet the chaplain at Ingleburn. So I rang up Ingleburn camp and it was Father Frank Gorman, who had been headmaster at Riverview [College] for

32:00 fifteen years. Frank Gorman was a pretty prominent Jesuit, big headmaster and superior, you had to be an upper class Jesuit in those days. And he invited me, 'Come out and have lunch with us,' so I drove out to Ingleburn. And Frank is a pretty great guy, and took me across to the mess, Infantry Centre, for lunch. Well I'm in my blacks, black suit, roman collar, and I hit the mess, that again is the old World War II huts. There's nothing sophisticated about

32:30 Ingleburn, it was pretty primitive. And as I came in with Frank Gorman, I heard a voice say, "Hoah, there's Frank with his new apprentice." 'Oh my God,' you know, 'What am I running into?' I met the staff with the CO [Commanding Officer] and I thought, 'Oh, you know, have I made a mistake?' That kind of funny feeling. So eventually, within a week I was in Ingleburn, living in the back of the chapel,

very much like living by yourself, but fostered

33:00 by the Infantry Centre mess. And the CO, Colonel Milner, another very fine man, strict, Second World War and also Korea and Vietnam, and the XO [Executive Officer] was away at the time, was Major Nichol, and the senior subaltern was a Captain Brooke, Pat Brooke, who has turned out a great friend, we're still great friends, he's one that's still alive. But he always had a, how can I... a

33:30 penchant for taking chaplains down, that was his... you know, I wasn't Father to him, I was Dad, 'Hey Dad,' you know, it was incredible. There's a book, You So-and-so. It was strange too, being to an army mess, I've got no uniform, I had to wait for three weeks before I could get a uniform, so I'm the one bloke, a black bird in this mess of people in khaki and Lord knows what. And learning the ropes, oh, Cathy, you know...

34:00 a pile of paper every day, ROs [Regimental Officers] and all the other stuff that came in through, and paperwork on this and that. And the army thing of contractions for names of acrostics, you know, DAA-QMG [Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General], and all that. I thought, 'Oh what the hell's it mean?' you know. And then learning to put a uniform on, that was another thing. In those days we still had boots and gaiters, not the GPs [General Purpose boots] we went to eventually. Your three 'pips' [epaulette rank insignia] as a captain had to go on the lapel of the shirt, and there's the same,

34:30 there's an acorn, three acorns on each pip and there's a Latin inscription, 'tria juncta in uno [three joined in one],' and the acorn has to face down. Oh... change your shirt, do six of these wretched things, you know. So but I began to make friends, slowly but surely, I got used to the system. The discipline, not so very different to the monastery in many ways, from the early years of the monastery.

35:00 And we got up earlier than they did, no, about the same time, twenty past five. Still had reveille, it was the bugle, reveille, or last post at night, so there wasn't a great deal of difference there. The living conditions were spartan, they were spartan when I was a student in Melbourne, a student at Waroongah. Meals were, you know, officers' mess, of course, meals were quite good, I say that they were quite good. Oh sergeants' mess was the best place for meals, they always get the best cooks,

35:30 then the officers and then the ORs [Other Ranks]. It really changed one winter's night in July. Ingleburn's a freezing place and these are the World War II huts, no lining, it's the old corrugated fibro roof, just the ceiling there, you can feel the cold come straight down. And I got this call about

36:00 eleven at night from the duty officer, 'There's a young soldier, he's down at bivouac [temporary camp], down near Wollongong, his father's had a heart attack, in Perth, can you go down and get him? The duty driver knows where he is, he'll take you down, get him back and we'll see if we can get him home.' So I thought, 'Oh God,' get up, get in my uniform and the Land Rover and this duty driver, no heating in the Land Rover by the way, freezing July night. All the way down to... the escarpment

36:30 above Wollongong, and the bivouac was in a magnificent position, all the lights of the south coast below you. So get the picquet, "Where's the sergeant?" Get the sergeant, 'Argh,' you know. So he said, "Okay, it's alright," changed man immediately. "Okay father, just get him as he is, leave all his stuff there, just get his boots, what he wants, and we'll fix it up." So I got this poor young lad, I said, "Look, I'm Father Maxwell, bit of bad news, your dad's had a heart attack, but we are gonna get you home as fast as we can." see.

37:00 And so on the way back in the Land Rover, I'm using 'we' all the time, not the army, 'We're gonna do this, we're gonna help you.' you know. Got back to Ingleburn, there's a special billet for him, for at least a couple of hours sleep, an early breakfast, he's on the nine o'clock plane from Perth... from Sydney to Perth, and the CO's car to take him to the airport, and ten days leave. I thought, 'Holy smoke, if you worked for David Jones or The Telegraph [newspaper], would they do that for you? I mean, this system has a heart.'

37:30 That was my turning point, the system has a heart, amid all the kind of discipline and bastardisation, at times, it's all there, but the system has a heart, once you're inside it. And that was my changing point. And of course, as I say, I made friends, and Pat Brook and Major Nichol. Major Nichol was an incredible character; can I talk about him for a moment? He was away on compassionate leave when I came to

38:00 Ingleburn, his mother had died. And he came back, this very, almost in a way stand offish, very quietly spoken officer, with his MID [Military Intelligence Division] up from Korea, Korea, Vietnam MID with it. Serious, very serious type of person. Erudite, obviously. Now

38:30 he lived, also lived in the same conditions we had, but being the XO, he'd knocked a partition out, he didn't just have his bedroom, he had a second room, they're a very small hut, most probably about the size of the area here, but he'd set it up with army furniture, army chair's not very comfortable. He had a very lovely Akai tape recorder, the old open... he'd brought back from Korea, his coffee percolator going and his library.

39:00 And he said to... "Come and have a cup of coffee, Saturday afternoon stand down after main meal, come across to see my flat." Went across to the old hut and he was talking to the other two guys and the coffee going, and I looked at his library, 'Oh hell... Sulum Theologica, Prima Paths, Tutsia Paths, Supplemento, Elementa Philosophia, Dominis Gret, this is the stuff I studied!'

39:30 So, “Look,” he said, “I suppose you’re wondering where those books came from?” I said, “Oh I am, Sir.” He said, “I was a Dominican.” I thought, ‘Oh no.’ He said, “Oh I was a student.” He said, “I left at the end of...” we have three years’ philosophy and your vows are for three years. He said, “I left at the end of (UNCLEAR) provision.” He said, “I don't know why,” he said, “I left, I had a (UNCLEAR) about being a priest, I don’t know.”

40:00 And he joined the army, that was the whole story. But he said, “Those summas were bound by your prior, Father Lufton.” I still have them by the way, in Canberra, and Gordon Nichol died a couple of years ago and his executor sent me the summas. And I said, “You mean Ambrose?” He said, “Oh yeah, Ambrose, we were students together.” So I rang Ambrose and said, “I got a student here,” and told him. He said, “Oh yeah.” So as well as being also a lot of, I say, social life, any formal dinners,

40:30 he would invite Ambrose across from Waroongah. We had some great nights together, especially as Ambrose had been a prisoner of war, that was the other thing too, Gordon the soldier, after being a Dominican, and Ambrose the soldier, a prisoner of war before joining the order, so I really had a lot of admiration for him. As I say, the cases you get, he was most humane with soldiers, he was strict, you couldn’t fool him.

41:00 Great company, and we kept in contact years and years and years. When I came back to Ingleburn after Vietnam, he’d moved down to the MIT, Minister’s Instruction Team, as OC [Officer Commanding] there, and still living at Ingleburn then. And then Colonel Milner had been transferred to Canberra, to Russell Hill, as a brigadier, he sent for Gordon as his assistant,

41:30 because he was just so efficient, so he moved down to Canberra. And of course years later I was in Canberra so contacted him now and again, where the meetings began again. And then he retired, and he was living at Maloola Bay down at Palms, Batemans Bay, and I used to go down and see him once a month, drive down from Canberra. And the deal was, going down after Batemans Bay as I turned left opposite the RSL [Returned and Services League (club)], there was a chicken place, hop in and get a chicken and some bits and pieces, and he’d provide the bottle of wine.

42:00 And I’d say mass for him, in his unit with him.

Tape 4

00:31 **If I can just ask you to finish that story father?**

With Major Nichol?

Yes.

Yeah. Oh yes. He had a ring, and I’d say mass for him in his oh, lovely flat that he had there, which was owned by the son of a general, who had absolutely adored him. I’ll put no names in, you might even strike him one of these days. Gordon had

01:00 been at the general’s ADC [Australian Defence College] and this teenage son adored Gordon. Went to Duntroon [Military College] but got out of Duntroon, wasn’t his thing, but kept the friendship, yeah. And he had this unit in Maloola Bay, and when Gordon retired he said, “It’s yours, for your life time. I want no rent, it’s yours.” As it turned out, I did a wedding for this

01:30 young bloke, it was a bit of a complicated one, I was able to go through canon law and do this wedding for him, so we’re fairly close. And I baptised, so far I’m baptising his children, baptised the second child about four or five months ago, so there’s been a kind of connect... but anyhow. Gordon would take off this ring and put it on the little table I was saying mass for the corps. He said to me one day, “You never ask me why I do that?” I said, “You know, Gordon, I know you too well,

02:00 you’ll tell me when you want to.” He said, “I’m gonna tell you now.” He said, “That’s for the soldiers I lost in Korea. I’ve never forgiven myself.” He took a patrol out at night and they got ambushed, he lost half his men and he was badly wounded himself, and, “Thank God.” he said, the Americans picked him up, like literally M*A*S*H picked him up. Young medic officer said, “We’ll have to take your arm.” He said, “No, save my arm.” and he did. Now this brings

02:30 Father Ambrose Lufton back into it. Ambrose eventually went into New Guinea, working in New Guinea, and he came back in 1998, I think, for a meeting we had in Australia and this stage Gordon had prostate cancer. So I said, “Look, I’m gonna take you down to see Gordon, because you’re great friends.” thinking, ‘Well next time you come to Australia, Gordon most

03:00 probably will be dead.’ So I went down and we had the same thing, I said mass and we had a, most probably more than one bottle of wine, and the two got talking together. Ambrose is the young New Zealander, badly wounded in the Western Desert. The first shell hit his gun, blew him off it, the second shell killed the gun crew, only one survivor, but he’s laying in the sand hills and thinking, ‘Well the Germans will come and finish me off.’

03:30 He wasn’t twenty-one, he was nineteen or twenty. Imagine a young person like that. The Germans

picked him up and put him in a military hospital and treated him very well. Gordon, in Korea, same thing. Night ambush by the North Koreans and the North Koreans took no prisoners, that was all there was to it. Thinking the same thing, 'My life is now over.' Now these two men, if I'd only had a tape recorder, you know,

04:00 it was such a conversation, you just can't get it down. Their thoughts were both on battle fields, and both facing death, twenty or so. 'How do you feel? What do you do?' And I sat there mesmerised listening to them, kicking myself, 'If I'd only had a tape recorder...' Because you could never get it down to yourself, just to hear these two talk about their experiences.

04:30 The type of... it made me realise a lot of the things that really made Major Nichol work, the experience, being a twenty year old or so and death was facing him, and he'd had his men killed around him. And he's years later, still never forgiven himself for it really. Now it's easy for us to say, "But Gordon, you took a patrol out at night, the intelligence was this,

05:00 you were ambushed, you had no idea!" But when you're in charge of people, and they're killed under you, in the army, it's a different thing.

From a professional point of view, Father, how do you, how did you counsel someone like that?

Well, the only thing you can do there is go back to the basics. 'What were your intentions? What was your preparation? What were your principles?' Now this man in particular, Gordon, Gordon

05:30 Nichol, he was always concerned about his men, they were not expendable. He put his life before theirs, type of guy he was. You can't, you can't judge what's gonna happen in the future, I can't judge. I could walk out of here and be killed tomorrow, walk in front of a car, something like that, and he was blaming the car driver. Blame myself. But the future you can't foresee. Warfare,

06:00 honestly Vanessa, it is just so tricky, so unpredictable, the things that happen almost accidentally. It's just your bad luck, you were in this place and that time. I'll give you an example that struck me, on the same line, in Vietnam. One Saturday afternoon we had, oh God, I don't know how many, six or seven Cambodians,

06:30 Cambodians not Vietnamese, we were training Cambodians, and two Australians were killed, in the Long Hai mountains. I'd been there on the Thursday, this is the Saturday afternoon. This corporal took out this patrol of Cambodians we were training, one trod on a land mine, three or four killed, they radioed for help, for a medivac. The chopper came in

07:00 completely red crossed, no weapons on it. The explosion of the land mine alerted the VC [Viet Cong], and they waited till the chopper came in, and when it came in to land they would fire on it. Now the young medic had taken off his safety harness to jump out, and the chopper turned, threw him out and landed on him and the corporal, and a few more Cambodians. Killed them. Burned to death. Now all they ever got back, the chopper burned all night,

07:30 they brought these poor devils into the field hospital at Vung Tau, dead and dying, heads just like a, I mean, just like a Christmas pudding, mashed, you know. And next morning they secured the area and all they got out of the chopper was, left smouldering, thing, was a piece of meat like that, and under it an exploded pistol. That was the Training Team man. Young medic was burned to ashes.

08:00 Months later his parents, and I can understand, the parents, there was no remains of their son, ever. Now the army prides itself on bringing bodies back, it mightn't be all my body but part of it's there, and it can be buried, you know. And your wife, your family group, and each has that opportunity of grieving. When's there's nothing comes back, what do you do? Memorial service. They raised it with their member of parliament and he raised it in parliament, and we got a

08:30 ministerial note back in Vung Tau that the army had been careless, hadn't searched the area properly, 'Do it again.' And Colonel Grigg said, "No, I'm not doing it again. If I go in to the Long Hai mountains, I'm gonna lose some more men. For what, you know, for what?" It was just the coincidence, call it what you want, and the accidentality of it, of this young medic, ready to help people and taking his safety harness off too quickly.

09:00 Do you chastise them for it? He was trying to do something for people. Dead, burned to death. What do you say to his parents? I've often thought, 'Now a chaplain had to face those parents, with an officer, and say, "Your son is dead." And later on, unfortunately, "we have no body." That's pretty hard to say to people. We had five guys killed on Saturday morning, in Phuoc Tuy Province,

09:30 they hitched a ride on an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier], coming home from patrol, and they were carrying Claymore mines on it, on the outside, out on the outer frame of the APC. All against regulations. And a VC got a lucky RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] in, killed the lot of them. Now, there wasn't a body available. Bits and pieces, the guts and flesh and God knows what,

10:00 they were up in the trees, we could not find a body. So all we could do was say, 'Well here are the five caskets,' we had caskets, 'We'll share the stuff out among them. What did Bernie Maxwell weigh? Right, a few sandbags in.' That's what came back to Australia. Now my parents, or my wife, would never know the difference. They buried what they thought was me, you know. Trying to say to the suffering people, 'You can write

10:30 a place of grieving there, you can write (UNCLEAR) to this,' you know. Not easy, not easy, you know. The accidentality of things, I'm straining for a moment now, Vanessa, thinking, you know, I'm not in any way knocking cremation at all, not in a way, you know. But we, even in cremation, you have your columbarium, where you can put the ashes, you know, there's some type of contact there,

11:00 you know. Others, of course, ashes are spread over a battlefield. There's a famous case of a Private Tandy [Henry Tandy, VC], First World War, and I can't give you all the history, it's too vague back in my mind now. Tandy was one of the most decorated soldiers, First World War, the little Scot. And in an advance in France, 1917-1918, they're over in a trench and there were some wounded Germans there, now he wouldn't shoot them because they were wounded.

11:30 If they hadn't been wounded he most probably would've shot them, but they were wounded men. That kind of principle. One of those wounded Germans was Corporal Adolf Hitler. Hitler went to a lot of trouble, when he became chancellor, to find out who that soldier was, who spared his life. And he found out and the regiment he belonged to, the unit he belonged to, to find out he was one of the most decorated men. And there was a portrait of him in

12:00 the mess, and he got a copy of the portrait, which he had at Berchtesgarden. Now when Neville Chamberlain [prime minister of Britain] came to Munich in 1938, the famous peace conference, Hitler's last words to Chamberlain was, "Now when you go back to England, I want you to ring Private Tandy and give him my regards." And Chamberlain did, "Herr Hitler sends his regards to you." Now if Tandy had shot that... Hitler in cold blood, we may never have had the Second

12:30 World War. You know, it's a... Tandy died in 1970 I think, and he had his ashes spread over the battle field at Cambre. I can only give you a rough summation of the story, but a man who will not take the life of another man. But if he had've, we might have millions of people still... we don't know, you don't know. How do you explain those things, Vanessa, I don't know. If I did, I'd be God. There's things you don't know,

13:00 the accidental things that happen. I think of Gordon Nichol, he carried that burden of that ambush all those years, this erudite... By the way, when I was in Rome years later, and one of the men who was teaching the Angelicum in the university we have there, Father Vincent Ryan, had been Gordon's master of students in Australia. He said, "He was my most brilliant student, he was earmarked to go to Rome and do his doctorate in theology."

13:30 Gordon didn't know that. He could've been a bishop, he could've been... he was a leader, he was a real leader. That was the thing, that was this thing I was struck in the army, you strike leaders, you strike real leaders. Colin Milner, Gordon Nichol, Colonel Hanikan[?], they were real leaders.

When you have a first hand experience of the indignity of war and the fragility of life in situations like that, what role does your

14:00 **faith play?**

My first experience was in Ingleburn, and a young soldier, engaged to a WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps], he was the non Catholic, she was the Catholic, they were getting married in Queensland, and I was only in Ingleburn a couple of months. And when they're a soldier you do all their marriage papers out for them. This, in particular,

14:30 just a couple... you know, you kind of click with people sometimes, he was back from Vietnam. And so I did the marriage papers for them and they went off and got married. Came back and he volunteered to go back to Vietnam. I buried him three months later. Now he wasn't killed in Vietnam, he had a brain tumour, and died in Vietnam. And the same chapel, were in the same chapel, PD [Protestant Denomination] chaplain, Padre Smith and myself, buried him from the

15:00 PD chapel. And here was the young wife there, who only three months earlier, I did the marriage papers for them. It's the fragility of life. He wasn't killed by the Viet Cong... a brain tumour. And when they woke up to it, it was too late. 'Oh, he's been on the grog,' or something like that, but... no. Terrible when you think about it. The other was in Vietnam itself, a young officer I got to know in Scheyville.

15:30 Now Scheyville was near Windsor, it was an officer-training unit, and these were national servicemen who were doing tertiary education, who postponed their national service to qualify, and so they were all tertiary educated people. This young... my first experience of Scheyville, go up on the Saturday afternoon to interview these blokes and see them for church parade on Sunday. Now this young guy was absolutely virulent of the army, 'God, I hate it!'

16:00 What it'd done to his life, it was incredible really. And obvious he was pretty, kind of, his adjectives were incredible. And I said to him, "Look, Steve, stick this out, it's a twelve week course, you come out with one pip up. Now because you are tertiary educated you will not go to Vietnam, they'll be giving you a job in army education, something like that, you won't go to Vietnam, I can assure you." Anyhow the transformation used to be marvellous, Vanessa, these lads came in on, you see them

16:30 on the Friday, Saturday afternoon, they come in on Friday night, stooped, long haired, sullen complexion. Give them a month, up straight, short, back and sides, athletic. Seven and a half hours sleep every day, three decent meals, exercise, they were transformed. And they had to learn how to

work together as a platoon, that was the big thing. And a platoon is as good as its weakest member, and we're gonna support the weakest member, they had to learn to work together, community. Anyhow this lad, his wife was pregnant, South Australian,

17:00 and I was there for his march out, and it was the evening parade, beautifully done in the evening, and they walk off into the dark almost. And that lovely army evening hymn, 'The day they go this all has ended,' it's beautifully done. What was his trans... what was his posting? Singapore. I said to him, "You lucky so-and-so, eighteen months in Singapore, at tax payer's expense, you and..." whatever her name was, "Jean, you and Jean, oh you, you know, so-and-so."

17:30 And they were quite enthusiastic. Anyhow, he went off, and almost two years down the track, before I went to Vietnam, not so long before, I meet him in the mess at Ingleburn. I said, "Oh, you're being discharged?" He said, "No, I've reenlisted." I said, "You what?" He said, "I've reenlisted." I said, "But you hate the army!" He said, "Oh no, I'm gonna make it my career." And he said, "I'm going to Vietnam." I said, "You're mad! Why go to Vietnam! Look," I said, "I'm going to see Colonel Milner, I'm going to see

18:00 Major Nichol, we can get you off the draft, there's no problem, not impossible to do." He said, "No, no, I want to go, gonna make it my career." I said, "You're mad! They're using real bullets!" I really got mad with him. So he went off to Vietnam, he was an extraordinary, outstanding leader, he really was, this is just as a one pipper [lieutenant]. I arrived on the Thursday, I had my first casualty on the Saturday afternoon, I go to the morgue and here he is, dead. Sniper. Took a patrol out,

18:30 only out an hour or so, got a sniper. And I stood there, Vanessa, looking at the corpse, and I was angry with him. I was really angry. 'Waste of life,' you know. Tomorrow morning, a chaplain, an officer has to face your wife, and tell her you're dead. What for? It was a bad introduction to Vietnam, I can tell you. Bad enough any young officer but for someone I knew, and I thought a lot of him,

19:00 seeing him there dead, for what? It was a, it was pretty kind of soul disturbing thinking, 'I'm just in this country, I'm here two days, and this is what I face.' I faced worse things afterwards I can assure you, but because I knew the guy, and she was pregnant again, by the way, another babe on the way. So they're things that stick in your mind.

19:30 I think also I didn't go there green on casualties because 2 Mil [Military] hospital, we received them back in 2 Mil hospital and, you know, blokes with legs blown off and arms blown off. Trauma'd, some are very badly scarred, mentally scarred. One young guy, extraordinary really, both legs blown off. And

20:00 I found I didn't want to look at him in bed, you see them in bed and he finished there, I didn't want to look down past his knees and I'd try to look at his face and look away. And he had a young wife, a very plain little girl, she was a machinist somewhere, and I met her there thinking, 'Oh God, for the rest of your life you've gotta face this guy. He gets into the bed, he's got no

20:30 legs, how does he get out of bed?' All this things go through your mind. She loved him, and she loved him back to normality. I mean, she was the most, how can I put it, the most mature, balanced young girl I've ever come across in my life. Just this plain little girl you'd walk past her in the street, she transformed him, because she loved him. That was one of the things that I might..

21:00 if I seem idealistic about love, 'See what a woman's love did here.' She didn't care whether he had any legs at all, which he didn't really. But she loved him. So I used to think about some of those, 'You lucky so-and-so, I'd give up my legs willingly to be loved by a person like you.' It's incredible, that strength of a woman's love, how it touched this young guy. There's no more saying, 'Oh I lost my legs and bloody war and God knows what, and what for, you know, and these politicians.' He was

21:30 positive all the way through, because of her, so you strike those ones, you know. My first reaction to see a young guy, legs gone, 'Oh no,' you know, you're twenty-two or so, twenty-three, another forty years ahead of you without legs, you know, but with a wife like that, it's face anything. 2 Mil. was a, could be pretty grim. I was always very impressed by the care of the staff,

22:00 they were tough, they had to be tough, to face what they faced, both the nurses and there, and the medics and the doctors. Colonel Grigg was the CO, fine doctor, tough guy, but they were caring people, they were caring people, all the army, you know, 'chiacking'. Again, it was really primitive, was just the old huts, oh some had been bricked up, it was pretty primitive as a hospital, you know,

22:30 it was like a casualty in many ways, and we'd have them straight back from Vietnam. Some went to Concord and some came to Ingleburn, and then would most probably move on from Ingleburn to Concord for future treatment, but there were some pretty grim sights. I think one of the most difficult ones I came across, again was in Vung Tau, very early in the piece again, my first week or so, a young soldier lost his leg, accidental... They came in for R&C [Rest and Care]

23:00 and of course they had to hand their weapons in to the armourer to be serviced. And one of the blokes had left a cartridge in, one up the spout as they used to say, dropped the rifle, discharged, and hit this other guy in the leg, and he lost his leg. And I remember coming to him in hospital in Vung Tau, and absolutely stricken. There's no words for it, it wasn't the enemy

23:30 as such, it was an accident, caused by another... he was court martialled about it afterwards. I mean, he

was a guy who either forgot regulations or took no notice of them, caused this damage to another man. I don't know how he ever felt about it. But to see this young guy, life had finished for him, I mean, it hadn't finished really, but... And you can't say at this stage, 'Now you lost a leg, it's not the end of the world for you.' And I had in the back of my mind, this young guy,

24:00 losing both legs and seeing what his wife did for him. There were some... our heli-pad [helicopter pad] at the field hospital, we called it 'Vampire', it was an appropriate name because it sometimes flowed with blood. I remember another young guy in a stretcher coming in and the ward master, these great scissors would cut all their clothing off, and one of his legs came with his pants, when he pulled

24:30 it. You think, 'Oh God.' I often wondered how I'd face blood but you get used to it, I never collapsed or anything like that. We had a very hilarious ward master known as 'Jungles' Jackson on his second or third turn back, and he examined everyone first, see your dog tags, what was on the dog tag. And, "Okay, one for you Father, another one for you Father." it was it was interesting. And I remember there was a VC brought in, he was a prisoner for us, but wounded,

25:00 he had a cross on... "One for you Father," VC you know. So to see these men, and I think I'm jumping now to Vietnam if I may, to the field hospital there, they were concerned, they cared, they were professional. Colonel Parker was my first CO at Vung Tau, a very concerned, competent, professional

25:30 doctor. And Colonel Grigg then came from Ingleburn to Vung Tau afterwards, whom I knew. I was always in admiration of them, it was a lousy job, in the tropics, there was no going home on leave, you were there for twelve months. One night we had, our last clash, we had seventeen guys wounded I think, and four killed,

26:00 and the wounded were brought in. Now imagine the pandemonium, there's heli-pad, like a casualty, and the nurses and the medics run off their feet. And then the wounded were in the jungle about forty-eight hours before we could bring them in, we always accounted for our bodies. And they came in this late evening and Jungles Jackson rang, "We want the chaplains to come in and pray." I mean the guys been dead forty-eight hours, you know, the best of theology Vanessa, what can you do, but that was the army respect

26:30 for the body, you know. We always respect their, that was one of the things that came through to me, this kind of rampaging you know, the army, all their things about drinking, women, the lot, but the respect for you. So I went down and got the other two gentlemen, 'We're going down to pray.' And these poor... they had the body bags there, these poor devils were in the jungle for forty-eight hours, the bodies had turned black, but the smell of putrefying flesh was incredible, and they were covered in these great big

27:00 cockroaches. So, what prayers can you say? So when we said what we thought was enough prayers, we said to them, "Okay." Now this Warrant Officer Jackson, the ward master, and about four or five regular soldiers, sergeants mainly, said to their national servicemen, "Get off, this is not your job, this is ours. You're not here for this." And they were the ones that cleaned up the bodies. In

27:30 new body bags, seal them in these leaden caskets, and then you went off and got drunk. Wouldn't you? Trying to clean up four bodies like that. I mean, you know, they say a drunken soldier's a drunken... but I would've got drunk too, it was, that was the type of thing you struck, there was that human side of it, you know. There was the, no I mean, it wasn't all grim always or

28:00 like that when we had our funny sides to it too, had our laugh sides to it and played jokes on each other, you had to. I mean, school boy things really, that doesn't... we were school boys in a foreign country in many, many ways. The final mess dinner we had for the warrant officers and sergeants in Vung Tau before we pulled out altogether. And it was done very well, I mean, the sergeants 'mess is always done well, and the Vietnamese waitresses were trained,

28:30 our waitresses. And we invited the Americans, equivalent top sides, whatever they call them, and also some Vietnamese regular army men. And a lovely meal, and then they presented the Vietnamese with all the crockery and cutlery of our mess, it was worth some thousands of dollars, it wasn't army... it was bought by the mess funds.

29:00 This Vietnamese top sergeant got up to receive it and thank us, and he said to us very slowly, he said, "I am not very good with your language. I can speak French, but then you may not be very good with French." They were... all the Vietnamese spoke French, they all spoke fluent French. He said, "I just want to thank you. He said, "This is the first time,

29:30 I've actually been invited to a foreign mess." He said, "I fought with the Viet Minh against the French, and now I'm fighting against the Viet Cong." He said, "The value in money which you have given us, we can't grasp. he said, "But it's the gift that is important." And that was a really touching thing to us and then we had a marching contest on the parade ground,

30:00 with the pipes, we had a pipe band there, Doug Pherson[?]. And there was curfew which (UNCLEAR) us on, there was the blockers' strike on Long San island across the flippin' bay, and then Dough Pherson the pipe mast, ah, major insisted on piping me back to my quarters. Now to be piped back through the camp, wasn't the most popular thing about one in the morning. 'That rotten Catholic chaplain being piped back to his quarters, he most probably was

30:30 dead drunk anyhow.' which I wasn't but, you know. But it's those things you don't forget. I meant to bring with me and I didn't, the menu for that dinner, done beautifully, formal menu done out. Things that I kept, they mean nothing to anybody else now, but to me they mean a lot, that menu for that final dinner. The good comradeship there, the Training Team men involved there,

31:00 men who had died with you. That was the other thing too, Vanessa, I was chucked into the Training Team, the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam]. If you're ever at the Vietnam memorial in Canberra, and I hope you do one of these days, you'll see just two words there, by the side, 'V. Team', that's the [Vietnam] Training Team, the AA [AATTV]... and I read that and I almost get tears in my eyes, the men I knew. A very high mortality rate, one in four came back dead or wounded,

31:30 our VCs, all Training Team men, in Vietnam, you know. But there was a comradeship there that was very precious, and you knew they would never leave you by yourself, they'd always be with you, anything happened, you wouldn't be abandoned, and that was... in the jungle, either in a jeep, thinking, 'Get set, what happens now?'

32:00 I've great memories of those guys, and most of 'em are dead now, quite a few of 'em are dead now, a few are still alive. Colonel Gowans, he's still alive, he's here in Sydney, a Brigadier Gowans somewhere, with the refugee committee. But they're, as I say, most of the ones I knew are dead unfortunately.

Father we might come back and talk about AATTV a bit later. I just wanted to go back and ask you a

32:30 **few more questions about Ingleburn.**

Yeah, okay.

What sort of army training did you have to do when you joined?

None. I didn't know how to put my gaiters on even. I arrived there absolutely green, Vanessa. And this Pat Brooke, this Captain Brooke who was the senior subaltern, got the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] to send a corporal across to teach me how to march first, up and down the verandah of the chapel, 'Left, right, left, right, left, left, left.' 'God, bloody stuff I... those so-and-sos.

33:00 And we had, when I eventually got my uniform, it was the old army boots and gaiters so I had to put them on, and these, the wretched pips up, and I learned green. So I'd gone to phone Pat Brooke, "Pat, what do I do now?" "Oh," he said, "You Catholic chaplains, you useless lot of so-and-sos." Or ring Gordon Nichol, "Gordon, what I, what's the procedure here?" We had a great RSM [regimental sergeant major],

33:30 George Chin, who was involved in Long Tan, the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam, who was a, he ran that camp, he had a wife and two daughters, three women at home ran him when he went home. He was incredible, he was this tough guy, who ran a camp of three thousand guys, at home, "Yes dear, no dear." interesting. I had no training until I was in the army eighteen months and then they had a chaplain's course, at Studley Park

34:00 near Camden. And that was in the, I'd been there eighteen months in the army, it was a bit kind of... 'What more could they tell me?' Well they could tell me a lot more; there was no doubt about that. The man who ran the course was a Warrant Officer Date, and there were thirty of us chaplains, Catholic, non Catholic, Anglican, a couple like myself, regular army chaplains who had now, we were old legs at it, a lot of them were just CMF [Citizens' Military Force] chaplains who

34:30 were learning. And Warrant Officer Date was trying to make us into young officers, kind of thing. And one morning we were putting our slouch hats on all back to front, we've done them the wrong way round. And he stood there, he knew this, and when we went to salute of course we, of course that was the thing that gave it away. Very funny. He marched us for another hour, around the parade ground. Ironically, in Vietnam, in twelve months time, I went down to the delta, and who's one of the warrant officer

35:00 Training Team, Warrant Officer Date. He said, "You were on my course in Studley Park." I said, "Yes, and you didn't teach me how to put a slouch hat on either." It was coincidences like that. It was an interesting course, practical things, I've had to put a hootchie [makeshift shelter] up, how to use your ration pack, all those things which I hadn't learned at Ingleburn because I didn't have to. But I was too long in the job at that stage of

35:30 the game to appreciate it, in many ways it was a bit of a waste of two weeks, but I enjoyed the comradeship, things like that. So, it would've been better if there'd been a practical course for chaplains before we came in. The American Army are insistent on that, they're different altogether, they're chaplains are, you know, they go through a course first and they can fail them, fail you, that's all there is to it, so you don't come in green as we did. It was kind of, as if being a minister or a priest was a,

36:00 was a kind of imprimatur, you can do it. 'You're right, you can do it, no problem.' Which isn't true, which isn't true.

To what extent were you subject to the same level of harsh initiation and recruit training

and…?

No, we weren't, Vanessa, we weren't. Not like the… I mean, I'd often, often… occasionally listen to the RSM dressing down a quarter guard at night, you know. "Private So-and-so!

36:30 You're a grubby, dirty little man! What would your mother say if she could see you now? She'd cry!" and we never got that. And the poor soldier was quaking, cause it was a game, it was a game in many ways, you know. RSMs had a great range of language, colourful language, which is a pity it isn't tape recorded. I mean their descriptions of things and persons and places and situations were absolutely out of this book, and you couldn't write them really.

37:00 But, their description, it beggars the imagination in many ways. But it was a game, if you took it too seriously you're round the bend and they knew they didn't mean it. The soldier didn't the first time. Older blokes, 'Just listen to it, okay, that's it.' But no we weren't subject to anything like that at all. It would've been fascinating if we had been, it would've been, Vanessa.

37:30 There's one thing too, kind of, because you're a chaplain, that was a catch. In the Second World War chaplains had no rank, they wore two black stripes and they were called corporals in mourning. Now we had rank. In the navy there's no rank, you're the rank of the person you're talking to, in the navy, which… I don't know. I remember we, the chaplain's retreat,

38:00 Father Eugene Harley, and he's still alive, Eugene, just finished as parish priest of Mosman, said, "The only reason you have rank is for the men you serve. If you think you're officers and try and pull rank, you're in for a big surprise. Don't play officers, you're rank for the men you serve." Now unfortunately sometimes a chaplain did try and play officer, so I (UNCLEAR) the whole lot, you know, and that was grief round the corner. We were not officers, and

38:30 officers saw that. They had to salute you but they knew you weren't an officer. And if you try and play that game, it was tragic, you were there to serve people, and that's the big thing. I mean, it was a very good point Eugene made to us, this was, 'Men you serve, that's the only reason why you have rank.' I mean, you were only one call, two calls from a commanding general, if anything went wrong, called chaplain general, and had this redressed. It was a pretty, kind of, dicey thing

39:00 to be in, if a soldier really got into strife and was unjustly treated you get help very quickly, because of your rank. Now I never had to use that, ever. I think there was never any occasion in those four years full time that I ever used rank, or the ten years part time. I never used rank. It wasn't necessary, it wasn't necessary.

Were there chaplains you encountered

39:30 **who did use their rank? Were there chaplains you encountered who did pull the officer card?**

There were, there were unfortunately. I'm thinking of one in particular and it was tragic and it did him no good, and it did chaplains no good either. You know, they think, 'Oh, they're all like that guy.' that was a shame really. Only one I, well

40:00 two, one in particular I know of, officers resented it, senior officers would certainly put you in your place. There's Major Nichol for example, if anyone tried it with him, you'd be in your place very, very quickly, same for Colonel Milner. They were tough guys, they were just guys. So for a chaplain to play officer, we were not officers, we were ministers, priests, whatever you call it,

40:30 but we were not officers. We were there to help people, not command people. There are famous cases and I'm thinking of one man in particular, in the First World War, who was the only officer left in his trench, and he took over command, and he was awarded a Military Cross for it. Unusual that he was a ranking person there and he could see what had to be done, and the man knew what to be done,

41:00 and pulled them through. Served in Australia many, many years, Father Clune, Father Francis Clune, an old Passionist. And I used to see him march on Anzac Day when I was a kid, the same thing, and the men adored him. Frank Clune, he was up in the front line with them, whatever it was, he took over, that's what you did. Gift that person has, it wasn't because you're an officer, it's because he was a leader, they he could do that, you know. The 'pips' mean nothing really, they were just

41:30 decoration. I mean, we, going out in Vietnam we wore cuff ones, because the pips were, put you in, for a, to be shot at. There was a price on our head, Vanessa, forty thousand piastres, which worth at about ten dollars or fourteen dollars American, as an officer, if they got you, if 'they' got you. And to prove 'they' got you, they took your insignia and they took your ears. (UNCLEAR) So, you know, My God, I'm only worth

42:00 fourteen dollars American..

Tape 5

00:33 **Father I wanted to ask you about the work that you did at Ingleburn before you went to Vietnam. What were the main issues there that you were dealing with among the men?**

I think there are a couple of categories there, Cathy. One was the hospital work, that was pretty absorbing,

01:00 2 Mil hospital, as I say it was people who came back from Vietnam, 2 Mil, there were a lot of traumas there and difficulties. You have to be sick, really sick, to get into a military hospital, when you get in, it's hard to get out, cause they won't let you out until they're absolutely convinced you're well. So there was an interesting kind of category there, people that were there were sick,

01:30 that was the sine qua non [an essential condition] there. A lot of strain on the staff at the hospital, they were good workers and, as I say, they were concerned about their patients, best way I can put it. Many were national service people, who subsequently went to Vietnam for the field hospital at Vung Tau.

02:00 It was a grinding day in a sense that it wasn't just a normal hospital, it's a hospital under army discipline, so the kind of say, breaks you get in a normal hospital existence, you could not get in a military hospital. Discipline was there, command, so forth, way of doing things. Also the isolation of Ingleburn, Ingleburn is about

02:30 ten miles out of Liverpool, between Liverpool and Campbelltown, it's a nice little place. There's no just across the corner to a cafe, you're caught there, that's all there is to it. That could be grinding on some of them. Again, young people away from home, and often hundreds of miles away from... interstate, no immediately family to drop back on. In the actual

03:00 Infantry Centre, again, there's this tremendous cross section of people, of young soldiers, national service men and also regular army. And again the trauma of being away from home, the normal back ups we get at home. It's not like finishing a job at five o'clock and coming home, you're in the camp. You face such things as doing your own washing, now for guys that can be a bit tough at times, you know, 'Mum'll do this, Mum'll do something else.' It's

03:30 up to you, do your own washing, do your own ironing. People thrown back on their resources, I want to say that our modern lads back in 1969 and through to, into the '70s were less resourceful, but they were less used to it than would've been my generation. We had to do it, that's all there is to it. So there was a bit of, kind of, could be a bit of tension

04:00 there. And again the isolation of Ingleburn, if you didn't have a car, you had to wait for a bus to get in, or get a taxi. There was a bus service into Liverpool, there were a train service out of Liverpool to the city, it was a bit of a major operation, to get from Liverpool into the city, I should say, from Ingleburn into the city, Ingleburn, Liverpool, to the city. And getting home again in the

04:30 evening, that was another problem too. So the isolation, lack of the avenues of entertainment you have in the city. There's no variety of cinemas to go to, things like that, or dances or places to go and have a meal or go and have a quiet drink. There is a charming club across the road from the Infantry Centre, there're Every Man's, Salvation

05:00 Army, there are outreaches like that but very restricted really. So the soldier came to Ingleburn, and suddenly found himself in a dining situation, with six or so hundred guys, they weren't really home meals, they were nourishing meals but they weren't what you want at home. Those things could add up. And also the living conditions, living in the

05:30 huts, again, Ingleburn, it was primitive, the tension, clashes of temperament, character, all those things could be there, which is difficult. Some of the problems you have, say, in civilian life exacerbated in army life, by accident or locality, or personnel. If you struck an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] who didn't like you, he could make life dead hard for you.

06:00 I remember one march out in front of the CO, this particular platoon had it in for their sergeant, and most probably quite justified. And they put on a terrible march out and he abused them afterwards, and they just stood there, they knew they got him, it was kind of tit for tat. We'd say silly things in many ways, but it was how it would happen. Pressure on the married life,

06:30 soldiers in Vietnam, now I must confess there was a marvellous back up for the wives of soldiers who'd gone to Vietnam. Now I'm just thinking of one unit in particular, the sig [signals] unit, before I could go to Vietnam I had to go through a whole list of things for living at home, for my wife. If a fuse blows, what does she do? If a tap leaks, what do you do? All those things that you take for granted, oh, you know, someone will do it. The practical

07:00 things had to be all worked out, 'Who do you go to?' So there was no kind of unnecessary traumas, there was always a back up for help. Car breaks down, who do you contact? They're never great things.

So how did the army organise that back up, was there a particular organisation who would do that?

No, no, done through the actual unit. If your husband was in Vietnam, and I'm in your unit, I'm responsible for helping you, it was

07:30 shared out. The same as social occasions, I'm thinking the officers' mess at our Infantry Centre, no wife whose husband was in Vietnam, was not invited to our social functions, and someone would be designated to be her companion. And often happened, it happened to me, we're the bachelors in the mess, so there's Captain Brooke, not so much Major Nichol,

08:00 the adjutant, there were four or five of us bachelors. But we'd always make sure that it was done very, very kind of prim and properly. If I had to pick you up, I'd always have someone else with me, if I took you into the mess I'd always have someone else with you. There could be no possible breath of scandal, that kind of... I mean, it was just being prudent most probably. But you were not excluded from anything, you were in and you belong to the family, so because your husband's in Vietnam and there's quite a lot of concern there, how are the kids are going at school, anything you

08:30 can do there. Oh no, there was great help there, Cathy, impressive help. For all the jibes levelled at the army it's pagan and God knows what, I found tremendous care, I really must confess that, to it's members. I'd love to say, whether I exaggerate sometimes, I found more consideration in an army mess among young officers for each other than I found in seminaries, for students among each other.

09:00 Interesting. Back each other up. Maybe over protective some times, but there was always that help there. So, oh it was there, it was a humane way of living.

What kind of impact did the public protest about the Vietnam War have on the camp?

Well, a group of protesters came out to Ingleburn and throwing eggs at the gates, the camp

09:30 gates, and their sons were there. They said, "They're mad, what's wrong with them!" It was interesting, lack of sympathy, with people protesting about them. Interesting example in Vietnam in 1972, '71 really, national service was reduced from two years to eighteen months, that happened in Vietnam while I was there,

10:00 and overnight a great group of national servicemen were no longer in the army, they were civilians. So the army hit the emergency buttons, brought them all into Vung Tau and said, "Look, you're no longer in the army, we're gonna get you home as fast as we can." Now interestingly enough, Cathy, over ninety percent re-enlisted to finish off their term in Vietnam... "But our mates are here." "But you know your parents

10:30 are protesting in Australia." "But our mates... we want to stay with our mates." Very few went home; they stayed and went back with the battalion. There's a strange sort of camaraderie, not in any way glorifying war but when you make those friendships, there's that unity with the thing. It's very hard, I suppose you used to call it the green machine, it's very hard to put it into any kind of specific terms, but, "I'm not gonna leave my mates behind, I could go home tomorrow but no, but I'm staying."

11:00 "We'll all go home together."

What particular views did you have on the war at that time when you were at Ingleburn?

Well the casualties coming back at 2 Mil hospital had an impact on me. At this stage, I would've been very much a domino theory person. There's a marvellous book called, The Last Confucian, written by

11:30 Warner, it's on President Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] in Vietnam. It's rather interesting, and a very interesting epilogue to it. Dennis Warner, he was a commentator, writer, part philosopher. That influenced me on the Vietnam War and the justification for being involved in Vietnam. And, as I say, I would've been a

12:00 fairly, well, supporter of the 'domino theory' or how it can come all the way down. The instability of Indonesia was always in the background and the confrontation with Indonesia over Malaya and over Sarawak in the 60s, that was very much in the mind of people like Major Brooke, or Captain Brooke... Major Brooke, yeah, and Gordon,

12:30 Nichol, all these people. They were suspicious of the stability of Indonesia, cause it could go tomorrow, that's the thing, it could go tomorrow, and it'd go Communist, that was the thing, it was Communist. And so here's Vietnam, stop them here, and they won't come any further, that was a pretty prevalent theory, and I would've said, "Yes, I can see a point in that." Now when you see your own young people come back wounded, traumatised, you begin to

13:00 kind of question. Why? Should we be there? And some of the things that began to seep through in the American conduct in Vietnam, My Lai, things like that, they were very, very scary, that our own people are capable of atrocities. Now I said, 'I can understand,' I can kind of grasp to some extent a platoon under

13:30 fire, every week, these few men, and then they go berserk. I could kind of somehow see, oh I could see it happening, kind of thing. But, when you, it started to seep through that we were not playing the game, I say 'we' the Americans, I'm sorry to say it, you began to wonder, 'What is it about?' I think the assassination of President Diem in Vietnam also put a

14:00 lot of question marks in my mind, he won't be a puppet of the American administration, and they sold him out, there's no doubt about that. His sister, the 'Dragon Lady', Madam Ngu, whom, I never met her,

but a priest I knew that met her, had a lot of time for her, definitely gave the Kennedys... and course within six months President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy President of the United States] assassinated. She's

14:30 supposed to have sent a telegram to Jackie [Jackie Kennedy, Kennedy's wife] saying, 'And now you know what it feels like' or something like that. There was growing... in spite of the Geneva Convention, and the DMZ, there was growing, say, doubts. It's only years later, looking at it, and having been there, and talking to people, realising

15:00 it goes right back to the French occupation. Indo China, when the Second World War finished, the Japs had, of course, occupied Vietnam. The French demanded that the Brits occupy it until they could get their army back, de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle, French statesman and president]. Now Mountbatten, who was the supreme commander for south east Asia, wanted to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh,

15:30 and de Gaulle said, "No. We come back; this is our territory, metropolitan France once again." I would honestly believe the French were the villains of the whole thing of Indo-China, but there are too... Interestingly enough, when Dien Bien Phu fell, the French fortress up in the north, the Americans had sent

16:00 two commissioners to Vietnam to examine the situation, and of the documentation that's in Vung Tau, both had the same finding, 'Don't go in, it's a quagmire. Once one man is dragged in, we're all gonna be dragged in trying to get them out. Don't go in.' This is the military commission, the Yanks, in Vietnam. But the politicians went in, and that's where you get the problem, you know. The army was, 'Don't touch it,

16:30 it's a quagmire.' It's all guerrilla warfare, and this particular guerrilla warfare, you got two facets of it. You have the Viet Cong, they were South Vietnamese themselves, but you got North Vietnamese who invaded South Vietnam. The Viet Cong are armed by China; North Vietnamese are armed by Russia. Now there was a, as

17:00 subsequently happened, when Vietnam fell in '75 Russia demanded it's price, which were the sea ports. In other words, the Russian fleet could now checkmate the Americans in the Pacific. That was the price of it.

So could you tell me how it sat with you when you had your orders to go to Vietnam, being a man of the cloth and going to a wartime situation, how did you see your role?

17:30 I feel that I was going as a chaplain, as a pastoral worker. I didn't see myself as a 'warrie', I can assure you of that. Chaplains normally didn't carry weapons, a couple tried to play that game of... you know, silly. We saw... I say, 'we,' I saw myself there because people were there, and there was a pastoral need.

18:00 And in somehow trying to, not possible to say, 'I don't support either side,' I also supported my own side, but trying to suspend judgement. I'm there to help soldiers who may need me, I'm not there to approve of their killing, that I think was quite clear in our minds.

18:30 If a man has to kill, that's a terrible thing to be in. I don't think you can easily kill, unless there's something strange with you. And I think of the brutality of taking another life, it's pretty kind of... I only had one experience where I possibly could've had to fire, I don't know, it may not have happened, but it's not a decision you can make easily, to think, 'Do I pull the trigger or not?'

19:00 Even if it's only a shot over their heads, once you discharge your weapon, it's an act of provocation, it really is. And it's an act of, I say, terror, to some extent, I suddenly have this advantage over you. So I went to specific lengths to be very sure of that, not as a warrie. I can remember,

19:30 Cathy, arriving.... I left Ingleburn, that was, I was sent from Ingleburn, and we have a flight, 707 [Boeing 707 aircraft]. The old Sydney airport, you don't know the old Sydney international airport, it was just a barn, it was just literally a barn. And regular blokes come in from Ingleburn, Pat Brooke, Gordon Nichol, Dennis Poynton,

20:00 Father Frank Gorman turned up, my mother, my sister, friends like that. And Cal Ryan, the young lieutenant and Barbara Grigg, nursing sister, whom I knew very well. And Cal had married about August and I did the wedding for him and Jan. He was going back for a second time; he'd been back as a soldier, 'digger', and he came back from Vietnam, applied for officer

20:30 training, went through Portsea, came out a one pipper [lieutenant]. And he was going back now for, as he said, 'platoon experience.' I thought, 'Mmm'. Anyhow. And Barbara Grigg was nursing, one of the sisters from 2 Mil. Hospital, she was in 2 Mil and Barbara's a lovely girl, really. And I have a few photos there which I'll show you later on. Anyhow just as I got to go through the gates, Pat Brooke in his parade ground voice,

21:00 'Hey Dad!' Everyone could hear it. And this is an airport full of weeping wives and daughters and mistresses and God knows what. I just, he wanted me to turn round. And he marched up to me, the same voice said, "Here's your last supper." It was a chicken and a bottle of red wine, to have on the plane going up. That was the type of thing. Flew up to Darwin, refuel in Darwin, flew to Singapore, and we had to take off our army shirts

21:30 and put a sport shirt on, Singapore do not recognise transit of troops, in Singapore, silly really. So you left your shirt and put a sport shirt on. Had breakfast in the airport, and then arrived in Tan Son Nhut, Saigon. Now this is my first experience of south east Asia, en-masse, and the heat, the primitiveness of it, we sat outside round a bit of shade we found round some of some of the huts. And they couldn't get us out of the place til afternoon,

22:00 so then lunch turned up, sandwiches and... people were not feeling like eating too much, or anything like that, and they picked at their sandwiches, and just, they were in boxes. Then they brought a big drum, putting them out, and then all of us threw into the drum, take it outside the fence and the Vietnamese pounced on it, hungry Vietnamese. And I thought, 'My God, we've thrown this away and they're eating what we're throwing away!' I mean, it was good food,

22:30 nothing wrong. That was my first thing, arrogant westerners. You know, it was a kind of terrible feeling, that these people are depending upon us. Every day a plane load came up, and the same thing would happen, the lunch that was provided was thrown away, and these Vietnamese workers jumped on it. Flew down to Vung Tau in the afternoon, met at the air base

23:00 by the Anglican chaplain. He was by himself in a Land Rover, drove me back to the camp. We came out of the air base gates and all I can see around me are Asians, every sign post is in Vietnamese. 'My God, I'm a foreigner.' I've never had this feeling before, I am now a foreigner in a strange country,

23:30 I can't recognise any of them. Now these are all, they're non combatants, they might be VC for all I know. This strange feeling, I'm a foreigner and to a lot of these people here, we are not welcome, that was the... you know. And then to get back into our own camp a few miles up the road was a, 'Phhew,' to be back into friendly territory. There was a strange kind of sensation, this first feeling I've ever had in my life, I am foreign,

24:00 in a foreign country. I don't speak the language, I don't know a great deal about their culture, I read a bit about it but I don't know a great deal about it. It's stinking hot. What am I doing here? I'm gonna be here for another three hundred and sixty-five days yet, it's a long time to go, three sixty-five days of this, 'Mmm'. That was the strange first feeling of it. And then I go to my billet, we had a chapel,

24:30 and we had a little hut block, three of us chaplains slept there, and a little one room office each, and a little breezeway between the area. And we were looked after by the hospital nurse, although we belonged to headquarters company, hospital nurse, just stay with the (orphans...UNCLEAR), just up, and they really fostered us, and that was interesting. But the hospital

25:00 most probably was a little bit kind of cut above the other messes in one sense. We actually had hot water for showers, which was quite pleasant, although it was water restricted because the monsoon hadn't happened, we were waiting for weeks before it happened. But that, yeah... I think when I first ventured out, after a week or so, to go into Vung Tau itself, I went with a lot of apprehension,

25:30 again, I'm a foreigner. We went in one night, a couple of us for a meal, now we never went out in our uniforms, we went out in sports clothes. The Americans had to wear their uniforms all the time, so we were, more or less, looking like civilians, with our leave passes. And went to a restaurant or a cafe they tried to call it really, a Chinese eating place, called Soy Kim Lan,

26:00 which was mainly used by Australians, the Yanks didn't get. And it was upstairs, lovely fish, Vung Tau was a fish port, you always got fresh fish. And the little girl who was the manageress of it, called Huan, or Huen, or Hoa, I forget what her name, a little pocket Venus, but she was strictly business, couldn't get a smile out of her, if you mention it, don't worry about it.

26:30 Months later, months later, in Vung Tau, I had to go in for some wretched thing or other. At this stage, after a while you become relaxed, you forget anything about, 'They might assassinate me, I'm gonna lose my ears.' you forget all that stuff, it's just like another place. And I'd been in Vung Tau for something or other, in my uniform, and went into the Catholic church, Saint Joseph's church in Vung Tau, and as I'm going up to the church, who's coming out of the church but

27:00 Huan, the manager at Soy Kim Lan, and she saw me, and she saw my crosses on. She said, "Oh, Cha?" Father. "Mmm, Cha, Cha ka wan?" "Oh..." The next time we went to Soy Kim Lan, I went with a young officer, she was all over me, 'Cha this and Cha that.' He said, "Now what have you guys got we haven't got?" I said, "Ian, it's just too hard to explain. Let's just say, the Catholic Church has influence around here." It was just that kind of thing, suddenly

27:30 we shared something, our Christian faith. It was a funny feeling, that different attitude altogether. Whether I was safe or I was kosher, I'm not too sure what she thought I was. I also tried to learn Vietnamese, that was a... I wanted to go back and start on French again, but I wanted to learn Vietnamese and went two nights a week into the school, a lot of, most were Americans, a couple of Australians and myself. And we had this text book and one

28:00 lecturer who never spoke one word of English, it was just all in Vietnamese. It was worse than doing Latin years ago with Greeks and Poles and Hungarians and God knows what. But one had very good English, he was very tall, he was a North Vietnamese, Phuc. Phuc had been a pilot and again, the Asian

cultured person, very gentle type of person, very thoughtful. And

28:30 eventually, I don't know how he identified me as a priest, but he did eventually, so he'd invite two of us to come down to his flat for a cup of coffee and lovely Asian paintings and that. And he spoke very good English, fluent French, he also spoke Mandarin, and I said to him, "Phuc, why Mandarin?" He said, "Oh Father, one day it might be very handy or very useful." But he was another, a North Vietnamese who was

29:00 questioning the whole war, although he was teaching in South Vietnam. A lot of them, Cathy, were people who came north in 1954, which is hard for us to grasp again. But when Vietnam was divided between the north and the south, a lot of these northerners came south, to be free, a bit idealistic. But you imagine yourself or your family just picking up and walking out, all you can take is what you can carry, and come

29:30 south, leave your home behind, but to be free. It's a thing that we have no grasp on, to be free. That I think, struck me as so many of the people I met in South Vietnam, not actually South Vietnamese but were northerners who came south in '54, they left everything to be free.

How did the South Vietnamese treat the northerners?

With a lot of suspicion.

30:00 When you see Vietnam, that funny country, you're looking at three countries. North is Tonkin, and Tonkin is rich in minerals, snows in winter. When you see big Vietnamese they are Tonkinese. Central Vietnam is Hue, H-U-E, is Annam, and South Vietnam is Cuchin China, with Saigon.

30:30 Saigon is the Johnny-come-lately of all places. Hanoi in the north, Annam and Hue, and Saigon in the south. Now the Tonkinese were the go-getters, in the sense they were people who took up initiative, when they came south they set about starting businesses. They could claim unused land, 'Okay we'll claim it, we'll turn it into a farm.' For example just outside our camp, there were two big fishponds, run by North Vietnamese,

31:00 so they sold the fish to the markets, fresh fish, freshwater fish, or you could go and fish there if you wanted to. Fascinating. They also raised ducks, and the duck droppings fed the fish, it was very, very environmental. One of the interesting weddings I had in Vietnam, a chap who was sometimes my driver, he was a corporal,

31:30 I can't think of his name, let's say it was Steve anyhow. Big, blonde, blue-eyed, surfie, and he'd often drive me down to mass on a Sunday to the air base, never went in himself, I presumed he wasn't a Catholic, so I'd never question people, "Want to come in? Come on. Don't worry." And I came to see him and he said, "Father, I'm thinking of getting married." I said, "Well, why come to me, Steve?" He said, "Well, you know, I'm a Catholic." I said, "What?

32:00 Never see you at mass." I became, sort of the old Irish parish priest. "Oh…". I said, "You come down with me to the mass, but you never come in." "Oh…" I said, "Here's the…" He said, "Oh, she's a Catholic too." I said, "Well I bet she's a North Vietnamese." He said, "Yes." She ran a laundry between the camp and Vung Tau, Nguyet. Nguyet was this gorgeous pocket size Venus and

32:30 a real tough businesswoman, but she was beautiful. So I saw them. I said, "Well Nguyet, I need documentation, I need to get your baptismal certificate." She said, "I'll get it alright." This is during the war. She said, "I can, we can get those things." There were things that we silly westerners didn't know. So, I'm the sort of type that queries, and as a priest, and query what I do, I said, "Look I'll give them instructions, and when I finish with them,

33:00 then you can take over." So I thought to myself, 'You're a little vixen, she's running this laundry…' He met her because we encouraged the Vietnamese to start things, and if you wanted to run a laundry, all the mess stuff went down to your laundry, it gave you business, and it was a fairly lucrative little trade. And Steve would drive it down, he meets you there, he falls in love with you, you tell him you love him, and he wants to marry you, and that means you're going to go back to Australia, that was the point, see.

33:30 In the end, in the beginning, the army was very, oh, frowned on these weddings, you'd send them back home immediately, by the time they got there they were much more lackadaisical. 'Cause once you married a soldier you were entitled to a wife's allotment, don't have to work anymore, Australian Army pays you to marry a soldier, that's how we saw it. Anyhow, eventually with a lot of bad grace, I did their wedding for them, on New Year's

34:00 Day 1972. Now, I didn't go to the reception, just to show my disapproval of it, 'You are using this guy, Nguyet.' And she was, very much… anyhow. Years later in Melbourne a man who was my superior at the driver's license renewed, went out to Blackburn, wherever it was, and he said to me, "The guy who tested me knows you, he was in Vietnam with you."

34:30 I said, "Oh." He gave me his name. I said, "Oh, God no!" this Steve. This is just before; it was the Christmas holiday period. So I went and I rang him up New Year's Day having, whatever it is, his tenth wedding anniversary, or something. "Oh, come out and see us!" So I went out at Ringwood, and here's Nguyet, still as lovely as ever, he has lost his hair, now bald, and lot of weight on, and here are all the

kids. This is, like, Susanna, she's just

35:00 made her first communion, this is one just been confirmed. And I thought, 'Oh my God, how wrongly I judged that girl.' She was the house maker, the homemaker, and still a really good cook, too. So that was one of the ones where I tried to play God, I fell flat on my face on that one.

How did the Vietnamese women, in particular, respond to the influx of soldiers in places like

35:30 **Vung Tau?**

Well in one sense, Vung Tau was ourselves and the Americans. With a certain amount of pride I say the Vietnamese were more pro Australian than pro American. I don't think we were as racist with them as the Americans were, although the Americans were really generous to them. Orphanages, they put up medical teams,

36:00 everything, they were marvellously generous in that way. We were uc da loi [Vietnamese name for Australians], was the, uc da loi. Now you had to be careful how you say it, there's six terms in Vietnamese, so eat too quickly, it means I'm a catfish. Uc da loi was lazy Australians, don't open your mouth, don't put another spoon, it's uc da loi. Vietnamese just kind of raise their eyebrows, you know, catfish. Generally I think we were better

36:30 received than the Americans were. We didn't have that, they say, that swagger, where everything's bigger and better at home, you know. There's simply more rapport, between ourselves and the Vietnamese, than between the Vietnamese and the Americans. I'm not knocking Americans though because as I say their generosity was outstanding really. But I just think that we were, the fact also, the ones

37:00 that live in south east Asia, America's up there. The Americans who'd say, "I'm going back to the world in two week's time." "Back to the world, you're in the world?" "No, no, I'm going stateside." As far as they're concerned, the world was there, this part of the world didn't exist. It was incredible. Their world was America. South east Asia...

What about the bars in Vung Tau and...?

The bars in Vung Tau,

37:30 I was hoping you wouldn't ask me that, but there we go. Bars and bar girls. Well, by the time I was there six months, there wasn't too many bars I didn't know, and there weren't too many bar girls I didn't know either, through some incredible incidents. Sure enough you get a soldier in strife with a bar girl, so eventually come back to the chapel, you know. Your

38:00 husband arrives home, and tells you he's gonna marry Hung, at the Milan Bar, 'Sorry, it's all over love.' And course, you go to army welfare and I get to see him and the girlfriend, go down to the Milan Bar and see Hung. Now if I was always by myself I'd get nowhere, see mama-san, 'No, no, hold it.' Now Vung Tau was divided into beats, the old police beats. The area we had, a plain clothes sergeant in charge

38:30 of it, he could close a bar for fourteen days like that, put you out of business. So when he went, he got, mama-san would come up to the... ask for the cards, 'Hung, oh God, I think she's had VD [venereal disease] last three times she's been tested'. So I had to send for Hung, and read the riot act to Hung that he was married. And there was one hilarious one, when they took one of our guys for a ride, one bar in particular. There was three or four bar girls writing to him, he thought he was only writing to one of them. And he was sending them money back. See, idiot.

39:00 To the one girl. They think, 'This is great, these stupid Australian soldiers, send you money'. So after incidents of bar girls and army welfare stuff, going to the bars, the bar girls knew me. Occasionally I'd be down at the market at Vung Tau, in uniform, crosses up, and an arm would go around you, there'd be a bar girl. They'd say, "Cha! When you come and see me again." "Get away!" And of course

39:30 the Vietnamese were looking, and they knew what they were looking at, and notice you. They'd see these crosses up, this arm, this bar girl with her arm around you, you know. "God, get away!" "Didi mau, didi mau!" "Out!" Or, they'd be on their motor scooter, in their hot pants and they're screaming out, "Cha, we love you too much," "we love you!" 'Oh, God,' you know, 'ground, open and swallow me'. I mean, with a true sense of humour.

40:00 But tell the story of military police, tell the story. Military police are not popular with the soldiers as you may well imagine, and they organised a barbecue one Sunday. And no use having it on our beach because there'd be a brawl, so I went to one of the Vietnamese beaches which is out of bounds, but the military police could use it. So they arranged it, it was called Windy Beach, get own beer, get meat from the Americans, have a barbecue. Just relax.

40:30 I said, "Oh, why don't we ask some of the bar girls, purely female company, to come and join us?" So I went to some of the bars and said, "Next Sunday we're having a barbecue on Windy Beach, now this is purely social, would you like to come and join us? There's no, you know, business." Her first question, "What is a barbecue?" Explained a barbecue. "Oh, what time?" "Eleven o'clock." "Oh no,

41:00 we cannot come eleven o'clock." "Why can't you come eleven o'clock?" "Because we go to eleven o'clock mass." 'Oh my God'. That was the situation once, but they were some of the answers. So bar girls, it was sad because I ran into, one night in Saigon, staying in Saigon overnight, and we had a billet called The Buers, and our eating facility was called The Greasy Spoon, and it was a greasy

41:30 spoon too. So we go out for a meal, and I say, 'we,' a couple of old captains, they'd been warrant officers who did a knife and forks course [officers' course], and they're very experienced soldiers, came back with three pips after Vietnam, in administration, and three or four of them might've joined me, the older men. And there's a place they went to is a, was a pseudo-Japanese restaurant in Saigon, specialised in stuffed crab

42:00 claws.

Tape 6

00:31 A lot of sadness with them because they could earn as much in a bar in one night as a month's work. As I say, one experience, going out with these two or three old captains, to their favourite eating place, this Fuji, and coming in, walking over the little bridges, beautifully set up, and we had a lovely meal. And then there was

01:00 the Fuji bar next door, this is where the money was made. And Australians, we were known as 'cheap Charlies,' we refused to buy Saigon tea. Now Saigon tea meant, I bought the Saigon tea for the bar girl and I'd pay the price of three whiskies for it. Now all she got was tea, and they made a profit, she got a certain cut from it and the bar got a cut from it. So my first experience of the Fuji, going to

01:30 the bar with them, they said, "Look Father, you're the new one here, someone'll attach herself to you. They know us, we bring our own drink with us, they won't worry us cause we're the cheap Charlies." And there was a famous little song called, 'Uc da loi [Australian], he cheap Charlie, he no buy me Saigon tea,' there's a whole thing. So, sure enough we sat down, within a minute, I had this girl beside me, I thought, 'I, you know, this is tax to this meal.' I said to her, "Sorry,

02:00 I'm not interested in Saigon tea, I'm a Catholic priest." Well, she into me, "You think I'm a prostitute!" At the top of her voice. She tore strips off me, 'How dare I say she was a prostitute!' And just being my luck, I struck the one genuine hostess in Saigon. I looked and here are my three mates, you know, laughing at my discomfiture, the whole bar had the performance, I had to go and buy her Saigon tea, shut her up. And she was the genuine hostess,

02:30 in her late twenties, she was a seamstress. Next day she would've taken me to the museums, the art galleries, she was the real genuine thing. And I said to her, I can't even think of her, gave her name, I said to her, "Why do you do this? One night you'll take someone home." She said, "No." I said, "Well," you know. She said, "In one night I can earn as much here as I earn in two or three weeks as a seamstress." I said, "But you know we're

03:00 not staying here forever. When we go, what happens?" "I will face it." Now she was a charming young woman, as I say, in her late twenties, but boy did I get dressed down for thinking she was a prostitute, so that was a interesting comeuppance. So they weren't all, there was the occasional genuine girl trying to earn a living.

03:30 But, you know, the majority of them, they saw no wrong in it, there's no use moralising to them. An orphanage between Nui Dat and Vung Tau, nearer to Nui Dat and Baria, the famous Mother Augustine ran it. And I was out there one Sunday taking some stuff out to them, and I thought, 'Oh, here's a mother visiting one of, visiting a child, I know her face.' And it clicked, she was a bar girl, from Vung Tau.

04:00 So next time I went in to her, which was during the week, I said to her, "Did I see you at the orphanage on Sunday?" "Oh yes, Cha." I said, "Does Mother Augustine know what you do?" "Oh no." I said, "What would she say if she knew?" She said, "She would say, you are very naughty." That kind of acceptance of things. I thought, 'Oh God, who can judge? Who can judge really?'

04:30 Yeah and, I mean, there are, there were one case I'm thinking of in particular, I came back from being out with the Training Team, I'd go north for a week or go south for a week with the Training Team, and go back on the Friday, or Saturday morning some times, I'm there for the weekend in Vung Tau, and there'd be notes on my desk, people wanting to see me. And this particular note was, you know, 'Padre Maxwell…' I thought, 'Oh, oh,

05:00 the guy's not a Catholic.' George, wanted to see me urgently about marrying a bar girl. 'Oh, why me? Why not take the Anglican chaplain or the PD [Protestant Denomination] chaplain, why pick on me?' Anyhow I contact George, he's down at R&C [Rest & Convalescence] from Nui Dat, this big guy, in this thirties, broken nose, big hands, really an awkward type of guy, you know, he's

05:30 in the construction group in Nui Dat. He told me the story, he met this bar girl in Vung Tau, she was a university student. I thought, 'Aha, that's a new approach.' And her aunt was looking after the bar but

she was mama-san temporarily, because the mama-san was always sick, and he wanted to marry her. I thought, 'Okay.' So, "Give me the name of the bar, name of the girl." Her Christian name was Marie Cecile.

06:00 "Okay, look I'll investigate it," thinking to myself, 'Well you're gonna get back to Nui Dat in a few days time and Marie Cecile will be disappeared next time you come down here, she says she's from Saigon.' So I thought no more about it, put it in the file, 'next year, whenever,' one or the other. A week later I get a call down to the main gate of the camp by this guard commander, he was a corporal and an MP [military police], a character of a man. Michael, Michael Ray. He said,

06:30 "Listen Father, I know about your nuns etcetera," he said, "But there are two birds down here wanting to see you." he said, "And one's pretty nice." "I'll come down." So I went down and a woman, I suppose, I'd say, she was most probably in her forties, absolutely gorgeous young woman with her, and she was gorgeous. And she introduces herself... "Anna, and this is my niece Marie Cecile." I thought,

07:00 'Oh my God, I can understand why George fell in love with you.' I mean she was absolutely gracious and... So the story was true, Marie Cecile was a pharmacy student in Saigon. She was on holidays in Vung Tau with her aunt, chaperoning her, and Ahnsrin [?] was the mama-san, so she was sick so she went and looked after the bar, and course Marie had to come with her, and suddenly she met George.

07:30 So, God, you know, this is going to be an interesting problem. So I said, "Well, you know, I'd think very carefully about this. George comes from a part of Australia which is pretty primitive, he's never been past primary school, and all George knows is booze and birds really, most probably, and poker machines." And I said, "It's a big step to take but let's take it easy."

08:00 So a few more contacts with George and then Marie Cecile and her aunt were visiting once a fortnight in Nui Dat. Come up by bus all the way from Saigon, and course they couldn't come into the camp at Nui Dat, or come in any of our camps, so they walked around the perimeter, Marie Cecile and George. And boy and girl can't hold hands, not done. I can hold hands with my boyfriends,

08:30 males can hold hands, but male-female, not done. So they walked, and one... no, more than one, four paces behind them, Aunt Anna, chaperoning them, perfectly chaperoning. Now soldiers being soldiers very quickly nicknamed them Beauty and the Beast. So it got to a stage where I had to go and see Marie Cecile's family in Saigon, Nga was their name, and her father was one of the press secretaries to President

09:00 Thieu. They were up grade Saigonese, and northerners, cause they're really from the north. So I thought, 'This I don't want to face,' you know. So I arranged to go down on a Sunday afternoon, I think I got Father Casey to come down from Nui Dat and say my evening mass for me. After, straight down after lunch to Saigon, got on to the Training Team people again.

09:30 It was great being chaplain of the Training Team, when I got back into Saigon, ring up the Training Team and said, "Look gotta come down and do a job, can I get a driver?" "No problem Father," you know. Meet me at the airport, take me to this address. So the driver took me out to this area in Saigon, wasn't the embassy area, but it was very close to it, very nice home. And I was met at the door by Mr Nga and his wife, and I'm brought into their main room, and here's the whole family, sitting round it in a circle, and I'm, like, sitting here.

10:00 I've Mr Nga on my left, one of his sons on my right, and the family go round, Mrs Nga also, by her husband, and she introduces all the kids. Mrs Nga is the Catholic; Mr Nga is not the Catholic. She is French educated and they're all, well we know Marie Cecile, Monique, Veronique, the whole lot, all, you know. I thought, 'My God.' And opposite me his mother,

10:30 grandma, in her black turban, black ao-dai [Vietnamese dress] and she's sat there. Now she most probably spoke English but she wouldn't speak English to me, she spoke fluent French, not English to me. And in the Vietnamese society, the father's mother runs the family, it's a matriarchal society, not patriarchal, it's matriarchal, and whatever grandma decides is what happens or doesn't happen. They'd gone through the whole thing with the

11:00 Chinese calendar year, that George and Marie Cecile didn't clash in their signs, they weren't a snake and a dog, things like that, can't marry a snake and a dog. Fascinating. And I had an agonising hour or so. So eventually, and grandmother's sitting there just... giving me the kind of stare. So eventually in desperation I said, "Mr Nga,

11:30 I know this doesn't happen in your society. In our western society we're a little bit more, perhaps, you know, not as religious as you are. If I was your eldest and you were asking me what was my opinion, should Marie Cecile marry George, my answer would be no, and these are my reasons. Marie Cecile is a very sophisticated young

12:00 woman, she's a university student, she's very well educated. George has no education; George comes from an area of Australia that's very primitive. To take your daughter from Saigon where she goes down the Street of Flowers every morning, and selects flowers for the home." I mean, it was very elegant, "To go to Australia, would be impossible, really impossible."

12:30 Now Marie Cecile has sat there for the whole hour, in her lovely ao-dai, her hands on her... and she

looked up and she said, “Father, you are wrong.” ‘Wha...?’ I looked up and... ‘In your society you don’t challenge priests.’ “You are wrong.” “Oh.” She said, “Father, when I marry George,

13:00 and we’re in Australia, I will send George back to school, and I will send him to university, because I will be a qualified pharmacist and I will support him.” End of conversation. What could I say? Why? This beautiful Saigonese girl, why does she love this big oaf from back of north Queensland somewhere, you know, it’s true. I mean, I was being

13:30 racist most probably. Could not (UNCLEAR). So, end of conversation. I came out from the home, and grandma’s sitting there where we nicely bow to each other. And I got in the Land Rover, and the guy said, “How’d it go?” I said, “Oh God,” I said, “Don’t Stan, it was just a write-off.” I said, “I shot down that beautiful young woman. She wants to marry this guy,” I said, “She’s crazy.” And I was still mad about it. Got back to

14:00 Vung Tau and I was away most probably next week with the Training Team. So about three weeks later George is waiting for me. ‘Oh, here’s the crunch.’ absolutely distraught. “Grandmother died. Marie Cecile’s the eldest in the family, two years of mourning; she can’t marry for two years.” ‘Thank you Lord.’ terrible thing isn’t it. So I thought, ‘Well, there’s that one solved.’ It didn’t finish there.

14:30 Her father was Buddhist, and his mother was Buddhist, it was the mother who was the Catholic. Her brother was the provincial of the De La Salle Brothers in Vietnam. I was in Perth, this is in ‘74, no, ‘75, I got a call from the PD chaplain in

15:00 Townsville who said, “I’ve got a soldier here, George.” And I said, “Oh no.” “He wants to go back to Vietnam and marry his Vietnamese girl.” I said, “Well he can’t, the two years aren’t up yet.” He said, “He’s gonna go.” I said, “Well, the way things are at the minute, no-one’ll be allowed to go to Vietnam, the place is crumbling.” So then a letter from her uncle, the De La Salle provincial, begging me to get his niece out of Saigon. Too late.

15:30 So I never felt really proud about that one, Vanessa, because I played God. What happened to her? I don't know. Her family were a marked family, North Vietnamese, President Thieu’s press secretary, they were a marked family. So, I felt it would’ve been better for her to come to Australia. I don't know, they’re the kind of unsatisfactory

16:00 human stories.

What would you say to, if say, a soldier wanted to marry one of the bar girls, you were talking about that story earlier, and you had to go and talk to the bar girls. What would you actually say to them?

Say, “Mate, come down and we’ll look at the cards. What’s her name? Here she is. She’s had VD the last three times she’s been tested. Now do you want to marry that girl?” It was a pretty, kind of graphic thing to say.

16:30 You fall in love with someone, I don't know how true, Vanessa, that ... I remember reading in Time-Life magazine, they were saying that the Vietnamese women were the most quiet and the most beautiful of the Asian women. And they were, they were feminine from their finger tips to their toenails. I mean my little sisters, my little Dominican sisters, had me round their little finger. They knew it, I knew it, and we got on tremendously well. They

17:00 conned [tricked] me, very nicely, in a very feminine way. But the bar girls, I don't know. No, she wouldn’t get through our medical tests anyhow, we were very strict, our medical tests, for VD, TB [tuberculosis] also, that was the prevalent thing in Vietnam. They had to have a complete, clear, medical certificate before they could come to Australia. And for a wedding it was the same

17:30 thing, they had to be absolutely cleared, so to the best of my knowledge, some of the few weddings I did, church weddings, and also just the civil side of it, because I was a registered celebrant, and you could do the wedding. They followed the French system; the church wedding follows the civil wedding. So you go to the Mayor’s office first and you have to have the civil wedding there, and then next day they have the church wedding. So

18:00 I could do that side of it, there was no problem there. But no, we were pretty care... oh, there was, in Vung Tau, had about half a dozen of the war brides, waiting to go to Australia. And every fortnight they’d come to the camp gate, they collect their wife’s allowance. I had to go to the paymaster with them, line them up, “Yes, this is Vanessa, yes she married so-and-so.” collect her allowance. “This is Cathy.” collect her allowance. So they lived a very good life, they had two or three together, units in Vung Tau. No

18:30 you don’t have to wait any longer, marry an Australian soldier, and he sends money back to you every fortnight.

So if you had to actually go down and speak to a bar girl, what would you say, how would you discourage them from pursuing a relationship with a soldier who, say, had a wife back here?

I’m afraid I’d be a bit heavy sometimes. Say, “Look, you know, Vanessa, if he’s dumped this wife, he’ll dump you also.” in pretty graphic language sometimes.

19:00 “He’s got a wife and three children, do you think you’ll fare any better? You’re coming to a strange country, different customs, you’ll miss your home, which you will, you may not think you will. But do you think you’ll fare any better? Do you think he’ll love you any more, once he’s got you to Australia? Different when you were here in Vietnam, you were the only person. He’s back in Australia...” you know. I don't know whether it ever worked

19:30 or not, Vanessa, I tried it. To the best of my knowledge, not one of them ever went to Australia. There was only one I had some doubts about and that was after Vietnam, oh it wasn’t, it was after I was back in Australia, and she’d married a rather older warrant officer. And she got through all the medical tests. Now I often wonder how it worked out, she was a pretty dominant lady,

20:00 older than normal bar girls. So, don’t know, I don't know. I celebrated Tet with them, Tet is the Chinese new year, so Tet 1972 they were at Ingleburn, and I celebrated Tet with them. As a matter... he was court martialled at one stage of the game, he called me as a witness, be a very difficult case. He was known as ‘Hydraulic,’ he could lift anything. So, however, he got out of it, he got out of it. And nearly got me into it, but there we are.

20:30 So, oh, it’s hard to know, this case, the chap and Nguyet, the laundress, it’s worked out well, it really has. She’s been a marvellous wife to him and she’s still quite an attractive girl, this is ten, fifteen years ago. He was very lucky. Others I don't know.

How would you counsel soldiers in regard

21:00 **to use of these establishments, and safe sex?**

Well, you know, safe sex, my first leave to go into Vung Tau, and this is going in, you get your leave pass, and stapled to your leave pass are two condoms. I was... “I don’t need these!” And the major says, “Father, you don’t know, do you now?” “Oh,

21:30 okay, come on, John.” He says, “There we are.” He says, “You can’t sell em anyhow, you can’t even give em away.” Again, you take a, I say, a normal young lad away from Australia, into a strange country, it’s tropical. You miss your home, you have every chance of having your head blown off, you go in to Vung Tau to the bars, and the bar girl’s job is to get you, you know.

22:00 And as I say, they’re very feminine, very attractive. I myself would, if I was in that position of a soldier, I would wonder. I had a couple of soldiers, three in particular, who would not go into Vung Tau on their R&C, unless they were together and they’d only go in for a meal. These are three guys I took to Saigon

22:30 with me. John Halloran was one of them, and we still correspond to each other, and Blue, and I can’t think of his other, his mate’s name. And then the same thing, “We’ll go in for a drink, we’ll stick together.” “No, no.” you know, the bar... “Piss off, piss off, we don’t want you, no, no, piss off.” They survived it. But the guy by himself, who gets drunk, you don’t know what’s gonna happen. I mean, we had the part of

23:00 the hospital, STDs, socially transmitted diseases, and we’d always have half a dozen guys there, in Vung Tau. I mean Colonel Grigg would read them the riot act to officers, “Any of you people come in that clinic, I’ll write to your wife immediately.” Human nature’s human nature, Vanessa. You miss your home, you’re lonely, you’ve had quite a few drinks too many and this attractive girl says, “Come and sleep with me.” For a price of course.

23:30 I mean, one of the jokes, the piastre was the unit of currency, we call them dollars, the piastre. And as I say, one piastre was worth about twelve hundred... I’m sorry, one Australian dollar was worth about twelve hundred piastres. Now there was the kind of offshoot from the brothels called, ‘Hundred P. Alley,’ short-time, standing

24:00 up. Hundred... that’s all it cost, you know. How do you know? I mean they’re things we laughed at as chaplains, I wouldn’t say laughed at, but you were quite aware of it. What do you do? Do you go down with a whip? With a gun?

Did you advise soldiers to use condoms?

No, but I wouldn’t advise them to have sex either. But that was the point. There were things you know happened, and what do you do about it? When you say, ‘Safe sex, it’s better to

24:30 use a condom, at least not get syphilis or gonorrhoea.’ I can’t say to you, ‘Use a condom, unless you use your bloody brains.’ you know. ‘If you’re going to give in, well, be protected.’ I’m not saying, ‘Have intercourse, or have sex.’ I’m going to say, ‘If you’re going to that stage, be protected. But don’t report me to the bishop for saying it.’ you know.

Given the extraordinary circumstances of war, to what extent did

25:00 **you find that you had to modify what you’d been taught in terms of traditional Catholicism?**

Yeah. We would, when they arrived in Vietnam, we’d always talk to them, we’d always have the chaplains’ opening talk with them, warn them about the bar, about VD, that’s all you could do. You couldn’t compromise your own standards, you could try and be merciful to other people. I always think,

Vanessa, there's

25:30 a great story in the Gospel, whether you believe the Gospels or not, Jesus, the woman caught in adultery. She's caught in bed with the guy, and they're taking her out to stone her. I mean, it's terrible, to be stoned dead, it happens in Malaysia, still, to be stoned dead for adultery. And the self righteous ones, the goody-goodies, are taking her out to stone her and they're into Jesus, 'We caught her in bed with a guy, what do you say?' If he says, 'stone her,' he's as bad as they are. If he says, 'don't,' he breaks the law.

26:00 His reply was marvellous, 'He who has no sin, let him throw the first stone.' And he just bends over and starts just doodling in the dust, and they all walk out, starting from the eldest to the youngest. Now Augustine, the great Augustine commenting on this said, 'What did he write in the dirt?' He wrote their secret sins. 'You must still be lying, if he wants to throw the first stone, you're a paedophile. And you must do (UNCLEAR), you are an adulterer, how dare you condemn another person.'

26:30 Their secret sins, he who has no sin let him throw the first stone. Now not too many of us can throw stones Vanessa, let's be honest. You may deprecate a thing, don't get caught up here, and then you go home, you may never forgive yourself. 'If your wife finds out you've caught VD in Vietnam, what are you gonna do then?' 'Or do you take it back and carry it back to her?' A lot like AIDS [Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome] today, you see, we didn't have AIDS in Vietnam, at least we

27:00 don't think we had it. I'm suspicious about one case only ever, of a man coming back from Vietnam. Looking… what they know now, but it's hard to say. It's just a suspicion, this is way back thirty years ago now. We were lucky, we were lucky. The bar girls formed another society, they were another class really, a middle class in many ways.

27:30 When I was back in 1974 the bars had gone, it was interesting, the whole street of bars gone. Vung Tau was now dead; it was no longer the bustling town it had been when I knew it in '71, '72. We had gone, the Yanks had gone, that was it. Hard to know, hard to know. I have great sympathy for the Vietnamese, the ones who'd come south, the northerners who'd come south,

28:00 and who'd come, left their own homes to start life again, to be free. I had a great, how can I put it, respect for their culture, seeing a little rice farm, the paddy, thinking, we knew your ancestors were writing calligraphy and studying philosophy, my ancestors were painted blue, and chewing raw meat, wandering round the hills of Scotland. There was

28:30 a culture there that we westerners didn't understand, they were a cultured people, cultured, cultivated people.

You mentioned Father, that the Australians were regarded generally as more tolerant of the culture.

Ah yes, yes.

Can you think of some examples that were indicative of perhaps American intolerance or racism or…?

Well the Americans had two lots of bars in

29:00 Saigon and anywhere they were, there were the white bars and the soul brother bars. They were the blacks. And we don't have that. And interestingly enough, or strangely, going to either bars, as far as the Yanks were concerned, the black Americans would welcome you into their bars, white Americans no problem. But they had that terrible, racial distinction. We never had that, the terrible disdain

29:30 Americans have, some Americans… I say, be careful, some Americans have for Asians. They were lower class.

Well what evidence was there of that, how did that manifest itself?

The way they treated them. They're the little person in the street, the way they treated them. Gooks. Knock the gook over, you know. Gooks, they call them gooks. 'Oh, he just knocked another gook over. Too bad.' you know. And that wasn't the general

30:00 American that was there, maybe the bloke was drunk, I don't know. I suppose also because there were so many more Americans than ourselves, that you could have a higher proportion of incidents than we would have, hopefully. But there was that racial, oh, distinction. I don't think

30:30 we had it as bad as the Americans had it. I mean, we can be racist also, I'm not canonising Australians, but on the whole I think we were more tolerant than the Americans were. The Americans of course, again, and I'm trying to, try to be more objective, I spent twelve months in America, but way after Vietnam.

31:00 It was fascinating, what is this country like? Deal with Americans, what is it like? It's a country of tremendous tensions, racism, Hispanics are regarded as second class citizens. There's still terrible tension between black America, Afro Americans as they call them today, and the white Americans.

31:30 It's in many ways, it's a racism we don't experience here, no matter how unjust we're being to our own

aboriginal people. We haven't got to that stage of black America and white America. Yet. I hope it never comes for God's sake. I think because of our proximity to south east Asia too, and because of the Colombo Plan,

32:00 I think we're more tolerant of the Asian than America is of the Asian. I think the Colombo Plan taught us a lot. Oh black doctors and black dentists and teachers and so forth, and black, and being coloured from Malawi where they came from. And the effect of mixing with them, in high school, they were not so bad after all, are they. That kind of

32:30 give and take of young people coming together in the same age group, studying, going to university together, I think that helped us a lot. That's my humble opinion. But before the Colombo Plan, remember we had our White Australia Policy, which is no great pat on our back. White Australia Policy and then bringing out of Britain, that was the great thing, bringing out of Britain, watch those slant eyes, you know.

33:00 That was a bit of a slur.

I just want to ask you, Father, about the national servicemen, cause we were talking about them earlier on. And you mentioned that there was a distinct change in them in Ingleburn after a week once they had hair cuts and had undergone training. But I wanted to ask you what your opinion is of how, of what level of resistance there was from those national servicemen to actually go to Vietnam?

The ones that I refer to, Vanessa,

33:30 were Scheyville, not so much Ingleburn, because Ingleburn was the second stage, they would've gone through Kapooka first, or Puckapunyal. Now I didn't see them at that stage as the raw recruit, I saw the national service men in Scheyville and these were tertiary educated people, who'd postponed national service and do this officer training unit. So I would only see the normal national service soldier, when they came to

34:00 Infantry Centre, so it means they'd gone through Kapooka, or gone through Puckapunyal. So they'd been, kind of, put, grounded the system already, this is their second stage. So they would've been army form by then, whereas Scheyville it was those first moments in the army. And to see them iterally, physically, transformed, so, stand up and straight, short back and sides,

34:30 you saw a transformation in the person, or in the exterior of the person. I think also in their attitude, having to work in a platoon, and to work with the platoon, learn to take orders, knowing that they themselves, one day would, in the very near fu... would be giving orders, if they survive the officer training unit. There was a bit of learning there also. People they would emulate it, 'He's a good officer, he

35:00 knows how to command, this guy isn't so hot, well, you know, we'll put him down when they were... What am I gonna follow this guy,?' And so the actual raw recruit from civvy street to the army, I didn't see that soldier at all. I saw him in second stage, infantry training.

So by that stage, were there men who were still adamant that they didn't want to go?

No. there is a standard thing, and I struck it very early

35:30 in Ingleburn, if a soldier didn't want to go, then the army didn't want him to go. Now Major Nichol was a man who brought this home to me very clearly, "Alright Private." "Smith, doesn't want to go on the draft, this is what he does. We give him ten days leave to get home, contact the family lawyer." they're told the letter he must write now to the army. And it worked. So the thinking was very clear, 'If I go to Vietnam, I don't want to be there, I'm a danger to my own

36:00 life and a danger to the lives of others.' There's enough normal danger there. I was amazed to find that, I had one young guy, twice, twice, he went AWOL [Absent Without Leave], the day he was to go to Vietnam. So the second time I said, "Look, come on." He didn't appear on the draft that night, and it causes tremendous consternation at the airport. Is he just late? Has he missed a train, or something like that? The

36:30 plane has to take off eventually. He went back eventually; he wanted to go back as, of all things, a medic. "I don't want to carry a weapon, I'm not backing out of my national service, I don't want to carry a weapon." And he went back as a medic. And I remember saying to him, "Look, you got more chance of being killed as a medic, than you have as a soldier. Just think about that." Thank God that never happened to him. But

37:00 it was just that he just couldn't get into the system of saying to his platoon sergeant, "I want to go but I don't want to go." There's pressure there, Vanessa. And even when he was gypped the first time, and the bloke who is his OC, a very reasonable major, said, "Okay, well we'll give you a chance again." Now it was the second time I came in contact with him then, and then getting his whole story.

37:30 "I want to be able to go as a medic." As though he was saying that the army spent thousands of dollars training him as an infantryman, 'carrying Band-Aids are you, not a rifle?' Okay. There was a humaneness in the system, it wasn't all blood and guts. But I think, again, some of the senior officers who were

very humane people, who didn’t force people. ‘Don’t

38:00 want to go, okay, we don’t want you to go. You’re a danger to yourself, you’re a danger to others.’ Kind of very clear, logical thinking really, so, there it is. So, there’s another kind of, struck two or three guys, those first few months in Ingleburn and one guy in the army, took, I mean, completely unsuitable, national serviceman. How he got through Kapooka, I don't

38:30 know, but he got through Kapooka. Maybe his mates pushed him through, things you don’t know sometimes, when you got to Ingleburn it was just too definite, so he was discharged from Ingleburn.

Why was he considered unsuitable?

He was unstable, a kid who couldn’t make up his mind on anything, and absolutely black today, white tomorrow. It was incredible. How he got through his medical, or his psychological test,

39:00 I don't know and the army judged him a danger. Now he was allowed to finish off his national service working in a store at Moorebank, in the army store at Moorebank, as a clerk, okay, happy to be there, no pressure, eight to five job, five days a week, for the next eighteen months. So it was like all parties were satisfied.

39:30 He wasn’t booted out of the army as completely useless. He wasn’t sent to Vietnam, as a danger. He stayed in the army, he retained his own dignity. To be booted out of the army and go home and say, ‘I was kicked out of the army.’ it could feel a bit of a slur on him. Now that was to me a bit... ‘They put me in the bloody stores branch at Moorebank.’ as if he resented it. To save

40:00 face. He was a good clerk, that was all. That happened, listening to one guy in Vietnam, he was in the stores branch in Vung Tau, he went through our school in Adelaide, Blackfriars. Now with a rifle, this guy would’ve been absolutely useless, but he was a very good clerk in the store. He was happy to do it, boring job, and he went to Vietnam, ‘I’m a returned man from Vietnam.’ One who was pushing a pencil

40:30 for twelve months, ‘But I did it.’ Another guy who would not go to the bars in Vung Tau. Some of them go in; they knew they were human beings. These three guys I was thinking of, they came down from Nui Dat, John and his two mates. At this stage I was looking after the Americans, I had a Jeep and a driver, big advantage. I was going to Saigon for some wretched reason, going by Jeep, and I said to them, “Look

41:00 I’m going to Saigon on Monday. Now I know you haven’t got leave passes, I can’t get you a leave pass for Saigon, and you won’t get one even if you ask for it. If you want to come with me, you can come with me. The American mil. won’t put us up because they’ll see my three pips and they’ll think I’m a general.” And that happened sometimes, even in general, they thought you were a three star general, it happened two or three times. “And our own place won’t put us up because it’s an

41:30 American jeep and you’re dressed in civvies. So you want to come to Saigon?” “Yeah.” Got a photo in that photo album there saying mass at four thirty in the morning for them before we left for Saigon. We had to be down to the isthmus for the bridge to open to cross into the road to Saigon. I took them in to one of these, my American driver knew where to go, Charlie Kriegg from Kansas City, Missouri. There were, these were centres run in Saigon...

Tape 7

00:33 **15**

Father, you were saying that you got to Saigon, with the three men?

There were these centres in Saigon, Cathy, run by young socialites from the States, looking after the boys, and they were, be a house they got, something like that, oh, completely over and above board, I can tell you. So any American soldier could make a phone call home, very important,

01:00 latest magazines, and there were doughnuts and coffee. So these young ladies were known as Doughnut Dollies, and they also had mini skirts, I can tell you, some of them fit the mini skirts very well. So we took these three Australians into one of these centres, but they couldn’t believe it. This Charlie Kriegg, my driver, he was in hysterics, you know, “No, they’re not bar girls at all John, these are genuine American women who are here to

01:30 try and provide a home atmosphere for the young soldiers. And you guys can call home to Australia if you want to, today, they’ll call for you. We have coffee and doughnuts here, but remember, it’s strictly hands off.” so. Well, they got their cameras out, they couldn’t photograph these... to show the guys back at Nui Dat that they’d been to Saigon and they met the Doughnut Dollies. And I said to them, “Now, I’m leaving here at three o'clock this afternoon, we will be here three o'clock,

02:00 we gotta to go back to the isthmus before the bridge closes, it might be in enemy territory, you’ll be in MI OP-4, and if you guys aren’t here, I’m still going.” Of course they were there. That was one of the more pleasant things of taking the soldiers down, they had a great day in Saigon, they met their

Doughnut Dollies, they phoned home, they most probably met two or three more Doughnut Dollies, they had a great

02:30 day, and it was purely above board, you know. A virtuous day to say, kind of thing. We did, it, we did it, you know.

Father could you tell me about the hospital in Vung Tau where you worked when you first got there?

My admiration for the hospital staff, Cathy, was great. First there was Colonel Parker a very humane man. I've

03:00 kept in contact with some of them. There's a magazine we call 'Vampire', 'Call Sign Vampire', put that out about four times a year or so, I've occasionally written an article or two for them, memories, and some of them still remember me. I must admit I was a green chaplain, coming to Vietnam, still green, I was two years in the army but

03:30 to come over to south east Asia, and to come into this hospital situation, where life was pretty, kind of, much in the raw. But great medical treatment, first class really, doctors equipment, medivac home. We could say to a soldier, we would say to the soldiers, that came to Vung Tau,

04:00 'Now, if you're hit in the province, if you're wounded, we can have you in this hospital within twenty minutes. It's better than a road accident in Australia. Helicopter has revolutionised military warfare, you get picked up, you'll be back here from Phuoc Tuy Province, anywhere in Phuoc Tuy Province, and twenty minutes and you're in this hospital. We've first class, air conditioned wards.' As I say, was everything was there for the

04:30 soldier to recover. I think of one case in particular, he was a sergeant brought in one night, we thought he had malaria, and of course catching malaria is a chargeable offence. And he was pretty well paralysed, he got worse. When he came to us, encephalitis, it was a mosquito got him, it carries it from the animal to the human being, and that's through them for

05:00 a day or two. A young national service doctor who received him in, was there, his doctor, and the care he gave him and the physiotherapist, and she was fantastic. A funny girl, who went out gazing at the stars at night, she'd tell you about the northern hemisphere, talk about, you know, 'There's the Orion's Belt, Father,' things like that, you know, but she was dedicated. He could've choked, she was there every hour, clearing his throat

05:30 and his wind pipe. And he was unconscious, but he wasn't unconscious, he couldn't speak, he was quite conscious he could hear you. And he hung onto a little thing we call finger rosary beads, that's all he hung onto, but he couldn't open his hands. And I went down when he was first brought in and I anointed him, gave him absolution, and I'd see him every

06:00 day, cause that's... go see him and just talk to him. He remembered me always being there, He said, "Every time you came Father I heard you." Now he recovered. There was one stage where there was a discussion in front of him, would they turn off this life support system or not, and this young national service doctor said, "No way in the world, he's my patient." you know, "We will hang on as long as we can." I can understand them saying, "He's not gonna get better." but he did. And

06:30 he was repatriated back to Australia eventually. Now the only ill-effect, I think he lost the use of two fingers on one hand, which is a type of funny paralysis, but the care lavished on him, maybe lavished is maybe the wrong word, the medivac flights back, the 1-30s, the C1-30s, completely set up as a hospital ward with perfect balance in them, to fly you back to Australia. And

07:00 particularly in burns cases, and burns cases were pretty, kind of, horrendous, the agony of persons in from being burned. There was a sense of fun in the hospital. We had a little mess we set up on a hillock above the hospital, just sand, little grating down, and they could relax there, go to the beach for a swim,

07:30 had a volley ball team going, go into Vung Tau for a meal or something like that. I don't, how can I put it, I could understand them letting their hair down after the things they saw, not easy. One of the nurses, Barbara, up with me, Barbara Green, she got married while we were there. And the romance began in Australia,

08:00 a young New Zealand artillery officer, Jim Herd. And Jim was on the Delta by the time we got there, and he'd come up on leave to Vung Tau, and I would put him up in my little room, I'd just switch my (UNCLEAR) down, so he always had a bed to come to. 'Don't worry about it, just, you know, Jim, you went up the end of the street to the (UNCLEAR).' And one Sunday night, they came in, our little breezeway where the chaplains were, we had an ice box, not a fridge but an ice

08:30 box, with ice in it. And I can tell you, Cathy, beer on ice is special, it's better than beer from a fridge, there's a special coolness about it. And we kept a bottle of rum there and see, the two of us, John Simpson, the Anglican chaplain and myself, the PD man, he didn't touch drink at all, he disapproved of our drinking habits. But every night when we were in Vung Tau we had a rum and coke before we went to bed, 'Okay John, all the best for tomorrow.' you know. And Jim and Barbara came in, oh and we had

09:00 this Michael Lowe, this police corporal who was, next day was going to Saigon, he'd been transferred to

Saigon. So he and, I, we got on tremendously well together, Michael Lowe, he's a con man, but a pleasant one. And he was having a cup of tea with us, and Barbara and Jim come in and announced their engagement. 'Oh, we gotta celebrate this.' So Michael went up to the officers' mess, hospital officers, they didn't know who he was, said he was a visiting doctor from Saigon, and then three

09:30 bottles of Italian wine, Lambrusco... wasn't Lambrusco, it was decent, good Italian wine. And got them, and brought them in, and we had a great celebration. With the (steam...UNCLEAR) that out of the place going to his observation post that night, he flew down to Saigon next day worse for wear. So Jim and Barbara decided, look either get married in New Zealand her parents can't come, get married in Australia, his parents...,

10:00 so we had the wedding in Vung Tau. The one and only nuptial mass, they were both Catholic, and photos there which are worth looking at. I was the celebrant, John Carr, the New Zealand chaplain, gave the bride away, no, was the best man, John Simpson, the Anglican chaplain, was father of the bride. Louis Saville, the PD chaplain, read the lessons, and

10:30 Bill Egan one of the Catholic chaplains from Vung Tau played the organ and Dom Casey, the other Catholic chaplain, served the nuptial mass. Very religious ceremony. The Vietnamese were absolutely rapt in this nuptial mass, you know, and it was a crowd at mass, I can tell you. And then we had the reception in the officers' mess, and Colonel Greville had the whole thing done beautifully done, had a lovely reception meal, especially billed for them.

11:00 His car picked up Barbara at the nurses' quarters, like, just where your car is, and drove it round to the chapel, the colonel's car. It was great. And then they went to Singapore for their honeymoon, and came back to New Zealand eventually, I lost all contact with them. But it was one of the lovely things for me. It was written up in the Women's Weekly, when she came back to Australia and my mother tore it out, I've got a copy there. One thing

11:30 that Barbara was furious about, I wasn't mentioned, there's this army chapel, 'Army chaplain in a little army chapel,' you know, she was furious, she'd put down, 'that was Father Maxwell.' We know who it was, and the photo's in that Women's Weekly article.

How often would you be called in to the hospital?

Very often, Cathy. Dustoffs as they call them, Dustoffs. And we'd all be called

12:00 and go straight down to the heli-pad, to Vampire, and wait there and a chopper would come in, and the people unloaded on the stretchers. And the ward master, Jungles Jackson'd go with them all quickly and allocate, you know, chaplains and doctors. Now I don't know how theology... you're doing

12:30 kind of anointing on the run, you know. Take a chance sometimes and you either, you know, conscious or not, and if he's Catholic, 'Got nothing on him, Father, I can't anoint him,' you know. And there's Vietnamese, I'm thinking of also Cambodians, I got hold of the Asians, if they were Christians they would normally be Catholics, you know. With the Vietnamese, if they were Christians, there was ninety-nine percent chance they were Catholics. The Cambodians, not too sure, but they were all anointed. I mean, God understands,

13:00 let's be honest. I hope anyhow. But it was normally almost a daily call. We took our own casualties; we took Vietnamese, the Yanks, Cambodians. One of the sad ones was the Easter morning, I'd had an early mass, I went across the air field for mass for them, and I came back to a dustoff.

13:30 There was an old Vietnamese couple brought in, they'd been going to mass themselves, in the province, and they hit a Claymore mine, an old couple and their son. They were both killed really, they were pretty much dying when I got to them, and the son was badly wounded. Their crime was to go to mass on Easter Sunday morning. It was the little things that made you pro war to some extent, in the sense of the Vietnamese, giving them freedom from this terrible regime in the north.

14:00 If you're gonna be killed because you're a Christian going to mass, what's wrong with the regime? I had a young Filipino soldier, when I was looking after the Americans, and they gave me tremendous support, the Americans, I'd be choppered [helicoptered] from place to place on a Sunday morning, and cutting across country was incredible at times. And my driver, Charlie Kriegg, we drove down so I could say, Phuoc Lo was the place, I said mass for the Yanks there.

14:30 I'd been choppered back to another place, back to Yeo for a second Mass, when I come back to Vung Tau for my own mass at half past nine, in the morning. And I got this, we got this call down to the cas, this young soldier brought in, he'd been hit by a truck crossing the road, he'd been at my mass in the morning. I couldn't, you know, 'God no!' he was at mass and communion three hours ago. Here he is now dead, hit by

15:00 a Vietnamese truck, army truck, and they were terrible drivers. Maybe it was his fault, I'm not judging anyone. I had to go back to the American camp and get onto the senior and sort of, 'Here is the case.' he would write home to the family. They were very good in a way, saying, 'Your son, Filipinos, Catholics, he'd been to mass on Sunday, he'd been to the sacraments and the Catholic chaplain had anointed him'. In a sense, I mean, it's not superstition but the Filipino would feel far better,

15:30 the family, ‘At least with the church there.’ something like that. But to me it was worse than a guy being shot, accidentally killed.

What would you say to a soldier who was in a bad way, while you were by his bedside?

Well, there was no use beating round the bush. I’m thinking this guy again, with the encephalitis.

16:00 I was always encouraging him, I’d say, “Stan. Can you hear me?” and you get no flicker of recognition. “Stan, it’s Father Maxwell again, you know I’ve anointed, you know you’re seriously ill, but we’re not going to give up.” That was always the thing, ‘we’re not going to give up.’ “Now, you’ve got to use your own will power. we want you to overcome, we want you to be better, you gotta want it yourself.”

16:30 I never had a case where there was a wounded soldier dying on me, I never had that, Cathy, thank God in many ways. There’s not much you can do, it’s like a casualty in a road accident. All you can do is give them the sacraments, that’s it. I had

17:00 a soldier die in the actual theatre in Vung Tau, and the young doctor there is saying, he said, like, “He’s dead.” It’s too late then, I’d been called in, and again there was a kind of rapport, going into the operating theatre, change,

17:30 get into all your stuff, your boots and smock, things like that, and go in, but it was too late. If I’d been called in half an hour earlier, I don't know what I would’ve said, I wouldn’t even have been sure he was dying. When they call the chaplain, it’s fairly, kind of... you know, it wasn’t just routine. These were hard bitten medics a lot of them, the older men, back for their second

18:00 tour of Vietnam, Jungles Jackson, third tour of Vietnam. They didn’t panic easily. If they said, “Father here’s another chance.” okay, that’s it. I never had that actual thing, Cathy, particularly the, I mean the dramatic thing in the field and things like that, I never had that. The chaplains in Nui Dat used to say, “Oh you blokes are down at the blunt end, we’re at the sharp end here in Nui

18:30 Dat.” I could always challenge that and say, “How many people have you anointed this week?” “Oh, you know…” “Well how many have you done? How many people have you attended to who are dying?” Whereas in Vung Tau we were, it wasn’t the blunt end, I can assure you, it was the sharp end as far as the hospital was concerned, and it was an experience you don’t forget. As I say my first casualty that Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, that was a traumatic one.

19:00 On the Tuesday I was in the delta, with the Training Team, so at Garaman Thursday, casualty on Tuesday. I had first casualty on Saturday afternoon, Tuesday I’m in the delta with the Training Team. I got mortared twice in the one night, which is unpleasant experience. I thought, ‘My God, this is fair dinkum [real].’ And the first lot of mortars, I didn’t realise what was happening. In Ingle-

19:30 burn, where we were on the western side of the Georges River, on the eastern side of the river was the artillery range, and they’d have night practise. So you’d hear the guns going off at night practise, and you’d hear this terrible ‘crump,’ and the chapel would shake, even thought there was a river and miles between us, the impact of shells.

20:00 So I was a bit used to night firing. And the first round of mortars in this place called Long Tan, didn’t wake me up. So this mortar tank... ‘(UNCLEAR), get, bloody thing, you know, what the bloody hell we doing here, we’ll (UNCLEAR).’ So I thought, ‘Oh God,’ you know, it was interesting situation. I realised this is for real. And I was mortared again there, months later, in the same place. And we

20:30 went twice again, all you did was lay... you couldn’t even get to the buckets, just lay on the floor. And think, ‘Well when’s the next one coming?’ it was a creeping mortar, ‘When’s the next one coming?’ There’s more danger, that second one, from the fire going out to the Vietnamese, than the fire coming in. We knew that. ‘Stay where you are, don’t move, if you put your head out here you’ll get it blown off by the Vietnamese. Won’t be the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong, it’ll be our gallant allies, they’re shooting everywhere.’

21:00 Which was, they panic and shoot everything. So, yeah, it was a… but you couldn’t live with that thing, ‘I’m gonna be killed tomorrow, or this afternoon.’ I got over that, I’d say, very, very quickly, Cathy, even perhaps to a certain extent in a foolhardy way. I spent a year in the States back in ‘88 doing a

21:30 special type of course in theology I was interested in, and I was working in a parish in Darien, in Connecticut. And it was a funny (UNCLEAR), I mean, there’s another story there. But the church and the house were quite, like, the church is one block up there, and the church was in a forest, beautifully situated. And it was, Father Ed Harry’s

22:00 the BP. And one night I was locking up the church and came out and there was a car, and I put a torch on the car and he went for his life. And I told him, he said, “Ooh.” he said, “Bern, you don’t do those things, that could be a drug deal.” I said, “Oh God.” And this morning, about two and I get a phone call from security, the alarm has gone off at the church and we’ve notified the police, and we picked up the phone at the same time. So, I said, “Okay.” so I got out of bed, put me shoes and socks and pants on, I got

22:30 down to the back porch and Ed was there, he said, “Don’t you go any further.” He said, “You don’t know

who's in that church." He said, "He could be a crazy." He said, "The police'll be here." and they were very quickly. He said to me, "You know what your problem is Bernie, you lost your fear in Vietnam." Which might've been true, Cathy, I don't know. So you can be imprudent, but you can't live with fear, you know, 'I'm gonna get my head blown off, I can't sit at that door.' I mean, he referred to me going outside the wire, and I never hesitated going outside the wire.

23:00 **Tell me about where you'd go for, to see the Team, where would you go?**

In...?

In Vietnam.

In Vietnam. Part of my pastoral duties as a chaplain, was the Training Team, or were the Training Team, the AATTV, and these were remarkable men really. I mean, I kind of canonise them, they were very human beings also, with their faults and failings as well

23:30 as anybody else, but I got to know them and admire them very much. And I'd have to go north to MR-1, Military Region went right on the DMZ, that took in Hue, Danang, Quan Tri, Quan Ngai, and it was red area. And again

24:00 I travelled normally, in the Jeep, two or us in the Jeep, I would take the Training Team man's weapon for him. I learned how to use weapons, saying that, hoping I'll never have to use one, but I'll learn how to use it. I'm in a jeep, left hand drive, I'm sitting on the right, I'm right handed, you try and hold a rifle out like that, won't be too... But if we were attacked,

24:30 they would've taken the driver first. That meant you were left by yourself in one sense. So I was very conscious of, if it was just the two of us, of having this man, well, he was my responsibility, married man. And I was only saying, I'm a chaplain, I can take a weapon, 'No, no,' you know, I'll be taking it, praying I'd never have to use it. There's only one occasion was a possibility of having to

25:00 use it, a possibility. It was in MR-2, we were at Quan Ngai, and we had a number of places to go to, there was always Australians with the American, with the Vietnamese. Our job there was to train them, that was the Australian Army Training Team, not fight but train them, which sometimes wasn't, kind of, observed, people went out and fought with them.

25:30 Such, the terrible things like ambushing and like that, not really pleasant. But anyhow, I was going to three places this particular day and staying at the last one. And one was called Tuy Nghia , this is the... Tuy Nghia, right on the river, with four or five Australians and we had to park the Jeep and walk through a minefield, to the place. And it was surrounded by bamboo to try and

26:00 deflect rockets coming in. Now I had mail for these guys and papers. There were three or four guys in the mail exchange, I'd met them, in Sydney. Saturday night they picked up all the first editions of the Sydney Sunday papers, wrapped 'em up and put em on the Sunday plane for me. I'd have them on my desk in Vung Tau on Monday afternoon, Sydney Sunday papers, you know, Telegraph, Herald or what they were, so I could send them out to the blokes.

26:30 And that was a big contact with home. So sending out to the Training Team, I'd take the Sydney papers with me, at least it kept some contact, and any mail, and I'd take mail back with me 'cause I'd post it when I got in to Saigon. There was no use trying to post it in Vietnam for these guys, they may never get out of the, to the camp. So, anyhow I had a cup of tea with these guys, had a yarn to them, and we walked back through the minefield to our Jeep and drove off. And minutes after we drove off, apparently a

27:00 sniper opened up on the camp. Now we didn't know this. Whether we were ever in any sights or not, I don't know. If we left a couple of minutes later... I wouldn't be here today most probably, snipered out. It's one of those things, 'Hmm, you know,' we had no idea. And course fire was returned. And as we drove along, we came... there's a hell of a noise, there was an air

27:30 strike the side of the river, with the gallant Vietnamese Air Force. 'God, pull off the track, any Vietnamese will be brassed up.' So we waited about an hour or so for things to calm down, and drove on. We're going to a place called Ni Hung up in the Annamite Mountains, the lower Annamite Mountains, there's a great mountain range that comes right down, separates a lot of south east Asia or what was called Indo China. And

28:00 this man had been there three or four times before, he got lost. He just said, "Father, I don't know where we are." We got our maps out, 'Where the hell are we?' So he said, "I'm gonna keep on this road for a little longer." So we came to a region down below us, a little valley, was a village, and just on the outskirts of the village, a church, and it had to be a Catholic church, there was a cross on it, tin roof, thatched walls.

28:30 So I said, "Let's try here." So we pull up in front of the church and we both went in. Now normally the kids would swarm round you, as soon as you came, the kids wouldn't come near us. Went into the church and it was a very austere little church, with these terrible statues of the 1920s, sour faced Saint Anthony's kind of scowling at you, a sour faced Jesus looking at you, you know. It was really a,

29:00 I'm exaggerating to some extent, Cathy, but it was another world. Altar rails, so hadn't heard of Vatican

II, spot was all (UNCLEAR), Catholic church, altar, sanctuary, statue of Our Lady, the whole lot, and a couple of old ladies in the church, praying away there. So I very consciously genuflected, blessed myself, knelt down at the altar rails. I went across to one of the old ladies then and said to her in my best Vietnamese, “I’m a Catholic priest,”

29:30 “Cha uc da loi, cha da men.” And my Training Team man, she looked at me, she ‘scgh,’ spat on the floor in front of me. He said, “I don't think we’re welcome here Father.” So I said to her in French, “Merci beaucoup, madam.” ‘I’m not gonna be put off by you, you old hag.’ So went back, genuflect, took our time going out, and back to the Jeep and no kids around us.

30:00 So we’d had to drive through the village, coming into the village, this little dirty, not dirty, this little mud track, main street, with great pools of slush in it. And I had his SLR [Self Loading Rifle], his rifle, and he had a terrible job manoeuvring the Jeep, you know, we did about ten ‘k’s’ [kilometres] that was all. We suddenly became aware, the kids were on the side pelting us with stones, and screaming at us.

30:30 And all they screamed is, ‘Fuck you,’ in this little Vietnamese... “Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you,” before we picked it up. And he said to, he said, “I don't think we’re popular here Father.” And he said, “Take the safety catch off.” And, ‘Oh no... I’ve (UNCLEAR) over myself, I’ve a right to protect my life.’ I could feel the hairs standing up on the back of your neck. He said, “If I say fire, fire.”

31:00 Thought he was gonna say, ‘If I say fire, fire over their heads if I have to.’ And we got through the thing, and I’m sitting there, you know, like a... I don't know what like, you know, this is the moment of truth. You go cold, you really do, it’s a terrible situation. And we got out of the village, got out, and kept on the road, we eventually got to the place we were going, was near Hung, which was Montagnard,

31:30 Montagnard was the mountain people. By this stage we were hours overdue, there was a yellow alert out that we were missing. Father Maxwell, and Warrant Officer whatever-his-name-was, were missing. And there was the sniper opened up on the place when we left, we’re hours overdue, they think the worst, you know, possibly we’d been caught. So when we got to the place, they almost kissed us, the couple of warrant officers,

32:00 and the American, the liaison officer there, grilled us. The village we went through had harboured a North Vietnamese, not VC, you know, North Vietnamese company only a week beforehand, it was a completely pro North Vietnamese village, NVA [North Vietnamese] Army village. Now this American intelligence officer said, “Did it strike you as funny that these kids pelted you

32:30 and no rocks hit you? Your windscreen is still intact?” Didn’t hit the wind screen. “Oh, I suppose it is.” “You know why don’t you? Because you, chaplain, went to the church and identified yourself, and they wouldn’t kill a priest. They had to throw the rocks for the VC informers there, to show they... and scream at you, ‘fuck you,’ but neither of you were hit, and your Jeep is intact because

33:00 you went to the church.” Thank God, I’ll call into more churches in future. But it was that strange thing that happened. I’m thinking to myself, ‘Well, we talk about providence, things that can happen to you. If we’d left Tuy Nghia a few minutes later, we may have been taken out by the sniper, if we were in his sights, why didn’t he take us off,

33:30 when we walked through the mine field to the Jeep.’ Don’t know. Maybe I’m meant to live another day, see another country, you know. But to be pelted by kids throwing rocks at you and screaming at you, it was an interesting education. And that was my nearest ever, I say, to any incident really. I’ve been mortared at night and, one thing, but to be in a flesh and blood confrontation,

34:00 the thing that I would not open fire, if I have to then I will, I can protect my life, I can, have to protect the warrant officer’s life too, you know. Thank God, Cathy, it didn’t come to that.

Had you done training with guns? Had you been trained to use a gun?

Yes. As chaplains of course we did, oh yeah, we were trained to use an SLR, which was a bit of a joke. And I went to, in

34:30 Vung Tau, as the hospital staff, I went to all the shoots, with a normal pistol, this blessed M-8, which was useless, because you had it in a very heavy canvas holster, you weren’t allowed to carry a loaded weapon. So by the time you got the damn thing out of the holster, put your clip in, you’d be dead. It was useless. One of the

35:00 photos there, I put one of the warrant officers’ pistol on there, put it in his (UNCLEAR) there, it’s nice decoration, but I wouldn’t shoot, I wasn’t much of a shot. I took a couple of the nurses down one time and one of them, Mary Meares, hit the target, she shot it off the office wire, and she turned around waving her pistol, “I hit it! I hit it!” And we all hit the ground. And he said, “Yeah, that’s what you get for bringing a woman down.” but she was so excited.

35:30 So yeah, I learned to use the SLR, our self loading rifle, and the pistol. The American style I didn’t worry about, didn’t have any cause to. It was always, if it ever came to, push came to shove, what would you do there? It’s one thing about yourself but other people with you, ‘I’m responsible for you.’ I know you say, “I’m sorry, I’m not armed, you can’t shoot her.” that doesn’t come into the bargain. That was the

36:00 reason there. It mightn’t have been too logical, Cathy, I don't know. And as I say, only that one incident

ever, which is most probably a near call, and as I say, going to the church, that funny little French Calvinistic, pre Vatican II church, and the old lady spitting on the floor in front of me, 'scgh,' you know. That's how welcome we were. And, 'Oh God,' that I hadn't experienced,

36:30 never experienced.

What kind of work did you do with the teams when you visited them, what would be the routine when you visited the teams?

In visiting the teams, one thing was to pick up mail for them; this thing was a bit, kind of, in many ways, not childish. We were the contact with the team. So we were very conscious that these men were specialists,

37:00 they really put their life on the limb quite often, so it was very, very much a thing of keeping in contact with them, not just ourselves, our office. We were considered part of the (UNCLEAR), so pick up mail, pick up papers, and go and spend time with them, that was the big thing. Even to go and have a meal with them. I think in Danang was one of the head quarters there,

37:30 and say, 'Okay, we'll go out for a meal.' Now they had a bar they used, it was called China Nights, they'd go to in Danang. 'Okay we'll go out to the bar with them, have a drink with them.' they could relax and joke. Obviously you can't kind of say, "Look, I'm not going to a bar with you blokes, you know, big, bloody bar girls." I'd give the Training Team guys, they were fairly high morale calibre, joke with the girls, that was about it, you know.

38:00 Very conscious that they were Training Team, all warrant officers or, they were all warrant officers at Danang. Very conscious that, what would you call it, a cut above the soldier. The only other soldiers there would be Americans, we were the Australian Training Team, we allowed no American to come in to our Training Team centre, we called it Australia House, except by invitation. And I took the American chaplain there, Father Bob Dombrovsky,

38:30 great character, and come down to Australia House for drinks, couple of drinks afterwards. And we'd have Australian beer, that was another thing, they got beer up to them occasionally. And Bob Dombrovsky, an incredible store of jokes, he had them in hysterics, we couldn't believe it, he was welcome anytime to come to the Australia House. One of these kind of easy going Yanks, fitted in well, not pushing

39:00 America. But the Americans admired the Australian team men, they were their green berets as were (UNCLEAR) to them. They were specialists, something special, and they were something special, and I had a great lot of admiration for them. They stuck their necks out, Cathy, the places they were with the Vietnamese, they were hard physical conditions, they really were. We'd normally go up some

39:30 times, we'd go up as two chaplains at a time, the one chaplain back in Vung Tau always, so there's always a chaplain there in Vung Tau, the hospital. We'd fly to where we were going to or fly to Danang, and then break up and go round the teams, and come back and join up at Danang on the Friday and then come back to Saigon. Occasionally I had to do it by myself, but normally it was two chaplains. And one occasion I had the

40:00 PD chaplain, Ern Sable, and that was at MR-2, no, MR-1 again, and I made a decision, I thought, 'Now, I'll go on to Quan gnai, this is the kind of yellow, orange zone, I only did that, decide because this is the more peaceful zone, you know, where it was.

40:30 And in Quan gnai that next morning it came out that where he was going had been overrun. 'Oh my God no.' The very decision I'd tried to make. Thank God he didn't stay overnight, he came back to Quang Tri, they were run that night. And two of the Training Team guys were wounded, one bloke had his eardrums smashed, he tore round the corner and ran into a VC. And the guy

41:00 through, ran him, which went under, through his legs, and straight up behind him, course he shot him to death. I caught up with him in the army hospital in Hue, and they're literally still pulling shrapnel out of his backside to do it, but he can't hear, you know, do your eardrums in it's pretty bad situation. And I noticed something recently in one of the army things, he'd died a year or so ago. That was one of the things I had a terrible shock and I thought, 'My God, Ernie is possibly caught.' you know. Which he wasn't, thank God, he'd

41:30 come back. But it was, it wasn't a, there wasn't just playing soldiers.

Tape 8

00:30 **You were talking on the last tape about the AATTV and you were going to tell us about some of the other things you would do with them once you visited them?**

Yes. These were men who had come back for even a third tour in Vietnam,

01:00 looked up to by the Vietnamese, well known really. Interesting, they were admired by the Vietnamese Army, military, they were regarded as almost invincible, now it wasn't true of course. They, in some cases, went out with the Vietnamese; they weren't supposed to be out with them. One thing

01:30 to train men, another thing to go with them and fight with them. One of the, oh another, they weren't only just weapons either, I'm sorry, correct that, there were also Training Team men who were medics. And the one case I'm thinking of at, in Hue, where the AATTV, one of 'em was advisor to the

02:00 hospital, to the military hospital there, on modern methods. So it wasn't just warfare, normally it was, but there was just occasional exceptionally. There was a, a sense of them, a sense with them, that they had a purpose to carry out in Vietnam, they weren't just conscripts, or men who were just sent there accidentally,

02:30 they had volunteered to go. That was a, I think a very strong point with them. Anzac Day 1971 was my first and only Anzac Day in Vietnam. The other two chaplains, one had gone to Saigon, and one had gone to Danang, I was in Vung Tau by myself. I had my normal run of masses, but also the dawn service,

03:00 and I was, you know, a bit nonplussed, whole cab to myself at the dawn service. It was dawn alright, and I got to the dais and I did, they would put my cap, so I left my cap off, and had the service from there. And this, some of the medics, who I remember this. I was most probably like a very, as I say, grim faced reform preacher, I wasn't feeling so hot myself.

03:30 But we had the gunfire breakfast afterwards, with the Training Team, and the AATTV, and they had with them a John Paul Vann, American, who was ex regular army. John Paul Vann had been a colonel in the American Army, had been training Vietnamese, and there was some clash in the north, his Vietnamese abandoned him,

04:00 'let him find his way out.' And he realised the wrong policy was to fight with them, the only policy was to train them. Train them well, arm them. Went back to America, he canvassed the Pentagon and no-one listened to him. So in frustration he resigned from the army and came back to Vietnam as a civilian advisor to the Vietnamese army. Now a great supporter of our Training Team, he... 'This is the way they do it,' this is how I met him.

04:30 Whenever you mentioned his name in an American mess, you got a fight on your hands, you could stand back, those that hated him and those that supported him, John Paul Vann. Never met him again. He was killed in March April 1972 when the north invaded the south for the first, first invasion in '72. He was shot in a helicopter and killed. But he was the calibre of a man who believed in the

05:00 value of a Training Team, you don't have to commit armies, but you have to train an army well, you have experts and men who are dedicated. That was the sense I say, Vanessa, they were dedicated, with a tremendous sense of humour. They had reputations. [Ray] Simpson, the VC [Victoria Cross], who only died just a couple of years ago, another Training Team man, Warrant Officer Simpson, another extraordinary character. There was an American

05:30 RO [military memo] out about bad language in MR-1, '...but this doesn't apply to Warrant Officer Simpson of the Australian Army Training Team.' I mean, his language was colourful. But it was that kind of dedication, mystique, a conviction of what they were doing. And that was the thing I found talking with them, listening to them, being one with them.

06:00 One of my other plaques I treasure also is a Training Team plaque, from them. I think it's very valuable, having once served with them. So I found my thing there was to be with them, to share their difficulties, to share their hardships, to share their rejoicing. When they let their hair down, they let their hair down,

06:30 to have a joke with them. And when they come back to Vung Tau, if they come into Vung Tau, I was always there, "Let's go and have a meal somewhere." Just that kind of friendship, I say, friendship was the big thing. There was some great characters, Robbie Robinson, who was warrant officer, he was the RSM of the Training Team in Danang, a scallywag but a great guy, like my friend, Pat Cooke, another guy, they would die with you.

07:00 Men I respected very much. We would disagree on a lot of things most probably, you know, moral issues maybe. But as a guy who would support you, who would be your friend, that was first class. Most probably some of my, I know, some of my, couple of chaplains raised their eyebrows at my friendship with Training Team men, the fellow was too lenient on them, you know. I don't believe so.

07:30 Trying to comprehend what they went through, especially guys who came back for a second tour. Tremendous strain on their families of course in Australia, that was another bit of a problem there, and it was very useful at times to be able to say, "Yes, I can contact your family, in fact, I can write to your wife or..." I know some of those, you know, things like that. They were just incidents sometimes, coincidences that happened. And then later on meeting them again in Australia.

08:00 **What was it like to travel around the country in a helicopter?**

Exciting. Exciting's a good word for it really, Vanessa, because if you got hit in a helicopter, you didn't get out of it. There's no way of getting out of a helicopter once it was hit. So it was a bit of a... again, it

wasn't a thing that crossed my mind. I often rode on the skids, just as I am with you here now.

08:30 I had the ground right below me, on the skids with the machine gunner, fore or aft with me, strapped in, and that's how we rode. You know, you've seen the helicopter films, the Iroquois [helicopter] particularly, riding on the skids with them. Sometimes you rode on the side, depending how many people on it, or type of helicopter. It was an interesting way to see a country. I can remember flying from

09:00 Danang to Hue, with the Americans, and again we, because we were Training Team people, we flew with the Americans, so it was a interesting situation. The aircraft we flew in, we flew American Army helicopters, when we flew aircraft, Air America, 'cause Air America was CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. I didn't find that out for quite a while,

09:30 flying, I was flying CIA, with Air America. And they were beautiful Pilatus, Porter Pilatus, or the Volpar Beeches. Volpar Beech is a lovely plane, travel CIA, Air America. Lovely photo there of myself leaving Saigon, that was a very early trip, and General Dunstan when he saw it said, "Mmm, innocence abroad, he doesn't know what he's doing." I didn't either. CIA on the, Air America on the damn aircraft.

10:00 **What were your impressions of the CIA agents?**

Well, see, I only struck the pilots, and so the, the operatives, except in... yeah, only struck the, they were coming, they were (UNCLEAR), the pilots. And often in the morning you'd be the only person on the plane, first time out, so they'd come up and sit beside me, and they wanted to talk about Australia. It was a fascinating thing really. I

10:30 found them, they were pilots, what stood for in CIA, I don't know, very pleasant guys. But the operatives, well it wasn't CIA, it was the Vietnamese reconnaissance unit. Can Tho in the delta was our main Training Team centre for the delta, Can Tho. From Can Tho you went to Mito[?] and then Dong Tam.

11:00 We lived in the, we always called it Australia House was our residence, and my first morning arriving in Can Tho, in the evening and leaving next morning heading for the airport, with the Training Team man. And he said to me as he came up the front gate, "Oh look out, look across and look up." I looked up across the road, and there was a bicycle repair shop, and above it was a loft with a twin machine gun looking at us. I said, "Oh, is this (UNCLEAR)?" He said, "That's our neighbours,

11:30 they're a, what we call a reconnaissance unit." He said, "They are assassins, employed by the Vietnamese government. You see 'em leaving here in business suits and literally their violin case. They establish that the mayor of this village is two timing, so he has an accident." Reconnaissance unit. That was their job. And I thought, 'Oh, nice neighbours at (UNCLEAR), you know, like the Mafia.' But it was the, well

12:00 dressed men, reconnaissance unit. So it was a, you know, a kind of a, how can I put it... coming from innocence to the reality of wars and just battle field. Here's this unit beside us, house beside us in Can Tho, our next door neighbours, and apparently sometimes they would join us for a barbecue, I never had that experience, but they were really assassins. Government, paid for.

12:30 No use trying to prove this guy's pro VC [Viet Cong], we know he is. Why arrest him? Waste of money, waste of time. Take him out. Simple as that, you know. So it was a bit of a, how can I put it, a introduction to the brutality that does exist in a type of war like that. It'd gone on for how many years, from the time of the Viet Minh before the First World War, no, Second World War I should say, into the Japanese occupation, after the Second World War,

13:00 and now into the Vietnam War, you know. They'd had fifty years of warfare, and hurts and hatreds went very, very deep.

Were there particular occasions when the Australians had suffered particularly bad casualties when you were called to Nui Dat?

No, no, Vanessa. My worst experience were the four killed and seventeen wounded, and the other was the guys blown apart

13:30 on the APC, they were my worst experiences. We never had any casualties like, you know, thirty killed or something like that, in my time. Long Tan, that was the major, that was a major engagement, Long Tan, you know. Accidental.

So what would be the reason, what would be the reason for you going to Nui Dat then, what would be...?

Nui Dat was the battalions; the battalions were at Nui Dat. Nui Dat

14:00 was where the three battalions, one out, one training, one resting, in Nui Dat. And also the SAS [Special Air Service] were at Nui Dat. Nui Dat was strategically placed in Phuoc Tuy Province, I missed their clash with the famous DD, was D-446 [battalion], the North Vietnamese, which is Long Tan. They were coming to take Nui Dat out, and they accidentally met in a rubber plantation in a monsoon, and

14:30 our guys came very close to being wiped out. The man who swung the battle was Adrian Roberts, in his tracks [APCs], and accidentally came into it, and cut the NV off and then took them out. Their casualties were horrendous. We had, I forget how many killed now but they were in the hundreds, you know. I met Adrian Roberts about three months ago, saying mass at our

15:00 parish in Canberra, and we hadn't met since Easter Sunday 1972 in Vung Tau. And he was the team commander who swung the whole thing, at Long Tan, three or four years earlier. So I met him, he was there on his second tour. But it was close, if they hadn't come in we would've been over run. We lost, we lost, two platoons. As it was they thought it was very close.

So did you have a routine then for visiting the troops at

15:30 **Nui Dat?**

No, no, there were two chaplains there already, each... there were two chaplains for the battalions, and I would call in occasionally. My area was Vung Tau, Saigon, Phuoc Tuy Province and the Training Team. The men at Nui Dat were specifically the battalions there, that was their area. Nothing over and above that, which is fair enough. And course it was full time

16:00 job too. There was a famous photo there, one of the chaplain's tent had on it, you know, 'God squad crash pad' on. There was always that touch of humour. I had on my door in Vung Tau, you know, 'Support your friendly God botherer,' so, you know, you had to kind of find in that silly childish things, oh, boys things really in many ways. But, you know, 'You're just a bloody God botherer. Oh, okay, 'Support your friendly God botherer,'

16:30 see the silly side of it, you know.

So what would you do to wind down, to help you deal with the horror of war?

Well when I came back from Vietnam I came back through Singapore, couple of weeks in Singapore, HMS [Her Majesty's Ship] Terror, which was a good break. All the, the sort of, pleasures of

17:00 civilian in Singapore. Singapore in those days was also very simple, the Singapore I knew then is gone, it's gone. We would go in to Orchard Road, chaplains, we had a very proper English chaplain, and he was a Benedictine Monk, very, very, you know, pukka [proper in the English sense]. And John Carr, the New Zealand chap and myself, Hugh Smith the Presbyterian, we'd go in. We'd go in to a,

17:30 a restaurant in the Singapore called the Troia Car[?], the three horses, the Russian sled, get a lovely meal there. Relax there. Saturday we'd go into the Mandarin Hotel, up to the roof garden, which is only about six or seven floors, where you had satay and beer, and you paid for your bill on your satay sticks, you know. Just a couple of hours. And what we would do then on a Saturday afternoon together, we'd prepare our sermon for Sunday. One way to actually. 'Oh God, what are we going to say about this one?' you know.

18:00 It was marvellous, (UNCLEAR) gone mad really, you know, Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian, swapping things for a sermon for Sunday. That was one area. Actually in Vung Tau itself, I think after the first couple of weeks, I began to sleep, it was just the tropic heat. Once you begin to sleep, you know, it's not so bad, when you just lay awake at night, you're absolutely bathed in perspiration,

18:30 it's a debilitating heat. When I, the first thing of sleeping five, six hours, once that started, I lost my tension. And I got used to the place and no more fear of, you know, getting bumped off and going to Vung Tau itself. I also had the advantage that we Dominicans had our novitiate in Vung Tau, the Vietnamese Dominicans. So I would go in there, occasionally have a meal at the community,

19:00 try and learn how to use these chopsticks, and go to confession, something like that, so I was always welcome there. Their provincial I got to know there, Father Huin Van Lim, got to know him fairly well really, that was always a relaxation to go there. Father Qui this Vietnamese (UNCLEAR), all these kids orphanages, he was an incredible character. Go and have a yarn to him or take stuff for him. Our own orphanage we looked after,

19:30 down at Phnam Noi. And teaching, teaching English to the Dominican sisters, these thirty-eight gorgeous novices trying to teach them English. It was fascinating. So those things outside of the army were relaxation. I was back in an area I knew, Vanessa, the church, and the Dominican order. That was interesting thing, you know. I suppose belonging to an international order, you're always at home, somewhere, you know.

20:00 There's American Dominicans, Vietnamese Dominicans, Irish Dominicans, there used to be, whatever it may be, you've got that thing in common, you know. No, that was a lessener of tensions. But over and above that, yeah, yeah. I was entranced by the beauty of the country. You know, the, one day coming around the coastline, coming back to Vung Tau from Baria or from Nui Dat, and

20:30 just the beauty of the coast kind of touching these beautiful flame of the forest trees in full bloom, you know, the beautiful orangey red flower. Thinking, 'This is a beautiful country,' and the frangipanis, things like that, you know. I suppose you could drive by there a dozen times and never see it, but it's just letting nature talk to you, you know, it was a... There were a lot of things, a lot of things, even the garden round, I walk round the garden, 'Oh, the roses are coming along.' There's a lot of

21:00 things in our world that help us if we let them, you know, (oh…UNCLEAR) your eyes or your ears, you know. No, I have an interest in that. Listening to a bit of music also, yeah.

Can you tell me about the orphanages father?

Yes. The one I looked after mainly was at Vung Tau, An Phong, Jardin An Phong, 'The garden

21:30 of the wind of peace.' Our air force had looked after it mainly, Father… oh, he was the chaplain before I got there, Johnny Ramil, Father Ramil. A great… he was an orphan himself, so he took great interest in An Phong orphanage, try and rebuild it, which he did. Father Qui ran it, oh just one part of it, there was a number of parts, the actual orphanage in the town itself, about two hundred and

22:00 forty kids there, three nuns, half a dozen helpers, primitive conditions. Their water supply was twenty or so forty gallon drums, that was it. And one weekend I got a call from our soldiers who used to go down and say, "Father, they got no water." "Oh, I'll ring the air force, that's their job every Friday, take water down." So I got onto the chaplain at the air force base, Saturday night, bit kind of peeved I should get him out of his

22:30 air conditioned mess where everybody's watching a movie. He said, "Well I can't do anything about it." I said, "Well it's your bloody job, you're the air force blokes, it's your job. You got kids with no water," you know. I really got a bit mad on the phone at him. We knew him as Roger the Dodger, I shouldn't say that, wasn't a great word, but anyhow. So I say mass for the Americans next morning and Colonel Pappilla was the commander officer, so I got him after mass and I said, "Look sir,

23:00 bit of a problem, I think you can help me, I need water for the orphanage. There's no water." He said, "What?" He said, "I'll get somebody to go down immediately." He said, "Now what's the story?" I said, "Well…" He said, "Tomorrow morning I'll pick you up at your camp, and take me and show me." So he arrived in his Cadillac and flags from, out riding, God knows what. This Michael, larrikin, this MP [Military Police] on his… "Who are you mixing with these days?" "Oh," you know, "Michael it's okay, they're not VC."

23:30 So I went down and I showed him the whole thing, the orphanage. And he said, "Okay, leave it with me." And I was away for a week or two weeks with Training Team, and say mass for the Yanks again and he said to me, "Been down to the orphanage lately?" I said, "No." He said, "I'll take you down, show it to you." And here is a thirty thousand gallon tanker, brand new, off its wheels, all cemented in, and taps and pipes going everywhere. He said, "Do you think this solves the problem?" I said, "I think it might." I said, "But tell me

24:00 sir, how do you account for that tanker?" He said, "Easy Father, 'hit by VC mortar.'" That was the generosity you know. I mean, there was engineering fee would've cost thousands really, but suddenly for the first time, the orphanage had water, and taps, you didn't have to go and dip it out of an open drum. So that was one thing. Medical team they put in, dental team, examine every kid, attend to every kid. The other orphanage I became

24:30 involved with a bit was Danang up on the north, Sacred Heart orphanage there, which had been built by the Americans, and interesting place, they had mainly, they were mainly senior kids. Now no-one knew who wasn't an orphan, who was an orphan until meal hour, and the orphans went to the orphanage building and the others went home, there was no distinction. Interesting. A normal education. The

25:00 Sister Marie Macalaya Federer there, saying to me, at the end of the scholastic year, "Father they are now finished their scholasticism at orphanage. They can all sew, they can all play a musical instrument, they can all cook, and now they can go and get married." you know, a practical thing there. It was there, just that, that was a very well run orphanage. Some were very poor, they had no resources and then we'd try

25:30 and help as much as we could, you know.

How were children orphaned in Vietnam?

How many?

How were they orphaned, how did they become orphans?

Parents killed in the war, or fathered by American service men, quite a few. Dumped at the orphanage door. Little girl I brought back with me eventually, she was just dumped on the orphanage door, and no-one ever knows who her parents were.

Can you tell me about that story father, and…?

I'd be delighted

26:00 to. When I was in Perth, Vanessa, I was parish priest there, I had a family, young, a couple in the parish, they couldn't have children so they wanted to adopt children. They adopted an Australian boy and then they decided it'd be a good thing to adopt a Vietnamese girl, a child who needs a home. So they went through some agency, and it was dragged on for months and months and months. I was going up to

26:30 Vietnam in November 1974, we'd run a thing in our parish for the orphanages in Vietnam, support

them, and I was using the Dominican sisters and Father Qui, I knew these are recognised genuine orphanages, no problem there. And one of the people who got involved said to me, “Father, why don’t you go up and take the money up yourself?” I said, “Oh no.” He said, “No, I’ll pay your fare up.”

27:00 I said, “No, Bernie.” he was Bernie also, “Put it into these.” He said, “No, I’ve made my donation, I’d like to see you go up and take the money up, and pay it.” And I had to get permission to do it, so, okay. So I went and saw Dennis and Pauline, the designated adopted parents, “Look I’m going to Vietnam, give me the name of the orphanage, I’ll go to the orphanage, I’ll get a photo of the baby that will be yours.”

27:30 So I was staying with Father Bob Crawford in Saigon, another man who ran orphanages, or ran... yeah, he did. And there, the kids he looked after were kids with their legs blown off, arms blown off, muscular dystrophy, he looked after the ugly orphans, if I can put it. And he did it by starting a kindergarten for rich Saigonese, and the profits from the kindergarten ran his orphanage. Very wise

28:00 thing to do. And they’d just built a new place out on the river, and that’s where I stayed. So after dealing with what I had to do and seeing our own provincial, I mentioned to Bob about this orphanage, had the name of the orphanage and he said, “Look I’ll drive you out to it.” So he took me out and I find the baby to be adopted, so I photograph the baby, and he said, “Would you like to take that baby back with you to Australia?” I thought,

28:30 ‘Well, you know, that would, this’ll be a bit of a coup.’ I said, “Yeah, sure.” He said, “I know the minister of social services.” He said, “I’ll get you an interview with him, tomorrow.” So I fronted up to this Vietnamese government official who spoke perfect English, sent for the papers, they’re stuck in the Australian Embassy. He said, “You get those papers Father, I’ll sign them.” I had an ace up my sleeve Vanessa. The young lady who was Colonel Greville’s secretary in Vung Tau and

29:00 she’d been Colonel Hooton’s secretary before Colonel Greville, was also my Vietnamese deaconess. She’d come down and set up the altar for mass, and serve mass if there was no Australians there. And this tall, elegant Vietnamese, she was a lovely person, she was a high school teacher. She taught me to say mass in Vietnamese, from a Latin Vietnamese missile, correcting my Vietnamese against the Latin, for the better. So when it became evident we were leaving the country, she was warned months before

29:30 hand and she says to me, “Father, I’m supporting my parents, how can I get a job in Vung Tau?” ‘Cause Vung Tau was just closed. And I said, “Oh,” you know, “I don't know Hung, but I’ll keep my ear open.” I was saying mass in the free world centre at Saigon a couple of weeks later, a new guy at mass, a civilian, so after mass he came up to me, introduced himself, he was the new first secretary to the Australian Embassy. “Oh, great.” And he said, “Would you like to come have dinner with my wife

30:00 and myself?” “Righto.” The place we went in Saigon was called the Greasy Spoon, I was telling you earlier, anything but the Greasy Spoon. So I went up, and had a lovely French villa, diplomatic area. And embassy car picked me up, lovely meal, dropped me back. So on one of these occasions he says to me, “Oh, I’ve got a problem, I’ve gotta get a Vietnamese secretary, and she has to be security cleared.” I said, “I know the person, Colonel Greville’s secretary.” He said, “Bring

30:30 her down.” So I brought Hung down and she got the job, hands down. So Hung, in Asian terms, owes me a favour. So three years later... two years, three years later, I return the request. Up to the embassy, ask for Hung, she’s there, the big reunion, ‘Good to see you.’ “Can you help me Hung?” She had the papers in five minutes, had ‘em signed, back to

31:00 Father Crawford, back to the ministry of social justice, and the baby’s gonna be mine tomorrow morn... I’m leaving tomorrow morning. So I thought, ‘Oh, you know...’ Now I make myself the hero of this story, so a little bit of, you know, kudos here. I get to the airport with my carry bag and my suitcase with all the sisters saying goodbye to me, and my baby arrives. And, ‘Okay sister,

31:30 hang on to your arithmetic now...’ They thought it was marvellous, the baby, be taken back to Australia. So I had a job getting on, tried to get her through customs and immigration. I made an entry on the paper, father’s name, Ho Chi Minh, you know, mother, Chung Kwun Dau. And eventually got onto the aircraft, Singapore Airlines, from Tan Son Nhut to the old Pailin, not the new,

32:00 the old Pailin airport. And get on board the plane, there’s the gorgeous hostesses saying, “You have no woman with you sir?” “No, no woman with me. I’m taking the baby back to be adopted in Australia.” “Ooh.” So before I left the tarmac, they produced a bottle of champagne, so we toasted the baby. In the air, within an hour, another bottle of champagne, toast the baby again. And they took the baby, look after the baby, “Of course you can look after the baby,” you know, “pleasure.” I thought, ‘Mmm, I think

32:30 I should do this more often.’ Get to Singapore, that’s where I struck trouble in Singapore. I had to get a special air ticket for the baby, through Air Vietnam for Singapore Airlines and Qantas, that was another hassle, they only would take American dollars. And I get to Singapore, I got no entry visa for the kid. My papers are alright, but we’re just changing, you know, national, international, like walking across the street here.

33:00 “No, you cannot do it.” So after a lot of hasting and arguments, I knew I was beaten. So I went back up to my lounge again, and the old white bucket seats like this. I got my baby on one seat, I’m on this seat and I got the stuff here, and then my baby begins to cry and the nose says, ‘There’s a job to be done.’ I

thought, ‘Oh no, my mother never taught me how to change nappies. What am I gonna do? I can’t go to the ladies room, I’ll be arrested in this place, there’s nothing

33:30 in the men’s room, have to do it here.’ So there’s disposable nappies in one of the bags, I got one out. Worked out the job of the damned nappy and the baby, goes on this way. Oh Vanessa, did I have a trial, a job, the poor kid had diarrhoea, you know. You imagine the result; I had two or three goes before I got a nappy on her. Got this filthy nappy, where can I take it, find a trash tin somewhere. So I thought, ‘My time’s running out, what am I gonna do?’ So I went

34:00 back to the immigration area and, ‘Can I use your phone?’ “Alright,” disdainful. Rang Qantas. They said, “Father, we’re waiting for you!” I said, “I’m stuck here.” He said, “I’ll come up.” So he said, “Oh, he’s making an example of you, there’s nothing you can do” And I said, “Well what am I gonna do?” He said, “Just relax. Well, there’s plenty of you know, waiting people, we’ll book you up through Kuala Lumpur, cause the Malays’ll be much more easier. ‘Thank God for that.’ So he came back in about an hour or so,

34:30 I think I’d changed another nappy or two by this stage of the game. And he said, “Look, I’m sorry Father, I can’t get you out for two days.” “Two days! What about this baby!” You know. He said, “Now we’ve wired Perth, they know you’re delayed.” I said, “I don’t have enough money.” He said, “We’ll see how we go.” So, he said, “Now you’re booked on the flight to Kuala Lumpur.” “Okay.” So on the flight to Kuala Lumpur my head begins to get a throb, I know

35:00 I’ve had no food since six in the morning, cup of coffee and a piece of bread. I’m getting a headache, getting worse and worse. I’m cranky, I’m hot, I’m smelly, my baby is hot and smelly and cranky also. So I get up to Kuala Lumpur and I’m prepared this time for immigration. They say, “Oh sir, very sorry. Oh? What is the problem? I see, you must have a visa for this child, you’re his...?” I said, “I didn’t know that,” which was true, I didn’t know either. I said, “Well what will I do?” He said, “I’ll get my superior officer.”

35:30 ‘Oh no.’ So this guy came along and he said, “There’s no problem. You sir have the baby’s papers, I give you a receipt, you come back in two day’s time, we give you... simple.” “Thank you very much.” This took over an hour. Go out to the concourse and my bag’s the only bag on the carousel going round, I was lucky it was still there. So got a taxi to take me to a hotel, they took me to the Holiday Inn, the Holiday Inn, not the place for bachelors and babies. So

36:00 I front up, book a room. “You’re by your...?” “I’m by myself, child with me.” “There’s no woman with you?” “There’s no woman with me.” “Oh.” So I’m on the forty-second floor, something like that. I get up there, I thought, ‘Now I gotta do it, I’ll get some coffee, something to eat, look after this baby.’ So called the room service and there’s a lovely Malay girl came up, beautiful hot, piping coffee, sandwich or two. And she took charge of the baby, showed me how to wash the baby in the hand basin. Lessons in surrogate fatherhood.

36:30 So oh, I thought, ‘Mmm, we got no more nappies left.’ So down to the pharmacy, explain to the pharmacy, nappies, diapers, whatever you call them, “We do not have them.” He said, “I’ll make you some.” So he got paper towelling, cotton wool and sticking plaster and made me this pile of nappies. So I got back in the lift, think, myself, idiot, this pile of, you know, whatever he’s doing there. So I lost my

37:00 Malay girl, she went off and I’m sitting there, and tired as billy-o, thought, ‘I’ll just lay down for a little while.’ And I went to sleep, I woke up with the baby really crying, ‘Oh no, there’s something wrong with this baby.’ So room service, “Is there a house doctor?” “Yes.” “Do you want...?” “Yes.” My doctor arrived and not only has my baby got galloping diarrhoea, she’s an ear infection, from the pressurised.

37:30 cabin on the plane, and she’s in agony. So back down the pharmacy with prescriptions. And the baby and myself became a bit of a, how would you call it, a talking point in the dining room. And she’d known, all she’d known for, she’s twelve months old, was a bottle stuck in her mouth twice a day and different people. So now she had the one guy with her, and got to know me, it’s fascinating really. And the Malay people there, they were great, making up

38:00 bottles for me and Lord knows what. So on the way back, two days time, out to the airport, get the papers back, get the Qantas flight, bit late. Oh, pardon me, not late, just held up. So eventually I get on it and on the very front of the economy they put a bassinet in, for the baby, and the one stewardess on board she’s

38:30 looking. Great. And who’s sitting next to me but a businessman from my own parish in Perth. ‘Oh God no.’ “What have you been doing Father?” “Mind your own bloody business.” He said, “I’ve had a terrible couple of days.” I said, “I’ve had a terrible couple of days too.” I feel like a drink, we feel like a drink, so we had a couple of whiskies each. And the hostess took the baby, and the main meal comes, bottle of wine with the main meal, most probably a brandy and coffee afterwards. I said to him, “Look Brian, I’m just gonna take my collar off, and

39:00 put my head back for a few minutes, have a doze. I woke up, Vanessa, as the plane was coming in to Perth, ‘My God, you know, where have I been?’ And the baby’s gone. Now this is not possible. And what happened, the baby woke up, began to cry, and to cry, and to cry as only babies can. There are two nurses a few seats back,

39:30 they could see what was going on, and here’s this poor baby struggling and crying, and these two guys wiped out in this kind of blue vapour of alcohol, flying over the place. So then delivered the baby in

Perth. I arrive in Perth, photo there for it, didn't know existed til a couple of years

40:00 ago. And baby's picked up by her adopting parents. And a photo when she was four or five and another one when she was about twelve I think, and then the final thing was the invitation.

Tape 9

00:31 Her Vietnamese name is Xuyn, X-U-Y-N which means spring time, but Dennis and Pauline called her Sarai. So I occasionally, going through Perth, catch up with Sarai, and there are Christmas cards and things like that. And about three years ago was it, a request from Sarai, would I do her wedding

01:00 for her. 'Oh my God.' "And we'll pay your fare home." You know, "Thank you very much but you can't afford that money. Use it on your honeymoon, do something like that with it." "Oh no, Dad..." and she's really Aussie, she doesn't speak Vietnamese, that's a decision she made, she grew up in an Aussie home as an Aussie. Which is fascinating really. She's a real... Anyhow eventually Dennis

01:30 said, you know, "I'll pay." "No. No way in the world, no, that's money they need." you know, "I'd love to do the wedding but it's not," you know, "just..". Believe it not, within a couple of weeks, a job in Perth, a month's supply of work, exactly what I'm doing here, and my last weekend would be the weekend of the wedding. So it worked out very well, I did the wedding on the Saturday and flew back on Sunday. So we had a lovely, it was a lovely wedding really, I say so

02:00 myself. Nathan, her husband, and his name, Nguin, N-G-U-I-N, but he changed it to Nathan because Australians, his father was shot by the Viet Cong, mother died of TB [tuberculosis], his sister, at eighteen got these five kids and escaped. Now imagine that, eighteen, five children escaping, coming to Australia, I mean they're tremendous people. And Nathan was to be the genius of the family, a brilliant doctor, lawyer,

02:30 anything. Went to university, hated it. What's his passion? Cooking. He's a chef. The sister is still furious, "You're a coolie." He says, "No I'm a chef." Working for Lamonts, big restaurant in Perth, with their own vineyard, Margaret River. And he speaks fluent Vietnamese because Vietnamese is the language on the home, so he's bilingual. But a lovely Vietnamese meal out about

03:00 three days before the wedding, in one of the Vietnamese restaurants in Perth. And it was beautifully done really, I enjoyed it. And the wedding itself was in the chapel of the Good Church Sisters, above Lake Monger, at Leederville. And where was the wedding reception? The Irish Club. What a... you know, of all places, the Irish Club in Perth. So anyhow they went back

03:30 to Vietnam, Nathan took her back to Vietnam about eighteen months ago, to the orphanage. And one of the old sisters remembers myself picking her up. You know, it's fascinating. She has no history of herself. We've talked about it a couple of times and I was there, and I've often wondered you know, were her parents killed? We don't know. There is just no family

04:00 to follow through, you know. Whereas Nathan, of course, has his brothers and sisters in Australia and his relatives in Vietnam, but Sarai has none. But she's gorgeous. And same, get you round her little finger, wouldn't stand a chance with me, you know. So that was one of the success stories, you know. At the wedding, we had the old crew there. Two nurses that looked after her when... I told you,

04:30 did I mention it when I was talking about going to sleep and that? After taking my collar off and both of us went to sleep. Woke up, we're coming down to Perth, there's no baby, the baby's gone, in the bassinet. The baby began to cry, and to cry and to cry, and there were two nurses sitting behind us, about three seats... Said, "What the hell's going...?" They went up and here's these two guys, out like a light in this, kind of, you know, vapour of alcohol around the place, and they took the baby, and looked after it.

Father

05:00 **before you left Vietnam, you were also doing work with the Americans. Could you explain how that came about, how you came to do work with them?**

Yes. The American chaplain, they worked to a different system, Cathy. We worked to serve on three chaplains, Anglican, Catholic and we call PD, they just have Catholic and PD. Now your PD chaplain can be a real Episcopal priest, or a southern Baptist, and it has its problems, I can tell you. Americans, we had a bit of a problem in Vung Tau

05:30 where the incoming man was southern Bap., was, what was he, but the Yanks didn't like him, they wouldn't come to church. We had to send our own chaplain down, our PD man. However, Father Bob Ward was the American chaplain, his brother was dying, went back to the States, he couldn't get a replacement. So the two commanding officers, Colonel Pappill and Colonel Flaherty, asked me would I help, and said, "Course we can't pay you." So I told him, "To be paid is not my job, if we can help I'll help."

06:00 So I suddenly inherited Charles Kriegg, Specialist Five Kriegg from Deltron, Kansas City, Missouri, 'Sir,'

and a Jeep, and this incredible American mass run. But the support was incredible, you know, chopper you all over the place. I'd say mass, there was a, like their aircraft carrier really, out on the harbour called the CC Bay, the Corpus Christi Bay, from Corpus Christi in Texas. It was called a FRAME, a Floating Repair

06:30 Air Force Maintenance Facility, and they would chopper me out to say mass, once a week there. To put a chopper in the air isn't cheap, you know, it's not a... you know, it's their system. I thought they were most generous and I had many a laugh with them, and also flying down to Saigon a few times, Air America this time, and seeing the senior chaplain. We were, as

07:00 Australians, we were always a bit of an enigma to them, we didn't fall into any category, you know, we were a bit different. We weren't obsessed with rank, where you stood in the hierarchy, we were just normal blokes, which I think they liked. I was invited to go to the States, on their invitation orders, but it happened too late, I was leaving Vietnam. It would've been as a guest of the American government, maybe it was a good thing it didn't happen.

07:30 It could've been too much of the razzamatazz, you know. I saw America years later, I was on my own. So that was the contact there. Charlie Kriegg and myself kept in contact for years, and then when I left Australia, I lost all contact with him. When I was in the States I tried to contact him, and he and his wife, Pauline, had taken twelve months off to do a trailer trip round America. Missed them.

So Father, when you're talking to the men out on the, in the fields and in the camps, what are some of the things

08:00 **that they're talking to you about, what are their worries?**

Worries are sometimes family worries, you know. None of them were conscious of personal safety, in the sense of, 'I might get killed,' you know. A sick child, a sick wife, a sick, parents, a sick family. It's interesting. The family, interesting enough, is my experience, it's only limited

08:30 to myself, your family became very important to you when you were in Vietnam. It was in touch with reality, so it was very important. Anything in the family became... even remembering birthdays, presents, cards, it became very, very important, it was almost reaching back to normality. 'Where I am here, in Vietnam,' is not normal,' it's abnormal really, and to get back to that family thing is normal, so family could be, it was very important.

09:00 And things that we may not consider so terribly catastrophic in Australia, when you are thousands of miles away, it's different, you just can't put your hand on it really, can you?

So how would you help them to...?

Through family welfare, and through the chaplaincy service. One thing you get is a signal off to the chaplain general quickly, and get John Hazel to go down and see so-and-so at Eastwood, something like that, you know. Give me an opinion, you know. They were

09:30 things we could offer them, you know. And they knew it. So there was a back up, a church back up there too that, you know, was, we weren't just a useless organisation. So there we are, not just God botherers.

Did they talk about death?

No, no. I never, I can't recall any soldier talking to me about death.

10:00 Sometimes people saying about fear. I never recall anyone talking about death as such, 'I could get killed here. If I get killed, what can you do for my family?' No, I don't ever recall that, you know. It may have happened to other people, I never recall it though, you know. We were pinned down at a place called Phuoc, up in the Annamite ranges,

10:30 or lower Annamite ranges in MR-2, and I was there really, the chaplain's there with the Training Team. And I'd been into the town itself with one of the, one of the men, one of the warrant officers. It was the twenty-first birthday of one of the officers, and... twenty-first? Twenty-first, big one, twenty-first birthday, anyhow. And we went to the American mess in Phouc and bought bits like chips and American beer and

11:00 brought it back with us, and we were about twenty miles out of town. We had a really quiet party, and we got attacked by the Viet Cong, or the NVA really, I say, attacked is the wrong word. Down on the mountains around us and they opened up on us, and for two days, you couldn't move, you know. And I was on my stretcher when it happened, and Kerry, his name was, the young captain in charge, he says, "Come on, get your flak

11:30 jacket on, get your tin hat on, don't worry about your shoes," so, at this stage of the game. See we were supposed to wear our boots, at night time, in case of emergency, I mean, your feet are a condition. And we were there for two days. Now in this funny situation, it's not like being in a normal camp, you're isolated, with Vietnamese around us. And the happen is at night, and we reckoned

12:00 that what it really was, that two patrols crossed, one was a NVA patrol, never opened up on the other one. When you think about it, one of those things that happened. And yet there wasn't any fear of, 'This could be fatal,' you know. It was a sticky one, sort of like being mortared in Vung Tau or Nui Dat, here

up in the lower Annamite ranges, this MR-2, miles away from anywhere,

12:30 you know. That was the, I think the only death with... again in the same area, from the same place Phuoc, another occasion, I was with 3 Training Team then, four of us in the Jeep, and of course whenever in the Jeep sand bag the floor, sand bagging, in case there was a killer open over an open mine, at least the sand bagging would give you some protection. And

13:00 we came to a village and the, it was an area under the Koreans, and the Koreans were cordoning off the village. We were stopped, we had red kangaroo painted all over the Jeep and pointed to it. Now one of the old warrant officers had been in Korea, he'd been to Korea, so he got out, and yacked to these Koreans. And he said to us, he said, "Let's get out of this place," he said, "Father, not the place for you." He said, "A Korean soldier has been shot in the village, they're cordoning off the

13:30 village, they'll take the first three men and shoot them." One Korean, three Vietnamese. He said, "Now by the time the American advisers get started," he said, " '...but they were VC.' Dead men tell no tales." He said, "That village will hate all of us for the rest of our lives." He said, "They'll never shoot another Korean." That was the kind of Asian brutality, you know, we were recorded often these searchers spend days, and get nowhere. Was,

14:00 first three men, you know, 'One of us, three of you.' They were disturbing facets you come across, nothing you can do about it.

What would the men talk to you about fear?

Fear? One of the warrant officers got caught, again, almost abandoned by his Vietnamese, and suddenly realised he was in, he was in

14:30 what we now call 'no man's land' in one sense, and thinking, 'How the hell am I gonna get out of this?' While they're firing from both sides. And as he said quietly to me, he said, "Father, that's the occasion you change your underpants." you know. I can understand it. And he got out of it. He was very sore about his Vietnamese, you know.

Do you ever counsel men who

15:00 **wanted to go home?**

No, no. No, Cathy, I didn't. The Training Team men were professionals, that would be unheard of, a Training Team man. The actual staff in Vung Tau itself, in the camp at Vung Tau which was RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] and engineers and support groups and drivers and hospital, head quarters company.

15:30 And we had about two thousand, I think two thousand men, I can't give you an exact figure now. Or maybe twelve hundred. They were fairly sure they were there for a period of time, you know. They would count on their, you know, say sixty-five days to go, forty days to go and a wakie, that was... tick em off. I couldn't live like that, I went there, and said, 'I'm here for twelve months, I'm not gonna tick days off on the wall.' you know, that's just agony. But

16:00 some of them did. And so it was always, 'I'm going home in, you know, so many days time.' Didn't worry me. So no, I wasn't, I personally wasn't conscious of time dragging, in a sense I was prepared to stay there, that's it, you know. The, as I say, the people in Vung Tau mainly knew they were there for twelve months, if it was in the capital of Vung Tau, you were in a fairly safe condition,

16:30 if you were outside the wire, that was another problem altogether. But no, wasn't a great problem with me.

What were your living conditions like, Father?

In the actual camp, good. Little room, an army bed. When I came into it, I was determined... this Pat Brooke, this great friend, had a very simple

17:00 maxim in the army, 'Any fool can be uncomfortable.' Now my little bedroom had been the wall of a hut, which had been exposed to the weather for a couple of years, it was covered with sand and dirt and God knows what. And my predecessor hadn't cleaned it up, so damn this for a joke. So I got up and I just cleaned the whole thing down, scraped it down, scrubbed it down, it took me two days, and the Vietnamese said I was mad doing it. And then I went to store and I paint,

17:30 I primed first, it just ate the primer up, had none. So eventually I painted it, I'd a nice cream room, wasn't nice, but pretty right, but cream room. I went and got wire for the windows, there's no such thing as glass, so you open, push the board out and of course everything comes in, mosquitoes, everything. So, damn this for a joke, back down to the store and I get this fine gauze wire, so I put that up,

18:00 and then I got coir matting for the floor. Made it comfortable. 'Any fool can be uncomfortable.' Our ablution block was from here not quite to your shops but pretty close to it, but we had hot water there, that made a big difference, and also a flush toilet, flush toilets. The rest of the camp didn't have that, not even the CO had that, because it was hospital thing there. No, they were

18:30 good living conditions, Cathy, I couldn't complain at all, I wouldn't complain. But I mean, war time, war zone, our meals were good, as far as you could. American rations, which become rather boring after a while, I mean, pressed turkey and pressed ham, you know. Ice cream, oh, oodles of American ice cream, couldn't get rid of it. Taking it down to the orphanage, cartons of ice cream, and melting in the damn trailer as I was taking it down to the orphanage.

19:00 Fruit was a bit sparse but there was some fruit. Local, we used to buy local fruit, go and buy the big, these big orange bananas, bananas. Mangosteens, paw-paws, go to the market and buy them, or better still get one of our girls to go down. If we went down we paid three times for it, if they go down they bargain for it. So no, it was, they weren't, they weren't intolerable conditions at all.

19:30 My father in the, you know, Gallipoli and those where they lived on biscuits and bully beef, they did it in terrible conditions, but we didn't have that. The field rations were good too, you know, on the field. Yeah, they were okay.

What was in them? What was in the field rations?

Field rations, tinned meat, tinned fruit,

20:00 tinned... I was gonna say tinned chocolate's the wrong word. It was an emergency ration, was chocolate, with nuts and everything, for an emergency ration. It was great, so we knocked it off, you know. And also toilet paper, we actually got toilet paper in the ration pack. Interesting. No, it was C [combat] rations. The old warrant officers were a bit experienced with your C rations and they could do anything with them. They'd turn up a bit of a casserole type of thing or a stew, you know,

20:30 fascinating really. Buy local bread from the Vietnamese in the villages and the French taught them how to cook bread, like long French bread. So you can survive, you survive. There was no, it wasn't First World War stuff at all, you know.

Father could you tell me about leaving Vietnam and how it felt for you, and what the reaction was from the locals?

Oh, I was deeply saddened, Cathy.

21:00 The longer I stayed in Vietnam, the more I became convinced that someone should be there helping the South Vietnamese, not necessarily ourselves, not saying that, someone. Only Asians understand Asians really, you know, we westerners don't, but they trusted us, that was, I think, the cruel thing. And especially people who worked for us for years, for example

21:30 you might've been a typist for us, your mother was working in the kitchen or sewing, your whole family had work from us. And suddenly, you say, 'Well, it's all over, sorry about that, we're going.' What do you do? There was no answer for it. We did a bankrupt really, and particularly those people I got to know well. The one exception of Hung and getting Hung the job at the embassy, there was no-one else I could help. You know, there's a mama-san who's looking after three or four kids,

22:00 her husband had been killed in the war, I tried to give her our crockery, 'Take those things, sell them, I don't care what you do with them,' raise money somehow or other. On the Saturday we left and I went down to Saigon by helicopter, outside our main gate for miles down the road, were the Vietnamese army lorries waiting to go in on Monday, who would strip the whole place.

22:30 Air conditioning, everything would be stripped and sold on the black market, not for people but for the army, you know, the Vietnamese Army. And that was a sour point you know. Our civilian workers, that was it, sad. And you think, 'What will become of them?' They had nowhere to go. Sergeant Hung, Sergeant... was not Hung, think of his name in a minute, ah, Soong, who was our interpreter,

23:00 I thought he was in the Australian Army, he was Vietnamese, but working for us. And he said, "In 1954 my family came south, I was a boy. It is now 1972, I can't go any further. You're going home, I can't go any further." A real fatality, the end is not far away, it's gonna happen. Some of them,

23:30 as late as '74, some Vietnamese did not believe America would abandon them. Our own provincial didn't believe it, in Vietnam, Father Huin Van Lim, didn't believe it, "The Americans will not let this happen to us." I said, "Father, the Americans will not come back." Didn't believe it. So they were down, Cathy, they were betrayed. Our policy, our western policy, the French were the

24:00 evil geniuses in many ways, they were the whole thing of Indo China. Americans going back, going in, that was another tragedy. Look back and you'll see the tragedies, you know. Hindsight's very, very, you know, false in many ways, but I was deeply saddened. And that's why, when I came back to Australia I was still kept, what we gonna do to help the Vietnamese, raising money for the orphanages.

24:30 They needed our help, you know.

When was it that you left Vietnam, when was it exactly?

I left Vietnam in end of February 1972, I was there 26th of February I think. My army record shows me later. I was in Vietnam, I left Vung Tau because I was in Saigon, for a week or so, trying to cover chaplaincy laws there. We were setting up

25:00 another organisation with the Australian Army, but the battalions had gone, Nui Dat had gone, Vung Tau was going. Was a segment left in Saigon, not quite, not Training Team, but some of ex Training Team men, because that fell through there, when you say it was true altogether. So I spent a week or so in Saigon. And that was going and saying goodbye to people too. It was very

25:30 sad thinking, 'I will never come back to this place again,' what I did, accidentally. But it was, put it this way, that one year in Vietnam was most probably the most formative year of my life. I really mean that. In values, in coming to terms with another culture, in coming face to face

26:00 with grotesque suffering, seeing these orphaned kids and these maimed kids, that was another aspect of it also. Seeing this terrible want and thinking, 'We have so much, and we don't appreciate it,' you know. It was a very formative year in my life. I don't regret it. I would do it again, I can assure you. I went unknowing in one sense, idealist,

26:30 with some question marks, I came back with a lot more question marks, in many ways, but grateful I'd had the opportunity of being in Vietnam. Not just because of the war but because of the culture, seeing something of south east Asia, and its better parts also. Hoping that I was less racist or less

27:00 anti Asian in my attitudes. I was, I became very much less anti Asian. I came back very much in admiration for Asian cultures. And they are some of the things that we understand, you know, holding and saving face, we laugh at it but it was very true, yeah. And thinking it, as I say, 'This is an ancient culture, and my (UNCLEAR) words were, 'barbarians,' you know.' And look at it now.

27:30 What becomes of these people? I don't know, you know.

What did it do to your opinion on war?

I suppose I can honestly say it made me very, very wary about war, in the wariness sense that seeing the terrible suffering it inflicted on people. Not in the proportion like the Second World War, I mean, there wasn't that type of slaughter.

28:00 Well the First World War, Second World War particularly, but seeing the results of people who'd been killed. Vietnamese as well as our own, and the terrible sorrow inflicted on people through war. There was hardly a family, Cathy, that hadn't been touched by the war, hadn't lost at least one member. It'd be very unusual if you hadn't lost a brother, a cousin, uncle, or maybe father, very

28:30 unusual. All families knew tremendous suffering, because of the Vietnam War, and we inflicted many of them ourselves, I say 'we,' the so-called, 'allies.' How you forgive people, I don't know. Some of the people who have gone back have met up with the Viet Cong and they say, 'Oh they're great friends now and, you know, they realise we were here.' and they can joke with each other, which may be so, you know.

29:00 If so, it's good. But to see it there and to know, 'I'm in a war zone,' that was the thing I suppose that come through too, 'I'm in a war zone.' I got lost in Saigon one day. I took a wrong turn, a trip I'd made a dozen times between free world and Queen of Peace church, I took the wrong turn. I realised between, 'I'm lost, I don't know where I am.' That was a strange feeling, I can't read a sign. So I

29:30 asked one of the Vietnamese policeman if he, 'whoit nice,' in my best Vietnamese, to direct me to the free world centre. He couldn't understand me, so I wrote it out, 'Oh,' you know. I was walking directly away from the place. I've often thought to myself, 'What could I have done? What could have happened to me?' You know, unarmed, without a weapon, he picked up saying you were an officer. Like they say near Baghdad today, you get kidnapped,

30:00 held as hostage. I don't know. Thank God that didn't happen in those days, but it was just that feeling suddenly once again, you're at the mercy of a culture, the culture of a people, you're not too sure who your friends are or who your enemy, and they all look the same, you know. So, but it was a sobering experience, as I say, very formative experience, in many, many ways. And it's reached right down through my life.

30:30 It didn't stop with Vietnam. It didn't stop with me leaving the army. It made me very conscious of south east Asia, and Asia, and Asian culture, and Asians, you know.

Why did you go back to Vietnam in 1974?

Because of the, for the orphanages. And that was a, it was a different return. I

31:00 came back as a friend, they were waiting for me, you know. It was renewing friendships again. Father Crawford, the sisters, Father Hui, all the group, you know, 'I'm back.' When I left Vietnam I thought I'd never see the place again. Within, what, three years I'm back. Three years? Two and a half years I'm back. Changed, mightily changed. A sense of, almost a sense, Cathy, I couldn't say, 'I'm home,' but

31:30 on familiar territory. This could be home, you know.

So how did you feel when the Communists…?

I was deeply saddened, deeply hurt. April, May, April sorry, March, April '75. I was there the November

32:00 ‘74. I had dinner one night, Father Bob Crawford, a number of Americans, they were generals, we had dinner together and they said to me, “Bernie, in six months time there’ll be no South Vietnam.” the build up in the north was so great. The United Nations cir [?] corps peacekeeping force are East Germans, Bulgarians, Hungarians, were the main lot. They were ordering the north to do what

32:30 they wanted to do. Do a sweep out of the mountains, the populace will panic and block the roads, the other won’t be able to move. That’s precisely what happened. And I was, the following night I was again having a meal with Father Huin Van Lim, our provincial, and I said to him, “Look father, I don’t want to panic you, but my Vietnamese, my American friends were saying to me last night, there’ll be no South Vietnam in six months time. Now we have a house of studies in Canberra, it

33:00 is nowhere near full, let me take, let us take half your students to Australia. It’ll do two things, it’ll take the burden of educating off you, and it’ll give them experience in Australia, it’ll give us experience with them. As they’re ordained they can come back to Vietnam. And we’ll pay for it.” I was on the provincial council, I could be the provincial, say, “Look,” you know, “let’s get moving on it.” And he said to me, “Oh no, no, Father, it will not happen.” He was North

33:30 Vietnamese. Again, a few days before Saigon fell our provincial in Australia, got a cable from him, ‘Please get these people out. all his students and his family at the end because they were North Vietnamese. Yeah, they didn’t believe the Americans would abandon them, that was the cruel part. They trusted the Americans too much.

Did they get out?

Oh no. Oh no, no, no, no. I think Father Van went to

34:00 prison. Some students escaped years later. Eventually (UNCLEAR) no-one escape because you’d be more needed here, well some escaped. We had about half a dozen to Australia. But two of them say they remember me coming to Vung Tau, coming to the house in Vung Tau. Now I don’t remember them, they’re all slant eyes, if I can put it that way but. But it would’ve been a great advantage if we’d got half his students out, educated them. We then had chaplains for the boat people, people we

34:30 knew themselves, you know, knew them. As it was they had no-one who could deal with them, which is a bit of a tragedy, so yeah. So it’s sad. Father Bob Crawford, by the way, got out, he took out a planeload of ugly orphans. A whole planeload of them, legs missing, arms missing, half their legs blown off. He said, “The healthy orphans can fend for themselves, the ugly ones, get them to the States,” and they were all adopted my American families. This is the generosity of the Americans.

35:00 Now it’s one thing to adopt my gorgeous little orphan, but a kid without legs, you know, things like... Americans are generous. So that was one thing. He, himself, the last I heard he was in Manila, in the Philippines working with the Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines, and Bob is ten years older than I am. Tremendous guy. More Asian. He had two years in a communist prison in China, gained great respect for Asia I can tell you.

35:30 But, you know, one of these mighty guys. So I suppose more than any other experience, Cathy, in my years as a priest, as a Dominican, Vietnam had more impact on me. Not so much just the army experience, that was the... the army experience was the entrance into it. No army, no Vietnam. It had more impact on me than almost anything else.

36:00 **When you came back, did you experience any discrimination because you’d been to Vietnam, any protesters ?**

Oh, you know, we weren’t popular, we were spat at sometimes. If you’re in uniform and wearing your two Vietnam ribbons, occasionally happened, in town, but I experienced no great discrimination. Oh people’d be, you know, slur sometimes, ‘Oh, you know, you’re a baby killer.’ things like that or, you know.

36:30 I’d just think, ‘That was your problem mate.’ you know. Not greatly, not greatly, no, just the occasional thing. Which is our... there’s no use doing your temper, what can you do?

How do you feel now about Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War? In hindsight?

Oh, I suppose you could say we shouldn’t have been there but, that’s hindsight. It most probably comes back, Cathy, to the same thing that, I came there convinced that someone

37:00 should’ve been there, helping the South Vietnamese. We non Asians don’t understand Asians and it was highlighted by the Americans. It wasn’t Europe, it was Asia. You can’t transpose another culture and try and make the original culture independent, you can’t do it. The French failed, the Brits failed in India. The history is full of

37:30 failures of colonisation. We didn’t learn it. Advise them, arm them, train them, that’s okay. But to fight in their country and say you’re fighting for them... another problem. And the Vietnamese politics themselves were too, the internecine fights and God knows what, they’re complicated, you don’t know who hates who. America

38:00 could never work out who’s on whose side, that was one of the great problems, you know. Are we loved

or are we hated? Could never work it out, you know. Whose force was against us, you know. Smile at you and say, ‘Oh yes, yes, yes,’ and behind your back... don’t know. So I can understand in that period of 1960s, of their interest in south east Asia, but I think the

38:30 policy of going in as an army, as an army, not... see the Training Team went 1962, the battalion went in 1966, that was the army being committed. The Training Team thing, yes I could, so that could’ve been worked, could’ve been very helpful, but once we sent a battalion in, the logistics, back up, problems, man power, human nature, all those things,

39:00 are suddenly facing you. The issue you cannot possibly foresee, and the aftermath would be pretty horrendous, you know. I don't think we did ourselves any good, in my humble opinion, by going in as an army, a gung-ho army. Now immediately, of the foreign troops in Vietnam, it was mainly Americans, I’d say

39:30 that we were the better received, even by the Vietnamese Army, as more efficient, more effective more cohesive, you know. But did it achieve any good? Well, the only, it’s a negative argument in one way, what happened in Cambodia with the killing fields, that’s a horrendous chapter in history, couldn’t happen in Vietnam because it was too publicised. Was one of the

40:00 fears when the Communists take over, they’ll kill everybody in Vietnam. It couldn’t be done, as it was done in Cambodia, because it was too public a war, you know. I mean, people were killed, there’s no doubt about that, but on the horrendous scale of Cambodia, in turning history back. Maybe that was the one thing that saved South Vietnam, also the South Vietnamese population to some extent. It’s just to hazard a guess there, Cathy, but I think it did have some impact on the mentality of,

40:30 you know, cut off and here we go again.

Father, thank you very much for being involved in the archive.

INTERVIEW ENDS