Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Geddes - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Well, Brigadier, 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 the main points in your life starting from where you were born.**

Well I was born in Tamworth, New South Wales, eighty-three years ago. But my earliest recollections

01:00 of childhood are at Grafton in New South Wales where I suspect I was three or four and I still have clear recollections of Grafton. We lived in a large two storey house very close to the river and it used to fascinate me to watch the river and the boats travelling up and down and so on.

01:30 After we left Grafton, we moved to Sydney and I lived at Mosman in New South Wales and I lived there from about the age of five or six until I left school in 1938. I went – do you want school details?

Where you went to school and then when you joined up?

Well I started off at Middle Harbour Public School at the

02:00 age of five or six or whatever age you start that and at the age of eight I went to Sydney Church of England Grammar School – also known as Shore, and I was at Shore for ten years. The reason for my long stay was that I started a year earlier at the age of eight than you normally do and I had ten happy years, not very hard working years at school.

02:30 Thoroughly enjoyed it, played rugby, rowed in the eight and did most of the things you do at school. I had a great interest in sport. When I left school in thirty-eight, I went to Sydney University and studied economics. And at that time the – it was quite clear that there was a war coming. I think we'd known about it for years. Everyone seemed to know

03:00 about it but no one seemed to do anything about it if you understand that. And I joined Sydney University regiment and when I was in – with Sydney University regiment the war broke out on I think it was the ninth of September. Because there was a war coming I had applied earlier in thirty nine to do two things. One was to

03:30 get a short service commission with the RAF [Royal Air Force], they were looking for pilots, and the second one was to apply for admission as a cadet to Duntroon [Royal Military College] in Canberra. In the event I was accepted for both and my mother mainly said I was too young to go all the way to England by myself. So I accepted

04:00 Duntroon and I started at Duntroon in February 1940. Am I going on the right lines?

That's fantastic.

Before I went to Duntroon I went with a school friend of mine to see a regular soldier, Major Woodward who was stationed at Victoria Barracks. Major Woodward incidentally was later the governor of New South

04:30 Wales and he advised against going to the RAF, but he said, "Go to Duntroon, because there's a war coming and they'll cut the course down from four years to about six months." And he said, "You are far better off going to the war with six months good training behind you." So that was the crunch point really. I decided to go to Duntroon. In the event of course we were there not for six months but for two and a half

05:00 years which was very frustrating and while the tanks were rumbling through Brussels, through Belgium we were still riding horses up and down the paddock and going over jumps. We were a little behind in our military thinking.

Brigadier we are going to probably talk in detail about your training and your time at Duntroon. So I just wanted to ask you to very briefly tell me where you served in the services

05:30 **and what your service career has been?**

Right. I graduated from Duntroon in June 1942. And I was posted to the Royal Australian Armoured Corps and I went strait from Duntroon to Puckapunyal where the armoured training centre was. And I was posted to thirteenth armoured regiment. This was very frustrating because it was a militia

06:00 regiment, not an AIF [Australian Imperial Force] regiment. Shortly after that I had a remarkable experience because the whole of the brigade I was in went on strike. Soldiers don't go on strike and my training at Duntroon had never really prepared me for this situation. But I did learn a lot from it, particularly about man management I think. The thirteenth was moved to Queensland to

06:30 the place where Joh Bjelke-Petersen [Queensland Premier 1968-1987] came from, up to Atherton and I again applied for transfer to the AIF and after much to-ing and fro-ing I left that regiment and went to Canungra, which was the jungle training centre. And I think that would have been in early forty-three. I can't remember precisely.

07:00 I spent six months both as a student and an instructor at the jungle training centre. And was then posted up to the Atherton Tablelands where I finally joined a commando squadron which was at Ravenshoe – the 2/12th commando squadron. Keep going?

Yes. I might just ask you where you served overseas in the army?

07:30 Right. Well the 2/12th commando squadron, we left from Townsville. I can't remember the date. And we went to Labuan Island in Borneo where we landed with two brigades of 9th Division and we were long range patrollers I suppose you could call us at that time. And we – I was on Labuan Island until the war finished and the moment the war finished, we were put on a boat and

08:00 sent down to Sarawak – to Kuching to get the prisoners of war, particularly the Australians out of the prisoner of war camp there. This was a pretty traumatic experience, actually, to see these fellows who had been incarcerated for over two years. And big healthy men were down to seven and eight stone and so on. And when that was all over I then joined

08:30 the occupation force – well the war had finished then. I then joined the occupation force that was going to Japan. The British Commonwealth Occupation Force, BCOF it was known as. And we were stationed at a place called Kure, which was about half an hours drive from Hiroshima. I spent nearly a year in Japan with the occupation force with sixty-sixth

09:00 battalion as the adjutant there and what happened next. I then came back to Australia and I've forgotten what I did when I first came back.

That's ok. I might just ask you what other conflicts you were involved in overseas.

During World War II?

No. Other wars.

Well the next conflict I got involved in was the Korean War,

09:30 where I served with the British regiment – the First Royal Tank Regiment. And I think I was there for eight months. That was a very interesting period and some very big battles were fought in the time I was there and which the tanks took an active part. At the end of that conflict I came back to Australia and

10:00 I'm trying to get the sequence right here. The next conflict I went to was with an infantry battalion to Malaya where there was an Emergency going on with the Communist terrorists there. And in fact I think I was in Malaya for nearly three years. Then came back to Australia

10:30 and I was posting to England for training purposes for a year. Came back to Australia and then went – I think I've got this out of sequence a bit, yes I have, I'm sorry. I've got the sequence all wrong. At any rate I came back to Australia.

11:00 I was married at this stage, I might add, and I was posted to Canungra again and I was then posted to Canberra to defence headquarters as a planner, which was a fascinating job. We were planning everything related to defence activity in Australia. After that the next conflict I became engaged

11:30 in was Vietnam, where I was there for about nine months, I think, and that was it.

Brigadier, thank you very much. Take some time to have a glass of water. And what I'll do is go back and we'll have a chat about your childhood now. Could you tell me about your mother and father and what their background was?

12:00 Yes. My father came from a country town called Warialda, where his great grandfather had settled after coming out from Scotland many years ago and he was brought up there. My mother came from Nyngan in the west – out towards – well out of the west of New South Wales

12:30 and she had been born in Tasmania and like my father's forbears she, her family had come out from

England and settled there in the early eighteen hundreds. I don't remember the right [UNCLEAR]. They were both very much basic good God fearing country people.

13:00 Both of them. My mother's family I think had eight children. My father's family had seven. They met when my father was the clerk of petty sessions in Nyngan and they were married in Sydney. I can't remember the date. My father was working for the – in the legal fraternity.

13:30 And when I was a child at Grafton he was a stipendiary magistrate. And when we moved to Sydney he was secretary of the Department of Justice and later became the Public Trustee. He was one of the leading public servants in New South Wales

What was your father working as when you were a child?

Well he was a stipendiary magistrate. This is when we were in Grafton. When we moved to Sydney, he became secretary of the Justice Department and

14:30 later he became the Public Trustee. So most of his life he spent in the judiciary I suppose you'd call it.

Do you have memories of Grafton yourself?

Vague ones. Yes. The river and floating boats in the water there. Walking through the gardens. Watching my parents play

15:00 tennis. Going down to Yamba which was the nearest beach resort to there. Going away with my father on trips. He was a magistrate and he went to dozens of smaller towns to hear court cases. And we used to pile in the back of the car. They were quite exciting trips really. Because the roads were appalling. Every time we went out we got bogged.

15:30 Those are my main recollections I think.

How many brothers and sisters?

Well I had two brothers, but one died before I was born. And my elder brother Bruce – well there were two of us – he later became a doctor – a very eminent chest physician, actually, at Royal North Shore Hospital.

16:00 And he served in the war as a regimental medical officer. So there are only two of us in the family really.

How did your older brother die?

He died of lung cancer, which is a dreadful thing to happen to a chest physician but he was a very heavy smoker. He died about twelve years ago.

And your brother who died before you were born?

He died of pneumonia

16:30 as an infant.

How did the Depression impact on your family?

It had a big impact on me and certainly on my family.

17:00 My mother seemed to be continually making sandwiches for nice gentlemen who were continually coming around looking for jobs. I think our lawn was being mowed about three days a week if you understand me and the garden tidied up about three days a week from what I thought as a young boy were nice men who were just

17:30 – couldn't get a job. Also at the school I was at I think about a third of the number of students – it was a private school. I think about a third of the number of students left in the first two or three years I was there presumably because the parents couldn't afford to pay the fees. [UNCLEAR] enough started drifting back just before I left when the Depression was nearly over.

18:00 **What do you remember of whare you lived in Sydney?**

As a child? Oh lots of things really. Sporting matches, friends, tennis parties, going to the beach, sailing,

18:30 sport I think was the most dominant recollection I have of school and outside of school sport. I wasn't much of a scholar I'm afraid.

What was the house like where you lived?

We lived in Mosman. I would say it was a comfortable suburban bungalow. I think there were four or five bedrooms.

19:00 Big verandas at the back. Nice big garden. It was a pleasant home, pleasant.

What would you do as a kid to play with your brother and friends?

Well cricket, tennis, swimming, that's about it I think.

Where would you go to go swimming?

19:30 To Balmoral beach or to the Spit baths. Do you know Mosman area at all?

A little bit.

Well that meant we had to walk up to the tram line and get on a tram to go to either Balmoral or the Spit. Not too far away – we also – as we got a bit older we used to like to hire rowing boats and row around Middle Harbour and as I mentioned my

20:00 cousin's father built him a sailing skiff and I used to love going out on that when I was invited. So I have always had a great love for water and boats and the sea. And I think that started then.

20:30 **What do you remember about your schooling?**

Quite a lot really – I started off as the youngest boy in the school at the age of eight and would you believe I won the form prize that year. And I can still remember at the school prize giving when the whole school was there plus most of the parents

21:00 and some dignitary was on the stage to give the prizes out. And the first name called was Ian Geddes so I had to walk along this great aisle. I thought I'd never get there to get to the stage and receive the form prize to the delight of my parents. But I'm afraid I never repeated that. That was a one only. I made some very good friends at school.

21:30 And most of them are dead now unfortunately but I enjoyed school – I enjoyed school very much. The side of the school I liked the most was the sporting side. I won't deny that. But I learned a lot. I think we had some fine teachers from which I also learned a lot outside the classroom. I think it was a good school. I think it had good traditions and I think it tried very hard to instil us,

22:00 quite apart from Latin and French and geography, with a right outlook on life. I sang in the choir for a couple of years. Schools are very different. I think we went to chapel three days a week there. It was a Church of England school. I'm sure they don't do that now. Religion has become a little less popular if I can put it that way.

22:30 As I got to be senior in the school and became a prefect and played in the first fifteen and in the eight – those were great days. I loved that. A bit of egotism there of course.

What did you want to be when you were at school? What ambitions did you have?

Nothing specifically. My father was anxious for me to become either a barrister or a doctor. But I wasn't interested

23:00 and this is an excuse really but I just felt, as did most of my peers, that there was a war coming and what was the use. The first thing I did when I left school actually was to join the surf club down here at Palm Beach. That was in nineteen thirty eight. And that was one of the wisest moves in my life. I've had some wonderful times down there.

23:30 I think that looking back on my education I could have got a lot more out of it if I'd applied myself more to it. But I guess it just makes me and average boy really.

What signs were there from your perspective that war was coming?

What signs were there? Oh the papers were full of them.

24:00 Full of talk about Hitler and his treatment of the Jews and of course later on when he went into Czechoslovakia and Poland and Austria and there didn't seem to be any doubt about it and of course the British Prime Minister Mr Chamberlain, was it? Went over and saw Herr Adolph and came back and said, "There'll be peace in our time." Which of course there wasn't.

24:30 We just felt that. Sydney University Regiment was chock a block [full] with young men who felt exactly the same way as I did. That the war was coming. Let's get into it now.

How did you choose what you wanted to do at university?

How did I choose it? I relied heavily on the advice of my father who said that – economics I studied – that economics was a good [UNCLEAR] course.

25:00 Useful education. No matter what you do, the knowledge of economics is worthwhile. In the event of course I was only there for a year. I could have gone back after I left the army but I didn't bother.

So when did you join the Sydney University Regiment?

I would say it

25:30 was in February 1939. About four months after I left school.

Could you tell me about that regiment and what you did for training?

I can't give you the exact number of people in it but I would think there were about eight hundred people in it. They were all undergraduates – there were a few graduates who were the officers and so on.

26:00 The first camp we went to I think was at Holsworthy. The second one we went to was Menangle Park. I don't think there was one vehicle in the battalion. All the transport was by horse or by horse limbers [drays]. A popular job we always applied for when we had to go on route marches and so forth was to be a brake man

26:30 in the limbers. That meant you rode at the back and if you came to a steep hill you had to hop out onto the road and wind the brake on but that was better than marching. One of my first jobs in the regiment was to be the CO's [commanding officer's] horse holder. That was a very onerous duty. I had to stand outside his tent and look after his horse. I have very grand ideas about the army – if I am waffling

27:00 just cut me off – but I learned at school some poems about the army. The mid Victorian sort of stuff – about Horatius holding the gate at Rome and Sir Henry Newbold, I think it was, wrote a poem,

\n[Verse follows]\n "To set the cause above renown.\n

To love the game beyond the prize.\n To honour when you strike him down\n

27:30 The foe that comes with field a seized.\n

To count the life of battle dear\n And dear the land that gave you birth.\n But dearer still the brotherhood\n That binds the brave of all the earth."\n

I've never forgotten it. I had that tucked away in the back of my mind and I got a bit of a shock when I joined Sydney University Regiment. And I think the first task I was given was kitchen fatigue,

28:00 where I peeled potatoes all day. They were a good bunch of fellows. My section officer was Roden Cutler. Later VC [Victoria Cross] winner and Governor of New South Wales. Yes. They were good fellows.

What was Cutler like?

I found him easy enough to

28:30 get along with. I was a private soldier and he was a lieutenant so we didn't become buddy buddies. "Yes sir no sir," was my reply normally. He was good, fair, and on the ball. Strangely enough he worked for my father in those days in the public trust office and I think he took it easy on me probably for that reason.

What was the

29:00 **discipline like in the regiment?**

On Australian standards pretty good I'd say. There was never very strict discipline in the militia as it was known. For a lot of reasons. One of the main reasons was I think the senior officers thought if they were too strict on the discipline, the people would lose interest.

29:30 Lose interest in the unit if you follow that.

Was there a sense amongst the officers then that they were training you for war?

I think so. I think there was an awareness. We certainly talked about it often enough what will happen when the war starts and there were the greatest rumours, you know. We were all going to become officers overnight

30:00 and we were all going to do this and that. I think there was an acute awareness. The biggest problem of course was a shortage of equipment. As I mentioned, no vehicles at all. We were hardly ready for war.

What personal equipment were you given in the regiment? What equipment would you have personally?

Boots, putties, trousers, jacket,

30:30 greatcoat, hat, that's about it.

And in terms of weapons.

Oh I'm sorry. Yes. The Lee Enfield rifle which had probably seen service at Gallipoli. In other words they were pretty ancient old rifles. And the bayonet.

How much did the Anzac tradition

31:00 **mean to you at that time?**

I think that it was the shining light that we all aspired to. I think it had a big influence really. As young and impressionable boys perhaps we thought, 'I wonder if we'll ever get to that level of performance?' I think we had forgotten – we overlooked some of the unpleasant side of it.

31:30 The shocking number of casualties and so on and rather looked at the glory of it. I see nothing wrong with that really. But yes they were an inspiration to us I think.

Did your family know people who served in World War I?

Yes they did. My father didn't but three of his brothers did and

32:00 on my mother's side I think three of her brothers did and one was killed at Gallipoli. There was a general awareness of war and the problems of war which was deeply stamped into the community by the Depression of course when all these fine young men came back from winning the war and couldn't get jobs.

32:30 That was the sad. The CO of Sydney University Regiment was a gentleman by the name of Windeyer who later I met up with – he was a brigade commander in 9th Division.

33:00 And I think his son later commanded the regiment as well. I think he became a judge actually. A fine man.

What do you remember of war breaking out, of war being declared?

Well the Sydney University Regiment was called up about ten days before war started or war was declared. In other words they knew it was coming and

33:30 we were given the job of guarding vital installations in Sydney. Specifically the company that I was with were sent to guard oil terminals. I'm just trying to think what it would be – near where The Rocks are – not The Rocks, where – on the harbour side at any rate, back there somewhere.

34:00 And we were at the Shell Oil terminal and this was to guard against sabotage and almost as soon as that aspect was over we went strait into camp from Menangle to Holsworthy I think it was to be smartened up and got more ready for war.

34:30 **How did they smarten you up?**

I think the intensity and the seriousness and the whole attitude towards the regiment changed significantly. Because war had started and it wasn't a game any more. It was something that we would probably all become involved in. Yes – I noticed, and I'm sure everyone else did, a very big difference.

35:00 Not that we all became little angels but I think we paid more attention to what they were trying to teach us and I think the discipline tightened up.

So where were you when war was declared?

I was at the front gate of the Shell Oil Pyrmont place – at the front gate with my rifle when word came though that war had been declared and if fifty motorcars passed me that night

35:30 everyone of them stopped and said, "Hey did you know it's started." So I was standing on sentry at the gate of the Shell Oil depot at Pyrmont.

Well did anything happen that night?

I think it was that night or the next night someone did try and get in. We never found them. We

36:00 rang through as we were supposed to because the soldiers had no rights over civilians. That's the right of the police but not the military. So we did what we were told and a couple of car loads of police arrived and searched everywhere but no one found anything. But they certainly tried to get in. There was no question about that.

How did your parents respond to war being declared?

36:30 Sadly I think. I think they felt that both my brother and I would join the army or go into the services. Both had had the sadness of losing brothers in World War I. And both had a mature adult understand of what wars were like and what sorrows and tragedies and

37:00 unfortunate situations they could occur. But they made no attempt to stop us. I think they felt that it was the right thing to do was to join up.

37:30 **When you heard the news about war being declared what thoughts did you have about what you would do and what actions you would take?**

Nothing too specific. At that stage I didn't know that I was going to Duntroon and at that stage I didn't know whether I was going to the RAF or not.

38:00 I think the specific thoughts I had was I wondered when and I think I was quite excited at the prospect

actually. That's why I joined the army and it's like joining a football club and not playing, isn't it. If you follow that logic.

What did you think war would be like?

I didn't have a clear idea.

38:30 My main knowledge of warfare was related to World War I and France and Gallipoli and the Middle East. Beersheba and places. I had some half baked idea of jumping out of trenches with fixed bayonets and charging. Or galloping across the desert waving a sword. Nothing too specific. I don't think I had pondered too long.

39:00 I'm sure none of my friends did either. I didn't ponder too long the prospect of having a leg blown off or being killed. I think it was exciting.

What knowledge did you have of the world at that age?

Of the world? Very limited. Unlike the lucky children of today who all seem to go overseas.

39:30 All of my grand children have had at least two overseas trips. They've seen more of the world in two years than I saw in sixty years, I guess. My knowledge of the world was limited to a study of British history. We did more British history at school than we did Australian history. I had a rough idea where Germany was, France was, Belgium, Russia. I knew that India was a place where there was a lot of dark people.

40:00 And that the British ran as a colony – pretty sketchy view really.

What kinds of thoughts did you have that this was fighting a war for Britain?

I thought that was right. I thought we were part of the empire and no, that side of it I never gave a second thought to it really.

40:30 If you follow what I mean.

Tape 2

00:30 **Brigadier you mentioned on the other tape that you wanted to join the air force. What was the reason?**

Oh I think it was the prospect of getting into an aeroplane and flying around and dropping bombs and shooting at other planes. It was a pretty exciting thing in those days. Weren't that many aircraft about

01:00 really and for someone to be a pilot of an aircraft was a pretty prestigious sort of pass time. And also it was a chance to go and live in England and train with the RAF over there. That's about it.

Did the air force have glamour attached to it?

Oh I think so, yes.

01:30 I think they always did during the World War II – I think, you know, I suppose the most glamorous fellow in the World War II was the spitfire pilot, wasn't it? This is before your time. Gallant men and did a wonderful job but yes, fighter pilots were big-time, big-time.

Very dangerous.

I'm not sure that it was any more dangerous than being a forward scout in an infantry platoon actually.

02:00 But oh yes – you took your chances.

In regard to that conversation you had with Major Woodward. What were his reasons for persuading you to peruse a career via Duntroon?

Well I can't bee too precise but I think his point was you don't know much about it, which was true.

02:30 Your country needs you which was partially true. He knew a lot about the Australian Army. He knew something about me because of his nephew and he knew quite a lot about Duntroon and he thought it would be good for both of us. In the event, as I told you, he said it would be six months and it turned out to be two and a half years but there it was.

03:00 **To what extent when you applied to Duntroon did you anticipate having a career as long as you've had or did you think, 'well I will serve for my country during the course of this conflict and then afterwards I might do something else'?**

Well I did think about that and I thought, "Well if I get a commission I will serve during the war and then I'll see what happens. If I like it I'll stay on. If not I'll get out."

So what was the application process

03:30 **for Duntroon? What did that involve?**

A fairly comprehensive medical examination. A psychological test and an interview between four frighteningly serious decorated gentlemen sitting behind a table all looking very grim about things. And they asked a lot of questions about likes and dislikes and how

04:00 we filled in our time and so on.

How did they test you psychologically?

I think it's – it's one of those IQ [intelligence quotient] tests. You know, you get a couple of pages of questions you have to answer and you had a brief talk to a psychologist. Army still uses the same system. I think most big firms do don't they when they are employing people. Did you have one?

04:30 **A psych test?**

Not that I can remember but they probably integrate it into the interview now. I'm a great believer in it and my sons all – when they were getting towards the end of their schooling went along to an industrial psychologist who made recommendations as to their future employment as he saw it and they are pretty accurate really.

05:00 **What made men good officer material back then for Duntroon? What were they looking for do you think?**

Guts and determination. I think an ability to inspire men to do dangerous things. I think leadership, and by leadership, I mean influencing a group of people to do – successfully achieve and aim whilst retaining their confidence.

05:30 I don't think those principles have changed in a thousand years actually.

So how did you receive the news that you'd been accepted?

For Duntroon? I think I was pleased. I had been up to Duntroon with the school rugby team. As it turned out I had a very different idea to the realities there. I rather got the impression when I

06:00 was up with the school rugby team that someone would wake me in the morning with a cup of tea and tell me my horse was outside ready for a canter. Well it wasn't quite like that.

What were your first impressions and how was it different to that genteel image you had?

Very different and I think I was about

06:30 one of many few – I would say only two or three people in my class had left school a year before. I had left school for a year when I went there. So most of them were school boys arriving and I felt more mature than they did and I thought the disciplinary nonsense they went on with was appalling. I thought it was childish actually. So I found it more difficult to

07:00 settle down than the little school boys who sort of – they may not have liked it very much but they just accepted it as part of the system.

Can you give me some examples of that disciplinary nonsense?

Yes. You had to jump to attention every time you were spoken to by a senior cadet.

07:30 If he didn't like what you were doing he'd send you for a mile run and come back. You had to sit up in the dining room like a statue. You had to turn on hot bathes for the senior cadets. You couldn't go into the bathroom for a shower until they had used all the hot water. That sort of thing. And there was an initiation ceremony that was

08:00 a little physical, not too bad.

Can you tell me about that initiation ceremony and what happened?

Oh we were just raced around unclothed, around the gymnasium and they threw water and other objects at us and flicked us with towels. Pretty childish stuff really.

Were there boys that didn't adapt or didn't cope very well with that

08:30 **intensive –**

Yes there were and several of them left. Not at their own request but they packed it in I guess. Yes. In a distorted sort of way I think the army was using the system or relying on the system to help them weed out people who couldn't take it.

09:00 **How would you be aware that there were men that wouldn't cope with that?**

Oh by their attitude. Morale, that sort of thing.

’ How was the structure of the course at Duntroon affected by the war?

09:30 Well in the time that I was there very little. Very little. As I said we were still doing equestrian training a year after the war had started. Some of the field engineering work we were doing was modelled on the lines of the trenches they’d dug in France during World War I.

10:00 I’d say it took Duntroon about eighteen months to get modern and of course there was a big equipment shortage so we didn’t get too much new equipment. The senior officers there of course had all been – these are the instructors had all been in World War I and it’s only natural that their instinctive reactions

10:30 to a military situation were related to that experience. And I think that they found it a bit hard to understand blitzkriegs and hundreds of tanks coming down and massive air raids and so on. Ye, I think they were out of date.

Was there a sense at the time that their techniques were out of date?

11:00 Well amongst the cadets there was because we read the newspaper and hear about the blitzkrieg coming in through Belgium and France. As I say we’d be going down to the riding school which gave us a sense that things were a little not quite modern – I’ll put it that way.

So how and when did it change?

11:30 I think it was improving a bit after a year, after I had been there for a year and modern equipment came through and a few of the younger instructors had had a chance to see the great wide world and introduced a new line of thinking in the instruction we were getting.

Did you have exposure at the school

12:00 **to people who were returning from the war or people who had hands on experience.**

At the very end of my time as a cadet a few had come back, yes.

And what was the feedback. What was the tone of their stories and how the war was progressing?

Not good. Of course that was forty-two when I left. The Japanese had just come into the war. There had been a disaster in Singapore

12:30 and throughout South East Asia and also things weren’t going too well in the middle east. It wasn’t until after El Alamein and so on that things started to improve there. I can’t remember the dates exactly. I can’t even remember the date of the El Alamein battle. But before that we were continuously retreating and so the war wasn’t going too well.

13:00 **You mentioned on the last tape that you did identify it as being a battle for Britain. How did your opinion of the war chance once the Japanese had advanced through the Malayan peninsula and had taken a hold of the Pacific?**

Well I think the immediate reaction of most people was the homeland’s under threat.

13:30 But our troops were brought back from the Middle East, as you know. That took time but the Japanese got to within a few miles of Port Moresby. Port Moresby was an Australian colony. Darwin had been bombed. Yes I think there was acute awareness that we were up against a pretty tough situation. We knew the Americans were coming in but it took the Americans some time. They weren’t

14:00 quite – they weren’t ready for war. And, you know, it took about a year or so before we started turning the tide. Yes, I regarded it as a fairly critical situation. If that’s answering your question.

Given how critical

14:30 **the situation was in terms of Australia’s security what level of frustration was there while you were at Duntroon that you were in a college while there was a war to be fought?**

An intense feeling of frustration. That’s the only way to describe it. In fact two or three cadets went over the fence and joined the AIF under a different name.

15:00 I would say the morale of cadets was low. Mainly for that reason. They had joined the army to fight the war. And here was Japan threatening our country and we were still doing physics and chemistry and other academic subjects – yes. I’d say morale was low. Frustrated.

In hind sight looking back what do you think the reasons were for

15:30 **not shortening the course and accelerating the preparation of young officers?**

I have no idea. I along with several other cadets applied to be discharged from Duntroon on the grounds that we wanted to go to war. Those applications were all refused. The instructors,

16:00 good men and true no doubt, must have known about the frustration of the cadets because they were

frustrated themselves. Many of the instructors wanted to get away and go to the war as well. So it wasn't a happy place.

How did they teach you leadership skills?

Duntroon?

16:30 I think their main teaching medium was teaching by example. Not by instruction. But if you were made a – in an exercise say you represent an infantry platoon sergeant they would correct you if you made bad decisions and so on but there was no formal

17:00 going into a classroom or a group and talking about the principles of leadership. And I have never forgotten that because I was confronted with the – to my delight actually – with the job of training national service officers back in sixty-four, sixty-five. And I remember when I first got the staff together I said, "We are not going to run this like they ran Duntroon."

17:30 Particularly in regard to leadership and we spent a lot of time trying to instruct cadets on the principles and the practises of leadership. It was a dominant factor in our curriculum actually.

What was different about it specifically?

Well we had formal instruction on leadership and

18:00 specially discussions – getting them talking about what they thought leadership was all about and correcting their ideas. And by, of course, giving them jobs on exercises where they had to be leaders. Difficult jobs to do and they had to run the show and get the group to complete the task. We had a

18:30 – we grabbed the idea from the Americans actually but we built a special leadership complex where about ten cadets would be put in a situation almost insoluble situation like getting a group over a mine field and all you had was a couple of coils of rope and a few bits of wood. And they had to work it all out themselves

19:00 and they had the fellow who was the leader had to give them instructions and a big part of leadership was, of course, as you know, is supervision. You can give the orders but unless you supervise them, you are still not leading really. We spent a lot of time on that. A lot of time.

At what point during the course at Duntroon did you choose your corps?

I think it was in about the last

19:30 three months and we were asked to nominate the corps we would like to do and I think we were asked to give three choices and the basis on which they made their decisions I've got no idea. But I suspect it was related to marks we got on various military examinations. The vast majority went to infantry. Oh that's also a salient point.

20:00 There were more infantry than any other soldiers in the Australian army so the majority would logically go to infantry as well. I was attracted to armour because it looked as though that was the battle winner of the future and as soon as I arrived in armour I realized this was the one to get out of because all of the big battles of armour in the Middle East we weren't

20:30 taking part in any more. We were all back in Australia fighting the Japanese and you can't deploy many tanks in jungle warfare.

What knowledge did you have at the time of what the technology of tanks were that were available to the Germans?

Very little. Practically none.

21:00 We had an armoured school functioning when I left Duntroon. And they had a few American tanks there. But when we were at Duntroon our knowledge about tank tactics, the employment of tanks, and so on was – the politest way I can put it was skimpy.

How old were you when you graduated?

21:30 Twenty-one.

How confident and prepared did you feel to assume a command position?

I felt quite confident. I found things weren't quite as I expected. I thought I'd say, "Do this, do that," and that would be it.

22:00 But I found that the soldiers always have a point of view and they don't mind letting you know what it is. So leadership, persuasion, came into it a lot. And the soldiers – the first soldiers I had the command of were very badly trained. They'd all been called up. Most of them didn't want to be in the army at any rate

22:30 and they were all cocky farmers from Gippsland. Do you know where Gippsland is? Victoria. And God,

all the discussion was about cows and horses – This is when they were talking amongst themselves. A lot of them couldn't write. Some of them had never worn boots in their life. Yes, it was very different from my ideas of what I would be doing. However I

23:00 think it did me good.

We talk to lots of people who talk about the cultural differences between the British and the Australian Army – to what extent do you think your expectations were shaped by a British model while you were at Duntroon in terms of discipline or reluctance to do certain things by Australian soldiers.

There was no question

23:30 that the basic approach to military instruction at Duntroon throughout the Australian army when war broke out was based on the British system. No question about it. I think we only had about five thousand soldiers in Australia and I think that the British system of discipline was very different

24:00 in the sense of shouting and roaring and yelling was more the vogue than, "Come on fellows, let's get it done." If you follow that. But the basic principles of war and discipline were based on the British system. Most of the Australian instructors

24:30 in those days had either served in Britain with the British army in India. And yes, that shaped their outlook on life.

Were you in the armoured corps when you had to train the blokes from Gippsland?

Yes.

So what kind of powers of

25:00 **persuasion did you use? I mean, how did you shape those men in terms of becoming soldiers and following instructions?**

Well I did my best. I found that it was very necessary to explain what we were doing and why we were doing it. I found it was very necessary to get them

25:30 involved rather than just stand up and talk to them. In other words we were moving along a road in tanks and we were coming to a defile or something like that it was worthwhile stopping the whole show and saying, "We are coming to that defile. That's an obvious place to have an ambush. How do you think we should do it?" And this helped me because I wasn't too sure myself how we should do it.

26:00 And you got a lot of stupid ideas but you got some good ones too. So I think it was a matter of friendly persuasion to a large extent. I would like to think there was a bit of leadership involved. I certainly learned a lot.

Given your background and that you were a young officer recently graduated from

26:30 **RMC [Royal Military College], how did you bridge the cultural gap with these men, some of whom as you said couldn't write and had no shoes?**

Oh not all of them. I think in my troop I had about four fellows who couldn't write and about five, four or five who had never worn boots. Oh not the others were not – they were good solid country kids.

27:00 The culture gap – I just to the best of my ability talked to them in terms that they would be used to. I tried to avoid high falutin' [educated, upper class] expressions and so on and I tried to give examples related to their occupations. You know, if you had a problem with a cow that's stuck in a bog how

27:30 would you get it out? Can you use that sort of technique for getting a truck out of a bog? I was no military genius by any means but I found it was necessary to get to their level to get things done.

How was your training and preparations effected by the specific conditions of the conflicts and battles that were happening in the war at that time?

28:00 I think that over shadowed the whole activity. I think we knew the war was going on. We knew we had to be prepared for battle. We read and were instructed in by our superiors about the experiences the British had had in tank warfare. We read and were instructed in

28:30 the way the Germans tackled the whole problem. I don't think I'd be disloyal to the Australian army if I said that in those days our knowledge of tank warfare was zilch and for very good reasons. We had never had any experience in it. And the information we got about blitzkriegs and so on was something we had never participated in.

29:00 Either on the offensive or defensive side and it wasn't until Australian soldiers started coming back from the Middle East that this information started to filter through into the Australian army.

What kind of tanks were you training with?

We were training with the honey tank, which is a light tank

29:30 about twenty tons, I think, with a small gun and General Lee tanks which was a bigger tank, crew of seven I think from memory. I should mention one thing which is not a boast but you mentioned the cultural difference and so on. Whilst I was at Puckapunyal this was all taking place – the whole brigade went on strike. Have I mentioned this?

Could you tell me about

30:00 **that in as much detail?**

That was, you know, I was absolutely appalled to think that soldiers. My idea was that if a soldier said, "I won't do this and I won't come on parade," you took them down to the corner and shot him. Not quite. At any rate is lasted about three days and the whole fuss was about someone had promised these soldiers leave after a period of time and they hadn't

30:30 got it. And there were a few rabble rousers amongst the troops and they persuaded them all to go out on strike. Pretty exciting on occasions. I was a town picket officer one night and one of my jobs was to close the bar, which is always a difficult job of course. And my picket of course were all people who were involved in the

31:00 strike at any rate and they weren't much help. So I passed word down to brigade headquarters saying that I was having difficulty closing the bar and would they send someone down to assist me. And the brigadier arrived. The big shot. And he got up on the counter of the bar and he called – excuse my bad language. He called them a lot of yellow livered bastards.

31:30 "Good men dying for you in the Middle East, and here you are going on strike, not doing your duties, disregarding orders you were given, simply because you missed out on a couple of days of leave. Now get back to your lines and shut up." And I thought, "Man alive. They'll pull him to bits." They all dropped their heads and walked off. Never forgotten that. That was an exciting time in an unpleasant way.

Can you tell me about

32:00 **that job as the town picket, what that would involve?**

That's a group of soldiers who are formed into a, let's say twenty men. And it's their job to maintain order in the camp if need be. So if a fight breaks out down in one of the huts they've got to go down and sort it out. They are responsible for security and seeing that

32:30 tank lines and so on were not being sabotaged or interfered with. Their job to close down wet canteens. Their job to see that all the lights were out at certain times. Pickets, town pickets and so on are as old as the army really. Even the Romans.

So when you had to close down the bar, was that at the wet canteen

33:00 **or at the pub in town?**

No that was a canteen built in the camp and there would be half a dozen of them I suppose. Like a large bar with I suppose a hundred and fifty, two hundred soldiers getting beer.

How rough a place was Puckapunyal?

Pretty rough. There were galvanized iron buildings.

33:30 A lot of the buildings had been built in World War I so there was nothing very smart about it. Facilities were rough but usable. Very uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable. There were no beds for example. You slept on the palliasse, which was a hessian bag filled with straw.

34:00 Puckapunyal was very cold in winter and very dusty in summer. Yes I don't think anyone looked back with great fondness about their stay in Puckapunyal.

How rough were the men? Were there fights and things?

Oh yes. Always are. About a variety of subjects, a lot of them about Australian rules football actually because Victoria is a great place for Australian

34:30 rules football and chaps would have a couple of beers and say well I'm for Collingwood and the other fellow said well St Kilda will thrash them and the next thing you know words have turned into actions. Nothing too serious. The worst town pickets I had anything to do with were Cairns much later on.

At this stage, Brigadier, how confident did you feel that

35:00 **the Australian forces had what it took to face off against a Japanese invasion?**

I had every confidence. It never occurred to me that we wouldn't cope except for one thing, that the Japanese had stolen a great march. They were within flying distance of Darwin. They were near Port

Moresby and the problem

35:30 getting soldiers there and of training them for fighting in that environment was a big one – and but I don't think it ever occurred to me that we were going to lose the war, if that's what you are getting at. I think the Australian soldier is a great chap but he's got to be lead and he's got to be trained. And given training an the leadership he'll perform some pretty remarkable

36:00 deeds actually.

So can you tell me about what happened when you left Puckapunyal?

Well the regiment was sent up to Queensland and I asked for a transfer from the regiment because I wanted to go to the war. The only way to go to the war at that time, you had to go through Canungra which was the jungle training centre.

36:30 Every soldier, be he a major or a private had to spend twenty-eight days in simulated environment to what he was going to find in New Guinea. For example you had one hot shower in twenty-eight days. Everyone trotted down to the river every morning and washed in the river. It was a great place. It did more for the Australian army, I think, than people

37:00 are prepared to admit. At any rate I did the course there and then they made me an instructor there. And then again I was applying for transfers north and I finished up in 9th Division in the commando squadron.

What sort of a blow was it when they made you an instructor at Canungra?

Well the blow was that I was staying

37:30 there but, you know, you've got to reel with the punches a bit. You know, people get sick of you coming along and saying, "I want to go." And in fact they tell you quite rudely, these are my superiors. "Go back and do your job. You'll be told when you are going."

38:00 I find all instruction is satisfactory if you are doing it properly. I think there's tremendous satisfaction to get some students, teach them what you can and find they are learning and it's doing them good. Always believed that and my experience after Canungra –

38:30 well, I had more experiences in instruction after leaving Canungra. And I got great satisfaction out of it.

What sort of knowledge was there at Canungra of Japanese warfare and tactics and what kind of an enemy they were.

Oh a fair amount. A fair amount. The – a lot of the instructors when I was there, particularly the

39:00 sergeants had been there and had done it and Japanese ruses and booby traps and methods of fighting and particularly emphasis on their determination and the Japanese had a remarkably convenient religion for soldiers being killed for the Emperor was the greatest thing that could ever happen to them. Well that's not quite one of my principles.

39:30 In other words they were a tough determined enemy and as much as could be provided about their tactics and so on was provided. But the biggest, the biggest emphasis at Canungra was living in the country, how to exist. How to manage your life and your bed

40:00 and blanket in teeming rain and dig holes in the ground and how to – they must have used ton after ton of gelignite to simulate battle. Battle simulation it was called. Yes it was good realistic training. I think there were fifteen thousand people there when I was there. It was a big organization.

40:30 I didn't enjoy it but I thought it was a good place if you follow that.

Tape 3

00:30 **What kind of conditions, Brigadier, were there at Canungra that were similar to what you would be facing in New Guinea?**

Well the basic accommodation was tents. They had showers but the showers weren't enclosed – they were just, you know, a pipe coming out of the ground with a shower rose on it.

01:00 There were no sit down meals places. You know, you couldn't go into a building and have a meal. As I said every morning we would double down to the river to wash and shave. They tried to make it – what they tried to get over to the soldiers was that in operations you are going to live it rough

01:30 and get used to it and they certainly achieved that. And whoever told you that New Guinea was far better than Canungra probably is quite correct but I would be brave enough to suggest that without Canungra they mightn't have come back from New Guinea.

What leadership skills did you learn being an instructor?

02:00 At Canungra I would simplify it by saying that it was a place where you had to be very firm but you had to be very fair and the biggest leadership problem you had was fellows packing it in. Crying – "I can't do it, sir. I can't do it!" And persuading

02:30 them they could do it. I think you had to lead by example. In other words when you went on the more arduous march and obstacle courses and so on you had to go first and show them that it wasn't impossible. Giving clear instructions, supervision, but I think firm but fair I would say is probably the

03:00 biggest lesson I learned there.

Where did you go from Canungra?

To the Atherton Tablelands, at a place called Ravenshoe. The Atherton Tablelands are where I think at one stage in the war they had sixty thousand soldiers there. The 6th, 7th, and 9th Division which I think were the basic divisions all went through there at one time or another.

03:30 And it is due west of Cairns. Are you generally familiar? And there were the basics of a camp. They put up a few mess huts and a few latrines and so on. But everyone lived in tents. It was way out in the country of course. There were

04:00 no big attractions to get soldiers to nick out of the fence at night to go down to the local boozer or anything like that. I rather enjoyed the climate there. A bit chilly in winter and a bit hot in summer but it is a beautiful countryside there. Rather ruined by soldiers there of course.

How did the local population respond to soldiers being in the area?

I had very little to do with them. I would think

04:30 some of the local population thought it was marvellous because they must have made fortunes selling – perhaps the publicans but selling food, fresh bread, that sort of thing. I think they were a bit upset probably when they saw their properties trampled into the ground but they knew they would be compensated for it. I think there

05:00 was a feeling throughout Australia mainly that the boys deserve it and there's a war going on and within reasonable limits we'll support it as much as we can. I certainly never had any dealings with a property owner who was upset by anything. We always went though the motions of approaching a property owner if we wanted to go onto his property of course. Which was

05:30 quite often.

What was your role at Ravenshoe at that time?

When I first arrived in the unit, I became intelligence officer. Now I should explain: a commando's only got about a hundred and twenty soldiers in it. It's a very small unit. It is commanded by a major. It has three troops, or it did in those days, which are commanded by captains. And

06:00 the basic group – the section was commanded by a sergeant. That would be about twelve or fourteen men. My job was intelligence officer. I don't know why I was given that. It was to provide them with as much information as I could about what was happening in the war and what Japanese techniques were and that sort of thing. To keep them in touch

06:30 **So how did you gather that intelligence information?**

It was passed down to me from higher, from above. There was a mass of stuff coming through in those days of course. This was pretty late in the war. And I forget what they called them now but if the Japanese used any new sort of technique it was publicised as quickly as possible to all involved.

07:00 **What kind of information was coming back that you were passing on?**

Well I'll try and give you a simple example. We were told that a Japanese ruse was to leave a sword like that, a samurai on a track. Knowing

07:30 that the soldiers coming would rush down and pick it up. But attached to the sword was a cord leading to a grenade so probably several soldiers who had all wanted to souvenir it would all be killed at the same time. That's the simplest sort of example I can give. So immediately we started training sessions where every soldier was

08:00 put through a simple situation with a Japanese sword on the track and told – attached to a firecracker and so on. And strangely enough, old Poncho Ross who was one of the officers in the unit was killed that was and left on an island. And he'd been and instructor. Strange, very strange.

What role was the commando unit going to have

08:30 **in New Guinea.**

The simple way of describing it was long range patrolling. If the main battle is going along at X the commando squadron would be patrolling twenty or thirty miles around the perimeter of X. Assuming that it was feasible. Long range of patrolling I think is the simplest way of providing it. And if a situation

09:00 arose where there was a small enclave of enemy somewhere they would be sent in on a raid to deal with that.

So how were their skills different or how was the training different to an ordinary battalion?

Well theoretically they were much more highly trained and there was a greater number of NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and officers to the number of men.

09:30 This was based on British army experience where the British felt that the maximum number of men that one lieutenant can properly train and manage in battle was about sixteen. An infantry platoon with one officer had thirty and we were close to sixteen. And in an infantry platoon a section of six or eight men was controlled by

10:00 a corporal and a commando was controlled by a sergeant, in other words a much more experienced man. Digressing just a little, there are some wonderful stories about the operations of the commando squadron in Timor and in New Guinea during World War II. Miles behind the enemy line. We didn't have anything quite as dramatic as that but that was

10:30 they were great units and small enough that virtually everyone knew everyone else.

So how keen were you at this stage to be able to get over to the war?

Bursting my buttons. Well I had waited a long time. God. Really. Yes, mad keen. Mad keen.

And how long were you at Ravenshoe for?

11:00 I find it difficult to be precise but I think about six months.

And where did you go after Ravenshoe?

Well we went to Borneo.

Did you spend some time in Cairns?

In Cairns. Yes we did. We had to go down for amphibious training. Amphibious training being the training that is necessary to get on to a ship and then get off it again in landing craft

11:30 come down on scrambling nets and things of that nature. And that was all done at Trinity Beach, just north of Cairns. I think two divisions went through before they went north. Amphibious warfare of course became a very big factor in both the American and the Australian operations because about the only way to get to the war was by sea. And

12:00 Amphibious training was all part of the game. And it was not only the soldiers of course getting their equipment, their vehicles and so on onto the ships. We never found a cure for seasickness.

So could you tell me about that time in Cairns doing that training. What do you remember of your time there?

Yes. We lived in very arduous conditions in

12:30 sand hills full of sand flies, and dirty dusty sand. Windswept, terribly hot of course as Cairns normally is and each day the soldiers would be taken down and loaded into some sort of landing craft. There were a variety of them ranging from ones that would take about twenty to ones that would take about two hundred.

13:00 They would be practised in getting themselves onboard, getting themselves off the ship. Getting from one large landing craft into a small one to go into the beach. They would be practised in what to do when they got near the beach, coming out of the landing crafts, sprinting out. That was about it I think.

Did you spend time in Cairns itself?

13:30 Officially not much. But I and a few others now and again we went in there. It was a pretty exciting place Cairns. There were Royal Marines from Britain who were the crew of some of the big troop transports there. There were Americans who were the crews of the American ships that were there and the Australians and mix those three together

14:00 and pour a lot of beer on top of it you do have some exciting situations.

Could you tell me about some of the things that went on.

Oh I can't tell you much except that there was a lot of brawling and fighting and I can remember one particular instant I was involved in – in that instant there was an other ranks club in Cairns and a brawl broke out there. I suppose there were two hundred

14:30 soldiers involved and I fortunately was only on the periphery to this but they were all inside the building and they were getting pretty sticky. There were a few fights breaking out and some wise gentleman called the fire brigade and they hosed them out. It might have made a mess of the hotel of course.

What were the fights over?

15:00 Oh I don't know – whatever groups of – differences of opinion about the – the Yanks seemed to have too much money, and too much sex. The Tommies [English] seemed to object to that and the Australians quite often went in with the Tommies against the Americans because the Americans had more.

15:30 Everyone seemed to forget that we were all trying to work for the one objective. But nothing too serious. But unfortunately especially with a mix of alcohol people get a bit excited. I had some pretty exciting times myself. I have been thrown out of doors and windows and so on by fighting soldiers. But that's all part of the game really.

16:00 **What do you think was specific about the mood and the atmosphere in North Queensland at that time that lent itself to those kinds of brawls?**

I think that the Australian forces there were well trained. I think they were anxious to go because they knew they were going. They weren't too sure

16:30 where they were going. I think the discipline was pretty good but it's a bit hard to explain really – even in the best of units. With a bit of alcohol you are liable to have a few brawls. And it's a bit like a game of rugby really. They are good fellows, solid fellows but someone does something the others don't like and the next thing you know you've got half a dozen forwards punching one another. They are probably the best of mates

17:00 when they come off the grounds. This is the human male I'm afraid. The general atmosphere in Queensland was – come on let's go and get the bloody thing over. That was my impression and mind you I was only a very humble lieutenant and the more senior people, most of them

17:30 are dead now, so you can't check on me. But I think they had much the same approach to it.

So could you tell me about learning that you were actually going and how those orders came through?

Rumours started and they had us going to practically every place in South East Asia. But it was pretty

18:00 easy to pick where we were going to go. We were going to go to former British colonies so that the natives in these British colonies could see the British come back to free them as apposed to the Americans coming back and them getting the kudos for freeing them. Have I explained that? At that stage the only part of South East Asia in our

18:30 general area of influence was New Guinea which was almost over, that campaign; and there was Borneo, so Borneo was the hot and rumoured tip and then we started getting books about – little leaflet things about life in Borneo and so on.

19:00 So we knew that it was – we felt sure it was Borneo but where in Borneo of course we didn't know until we got up there.

So could you walk me through that day of leaving Ravenshoe and how you actually got over to Borneo?

Well leaving Ravenshoe was – I think everyone was glad and everyone, you know, had kit inspections

19:30 fellows got new socks and new shirts and that sort of thing. All the tents had to be pulled down and all the soldiers were temporarily accommodated for a few nights in our shower and mess buildings so that we could get away. The army always starts at about dawn in the morning of course. We can't start at a respectable hour. And there were a few wild parties. I remember I was duty officer that night

20:00 and the CO called out to me. He said, "Go and tell them to stop that bloody row up in whatever it was." and I had to go up there and there were about twenty soldiers who were rotten drunk and it took me about forty-five minutes to persuade them to quieten down and go to bed. But it's one of those situations where it is no use charging in and shouting, "Attention!" and this that and the other.

20:30 It was a matter of persuasion and they were good soldiers. They just had too much to drink. We left the next day and we went to Townsville. I think we stopped at Cairns overnight and stayed somewhere. And there at Townsville we had to get on what was known as a Liberty ship which was one of those ships that the Americans were building in twenty-four hours, which was

21:00 converted from a cargo ship to a troop carrying ship. And we got on the ships in Townsville. Will I go on from that?

How did you get from Ravenshoe to Townsville?

By truck. I can't remember the details of it except travelling by truck is never terribly comfortable and it took a long time.

So what was the scene on the Townsville wharf when you were leaving?

21:30 There had been an altercation there the day before where the wharfie – the wharf labourers had walked off the job and we weren't involved in this I'm glad to say. At any rate the next day they were still off the job but they walked onto the wharf and the soldiers threw them all into the harbour.

22:00 Which I thought was great. Don't quote me on that. But it seemed a dreadful thing to all of us that wharfie were going on strike and stopping soldiers from going to war. That's what it amounted to. So we – eventually our turn came. There were several ships going. We were down on bottom board of the ship and I think it took us about twelve days to go from

22:30 Townsville to Morotai up in the Halmaheras, north East of Borneo. The ship – the conditions on the ship were pretty crude. The bunks were seven high. I don't know how much room there was per soldier. I suppose he had that much from the floor. So they are up about thirty feet and in one of the holds I

23:00 I think there were about two hundred soldiers all stacked in these bunks and it really was – it was bad enough just being there but we had been held up by a cyclone so once we got out from the reef it was quite rough and I would say that fifty percent of the soldiers were seasick. So you can imagine what the [UNCLEAR] feels like and when it quietened

23:30 down a bit we had to get working parties to get people out. These soldiers were just so seasick they had to be carried out and then we hosed out the whole place and smothered it in lisle or something, whatever, some antiseptic or clean thing to kill the smell a bit and we had to go onto American food and the Americans only had

24:00 two meals a day and the food was not to the Australian liking. It was largely spam type food and very soft bread with a lot of condiments, peanut butter and tomato sauce and so on. But that seemed to be the – that was the only item on the menu as I remember. So we were

24:30 glad to get where we were going.

Did you have convoy protection on that journey over?

Yes we did. I think – I can't criticise. I think there were about four troop transports including ourselves and I think there were about two or three naval vessels as well. Not that there was much threat of interruption in that part of the world from the Japanese

25:00 then. And they were fighting more up in the Philippines.

So what were your first impressions of Morotai.

Not good. Morotai is a typical tropical island. All the port, so called port area had been completely ruined scenically by the establishment of vast dumps of military equipment.

25:30 It was hot, it was dusty. It was certainly tropical and for many, I think I was one of them, I had never lived in the tropics amongst the palm trees. It was interesting from that point of view and to our astonishment we found after we reached our campsite which was about ten miles out of town

26:00 – or out of the port area we found that there were quite a few Japanese still on the island but they had retreated right over the other side and they weren't considered a threat but having been warned we had to do something about it so we had to man patrols and sentries and so on and take things fairly seriously. And we were there for about three weeks I think. And we did more amphibious training

26:30 to get into the American vessels that were going to take us from there to a place called Labuan Island. The ship we were travelling on was known as a landing ship, infantry, which was designed to take one American company – in other words about a hundred and forty people could live onboard. And if you've – I don't know whether you've ever lived in

27:00 close and cramped conditions. But this was the epitome of close and cramped conditions. We were literally packed in – I slept up on the bridge. I slept on the deck every night. A ship about the size of the length of a Manly Ferry I suppose it would be. And its specialty was to run up on the beach

27:30 and ramps would come down and everyone charge ashore and invade the country. But we ran PT [physical training] on that ship from dawn to dusk because we only had a space about a quarter the size of this room to do the exercises on. And the food, as I said, the American food never – I don't know why it is really but American food just doesn't appeal to Australians, that's all. Well, the American army food.

28:00 Played a lot of poker in the little wardroom we had. Tried to keep in touch with what was going on but that was not possible really. I was interested in – I have always been interested in boats. I spent a bit of time with a young American naval second lieutenant who was the captain of this ship.

28:30 And I was asking him about navigation. And he said, "How?" He said, "We don't do no navigation." He said, "I just follow the ship in front." Which worried me a bit because we ran into severe tropical storms, you know, where the rain comes down and you can't see the ship in front. And apparently that happened quite a lot on the trip that several of these American landing craft got lost.

29:00 But we made it.

How many ships were in that trip across to Labuan?

Look again I would be guessing. I would say a hundred. All sorts and sizes including warships of course to do the bombardment of the beaches. I may be exaggerating there. I'd say between

29:30 fifty and a hundred. And enough troop ships to carry what, ten thousand soldiers, I suppose.

When you were on Morotai what had been the camp site where you were living? What had that been like?

Well we were just driven out into the bush and said, "This is it, out you get." There was nothing there. We just had to, you know, hack out a –

30:00 put up our ponchos and improvise.

Did you see evidence of Japanese while you were there?

None at all. The main – Morotai was a fairly big air force base. There were quite a lot of RAAF people established there. But they as they always do, lived in luxury at the airfield

30:30 in a hut site. No. I don't think there was much of a battle for Morotai when the Americans got there actually. I don't think it was regarded as a strategic target. The only thing of importance was an airfield which was critical to General Macarthur's campaign of course. And I think the

31:00 airfield there was built by the American largely.

What kind of briefing did you have about what the landing at Labuan would be like when you were at Morotai?

Pretty adequate. We were given detailed maps with likely Japanese positions. Not only on Labuan but on the neighbouring coast

31:30 line. We were given detailed instructions about the general tactics for the battle. About the bombing that would take place and the bombardment from the warships. We were given detailed information about where the landing places were and quite detailed information about roads and tracks and

32:00 general conditions onshore – all pretty factual actually and all of the information they got had been checked out before the landing by putting ashore these clandestine soldiers who went down in a submarine and landed and had a prowl around just to make certain there were no mines either in the water or in the sea.

32:30 Or in the sand, in the beach. So I'd say our instruction about that was good.

So what do you remember of the landing? Could you run me through what happened and what you did?

Nothing very exciting. First troops to go ashore were two battalions and they did the brunt of

33:00 the fighting in the first day – we were in a reserve position and we went ashore, I would say, two or three hours after that. And we were allocated a place just off the beach and told to be ready to react if need be. And we, you know, dug pits and generally made ourselves comfortable but secure.

33:30 And I think two days after that we were told to move up to the north of the Island. And at that stage they had started work also on – there had been a Japanese airstrip on the island which had been bombed and they had to get some engineers ashore to mend the airfield so that we could bring our own aircraft

34:00 in. And we had to move through that area and take a position to the north of it. Partially to protect the people who were working on the airfield but also to establish whether there were any Japanese in that part of the island. Nothing very exciting.

And the first troops that went ashore – what was the scene for them?

34:30 They had some pretty tough battles for about two or three days. The Japanese had dug themselves in very thoroughly and they defended it as they always did with all the conviction and courage they could muster. I don't know – I can't remember how many Japanese were there but

35:00 I would say there must have been a thousand or so I suppose and they also sent out patrols and they would patrol into the area – or raiding parties really where the supplies were coming ashore. So you had to be careful, put it that way. I have laughed about the story many times when we moved in the position on about

35:30 day five. We arranged to get some of the local people to act as guides. Particularly, you know with tracks that weren't marked on the maps. And the only thing the guide really wanted was boots so I was sent back to get six pairs of boots. When I got down to where the boots were held – boots was at an

36:00 ordnance establishment where there was a pile of boots about half the size of this house and two very frightened little men who had never expected in the war to have to fire their rifle but they both had their rifles out and a Japanese patrol had arrived in the periphery of this particular depot and they were very glad to see me, so we had a bit of a battle there for a while.

36:30 At any rate the Japanese saw the wisdom of their – well they got the message that we weren't going to give away our boots and they withdrew. But it seemed such a funny story. I remember telling my grand children about it. The first time I came under direct fire in my military service I was hiding behind a pile of boots. At any rate I got the boots and I got back to the unit and

37:00 the trackers were happy and that was that.

So what was the role of your unit during that time on the island? What were you then told you had to do?

We had to patrol and find Japanese. Some of them were people who had retreated from the main scene of engagement – others were –

37:30 well, a variety of them. And it was thought there would be three or four hundred of them roaming around the island somewhere or another. So our job was to find out where they were and kill or capture them. And I think we did that reasonably successfully.

Could you tell me how a patrol works in that context?

Well

38:00 the biggest thing you always need is intelligence or information. In other words where to go to, to find what you are looking for. No one had been kind enough to say that there were Japanese at A, B, C, or D. So we spent most of our time trying to find where they might be. So the patrol of say twelve men or whatever it was would head in a general direction and look for signs

38:30 of Japanese occupation. The sign might have been rubbish, foot prints, fires burning or fire campsites, that sort of thing, caves, and it was just a matter of searching for them really. There were a few instances where they did take an initiative

39:00 and attacked one of our – sorry, not my unit, but they did attack small units that were near the airfield. But mostly I think they were concerned about getting off the island and over to the mainland. I did mention it in my story to Elizabeth Richards, but again I wrote it in

39:30 for the benefit of my grand children really. We went out on a patrol one day and we came – and we were following a track that had obviously been used by the Japanese. So we were being a bit careful. And the track seemed to finish at a large cave. We had made very little noise coming up but it seemed to be an absurdly stupid thing to do to just walk strait into the cave.

40:00 So I gave instructions for the leading group, section to use smoke and hand grenades and toss them into the cave. Which they did. [UNCLEAR] around and tossed them in. And there was a lot of 'bang bang bangs', and these great clouds of smoke coming out and then this violent waring noise and out of the cave came thousands of bats.

40:30 Not one Jap was there. But the nose of these animals coming out and everyone jumped. We got such a shock. However the Japanese had been in there and they'd got out a tunnel at the back. And we sent a patrol round the other side there and they ambushed this group of people the next day.

Tape 4

00:31 **Brigadier what was the Japanese aerial presence like when you landed?**

In?

Labuan.

Oh very limited. I think there were bombs dropped on two or three occasions but the Japanese were really then a depleted and a defeated force in that part of the world. And the main thrust of the war was up in the Philippines there and they were being

01:00 defeated so the Japanese aircraft and bombers presented no real threat at all.

Were there any suicide attacks either in the air or on land?

Not to my knowledge. None at all. I also mentioned this in my notes that we were highly amused I think the night we came ashore there a Japanese plane came over

01:30 and every gun on the island opened up on it and we were all very amused the next day to notice that all the ships in the harbour had painted on the rising sun which was an indication they'd shot down the

plane. Every one of them.

What do you remember about the first time you actually killed one of the Japanese

02:00 **enemy?**

Me personally? I never did. I never did. I fired at them but I'm not sure that I killed any though. I don't think I had many feelings at all. I believed that that's why I'm here and I had no compunction. It was him or me as far as I was concerned. No. I think that's an honest answer.

02:30 I think most soldiers are like that. I don't think they enjoy killing people but I think that when it's a matter of you or me they are glad that they did the killing and not the other way around.

When you were part of these patrols trying to mop up the wandering Japanese when you came across them how prepared were they to surrender?

03:00 They weren't prepared to surrender at all. The Japanese philosophy was that to surrender was a disgrace, an absolute disgrace. Their epitome of military behaviour was to die for the enemy and there was one particular occasion when we came on about fifteen or twenty of them moving around the side of a hill and we took up a position and

03:30 they just stayed there and fought and they were all dead in twenty minutes but they made no attempt to run away.

And then what would happen to the bodies?

Well this is a bit grisly, but there were natives of course on the island and the moment they could get near them they immediately set about

04:00 knocking the gold fillings out of the Japanese teeth, which I thought was disgusting but we couldn't stop it. I mean we weren't going to leave people there just to safeguard the Japanese teeth. And I think and I'm not sure now but I think that the natives were paid to dig graves and bury them. We never did.

04:30 I might add that that incident with the Japanese I mentioned at least four of them had committed suicide. They had been wounded and they went and killed themselves.

How did they kill themselves?

Put the muzzle of the gun in their mouth and pulled the trigger.

What physical condition were those Japanese in in Labuan.

05:00 I would say they were a bit lean. They didn't seem to be too bad actually. There was a lot of produce. I don't think they had a very good logistics system bringing them in fresh food daily but in those tropical areas things grow so easily, particularly fruit and vegetables

05:30 of certain types and I think they were getting plenty of that. I thought they were lean but most Japanese were lean people – well they used to be lean people. I thought they were in fairly good condition.

Did you come across many of their camps?

Oh, you mean built structured camps?

Just what their living conditions were like on Labuan?

Much the same as ours in the sense that they

06:00 had – they slept in tents and they dug holes for latrines. And had buckets and things for washing. That's about all. I think most soldiers lived much the same way in a field of battle if you know what I mean.

So where was your camp located exactly on the island?

Well we were in four different locations. There were three troops in A, B, C.

06:30 and a headquarters more or less centrally. A small headquarters and they would have been several miles apart I suppose but it is a bit hard to describe without giving a detailed discussion about – we were at the northern end of the island. It was not thick rainforest but was thick tropical growth

07:00 everywhere and the only breakdown on the tropical growth were the gardens and vegetable patches that the native people had made and were still working on. They seemed to be glad to see us.

As an intelligence officer how would you gather information on what the Japanese were up to on the island?

Well I would get information from the divisional headquarters giving me the bigger picture.

07:30 And I would send to divisional headquarters anything that happened in our area that would have been of importance. Sightings of Japanese casualties, number of Japanese killed and that sort of thing. It was done by radio.

What were the casualties like in your squadron?

I couldn't

08:00 give you an exact number but I would say a dozen, that's killed and wounded.

There's been a lot of conjecture over what some people call these mopping up operations at the end of the war. What's your opinion of the necessity of some of the landings like on Labuan and clearing out the remnant Japanese?

That's an odd question.

08:30 I'm tempted to give an honest answer. I'd rather duck that question. Have you asked other people this?

Yes.

Have they given answers?

Yes.

I'll go for broke. I thought it was a waste of time. The Japanese could have been left on Labuan indefinitely and starved to death. There was no point putting troops there. And we didn't really need an airfield there. As far as New Guinea is concerned

09:00 to send 6th Division up there at the end of the war was a shocking waste of time. And lives. The American attitude was land, get an airfield going and then move on. They just left the Japanese and in many places they left hundreds of Japanese. They just – the Japanese went into the scrub and they just left them there. They didn't make any

09:30 attempt to chase and kill every Japanese on these various islands. No. I would say I was very critical about the, what do you call it? Mopping up. Going back into areas that have had no strategic importance. And the only thing I will concede and I remember hearing General Blamey who was our commander at the time, talking at

10:00 staff college and I think he felt – I think, I don't know – he felt much the same way. But it was a political matter. Take New Guinea. It was very important that the New Guineans saw the Australians come back and liberate them.

How much did that have to do with exercising some colonial control?

Well they were our responsibility.

10:30 It was a colony of Australia. It was our moral and legal responsibility to look after these people. And I see the point that it – for the natives to see the 'Mother Country' or whatever you like to call it, come back after defeating those dreadful Japanese. That's a point. But there's a cost to that.

11:00 A cost in human life. I – after Labuan I went down to Sarawak in Borneo to help in the release of the Australian and British, Dutch prisoners of war and as all part of that operation I went on a wonderfully interesting trip up and down the coast of south Borneo

11:30 to advise villages, small and large, that the war was over and the rajah was coming back, Rajah Brook. I suppose you've never heard of him, have you?

Can you explain who he is?

Rajah Brook was a British, English gentleman who was sent to Borneo many years ago. And he ran the southern part of Borneo, that's Sarawak from a city called Kuching.

12:00 And he was known as the white rajah and he was a famous man and did a wonderful job as a colonizer. And Rajah Brook – he was a well known man but all the local people that I struck spoke of him with reverence. Now on that trip I did on the air/sea rescue launch I must have gone to a dozen villages up the rivers and on the coast.

12:30 All the chat was – or my little spiel I used to go on with when I arrived was that the rajah was coming back. "Hurray the rajah!" You know. It was terribly exciting. But I never once said the British are coming back. I always said the rajah was coming back. This is on advice. So the reception of – our reception there and the banishment of the Japanese was greeted with great joy.

13:00 **Do you remember what was actually in your spiel when you'd arrive at these villages?**

Oh. I introduced myself. I said that I was an Australian army officer. That I had come to Borneo

13:30 to help get rid of the Japanese. That the war was now over and that a super bomb – I never quite knew how to describe the nuclear bombs because there's no use saying to these people talking about nuclear bomb – that a very big, large, super bomb had been dropped in Japan and caused much damage and destruction there and the rajah was coming back

14:00 and just be patient he won't be long. That sort of thing and it was quite touching really. At one village

we went to – I suppose there were three or four hundred people in the village who surrounded us. I wasn't by myself. There were a few sailors – a few sailors with me. And they took us up to the long house or whatever they called the main building there and after much fiddling around

14:30 they prised up some floor boards and took out from underneath the floorboards three packets of Gold Flake Cigarettes and six bottle of Guinness Stout which they had been saving for the celebration of the return of the rajah. I've never forgotten that. That was an interesting time really. I won't waffle on too long. But to go round and see these long houses

15:00 where there are a remarkable number of very fair skinned and very attractive native girls wearing nothing but a pocket handkerchief. And all allegedly sired by Scottish engineers who had been there years before. And they were interesting nice people I thought. Not that I could speak the language. Went out the end of the road from Sarawak one day

15:30 and a great crowd of Dayaks – they were the local people. Must have been two or three hundred of them arrived with great big baskets. Baskets – well they would hold about fifty human heads each. And they came in with these things and they had been told by the British government, they claimed, that they would get five pounds sterling for

16:00 every Japanese head and there must have been two or three hundred Japanese heads that were plonked down at my feet. And I didn't happen to have two or three hundred pounds in my pocket so we discreetly and very politely made out way back to Kuching and passed the matter over to the British attaché who had then arrived. What they did about it, I don't know.

16:30 **Do you think that they had scavenged for those heads or they'd actually killed Japanese?**

A lot of conjecture about this. Some people say that a lot of the heads were heads of their rivals. But there were a lot of Japanese there too and the Japanese were scared of them. Look I won't waffle on but there was another situation I had to go out and tell the Japanese

17:00 general that his soldiers had not handed in their weapon and he refused to hand them in because they were frightened of the Dayaks. And the argument went on and on. He was a very arrogant chap and he wasn't really prepared to have much of a discussion with a humble Australian lieutenant being a major general in the Japanese Imperial Army. At any rate common sense prevailed and we reached a compromise that they could keep one rifle to every ten men.

17:30 But they were frightened of them. They were ferocious, bloodthirsty, fighting people the Dayaks.

Could you gauge what life was like for the Dayaks and other villages under – what their life was like under the occupation of the Japanese?

18:00 They hated the Japanese but whether that was because they were not Rajah Brook's boys I don't know. I think the Japanese were very cruel to them if they stepped out of line. They wouldn't hesitate to execute a few and so on. Look I really don't know. I really don't know but I suspect – they seemed to be so pleased to see us that life couldn't have been much good with the

18:30 Japanese. Japanese are very hard – very hard on their inferiors if I can put it that way.

Did you have an interpreter when you went on these –

Yes. Not very good, but they were Australian or British people who had been given crash courses in the language.

So you mentioned that

19:00 **you got the impression that the Japanese weren't terribly good at dealing with people they perceived to be inferior.**

Yes.

When you had to negotiate with that commanding officer to what extent did military rank play a part in the way you communicated with each other?

Well from his point of view very strong. He objected strongly to

19:30 being confronted by an Australian lieutenant who was telling him what to do. And for an hour or so it reached an impasse, he wouldn't see me. So we kept at him and told him that unless he did what he was told he would be in serious trouble and he would be arrested and taken away and put into prison which was quite true and he eventually got the message

20:00 that he was the defeated man. He had to do what I liked. But I guess there are arrogant generals in every army. I wouldn't doubt we have a few. But he was a very arrogant Japanese in the old tradition. He was a god, in his judgement.

Did you call him 'Sir'?

No I didn't. I called him 'General'.

And what

20:30 **were his living conditions. Where was he actually located?**

Oh he was very comfortable in a lovely old house that had been built about twenty miles up from Kuching and I presume built by some wealthy planter or miner years ago. A lovely big old house there.

And did he still have staff?

Staff. Plenty of them, yes. Japanese. Oh yes there would have been several hundred soldiers there.

21:00 **So when you finally encouraged him to surrender what – how did he?**

Well it wasn't a matter of surrendering so much. They had surrendered. He conceded that. But he wasn't going to hand over his arms because he was frightened that his soldiers would be killed by the Dayak. That was his story. Which is partially true.

What do you remember about hearing

21:30 **that the war was over and the atomic bombs had been dropped and there had been a surrender?**

Let's be honest. I didn't know much about nuclear bombs but I had heard of nuclear weapons. When we heard we were camped on a beach on the far side

22:00 of Labuan Island from where the main troops were. And a jeep arrived in a great hurry and said, "The war's over. They've dropped a big bomb on Hiroshima, but the Japanese haven't surrendered yet." That was the first indication. And I think it was two days later that the Japanese did surrender. And of course there were wild celebrations. Not that we had much to celebrate with. I think the beer ration was one bottle

22:30 of beer and I think every ship in the harbour – I went round to see my brother who was working in the field ambulance round the other side. And our conversation was being continually interrupted by every ship in the harbour opened up with machine guns, you name it, wild celebrations, and rockets going off. It all seemed unreal I think.

23:00 Everyone was talking about getting home. "I wonder when we'll get home?" That sort of thing. Pretty exciting. It always amused me though the resourcefulness of the Australians. About a week later our soldiers who weren't patrolling any more were all involved in what I call cottage industries. They were catching little

23:30 monkeys and they were making Japanese flags. And they used to go down to the harbour where sailors were eager to buy a Japanese flag and they all seemed to want to have a pet monkey. Much money was made. Those monkeys – they used to drive us mad. The number of times we stood to in the middle of the night thinking the Japanese were coming and it was the monkeys. Only little fellows about that big.

24:00 **What were you told initially about what the civilian casualties were in Japan?**

I'm not quite sure but I got the impression that practically a whole city had been destroyed.

24:30 And that most of the population had gone and I think that was thousands, not hundreds. I can't be precise. Its just is was a tremendous explosion and then there was a later one at – I'll think of the name of the second one they dropped in a moment. But it was interesting actually a year later to go and see those places when we

25:00 were in the occupation force. It just seemed – I remember trying to explain this to the Japanese actually – without getting into the technical matters of nuclear explosions and so on but to try and explain to them that a very large bomb had been dropped that it had completely destroyed the city of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

25:30 was the other one, wasn't it? Yes. The Japanese weren't, of course, very delighted to hear that but I wanted to explain to them why the war had stopped so quickly. Because they had all expected that the war – Japanese would fight to the last man on the island of Japan. On the island of Japan – not in this way. Because you'll remember that the fighting was going on in Okinawa which was

26:00 [UNCLEAR a hundred or two] miles from Japan. I think the most – please stop me if I am waffling. The thing I will never forget in my life was going into the prisoner of war camp. And I think I was the first Australian officer to go into it actually.

26:30 Lintang Barracks it was called. And I drove up the road in the jeep and there was a guard house at the gate and about thirty Japanese ran out and lined up and I thought, you know, Goodbye Goose. But they all stood to attention and saluted – in other words they knew the war was over. I then went up and I was met at the top of the hill, slight hill,

27:00 by several Australians who – it really was an emotional experience. These fellows who were so skinny.

You know, their arms were like match sticks and I ran into a chap I was at school with, Max Carment, and Max was a chubby boy at school and he would have weighed

27:30 about seven and a half stone I think. I ran to another fellow, Ken Mosher, who had been my company sergeant major in the Sydney University Regiment who was about five foot ten, husky strong man. He was about eight stone. But their spirit was great and they were mainly worried about what people though about them at home. In other words whether they were in disgrace or not. Which I can understand. I mean they all

28:00 surrendered. I then went to the hospital there and saw twenty or thirty, I suppose, Australians. Most of them suffering from either malaria or bowel trouble. Everyone gets it if they go to the east.

Dysentery?

Dysentery.

28:30 And I found it an emotional experience. Something I have never forgotten. And I think the soldiers were similarly – felt similarly about it. And almost immediately after we'd taken over the camp and shipped all the prisoners of war back to Labuan the Japanese army came in and surrendered to us and they occupied the same

29:00 barracks. In that camp there were Dutch civilians and families and the Japanese had put all the men on one side of the camp and the families were on the other and they were not allowed to mix. And for two years husbands there, wife and kids there, not allowed to mix. Dreadful, isn't it? And

29:30 a lot of those Dutch people were put on a landing craft and sent back to the Dutch part of Borneo. That was about three hundred miles away and at that time the Indonesians had revolted against the Dutch and when these poor people got off the landing craft and walked down the wharf at – I'll think of the name of the place in a moment. The Indonesians killed them all because they were Dutch.

30:00 Human beings are dreadful people aren't they?

What did the Australian prisoners know about what had happened during the war?

Very little but they had a rough idea that we were winning. In other words we were moving north towards Japan. They didn't – I think they had a few clandestine radios as well that they were getting a bit of news from.

30:30 A lot of them asked me questions about the nuclear bomb and I said, "It's a bit technical for me. It's very big though."

What was their opinion of the Japanese and what was their understanding of how widespread this treatment of prisoners

31:00 **was?**

With notable exceptions they had a deep hatred of the Japanese for their cruelty. Now this was the example that was sighted to me most often there, quite apart from the beatings and so on if you didn't salute or something. These people were being starved to death.

31:30 Documents were found that said that. The Allies have landed in the north of Borneo and when the Allies come down our way these prisoners will all be taken out, worked on roads and defences, and worked till they drop. And when they drop they are to be shot. And those were the official Japanese instructions. But the – as the prisoners of war explain, within a hundred yards

32:00 of where they were camped there were paw paws, mangoes, all the tropical fruits you could possibly want and they weren't allowed to have them. Now that's a form of torture to me. I mean to starve people when there is an abundance of food outside! I'm not saying they would get beef steaks or anything like that but vegetables and fruit. There was ample. As you may or may not know you stick a stick in the ground in that sort of climate

32:30 and a year later it's a tree.

How did it affect the way the soldiers treated their Japanese prisoners then?

Well we had about a hundred soldiers who were guarding the Japanese.

33:00 They were short and sharp and tough but I have never – well in my experience not one Australian soldier ever struck a Japanese. Now that's my experience. They hated, the Australians hated them for what they had done. But they were tough but not brutal.

33:30 The attitude of some of these Japanese coming in to surrender was quite extraordinary really. You know I find myself screaming at them. "You are defeated. You will do what you are told." And they – the senior officers expected me to, now kowtow to them,

34:00 but they expected me to be subservient to them, which I didn't. Yes, that's it.

What sort of souvenir hunting was there?

What do you mean? Looting?

Looting or just souvenir hunting, whatever you like to call it?

I think every soldier liked to get hold of something and bring it home to say

34:30 that he'd been to the war – I personally – there wasn't much to loot there actually. You know, the shops were all empty and so on. I think the main business that was carried on with the soldiers was getting hold of some cheap liquor somewhere. I've forgotten what the Japanese, or the local wine was called now.

35:00 It's like drinking fire water. I think a lot of soldiers took from Japanese without any control items of their equipment. Not clothing but swords and things like that. The Japanese money was worthless so there was no point in taking that. I'm not aware of any looting quite frankly.

35:30 It was different when we went to Japan when black marketing became a big problem there.

What happened once you left Sarawak?

Left Sarawak – I went back to Labuan where I joined sixty-sixth Australian battalion that was destined to go to Japan as part of the occupation force and after about two weeks on Labuan we went to

36:00 Morotai where the three Australian battalions were, there. One from each of the 6th, 7th and 9th Division. All being trained and prepared and organized to go to Japan as part of the occupation force. A lot of dead beats [unmotivated or useless people] but generally speaking they weren't too bad. A lot of the soldiers who volunteered

36:30 were soldiers who'd just got to the war if you know what I mean. And they said, "Gosh we haven't done much yet. We'll go to Japan." And so there were some – yes, I won't make any further comment.

What do you mean dead beats?

Not good soldiers.

Did that manifest itself in

37:00 **social problems in Japan?**

Yes it did. I won't say any more about that.

We'll save that for after lunch. You mentioned that when in Townsville there were stoushes between US and Australian forces.

Yes.

What was it like on Morotai?

37:30 Oh everyone was too busy there to get involved in that. No. We were so remote from the Americans. You know, we were ten miles from where they were. And as far as – travelling on the American ships was no trouble at all. The ship that we went from Labuan down to, my squadron was sent, the whole hundred of us,

38:00 group of us was sent down to Kuching, which was the capital of struck which was where the Japanese had the Australian prisoners and we travelled down on the mother ship to an American torpedo boat squadron. And this ship was allegedly Al Capone – have you ever heard of Al Capone? Well it was allegedly his yacht which the Americans had taken over

38:30 for war use. Magnificent vessel, and well there were a hundred odd Australians onboard and we all got on terribly well with the Americans there. And when we got to the river – this ship was too big to go up the river. When we got to the river mouth we had to offload and get onto the PT boats.

39:00 And do you know those Americans made us take out boots off so we wouldn't scratch the deck of the boat. However we made it and they went up a bit fast and I would say they sank about a hundred and fifty canoes and so on of all the people who'd come out to welcome us, you know, the wake of the boat. I'll go on here all day and all night if you're not careful. What's the next question?

What did that yacht, Al Capone's yacht look like?

39:30 **How luxurious was it?**

Oh it was a beautiful looking steam yacht in a classic style. Oh it would be bigger than the Manly ferry but beautiful lines to the boat and in beautiful condition and what they did was carry torpedoes and petrol and food for the

40:00 PT boats which they couldn't carry on – they could only take a very limited amount onboard. The PT boats were sparse. They do about thirty-five or forty miles an hour I think. And you may remember General MacArthur got out of the Philippines on a PT boat.

Tape 5

00:31 **Brigadier, could you tell me at what stage you went to Rabaul and what your role was there?**

Well I'll have to go back to the formation of the occupation force. I was in Morotai and nothing much was happening and it was taking a long time to make a determination and the army in their wisdom

01:00 decided they would send me as a staff captain to Rabaul. So away I went. At that time in Rabaul there was I think a brigade and their main function I think was to control Japanese prisoners of war and try and get the country going again after being occupied by the Japanese for a long time. From the

01:30 point of view of direct military involvement a small and very direct part was the locating, arresting and trying of Japanese war criminals and for those that were found guilty and found guilty to the extent that they were to be executed, the execution of those Japanese war criminals,

02:00 which meant we had to find firing squads to do that. That's about all that happened there. It was interesting to see what the Japanese had done there with great tunnelling systems and masses of war equipment and so on.

Could you explain where the firing squads were obtained from?

Where they came from – volunteers were called for from the Australian army.

And how

02:30 **was that system established on Rabaul?**

Well this had been established before I got there but as I understand it in accordance with military regulation and the manual of military law which covers such things it was decided that firing squads were needed and notice was sent

03:00 out to all units saying, is anyone prepared to volunteer to be in a firing squad.

What kind of a response was there from the units?

I didn't hear of one case where a firing squad couldn't go ahead because of lack of volunteers.

So what was the system of trying the Japanese war criminals before they faced the firing squad?

The system of trying them was to have a tribunal or a –

03:30 yes – a tribunal set up. Usually chaired by a senior officer. For example, I was a staff captain on a brigade headquarters. My brigade commander was the chairman. I'm not sure if that's the right term but he headed up one committee. And the case was then put forward by the prosecution which were usually an Allied officer or civilian.

04:00 And the defence pleas were heard either from the people charged themselves or – I'm not sure where the others came from but I think they came from the legal services or either the United States or Australia.

Were there Japanese representatives there as well or was it the Allies that were doing these – ?

You mean on the court?

On the court.

Not on the

04:30 tribunal itself but look – I'm not certain of this. I think there were cases, certainly in Japan but there were cases there where the Japanese defended themselves or another Japanese would assist them to defend themselves. In Yokohama years later, well a year later, the courts – there for the Japanese war criminals American attorneys were often employed as

05:00 defence attorneys

Whereabouts were the trials on Rabaul? Where were they held?

Oh just outside of Rabaul. Well, yes, just outside of Rabaul, yes.

In what kind of building?

Oh just an ordinary attap [coconut leaf matting] tin hutted building, that's all. Nothing special.

Do you recall attending those trials?

No. I stayed well away.

Why was that?

05:30 It wasn't a matter of my direct concern and although I was curious I just didn't want to go.

Why didn't you want to go?

I'm not too sure. I thought I'd leave that to the people who were responsible. In other words I didn't want to be a sticky beak. That's what it amounted to.

06:00 **What was the atmosphere on Rabaul when those trials were going on?**

Well the atmosphere was one – most of the Japanese had been taken away when I arrived there. They had been taken away on American aircraft carriers and other ships. There were a few Japanese left there mainly who were

06:30 suspected of being involved in war crimes. The local people, I think were glad to see the Japanese go but they didn't take an active part. There were of course atrocities against – I've forgotten the name of the tribe in Rabaul now. But there were atrocities

07:00 against residents of Rabaul and I'm sure in some cases there was much feeling about the Japanese.

So what did you do on a daily basis on Rabaul? What was your task?

Well I was a staff captain which relates to administrative responsibilities. And I would worry about accommodation, rations, movement of people in and our of Rabaul, entertainment,

07:30 sport, recreation and that sort of stuff.

How were the people who were there keeping their motivation up considering that the war was over?

You mean the soldiers?

The soldiers.

With difficulty. They were gradually, of course thinning it out.

08:00 I'm not sure of the numbers before I arrived and I'm not sure of the numbers when I left but everyone wanted to go home. There's no question about that but a lot of things had to be done apparently before we could go. And I think the main thing that had to be done was to set up the civil administration to a stage where they could cope with it and to make certain that there was no conflict between the local people and the Japanese that were left there.

08:30 **What was happening to the Japanese who were left there?**

Well they were just in prisoner of war camps. That's all.

Did you see any of those camps yourself?

I saw one. It was just a simple army camp in terms of crude accommodation with a barbed wire fence around it.

And what was the plan for those POWs?

09:00 Well at that stage most, if not all of the people who were cleared from having committed war crimes were on their way home. So these people would be involved in some ways in war crimes. Whether as witnesses or supporters I don't know.

How long were you on Rabaul for?

Only four months.

And could you tell me about your orders to

09:30 **go to Japan?**

Yes. I applied a bit of pressure to my brigade commander, such as a captain can, and said, "you know they must be missing me dreadfully in sixty-six battalion. I was an original member and I really shouldn't be here at all." And anyway finally he signed a letter which said, "Get us out of here and up to Japan," which they did.

10:00 **Could you tell me about that trip over?**

Yes. I flew from Rabaul to Port Moresby, then Cairns, and I think from Cairns to Darwin and then from Darwin back to Morotai, from Morotai to the Philippines, the Philippines to Miyajima, and Miyajima to Japan.

10:30 It took about fourteen days I think. And we had a pretty exciting trip back because when we left – with

the run down in the services there were problems in keeping the aircraft fully maintained. And the problem was particularly acute in Morotai where apparently they didn't have enough fitters and so on to do all the routine checks. So that interrupted

11:00 the service a bit and they finally designed a system where a maintenance man always travelled on the aircraft which was a good idea. But we set out from Morotai to fly from – what's the capital of the Philippines? Manila. And after we had been flying for about two hours the noise from the engine sounded a bit strange and

11:30 the pilot came out and said we've lost and engine and we'll have to go to San Batangas, which is in the Southern most tip of the Philippines. And he then gave us a lengthy preparation and drill of what to do if we had to go into the ocean. Ditching drill. At any rate, I think there were twelve of us onboard. At any rate after a very nervous hour or so we arrived at San Batangas. So all was Ok.

12:00 Where we were stuck for a couple of days while they found a new engine. Then we went on to the Philippines and then on to Eta Jima and then on to Miyajima and then on to Japan.

What were your first impressions of landing in Japan?

Great curiosity. Interest in how

12:30 peaceful the Japanese were - or subservient really. There seemed to be no trouble with – you know, not strikes so much as protests or anything of that nature. Interesting – we had guards on the wharves while they were unloading ships. Allied ships. And

13:00 a lot of the stuff onboard was very attractive stuff to the Japanese, particularly on the food side. And there were several cases of guards shooting Japanese who were trying to steal it. And I'd say three months later our biggest problem was stopping soldiers giving these things to the Japanese – if you follow the way attitudes changed over a short period of time. But the Japanese were in a pretty desperate

13:30 state, really.

So where did you arrive in Japan and what was your job going to be?

I arrived at a place called Hiro and my battalion was stationed just outside and I became adjutant of the battalion. That was my job.

And what did that involve?

That involved the detailed administration of the battalion in all aspects.

14:00 You were like the COs immediate deputy. He told you what he wanted and you were the person who had to see that's what he got.

We've spoken to many people who were in BCOF about the issues of black market in Japan.

Dreadful.

What did you experience or what did you see of what was going on?

Well I hate to say it [UNCLEAR] but I was often ashamed of

14:30 my Australian countrymen and the things they did there. But there was a great shortage of all sorts of things in Japan, sugar for example. A pound of sugar was worth a small fortune. Cigarettes were something the Japanese had no supply of at all and a tin of cigarettes was worth, I've forgotten now, but a lot of money. And what other things? Any form of

15:00 edible food was also worth a lot of money. And there were a lot of people actively involved – up to big organizations really of supplying these things to the Japanese and making a fortune out of it. I mean there were convoys of five or six vehicles that were apprehended chock a block with blankets, sugar, cigarettes and so on. Big trouble. They had exactly the same trouble, I hasten to add, in Germany of course.

15:30 **In terms of the organization of the black market how senior did it go in the defence forces?**

I really don't know but it certainly went up to the level of commanding officers. At one stage they put a whole unit under arrest. That's from the major

16:00 down to the last private because they were actively involved in running a big black market ring. I won't say any more about that but it – yes, involved at a fairly high level in some cases.

How would they obtain the goods to be sold and where would they sell them?

Well a lot of them were stolen from unit storehouses.

16:30 Blankets for example, food, and a lot of things were sent up from Australia under the guise of gift parcels. I remember – I've forgotten what the tablet was, sweetener or something like that. Someone

got in the mail from the postman one day a package about that big and it was all saccharine tablets.

17:00 And he was queried about it. And it turned out that that box, whatever size it was was worth some thousands of dollars or pounds they were then. Because the Japanese couldn't get sweet things which they needed. So things were stolen in Japan and a lot of things were sent in to Japan. It was a big organization.

Where would they go to sell the goods?

17:30 Well I think the better organized one probably had a number one guy in the Japanese community. I think the lower down the level, the private soldier who had six tins of cigarettes, would just walk up and down the street of the village and say, "How much will you offer me for this?"

In your role as an adjutant did you see some of this black marketing going on?

18:00 I didn't see it going on but there were literally hundreds of soldiers in the battalion I belonged to who were charged militarily for being involved in black marketing.

What would be the punishment?

I think for the bad cases they got twenty-eight days detention or something like that.

You mentioned earlier that you visited

18:30 **Hiroshima to see this destruction. Could you explain what you saw and what that was like?**

Words – I find it difficult to put into simple words. As you approached Hiroshima the coastline there was fairly flat. But you could see this jagged outline of what were obviously buildings coming up and getting closer.

19:00 As you got to the edge of the city it was just like, well flattened buildings. That's all. Houses, warehouses, hotels, either flattened or almost completely destroyed. It was devastation. I don't think there were many people living

19:30 there but there were a lot of people coming into the city trying to find things. I suppose they were looking for money or jewellery or something else that might have been of use to them. Strangely enough the battalion I belonged to had its first annual sports meeting. As you remember the battalion had only been formed for a year, in the football stadium in Hiroshima. Which was in reasonably

20:00 good shape actually. Certainly the playing surface was. Which I thought was a great thing for the battalion to have on it's military record. We obtained a lot of things from the Japanese legally and agreement reached by General MacArthur and the Japanese that the Allied soldiers could not complicate, procure,

20:30 the goods that they needed from the local economy and all they had to pay was to sign their name on the form. And the battalion I was with sent some people down to a Japanese naval storehouse and they came back with a truckload of china, the most beautiful Japanese china. From dinner plates down to little coffee cup, saucers.

21:00 All with a blue – white with blue embroidery and gold around that and with the gold badge of the Japanese navy on one corner of it. Magnificent stuff. They also got a lot of beautiful glassware and decanters and things of that nature. This was for use in the officers' mess actually.

21:30 Generally speaking life in Japan was I suppose pretty good. We were all given – the officers were all given house girls which were female batmen, if you know what a batman is. But they were responsible for washing, cleaning, ironing and son on. And I'll always remember – I asked the –

22:00 I didn't want to fall by the wayside as many did there and succumb to the temptations of the Japanese female so I asked the Japanese employment officer that – I told him I wanted a Japanese house girl and I said I don't want an attractive woman, thank you! And he sent me along this dumpy waddling little girl who was about twenty-five I suppose and

22:30 really she was ideal. But I couldn't pronounce her name and I called her Porky. Porky San. You called everyone San. Porky San, which really meant 'fat girl' and she did a great job but one day she came in and she was crying and howling and waving her arms around. She said to me, "Me no Porky San. You Porky San!" In other words I'd put on a bit of weight too.

23:00 Poor old Porky San. Most of the menial duties in the battalion like sanitation, taking away garbage, sweeping up, keeping the grounds in order, were done by Japanese. Yes the soldiers did pretty well there really.

Whereabouts was the barracks where you were living?

We started off just outside of

23:30 Hiro. And then they built new barracks before us which were again just outside Hiro about three miles out of town I suppose. Pretty rushed job but they were comfortable. Yes, they were comfortable.

You mentioned that some of the Japanese men fell for the temptations of the Japanese women. What were the

24:00 **rules on fraternization with the locals at that time?**

Strictly speaking, fraternization was frowned on. Men being men and women being women that didn't last all that long, and a lot of soldiers had very close relationships with Japanese women and of course, as you probably know, a lot of them married Japanese women and brought them back to Australia.

24:30 But generally speaking the Japanese were an extraordinary country. The emperor told them not to interfere with the occupation forces and some of the more rather unpleasant Japanese and American and British fellows and so on fellows beat them up and raped them and so on but they never lifted a finger against them. All they'd do is report it to the military

25:00 police – and this is not relevant but I'll tell you it at any rate. We had one soldier in the battalion who was charged with raping a Japanese woman and I didn't normally go to the court martials but I went to this one and the woman who claimed she had been raped was a little old lady. I would say she would have been fifty-five at least. And rather the

25:30 cartoon type of a little wizened up old lady and she said, "Yes. That's the man who raped me." She was asked how he got into her bed. And she said, "Well I thought it was my husband. And her husband was about seventy years of age and the Australian was about six foot two and about fourteen stone. And the

26:00 whole court burst our laughing at the ridiculous situation of a women describing a man of that size being mistaken for her husband and she didn't realize it wasn't her husband until after they'd had intercourse. However he was found not guilty.

Were many soldiers found guilty of rape?

I don't know. I'm sure a few were.

26:30 **Where could soldiers go to meet Japanese women? What kinds of bars were there?**

Strictly speaking there was nowhere but they had clubs where they'd have bands and so on and I think as time went on they did allow, under certain restrictions, Japanese women to come along but they came along separately and I presume they screened it in some way.

27:00 Some of them were very attractive young girls actually. In the way of recreation there wasn't much there. We played a bit of football and a bit of cricket and we had athletics but not much in the way of entertainment.

So what would you do to pass the time or to wind down?

Yes, have a drink or two.

27:30 I was interested in boats and we got hold of a couple of launches and we used to tour around the harbour there, which was very interesting. It was full of sunken Japanese warships actually and there was something, I don't know, that attracted my imagination. Cruising around a Japanese warship of about thirty or forty thousand tons which was, you know, three quarters submerged and seeing so much devastation.

28:00 Soldiers were encouraged to go on recreational trips and they had clubs and guest houses set up around the countryside where they could go to. I think they tried hard but the difficulty was fraternization and whether it should be allowed completely or not I guess.

Did the rules change as time passed?

I think so. Yes.

28:30 I think it changed completely actually.

What kind of evidence was there in Japan about what the Japanese had been planning with the war – did any documents come up or what kind of facilities did they have?

Well if there were documents of that nature I wouldn't have seen them at any rate at my level. But the only indication that

29:00 was accepted by most of us was that if the atomic bomb hadn't been dropped the Japanese were prepared to fight on in Japan. In other words the Allies would have had to invade Japan and that's about it I think. I think the atomic bomb put an end to those ideas and it just finished. The Japanese, I think, found it very hard to believe they were

29:30 defeated but they are intensely loyal to their country and the emperor was a god, of course. If he said 'bow', they bowed and if he said 'stand up', they stood up. And he issued several edicts about their conduct in relation to the occupation force which they followed very carefully. A lot of interesting things the battalion had to do. We had to

30:00 destroy a lot of armaments, particularly explosives. We had to search and go through all the military warehouses and buildings to make certain there was no war material still there. Yes we all seemed to be reasonably busy. I don't know why.

In terms of how much armaments you found how well equipped do you think the Japanese were

30:30 **to continue fighting?**

I'm not too sure of the answer to that, but they certainly had a mass of ammunition and explosives and things of that nature. Vast amounts of it. But no more than you'd expect, I guess, for a country at war.

Where were those armaments kept?

Oh in warehouses tucked away in valleys and around the countryside.

31:00 A lot of the explosives in a highly dangerous state as you probably know. Take gelignite for example. If it can become unstable – it is normally stored in boxes about that big and we went into this warehouse one day and the explosive had become unstable and it was oozing out of the edges of the box, which meant that if you coughed too loud it was

31:30 likely to go off. But when situations like that arose we handed them over to the Japanese to deal with and they'd have to get it onto a truck and down to a ship to take it out to sea and sink it.

How much travel did you get to do when you were in Japan? Where did you go?

Not that much. I went up to Tokyo several times. I went to Kyoto.

32:00 Oh I suppose three or four days a month I would have been away travelling somewhere. Just to have a change of scenery and to fill in time really.

What was Tokyo like?

Well the whole of Japan at that time was pretty ravaged by bombs. Yokohama which is their big port near Tokyo. I think you could drive

32:30 for twenty miles there and you wouldn't see a building higher than about twenty feet. It was just flattened. A lot of damage in Tokyo. A lot of people about but they were all. They all sort of seemed to be looking for something or waiting for something. But when – we used to put guards on the emperor's palace there and to my astonishment

33:00 every time the guard was changed, which was one a week, I would say twenty, thirty, forty, fifty thousand Japanese turned up to watch it. I thought that's the last thing in the world they'd want to see but they did. And they regarded General MacArthur as a god, really. And General MacArthur came out of the hotel he was staying in – I have forgotten now. There'd be ten thousand people there every day just to see him. Interesting.

33:30 **What did you learn about Japanese culture given that they were responding this way to occupation?**

I didn't learn very much about the Japanese culture. I think that eight or ninety percent of the Japanese at that time were peasants, pure and simple, working in the fields growing rice and so on. They were

34:00 very industrious. I think they were very loyal to their own people. I thought that the country would have been a lot better off if women had been allowed to make a much greater contribution to the society. They had practically no rights at all in those days. And whilst I'm not a great women's libber [liberationist] really I think there was no question about it in the limited dealings I had on a social side,

34:30 not sexual, social, side of the Japanese women. They seemed to have more qualities than the men. They seemed to be more intelligent. And yet I must be wrong because they don't seem to play a very big part in Japanese affairs now do they, as far as we can tell from the media.

Could you tell me about some of the Japanese civilians that you did meet? The women that you may have met socially or the other people.

Well I didn't meet too many socially,

35:00 you see strictly speaking there was this no fraternization so the number of times I went to a Japanese house would be very few and each time I went in there it was because of some problem that we were involved in. The Japanese were a bit reticent and a lot of them didn't speak English at any rate, were a bit reticent about mixing,

35:30 socializing at all with the occupation force so I really am not in a position to make much comment about that question.

What would be some of the problems that would warrant a visit to a house?

Japanese alleging that their house had been broken into and things stolen or rape or that soldiers had

beaten up the daughter or husband or something of that nature or

36:00 they suspected black market activity. That sort of thing. Nothing social to it at all. All official stuff.

How often could complaints be made against soldiers?

Oh pretty frequently I think.

In your opinion how much of that was warranted?

I think probably most of it was actually. I think that as in any large organization you've got

36:30 good fellows and bad fellows and I think we had a lot of pretty ordinary soldiers up there at the time. Not only Australians of course. There were British and Indian, Canadian, we weren't the only people there and again as I said about some other question you asked me. You know, if the soldiers go out and drink a quarter of a gallon of Japanese beer they sometimes lose their sense of proportion

37:00 and honesty.

How long were you based in Japan for?

A year. Glad to come home actually. Had enough by then. It was interesting though. I went back to Japan on the way to Korea and the amount they had learned in the five years or whatever it was was remarkable. You know, we had sweater girls and bar girls and a lot

37:30 of the women were out of their national costume, you know, the kimono sort of thing into European style frocks and jeans or something. Big changes. And the economy was bubbling. There were new factories going up everywhere. Yes, a big change very quickly. And of course their recovery had been dramatic as we all know in the economy of the world. Although it's fizzling a bit in the moment. I have

38:00 never liked the Japanese. I am afraid I'm set in my ways and seeing what I did of the treatment of Allied prisoners of war and citizens of the countries they were in I just can't forgive them. So I make no secret of the fact I'm not a Japanese lover. I'm Christian but I don't take my Christianity far

38:30 enough to love the Japanese.

When you came home from Japan what did you do once you returned to Australia and what was the lead up for you towards the Korean War?

Well, let me have a think. Coming back from Japan. Oh I came back from Japan because I had to attend what is known as the staff college which is a

39:00 years course which is more or less compulsory for the career soldier. It was down at Queenscliff in Victoria and that was a year's study I guess. So I spent a year as a student at a staff college.

And where were you when the Korean War broke out?

Well after staff college I had a job in Sydney.

39:30 And then I was given an appointment of courses and attachments to the British Army which was a wonderful thing. I was over in the United Kingdom and Germany for eighteen months. And it was when I was over there that the Korean War broke out. In fact I was attached to a British cavalry regimental Warminster when the war broke out.

40:00 And this regiment had been warned that they'd be going and the CO very kindly asked me if I would join them mainly because I had just done a course in a new tank which they had been issued with. So I immediately cabled through to Australia House and Australia and said, "Righto, chaps. Here's the chance of a lifetime. I've been asked to go. How about it?" And they said no. Never forgave them

40:30 for that. And I had to wait two years then to get to the Korean War.

Tape 6

00:31 **Brigadier what was the role of tanks in the Korean War?**

Well they played a very big role before I got there in the tremendous advances and withdrawals of the Americans and North Koreans. A very big role. When the warfare was very mobile. Their role was shock attacks –

01:00 weight of fire power, destroying defences, encircling infantry and coming in from the flank across country and so on. But as the war went on and particularly after China came into the war the war became a lot more static. And became a little like World War I in the sense that there were great

01:30 trench systems put across the country and the tanks role became much more limited because there

wasn't very much mobile warfare and when I was up there that was the situation actually. But the tanks played a major role in mobile warfare in the early days there.

What was your opinion at the time of going back to war?

Well I was a professional soldier and going to war, you know,

02:00 is good. I'm not a blood thirsty old coot but you know, that's why I joined the army, to take an active part in soldiering. And whilst you might say well you are a bit blood thirsty or it's a lot safer behind a desk I didn't see it that way. I just wanted to get involved in as much combat as I could. And that doesn't make me in any way unusual I can assure you.

02:30 As far as soldiers are concerned.

How did you come to be posted there as part of the Royal Tank Regiment, was it?

The British Royal Tank – well I'm a great person for asking for things. I believe in a quote from the Bible, "Ask and it shall be given thee. Seek and thee shall find." And after they rejected my application when I was with Britain I kept on shoving in applications in Australia and eventually I struck a friendly

03:00 person and I was attached to this British regiment.

We talked earlier about the cultural differences between the British and the Australian military. Can you describe what it was like as an Australian soldier to become part of a British regiment?

I think it takes a bit longer to settle in.

03:30 The British aren't quite as outgoing and as friendly and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense. But they are more reserved than Australians so when I first arrived there I felt a bit on the outer for a little while. But I finished up with very good friends in the regiment actually and the majority of soldiers in the regiment were national servicemen which meant that they had been conscripted and sent to Korea. And I have a

04:00 great respect for them. For soldiers who didn't ask to go. They were just told, "Hop in the boat, son, you are going." They were good chaps. They all tried very hard. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. The [UNCLEAR um] was a good regiment and they worked hard, did their jobs well, yeah.

What was the tradition and the

04:30 **history of that regiment?**

Well I'm not quite certain of this but the origins of the tank in war really started at the Battle of Cambrai in France. I've forgotten what year it was but I guess it's about 1917 or something like that. But the tanks in those days were used almost entirely in close support of infantry. So all the soldiers would hop out of their trenches

05:00 and tanks would move in with them and they were like mobile machine gun posts. That's what they were. So the origins of the First Royal Tank Regiment really goes back to Cambrai Day and the style of tank and the use of tanks has, of course, developed tremendously since then. After World War I was over and – the Germans had the biggest influence on the use of tanks. They with their blitzkrieg

05:30 and the way they hurtled through France and Belgium and Holland and so on at the start of World War II. Also the Russians did a lot on tank warfare and obviously Britain had to adjust as well and the Royal Tank Regiment became a mobile tank in the classic sense. It just graduated from a close support of infantry to a general fighting vehicle.

06:00 But they didn't do much moving around in the regiment I was with in Korea then because it was largely static.

So if there was a raid on a hill say how would the tank be used?

Well to use both, it's machine guns and it's main armament to kill the enemy. Simple as that and it's like

06:30 a tank could produce a tremendous amount of fire power relative to infantry because of the weapons it's got. They were largely responsible for maintaining the security of many a hill top in Korea simply because of their ability to do that.

So can you give me and example then of how

07:00 **it was used during say a hill raid when it would be moved and how it was used in cooperation with the infantry?**

Well to describe a situation there the front line between the Chinese or North Korean and the Allies when I was there was anything to five hundred yards to a thousand yards apart

07:30 running along a valley and the deployment of forces on the Allied side would be usually companies as part of battalions would be deployed on the higher ground simply because you get more range of –

better range of fire and better range of vision. Now with all – if not all most of those company positions would be one, two, and sometimes three

08:00 tanks located outside of the company perimeter but in close proximity to it, say fifty yards or thirty yards away. Those tanks were invariably put into revetments which were cut out with a bulldozer so they were three quarters dug in to make them a smaller target. And if there was a raid on the company they were close to at night and they were told about it

08:30 they just started firing at the targets as they appeared. Fire power, that's all.

What sort of tanks did the Chinese and North Koreans have?

The main tank they used was a T34 which was a Russian tank. Yes the T34.

And how did that compare to what the Royal Tank Regiment had?

09:00 Not as good. A smaller tanks and with a smaller gun. But for the type of war that we were fighting at that time more than adequate. More than adequate. It had one great advantage. It was a very easy tank to maintain and look after. Where as our equipments were a bit more complicated and sometimes broke down.

Was that the Centurion?

09:30 Ye.

So how did the Korean conditions effect maintaining the tank?

Well, Korea is a funny climate. It is very hot and dusty in summer and freezing cold in winter. And the tank crew that I've described who is just outside the company perimeter. He is awake most of the night

10:00 either engaged in battle or looking out for it. And come the dawn he's got to look after his tank. Now he's got to load the – he's got to get refuelled for the engine. He's got to get his ammunition for the gun. He's got to do basic servicing on the tank which may have been putting oil in or getting onto the grease gun or something like that.

10:30 And when you are dealing with an object that if you put your hand on it in winter you stick to it if you know what I mean. We had a lot of cases of frostbite. It's hard work and the fellows used to get very tired. You know, when something was going on. No sleep, too much to do. And everyone rallied round as best they could. Even our padre used to go up and help

11:00 load ammunition and the tank round, which was about that height off the ground and it was a good man lift – you've got to lift it up in the air and get it through a hole in the side of the turret. I think we had the fittest padre in the brigade. They had a busy time but we only left them in the line, that's right in those forward positions for two weeks at the most. Then another tank would take their place

11:30 just to give them a rest. And they deserved it. Pretty lonely, you know. It's like we are in a tank here and the nearest person is a hundred yards down there and there are only four of in the tank and in front of you is the enemy – I don't know how far away they are or any patrols in front of you. Yes. It's lonely.

12:00 **Given that the war had been going for several years by the time that you arrived what was your prior knowledge of what the enemy were like?**

Stubborn and determined. Brave. Fairly inadequately equipped in certain senses.

12:30 Their air force was a bit weak. I'd describe the North Koreans as a peasant type army but the Chinese were in it by that stage. The Chinese were very efficient professional soldiers. I would say

13:00 they were a pretty tough opposition really. I think the thing that kept the Allies in business there on many occasions was the superiority they had with aircraft who – you know every day there were planes coming over and bombing and strafing and so on. Yes, they were a tough bunch.

Did you see anything of their tunnel systems?

No, I'm glad to say.

13:30 But a friend of mine was taken prisoner there. He described it to me in detail. I think he said he went for ten miles in tunnels. He was taken prisoner right on the front line and they had these tunnel systems running back for miles in which they brought all their stores up so that you could fly over it in daylight and you wouldn't see a sole in sight but, you know, forty feet under the ground there were hundreds of little men

14:00 carrying guns and ammunition and food and water and everything else you need. Great on tunnelling.

What thoughts did you have about being taken prisoner after seeing the treatment the Allies had received from the Japanese?

I didn't think about it too often.

14:30 But I think I made a determination once that I would never become a prisoner of war. There are alternatives. They're pretty drastic ones. But the unfortunate situation, and I've talked to quite a few prisoners of war about this, you may not want to become a prisoner. You may want to keep on fighting but if you've got forty or fifty men with you and they are depending on your decision as to whether they live or die it's a pretty sobering thought, isn't it?

15:00 I think if it's just you it's a pretty easy thought, yes or no. You can do that in a few seconds. But I think I'd rather pull the revolver out and put it up against my right temple than become a prisoner of war.

So as a commander what was your theory then in Korea in regard to when you would – when you were prepared to surrender and how that was affected by how many men were involved?

15:30 Well I was never in that situation. I make that clear. But that were the thoughts that went through my mind, what I've said. It's not just you you've got to think about the people that you are responsible for and that's a very difficult decision indeed. I don't think I can enlarge on that question but I was never in a situation where I was forced to make that decision.

16:00 The – you get into the most extraordinary positions in war – one of the companies we were supporting in Korea from the Duke of Wellington's regiment, the British regiment. They had a company on a very exposed hill top and we had two tanks near them. At any rate an attack took place and the British tactic was that all of the soldiers in the company

16:30 went into tunnels which had been dug and they blew the entrances to the tunnel so that when the enemy arrived the hilltop was deserted and that enabled them to bring artillery fire down onto the hill where the enemy were, do you follow all that? And when the counter attack was put in and the enemy were drawn off, of course they had to get these fellows out of the ground and I happened to be there when they were

17:00 coming out. God. I think I would have been court martialled rather than do that. To go down into the ground and stay there for twelve hours, you know. Listen to everything going on up top and doing nothing. That would be too much for my nervous system. But they were a great regiment and a difficult situation.

Can you tell me about the journey to

17:30 **Korea?**

To Korea. Yes. I went up BOAC – British – I'm trying to think of the name of the air line now that was running. At any rate we got into a four engine propeller, commercial airline in Sydney, flew to the

18:00 – first night we spent was at Darwin. The second night we spent was at Labuan Island. The third night we spent in Hong Kong. The fourth night we spent in Miyajima and the forth night we spent in Japan – the fifth night I think it was. So we went up on a civil airliner, very slowly. And when I got there the regiment met me and

18:30 that was that.

So what was your first port of call in Korea?

I got into a plane at Iwakuni – let's see. Seoul was my first point of entry and I climbed out of the plane and the tank regiment had a chap there to meet me and we drove up to the front which was about I think a hundred miles further up, something like that.

19:00 Nothing very exciting.

Given that Seoul had been occupied at one stage during the war what did it look like when you arrived?

Not too bad. Of course that would have been at least eighteen months before I was there I think. Possibly two years. But no, Seoul looked in pretty good shape really.

19:30 **Did you need to get accustomed to different techniques of using tanks or cultural differences between the Australian tank regiments and the British tank regiments? I mean how did you become part of the regiment?**

Well I'd had specialized training in the tank itself. That's the

20:00 technical side. There wasn't very much to learn about the employment of the tanks because as I say the position was static. And you put your tanks on a position on the hill where they were partially dug in. You pointed out targets to the crew and they gained information themselves. You made certain they had good contact with the battalion they were with. Then it was a matter of infantry tanker operation at that level

20:30 But the only things we did at a higher lever were in the event of a major attack coming in which happened a couple of times we would move more tanks up in reserve to be ready to replace or bolster the defences if necessary. Pretty simple stuff really.

So how soon was it when you actually moved onto the front line?

Well I think the first month I was that's all I did.

21:00 I went from – so I could see the whole of the front I was going up and spending two or three days with companies all the way along the line. Some of them were commanded by old friends actually, there was the Australian – and spending nights with tanks on the front line, finding out the routine and the special requirements. I would say about a month.

Can you describe exactly that the front line looked like for the

21:30 **benefit of someone who doesn't know about the Korean War?**

First of all it ran along a line of hills or almost mountains. The dug defences tend to be on the higher portions of that hill. There were open trenches all with overhead cover. By that I mean that there was an open bay in the trench but all of them had covered areas

22:00 as well into which the soldiers could get if they were being shelled. You know, there were latrines and other sort of things. And from the air if you looked down on it you could see the line of trench running along quite clearly because of the freshly turned earth. And

22:30 as part of the trench system, the Allied trench system and certainly the enemy trench system were tunnels where sometimes the trenches were connected to especially good fire positions say sixty yards further down the slope and do disguise the position of machine guns or a machine gun they would tunnel down to it. And they had these tunnels which were

23:00 about barely big enough for me to crawl through actually to get to and from them. And behind those hills would be a bit of administrative brick barrack. Weapons stores and ammunition stores and so on dug into the side of the hill but on the non enemy side.

23:30 **So if you were maintaining a forward post, what sort of, apart from the tank what kind of defences would there be between that post and the enemy?**

So the companies might be a hundred and fifty years apart. Is that what you mean? Yes? And that's what I was saying before is that the poor old tank, he was a bit lonely. He might have been forty or fifty yards outside of the company perimeter, that's the company trenches.

24:00 And on another side there might be a hundred miles to the next infantry location. So they were four men on their own.

So how did the cooperation work between the various forces?

Telephone and radio. Telephones were used a lot in those days because the radios weren't as good as one would like. The difficulty with the telephone was it relied on a line and if a shell

24:30 or something landed on the line the communications went out. But those were the main means and, you know, the tank commander could talk to the company commander or the battalion commander either by radio or telephone, theoretically – not always. Communication is a very big problem – or it was in war. What the next war will be like I don't know because it looks as to me as though every soldier will

25:00 have a mobile phone in his pocket.

So would the Royal Tank Regiment be relieved by other tank regiments or would it stay in that one position permanently?

Well the Royal Tank Regiment was supporting the commonwealth division. In the division there were always two brigades in the line

25:30 as we used to say and one in reserve. And the tank regiment would supply tanks to the leading – to the regiments in the line and the tour of service was a year so they'd be doing that job for a year or whatever else happened in the war. If they all moved forward they'd move forward and so on. And I think the normal tour of duty for both British and Australians in Korea

26:00 was one year. The only break being R and R as they called it, rest and recreation, where I think after three months you could go to Japan for a week for a rest. Good idea.

We've heard mixed reports from other people about what their opinions are about the levels of professionalism of the multi-national forces. What were your impressions of the other countries and

26:30 **their level of professionalism and what their soldiering was like?**

Well I had a high regard for the British. I thought the Australians were fair enough. The only ones I found a bit wonky were the Canadians, but I could be quite wrong. I may have seen them at the wrong time. In regard to other countries I

27:00 just don't know.

Why do you say wonky?

I just felt that they were a bit slap happy about things. They were a bit relaxed. They didn't give me confidence. The two nights I spent with them I sort of had my hand close to my revolver under my pillow. I may be quite wrong there. I may be quite wrong.

Were they

27:30 **lax in maintaining their defence positions? Is that what you mean?**

Ye. And very lax about their hygiene. That was my impression and I only spent a very short time with them and it's improper for me to comment at all I think because I don't know enough about it.

So given the difficulty of the conditions how would you maintain a certain standard of hygiene in Korea?

28:00 By very strict rules about the use of toilets for a start and by very strict rules about soldiers washing themselves. By very strict rules about soldiers keeping their cooking utensils clean all of which is possible if not every day it is possible over a period of time to maintain satisfactory standard. Australians I think are better than any army I've had

28:30 anything to do with on standards of personal hygiene and discipline. You've got to be. Otherwise you'll get cases where diarrhoea or other complaints just go strait through a battalion. You'll find you've got a battalion one day and about half strength the next simply because of lax hygiene.

How do you wash while you are in the front line?

29:00 With difficulty.

Walk me though it.

Well you get some water and you've got a flannel or a bit of soap or something and you just do this. But if you don't insist on those standards soldiers will get filthy hands and they will handle food with it and all this goes into their stomachs and makes them sick. So that's the job of the platoon commander to make certain, to have a look at their hands now and again. And their feet which is a disgusting

29:30 job but you've got to do it. Soldiers wear the same socks for weeks on end if you let them. God bless them. But you've got to get their boots off and have a look at their feet whenever you can. I don't mean every day but certainly once a week. Now this is not just theory. This is needed and this is what you are taught when you are being trained as an officer and it is difficult to do on many occasions. Particularly

30:00 in the middle of winter, you know, when the ice is thick and the snow is high and you've just got to do your best. In the World War II, there were more casualties in the Pacific from illness than there were from gunshot wounds because of lax hygiene largely and malaria.

30:30 **What was the climate like when you arrived?**

Cold. A great tragedy had just occurred because the regiment had an officers mess in Gloustershire Valley, which was about four miles back from the front and it was a humble little wooden make piece shelter but the night after I arrived they had one of their early frosts and they lost their whole

31:00 beer supply. All the bottles burst. This was a dreadful tragedy I can assure you. I've forgotten what your question was now.

The climate.

Very cold. Very cold indeed and we were given a lot of arctic clothing some of which I've still got. But starting off the underpants we used to wear were what we called

31:30 sword fighting trousers, those long john underpants. They singlet you had knitted – they were knitted out of string. Very loose knit string vests which are wonderful because the friction on the skin keeps you warm. Then a very thick woollen shirt. Then ordinary pants and on top of the ordinary pants went your arctic pants.

32:00 And on top of your shirt you put on your normal combat jacket and on top of your combat jacket you put on your arctic jacket. And it kept you reasonably warm. The only problem was was most of the positions as I've described tend to be on the top of hills and the only way to get to the top of the hill was to walk up. So you'd start off with all your arctic kit on and by the time you got half way

32:30 you were melting so you had to start taking it off again. Then there was the danger of catching cold if you didn't put it on again as soon as you got to the top. Oh it's a hard life.

Sounds dreadful.

Still, we survived.

Were the tanks used in any snatch patrols?

Did I go on any? No – I was to go out on one patrol and the CO wouldn't let me go.

33:00 Thank goodness. Because they ran into dreadful trouble. They walked strait into a minefield. Lost about thirty men so the answer is no I didn't.

Can you tell me about the first patrol you went out on?

Nothing very exciting. Strictly my job wasn't patrolling and the only reason I went out this time was to see whether a tank could get from A to B and you couldn't do it in daylight

33:30 so I went with, I think it was six infantry fellows and an engineer and we just very carefully made out way down the hill, through a little valley and another hundred yards or so. We only went about three or four hundred yards. No I didn't have much experience of patrolling at all.

So once you'd become accustomed with all the various posts, what

34:00 **would be your typical day when you were in the front line, if you weren't patrolling?**

I put at the top of all of that. Administration primarily. That's making sure that all the tanks had all they needed. And there was always something wrong with something, invariably, particularly with the radio sets. Making certain they had all the ammunition, making certain that the hot meals which we tried to get them every day

34:30 were arriving and they weren't hot and there weren't too many complaints about it. Finding out what operational information they had. And particularly information in regards to their relationship with the infantry nearby. For example a new company commander may have arrived and he may have wanted to do things a bit differently.

35:00 Have a cup of tea with them, pretty mundane sort of stuff. And having visited the tank I invariably used to visit the company they were alongside to make certain they clearly understood the problems for the tank people out on their own and to make certain that all their alarm systems and so on were

35:30 working properly. Supervision I guess you'd call it.

How did their alarm systems work?

Well the alarm system I'm talking about was that if movement was detected in front of the infantry position how did they get word to the tank commander. Now it sounds easy, you just get on the blower and say there's someone in front of my position but sometimes that didn't work and sometimes the telephone didn't work.

36:00 Now the most used method after that if it took too long to get a runner to go down and see them was to put a flare up. So a red flare might have meant they are close or a white flare might have meant we are just having a look or a green flare might have meant something else. Simple things like that.

Was it difficult to lay phone lines in Korea?

No. It wasn't. It was a highly dangerous task

36:30 but they all had to be laid on the ground surface. You couldn't dig holes for them everywhere. And the line maintenance parties, during the night on many occasions, would be called out a dozen times because a mortar would come in and cut the line so someone had to go and fix it and that was happening the whole time as it was bound to.

37:00 Because the phones all lead into a defensive position. The guns were all firing or the mortars were all firing at the defensive position. Sooner or later one is going to land on a telephone line. That's the way it worked.

Where was the front line in proximity to the thirty-eighth parallel?

Almost on it.

37:30 **What sort of activities were there at night time?**

Well in the time I was there all the major engagement took place at night. None in daytime at all. The enemy were on a hill with a wonderful lookout over the whole of our positions and vice versa so you couldn't move troops around in daylight. They would have been chopped to pieces in a matter of an hour or so,

38:00 so the real – the fighting action always started after dark.

So can you give me an example of a Chinese assault?

Yes. This happened just before the war finished. Without making it too complicated and without drawing sketches which I'm sure you don't want me to do the Chinese put in a major attack

38:30 on – partially on 2RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], an Australian unit and partially on – I think it was an American unit who were next to them in the line. They had to move over about a thousand yards of

open countryside which sloped down, then up. They put in a very heavy artillery barrage before they started off. All of which was aimed at

39:00 Allied positions that could interfere with the battle, naturally enough, and down they came. Now that attack lasted the whole of the night and they, enemy were forced to withdraw and you're not going to believe this but it happened never the less, there were Chinese bodies

39:30 over a thousand yards. Hundreds and hundreds of them. All being killed by the Allied artillery fire. And every truck in the commonwealth division had to be used at some stage to keep the ammunition supply up they were firing so much. Now that wasn't typical but that was a major assault all at night so from the point of view of the soldier in the front line

40:00 all he is getting is an awful lot of artillery fire – that's the friendly forces. All he is getting is an awful lot of artillery and mortar fire. But he is not using his personal weapons much. For two reasons. One is he can't see anything. And the other one is he's keeping his head down away from the artillery fire. Not that I'm decrying his position. He is in a highly dangerous difficult position but very few of the Chinese got to within small arms range

40:30 of the Allied position and those that did were usually killed on the wire fences.

Tape 7

00:31 **Brigadier could you tell me about leaving Korea?**

Leaving Korea. When the war finished I was up there and at that stage my wife was about eight and a half months pregnant. No one seemed to be too certain about how long the force would remain

01:00 up there. And the CO of the regiment I was with asked me if I'd like to stay in the capacity of a person who patrolled along the cease fire line and saw that it was Okay. I made the big decision that as this was our first child, I'd rather be home with Jan.

01:30 So I appealed to his paternal or maternal instincts and it was agreed I could go home. So about three weeks after the war finished I came home and got there in time for the birth of the babe.

How had it been for your wife with you overseas during that time?

Lonely I think. She stayed with her parents in

02:00 Coogee, heavy with child as they say. Pretty miserable I think. Although she did have a lot of friends that helped a lot.

How easy was it to get mail in Korea?

Pretty good. I couldn't be precise but I think it was about a week from pen to pen. Pen to reader. Pretty good.

02:30 Jan used to sent me up Saturday Evening Posts. A wonderful American magazine at the time that came out weekly. Famous magazine. She used to send those up to me. I used to send her back cartons of cigarettes. No I think the mail system was good but there was no telephone communication as there was in Vietnam for example.

What do you remember of the day the cease fire was declared

03:00 **in Korea?**

I think we all felt a bit flat. We knew it was coming. They had been negotiating the peace there for as long as I could remember and it seemed to be that it was just a matter of days before it would happen and then I think we finally got a notice that the cease fire would take effect from six o'clock or whatever it was on a certain date and

03:30 I made a determination that I would go up before first light on that day just to have a look and see what popped up on the other side of the hill and of course practically every soldier in our vicinity did the same thing. We stood on the top of hills and saw all these heads coming out of the ground. I think we even waved on a couple of occasions. There was no wild celebrations.

04:00 Certainly wasn't where I was at any rate. Just relief I think and many, like myself, looking forward to getting home again.

We're just going to move forward and ask you about where you were when you were called up to go to Malaya?

To Malaya?

04:30 Just give me a couple of minutes, will you? I got back from Korea. After I got back from Korea I was

posted to a job in Victoria and Jan came down with our new baby and I'd been there about eighteen months I think when word came though that I was to go to Malaya to be a

05:00 planner on the headquarters, Malaya command and that wives and children could go. That sounded all pretty good so we climbed onto a ship and went to Malaya. Dreadful trip too – it was a troop ship and – it was a migrant ship actually and very crudely fitted out. So we started off our tour in Malaya

05:30 in Kuala Lumpur the headquarters and of course no one had been really prepared or ready to look after Australians and it took us about six weeks to find somewhere decent to live. But there were certain compensations for married people. They were all provided gratis a cook and an amah, a lady to do – and we eventually found – well after six weeks, we found

06:00 quite a nice two story house there that was very comfortable and we joined the Royal Sailing Club and used their swimming pool and their tennis courts. It was a pretty easy life in Kuala Lumpur actually. The war was all going on our in the out field. So that was the first – I think I was there about four months. At any rate I was getting a bit restless.

06:30 So I asked for – applied for a transfer to the Australian Battalion that was in Malaya. That was approved and we moved from Kuala Lumpur and Jan and two children then, one was born in Kuala Lumpur, lived in a house in Penang Island. Do you know Malaya at all? Well we lived in Penang

07:00 – they lived in Penang Island and I was a company commander in a place called Sungai seaport and then up on the Thai border at Kroh. The big problem was really for Jan who was – You could come home once a month for two days so it was a pretty lonely life for all the ladies there. And there were quite a lot of soldiers' wives there.

07:30 And I did that for the next eighteen months I think.

What knowledge did you have about Communism and the threat in Asia at that time?

Oh quite a lot. There was an awful lot of literature about it. Going back to World War II really where the national movement started to – from which the terrorist organization sprang.

08:00 The country was very strictly under military rule then. It wasn't ruled by the Malayans. It was ruled by the British and very strict control of movements of individuals throughout the country, especially the movement of any food stuff and curfews at night, you couldn't move around at night. And there had been a

08:30 lot of military literature produced on the tactics and habits and procedures used up the terrorists and the terrorists in those days, their main offensive activity was ambushing. The army had to be particularly careful about ambushing but there were no really fixed attacks or anything like that.

09:00 I would say we had an understanding of the problem. The biggest problem was to find these people. They were very hard to find.

Could you tell me about that?

I don't know what the exact proportion is but I would say eighty percent of Malaya in those days was either bushland or rainforest and

09:30 looking for – When you've got a rainforest that's covering several thousand acres to search there for Communist terrorists is a very time consuming difficult job. Especially as they've been doing it for years and they know all the tricks of the trade. However we used to go out on patrol. We patrolled incessantly every day. We would go out on patrols and look for the signs, tracks were the biggest sign.

10:00 To help us we had Dayak trackers who weren't that much help at any rate and tracker dogs that theoretically could sniff people some fifty or a hundred yards strait distance. No, they were very difficult to find indeed. It was very frustrating really. Very frustrating. But we kept at it. That's all we could do. There was no new technique or new system.

10:30 The air force helped a bit by – certainly in supplies because we could go out for say six weeks on a patrol and get an air drop every week or whatever it was. And the air force also did a lot of flying to try and detect the camps as they used to call them, the terrorist camps which were hidden in the most inaccessible

11:00 places. It was almost a case of finding a camp and just stumbling over it. Very difficult.

Did you come across terrorist camps yourself?

Yes. I did. I came across two. The first one – they heard us coming and left – and the second one there was a small

11:30 engagement – exchange of arms and they took off for the border and we didn't do terribly well actually, for which I accept the blame. We didn't have much success.

Why do you think that was?

12:00 Well it wasn't lack of determination and it wasn't for lack of trying. I think the only way to find terrorists in the situations that I'm thinking about and I'm not really suggesting we should have done this is to organize a force of about three or four men in tiny little groups and get them to

12:30 highly, secretly and securely just scour the countryside until they find something. These people who have been living in the jungle for a long time – If you washed in a stream the first thing they do when they go to a stream is – and they can smell the soap. So we were told. You can't smoke because the cigarette smoke

13:00 can be smelt both before and after and during some distance away – these are the sort of things that we didn't learn. We didn't know when we got there but we learned them. They were very skilled at living in the jungle – that's what it amounted to and I think that there must have been hundreds of occasions when an Allied British or Australian or New Zealand unit was moved very close but they just

13:30 disappeared. They weren't prepared to make a stand and fight situation. They wanted to limit it to acts of terrorism. That was the only way they could hope to achieve their mission. Any confrontation with Allied forces, from their point of view, would have been a disaster. They would have been wiped out quickly.

The camps that you came across – what were they like? What did they look like and what was the set up?

14:00 The one I've got in mind I suppose the area of it would have been about four times the size of this house. Almost all but the living area was underground. Sunken paths and sunken kitchens blended in very skilfully into the vegetation. Including in the older

14:30 camps they had grown their own vines and so on. Yes it was a bit like an underground boarding house.

How well equipped were the kitchens?

Well I think the biggest problem they had was resupply. They had to get their

15:00 rice in. That was the main thing but they had to get that from a civilized area. They couldn't grow it themselves. And that's one of the reasons that soldiers were – my soldiers in particular were tied up searching Malay civilians coming out of their camps to go out and work in paddy fields or whatever every morning. And so we were told, you know, if every Malay coming out of that

15:30 camp had a pocket full of rice and there were several hundred of them that would supply the terrorists for and awful lot of rice for a long time. I didn't explain that all the civilians in the country areas by law had to live inside barbed wire camps and they had to stay. They weren't allowed out at night at all. So we had to search to make certain they were

16:00 not taking food out. But I think that was the terrorists biggest problem keeping up the food supply.

While you were in Malaya what were the main acts of terrorism that the Communists were committing?

I think the one that got most publicity was the murder of the high commissioner there, Gurney, I think his name, who was ambushed on the road somewhere. All of them were ambushes in my area, sixteen policemen were ambushed and killed about four miles down the road from our camp. And when you look back on it it was just stupidity really because every Thursday or whatever it was at about three o'clock they – all these sixteen police went down to do certain things in certain areas.

16:30 So obviously they reacted to that and

17:00 got ready for the next Thursday. But most of them were ambushes outside of the city areas. Very few activities in the cities.

Those policemen, were they British policemen?

No. they weren't – no they weren't.

They were Malay.

Yes.

What kind of weapons did the terrorists have and what were you dealing with in that regard?

17:30 The weapons the terrorists had were largely weapons given to them by the British government during World War II when they were trying to build up the resistance to Japan and they were smuggling in rifles and machine guns to the nationalists in Malaya. So they were mainly British rifles and machine guns. And what was the second part of the question, what did we have?

18:00 **What were you dealing with against the terrorists? I mean what kind of methods were they using.**

Well whilst I was there the army switched from the Lee Enfield rifle which had been the staple weapon

of the British and Australian army since 1914 to a rifle called the FN. The FN had a lot of advantages but a lot of disadvantages. But the main thing was it was an automatic rifle. You didn't have to reload every time, you just kept pressing the trigger.

18:30 The disadvantage with the FN in Malaya in particular was it was too big and bulky. When moving around in close country you need something that's about that long so you can move in and out of the bushes. The FN was about that long and it kept on catching on things. It was also very heavy. The army didn't persevere with it very long. I think five or ten years later they scrapped it and got

19:00 another one.

How difficult was it working in that jungle terrain?

The worst problem I suppose is heat and humidity and rain which is almost a contradiction but it's not – rain – in the wet season it rained every day and when I say rain it really rained. That made it difficult particularly

19:30 if you weren't on flat ground because you were one pace forward and three slid back on the tracks. That was a problem. When you were out overnight keeping dry was a problem. A lot of fungal diseases that soldiers got there. Tinea and fungal diseases caused by damp and humidity, that sort of thing.

20:00 And the camping equipment we had – I call it camping equipment, was crude to say the least and a lot of soldiers, myself included, used to grab the parachutes they dropped our food with and cut big lumps out of them and make them into sleeping bags. And they were quite good and they took up little space. Sleeping on wet

20:30 ground was always a risky business in that area. Because there was another unpleasant complaint that you can get which comes from mites, I think, that live in the moist undergrowth. That was a problem. So I think the main problem is uncomfortable living. It wasn't so bad if you were working down on the rubber plantations where it was relatively flat and

21:00 no difficult shrubbery or scrub to get through. I think the people I felt most sorry for on some of those patrols were the dogs who used to get covered in leeches and you could practically see – these were Labradors or Alsatians and I don't think they were –

21:30 they had the genes for that climate. Beautiful dogs but it was hard on them. They were literally exhausted after a few days. And I'm certain their sense of smell went first.

How reliable were they?

Not too good in my experience. I think again moving around in the flat country like on the rubber plantations

22:00 and close to civilization they were probably satisfactory. In my opinion it was a waste of time taking them into the jungle. In fact I stopped doing it.

Where were you based when you weren't on patrol?

Well most of the time I was in Malaya at a place called Kroh, K-R-O-H. It was up near the Thai border and we were in a camp that had been built by the Malays or the

22:30 British some years before. It was quite a pleasant climate. It was about two thousand feet above sea level. So at night you sometimes pulled a blanket over you and much cooler than down on the sea level. Soldiers lived in tents but they had a recreational hut and a mess hut. Quite good really. Quite good.

And how often

23:00 **would you be out on patrol?**

Look I'd be only guessing now but I would say four days in seven. That's a guess. It varied a lot with the information we got which was quite often unreliable of course. I would say about four days in seven but the

23:30 – it rotated. You know, a platoon might do patrols for six days and then not have another one for five or something like that. And the longest patrols we went out on were about five weeks. They were difficult because we had to carry so much more on our backs. The, you know the army pack was about that big and we needed something about that big.

24:00 **You mentioned the equipment earlier, the camping gear. What did you actually take with you on patrol?**

Well lets start from the top, this is for accommodation. We took food for – if we were going out for four days we could carry that. And the food all came from ration packs which reached us in little cardboard packages and they

24:30 would consist of baked beans and steak and peas or something like that. Biscuits. I think the British ones had a Mars Bar in them which were supposed to be enough for one day. I found that our soldiers

threw most of that stuff away and went down to our canteen and bought things they liked which

25:00 was bully beef and chocolates and biscuits and things like that. But the – from the point of view of protection from the weather, we had a – I've forgotten what they were called now, but each man had a thing like a large cape which he could use as a cape actually. But when there were two of you

25:30 you buttoned these capes together and they made a tent large enough for two people. In addition to that I took my two parachute sleeping bags and a ground sheet

26:00 which is just a waterproof thing that you put on the ground and lie on. That's about it. So it was rations and sleeping gear plus the, you know, the tooth brush and so on. That's all.

What did you have to cook with?

Well the mess tins we had were also cookers. In other words you cooked in them. But – and they gave us those blocks of white stuff that

26:30 burn – I've forgotten that they are called now – do you know what I'm talking about?

I think so.

They are like the fire lighters you get. You set a match to it and it burns away. And you hold your mess tin over that and it boils the water or cooks the steak and peas. Pretty rough stuff.

What was the greatest challenge for you as a leader?

27:00 Finding the terrorists which I wasn't very good at. The greatest challenge I think was to keep the enthusiasm going. You know, when you've trudged around for about a week and you've seen nothing, heard nothing, done nothing really you begin to wonder, and I'm talking about the general atmosphere. You begin to wonder is this all worthwhile, what are we doing here,

27:30 what are we doing here, that sort of thing. There wasn't enough excitement or movement or activity to get your mind off yourself. So my problem was to try and keep enthusiasm at a reasonable level. I'm not sure that I mastered that actually.

How did you try and do it?

28:00 Oh just by talking to them, jogging them along, having a chat with them. Saying it's not really as bad as it is, is it and think of some corny joke to tell them. You know, just normal human relations conversation. I had some – a couple of good platoon commanders who did most of it of course.

How often did you get to see your wife and kids during this time?

28:30 Home for three nights I think. Every soldier got off for three nights once a month. I think it was three nights, yes. Pretty miserable life being an army officers' wife really. And I think of Jan. You know, I left her behind. I really left her behind in Malaya. I left her behind in Korea. And

29:00 I left her behind when I went to Vietnam. Pretty hard for the little woman. It's always exciting for the man because he's going to a new job a new challenge, wack o. But the little mother is left in a house. She probably had never met the neighbours. It's probably a dreadful house because you can't find one or you can't afford to get a decent one. Am I bringing tears to your eyes? It is. It's a rough life.

29:30 And things have changed tremendously now because postings into the army are largely dictated by where the wife works as you may or may not be aware there are a very large percentage of married ladies who have a job. Now going back to what I'm talking about that was completely exceptional rather than the rule. So if today they want to post

30:00 Joe Smith from Sydney to Townsville it is a matter of debate as to whether the wife will go there or not. Quite often the wife is earning much more than the husband.

What would your wife talk to you about about her difficulties when you were away?

I think she was. She is a wonderful girl. I think she is marvellous. And I am biased I wouldn't deny that.

30:30 She took it wonderfully. She's a very gregarious person. She gets on very easily with people but I think her main problem was separation. Just not seeing one another. I think that was it. She really didn't have much problems in the household side because all the cooking and all the cleaning and washing and sweeping and so on was done for her.

31:00 That has big advantages but it also has disadvantages because the ladies tend just to sit around and feel sorry for themselves. Not my wife of course.

How long were you in Malaysia for?

Two and a half years I think.

And what was the state of the Emergency when you left?

Malaya had it's independence

31:30 before we get. Merdeka [freedom] it was called – yes they became – they took over the running of the whole country.

Could you remember about what you remember of that transfer of power?

Well we were aware from the time that we got to Malaya that the British government were working towards and independent Malaya and reading the papers you just got there

32:00 were splashes of news about it almost every day. And soon, after about a year or eighteen months it was quite clear it was coming but no one knew exactly when. And then I think about six months before Merdeka Day, the announcement was made that they were taking over everything at that time. And sure enough they did. I think there were some

32:30 pretty wild celebrations in the major cities, as there should be. I think there was also a lot of concern in Malaya because although the Malays are the dominant race in numbers a lot of the finance of the country was tied up by the Chinese and there is no love lost between the Indians and the Chinese and the Malays. There are a large number of Indians there too.

33:00 And I think there was some concern as to whether this was going to make a happy mixture. Apparently it is working.

How had the locals responded to the emergency and responded to the troops?

A bit hard to say. I think they were very irked and restricted by having to live outside of the cities in these containment or whatever they were called

33:30 where you get probably a thousand people all behind barbed wire living on the periphery of a town and they had schools and all the rest of it and the shops and so on. But they were very restricted in what they could do and the accommodation was pretty crude. So I think there was dissatisfaction there. Particularly as the Emergency wound down. It got a little less every year. I think there were Malays or other nationals there who queried

34:00 the need to keep these restrictions going. I would have thought that for about ten years during this emergency period, if it was that long, perhaps six or seven years that the average Malay country family had a pretty dismal life really.

What was the rationale for the restrictions in the countryside?

The rationale. To deny the terrorists logistic

34:30 support particularly food and information and as I said earlier that was the biggest – the terrorists' biggest problem was food, without doubt.

Could you gauge how much local support there was for the terrorists?

You got an idea of it. One of the way of finding out was to –

35:00 if a terrorist was shot or killed or captured, if he looked in reasonably good condition you knew that he was getting some good support locally. Other than that it was guess work I guess but they had special police who were allegedly finding out and advising the military what to do about places were supplies were readily available or not.

35:30 I don't know.

Could you tell me about coming home to Australia and where you were posted to?

We all assembled at Penang and the same ship that took us up, that dreadful ship. New Australia I think it was called, came in

36:00 and the whole battalion and all the families got onboard and away we went. And the captain we didn't see I think for the whole trip because there had been a collision at sea on the way up apparently and he was very upset about it. That didn't fill us with confidence about the trip I suppose. At any rate we got home safely and when we arrived in Sydney they took away our

36:30 FNs and gave us the old rifles and told us to march though the city, which we did. I think Jan and I were delighted to be home and my mother who was still alive and Jan's parents and my brother and so on were delighted to see us. It was good to be home.

What was the reception in the streets of Sydney?

Oh very limited.

37:00 I don't think there was much excitement about a battalion coming back from Malaya. People politely waved all the way up George Street but nothing like the reception some units get when they are coming home now. I don't think that worried us. It was just good to be there. And I've forgotten what job I got

now. At any rate we had only been home six

37:30 months and we went to England so we didn't really have much time to ponder our situation in Australia for long. Lived at Victoria Barracks, which was good.

Could you tell me about where you were when the Vietnam War broke out?

Yes.

38:00 I'd like to explain that for a while in my career I was a defence planner and I had much greater knowledge of the situation there and the likelihood of war than ninety percent of my fellow soldiers because the information coming through us was all highly classified stuff so the Vietnam was didn't come as a surprise to me as it did

38:30 to many. It just happened. I am just trying to think exactly where I was when it broke out. Yes, we were in Puckapunyal that famous army camp in Victoria, and word came through that we were involved in a war in Vietnam and Australian soldiers would be going there.

39:00 And it was about that time that the government announced that there would be a national service scheme and I was removed from Puckapunyal and sent up to a place you've never heard of called Scheyville, which is just outside of Windsor and given the most wonderful job of training national service officers. One of the most satisfactory jobs I've ever had in my life. My main contribution to the war in

39:30 Vietnam was providing a lot of officers actually. But these young men, they were twenty when they came in I think. In their twenty-first year. They rose to the occasion and I had the greatest admiration for them. Did a wonderful job and the tragedy of it all was, and you won't remember, that no one welcomed them back and I think it was three or four years before there was a sort of a national welcome home to the Vietnam

40:00 Boys. Dreadful. A national disgrace. You don't remember any of this do you? You're too young. But they did. They served their country magnificently and I have close contact with them still. I'm very proud of what I did there and more fortunately they are all very proud they did it. I've asked hundreds of them who came through that school – the officer training

40:30 unit whether they regretted it and they said, "No. It's the best thing that happened in my life." Which is good.

Tape 8

00:31 **Brigadier I believe you went to Vietnam in the early days of the conflict. Can you tell me about that?**

Yes I was – at that time I was a defence planner and as part of my job along with others of course we used to go to Malaya and Thailand for meetings with other Commonwealth countries about

01:00 defence matters and we used to go to Bangkok quite frequently, I mean every three months or so. And it suddenly occurred as we were generally aware of the problems in Vietnam that it would be a good idea of someone went and had a look. So I talked – I put on my most persuasive smile and talked to my boss and he agreed it would be a good idea to go up and have a look. So I went up.

01:30 This was in 19 – I think it was the early sixties sometime, about sixty-one or sixty-two. So I went up and spent about four days there staying at the Australian Embassy. And learned a lot about what was going on. Now these were the very early days of the conflict and there were only a few thousand Americans there. And all the ominous signs were apparent.

02:00 And I think I did that trip about three times finally – each time it was a bit worse, I mean the situation was worse. So I had a rough idea what was there before it all blew up and some of the problems, not a detailed knowledge. And it was very interesting doing that.

What were the ominous signs?

The ominous signs were that the

02:30 natives were restless if you know what I mean. They felt as though something was going to happen to them. They felt that the Communists in the north were going to come down and kill them all or grab them which is exactly what happened of course, finally. They weren't – they didn't have a feeling of stability. And the economy of the country was pretty low

03:00 and some of the positions weren't exactly spotless in their behaviour or their spending. Yes, I think there was a lot of dissatisfaction there.

What sort of contact was there between you and local Vietnamese politicians?

Very little. My main sauce of information was the Australian ambassador or the army attaché. We had an

03:30 attaché up there for years and a retired Australian soldier named Ted Serong who became quite famous up there actually as an advisor to the Americans on how to meet that sort of a threat. I met quite a lot of Vietnamese service people but I wouldn't say they were contacts really.

04:00 **Generally what was your opinion of how equipped and ready the South Vietnamese army were?**

I'm not sure that I can answer that very well. I didn't get the impression that they were certainly ready to go at the drop of a hat. But I really don't know.

Were the Australian training team there at that stage?

04:30 Oh no. No. This is well before that.

What sort of information was there about the Viet Cong?

I think the main information were that they were a warlike terrorist rebellious group of people supported by the Communists

05:00 whose main job was to undermine authority in South Vietnam, To terrorize the villages into giving them support both in the way of food and support from a political point of view. I think they were responsible for a large number of assassinations and murders of people who weren't sympathetic to their cause.

05:30 And I think they were regarded as being a threat, a definite threat to the whole situation. And getting bigger.

This is an archive that will probably be accessed for many years into the future and I was just wondering if you could give me an idea of what the opinions were at the time in regard to the Communist threat in Asia

06:00 **and the Domino Theory and why Vietnam was considered so important.**

Well the Domino Theory was widely accepted by many people. And it was pretty logical in the sense that with China to the north a very strong and militant Communist nation that pressure would come on to states like [UNCLEAR]

06:30 and North and South Vietnam and even Thailand to join the Communist group and certainly in those days there was an organization, a political and military organization known as SEATO, South East Asian Treaty Organization. And that's one of the reasons I was going to Bangkok. They used to meet

07:00 in Bangkok. It was accepted, openly accepted by France, Britain, Australia, Thailand, New Zealand – who have I left out? The United States, that there was a definite Communist threat. And there was a possibility that the domino theory might prove to be factual if it was allowed to develop.

07:30 So there was genuine feeling against those nations, that's France, United States, Britain and Australia that things weren't too good as far as stability, political stability in those countries.

So from a military and strategic point of view what was the perception of what was required to stem that flow?

08:00 Well a lot of plans were written. But the first thing that was needed was an awful lot of soldiers on the ground. And I don't say this critically so much as you've got to be realistic, none of the countries I've mentioned – I don't think at that time were prepared to build up their armed

08:30 forces on the unproven domino theory, threat, if you follow what I mean. Australia certainly didn't, New Zealand certainly didn't. Britain I think was anxious to get out of South East Asia all together which they were in the process of doing actually. They were trying to get out of Malaya and other places. France, I can't – I'm just trying to

09:00 think when Dien Bien Phu was on. But France as you know also wanted out. It used to be French Indochina and she had had a bad beating in there and I think she wanted to get out too. So there really wasn't much impetus or drive amongst those SEATO nations to produce tangible troops on the ground or

09:30 evidence that there was going to be a – a military array there to stop the Chinese, the Japanese, the Communists threat coming down.

So how early were plans floated for a mass commitment of ground troops?

Well America was really the only country that

10:00 had contributed anything. I mean we put in a little bit which I suppose proportionate to our size was not too bad. But France didn't put in anyone. Britain didn't put in any one. Germany, or any of the large

nations. None of them put any in. It was an American effort and so there was no real determination amongst a group of Allied

10:30 democratic countries to commit troops there. It was America went it alone and what's his name talked what's his name into sending Australian troops. It was [Australian Prime Minister] Menzies wasn't it, I've forgotten.

I think so, yes.

We fortunately had decided on a national service scheme which was in operation but unless that national service scheme had been

11:00 introduced when it was we would have had great difficulty sending anyone up there. We just didn't have the soldiers to send.

So what did your role as defence planner involve?

Defence planner. We planned about every likely defence contingency or threat contingency as it effected

11:30 well the Australian military forces. There was a lot of planning done on Indonesia for example and at that time there was a Dutch New Guinea and there was a lot of concern in Canberra about whether the Indonesians would take over Dutch New Guinea and if they did what the Australians would do about it. That was one of the matters that just used to keep on popping back on my table.

12:00 We were greatly concerned or occupied with contributing to SEATO plans for the – for this Domino Theory idea of what we might be able to do and what we think the force size should be and thing of that nature. We planned about – You name a subject we planned it.

So how prominently did Indonesia feature

12:30 **in these fears of what was happening in South East Asia?**

At that time? Oh I think they – the president was Sukarno, is that right? And some pretty dreadful things were going on in Indonesia at that time. And I think there was great concern particularly in the political circles as to the future intention of the country and what effect that would have on Australia.

13:00 I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Were you visiting Borneo in your role as defence planner?

I visited Indonesia a couple of times. Not Borneo no.

Was it during the Malaysian Confrontation.

Yes. That took place about that time. I'm just getting a little hazy about dates now.

13:30 But I was in Canberra in sixty-one or sixty-two. I'd left Malaya in fifty – yes, it was about the same time as the confrontation between Borneo, between Malaya and Indonesia. Yes, so things were a bit dicey, potentially dicey.

14:00 **I'm just going to fast forward now Brigadier because we are aware of time to your role at Scheyville. What sort of facilities were there for training national servicemen and what was specific in terms of the requirements for getting those men who were strait off civic street into ship shape.**

Well first of all to get them there. It was a

14:30 ballet system of calling up, you know, your number was drawn out of a hat. When you were called up you went to a training battalion and at the training battalion the CO stood up and spoke to all soldiers and said, "You have an opportunity to be trained as an officer, do you wish to be? If you wish to be somewhere or put your name in," or whatever. The requirement was that he had to pass a psychological test

15:00 which was basically an IQ test and he had to volunteer for the training and he had to pass the leaving certificate or the equivalent at school. And then having done all that if he still applied he went before a selection board of three officers and a psychologist and he was either selected or not. If he was selected he had to go to Scheyville for

15:30 what averaged out to about twenty-three weeks training and if successful there he became a second lieutenant and was posted to a battalion and to give you an idea of how quickly things were happening people were leaving Scheyville and fighting in Vietnam three months later. You know, the whole thing was going pretty fast. The facilities at Scheyville

16:00 when I first saw it was a migrant camp so it really wasn't geared to migrant training at all. But the Department of Works and a lot of keen soldiers sorted it out. It was no Hilton five star [hotel] I can assure you but it did the job well. And it was far enough away from civilization to keep the cadets out of trouble from the point of view of going over the fence at night and mixing in the sins of the city.

16:30 And believe you me they were a great bunch of fellows.

What was the public reaction to the overseas deployment of national servicemen?

I think they accepted it for a start and gradually as you probably are aware the enthusiasm and the support for Vietnam got lower and lower and lower and like in the United States the decision to leave Vietnam

17:00 and the reason, largely the reason the battle was lost there is that it has lost it's political support. People didn't want it any more. Stay out of Vietnam. Big protest marches. Universities had a wonderful time if you get my drift.

Did you think back in sixty-two that it was a winnable war?

Yes I did.

On what grounds?

I just thought that when

17:30 American and Allied military force got there, if the country could be organized in certain ways, as it had in Malaya, although it was on a far bigger scale, it was winnable, yes. But the unknown was how much support China would put in, how much support Russia would put in. At any rate I was wrong. I was wrong. I freely admit that. I wasn't the only one who was wrong by the way.

18:00 **When did it occur to you that you were wrong?**

Well I started to worry a bit, you know, in the mid sixties when it just seemed to me that we were going about it the wrong way. See the basic idea was to shield the population from Communist influence largely through the Viet Cong. Now if you want to

18:30 shield the population from the Viet Cong you've got to stop the Viet Cong getting to the population. But the Viet Cong were moving quite readily from village, into the jungle, into the towns and so on. There wasn't enough control of the population. But you could write a book on this subject. But that to me was one of the main things and although I'm not comparing the scale of the war at all, the British in Malaya

19:00 shielded the population almost completely from the terrorists by forcing them to move into those enclosures I was talking about earlier. And the terrorists just ran out of support and they weren't achieving their aim. It's no use sitting in the jungle; you've got to get out there and get your doctrine over to the people and they weren't able to do that.

Why were the Viet Cong so successfully able to infiltrate local

19:30 **village populations?**

Well I think they were selling a pretty, you know, viable item. What they were promising was we'll be our own masters. We'll run the country. That's a pretty attractive proposition for the humble peasants isn't it?

20:00 See the basic break up of Vietnam – the Communists stayed in the North and the non-Communists came south. And it was all about Communism really. You don't look convinced and I don't blame you.

Well the former Defence Secretary of the United States said that in hindsight he felt that it wasn't

20:30 **the civil war that we thought it was, it was actually about colonialism. About people being their own master as you said.**

Well that's the term I used. Yes. It certainly wasn't about colonialism. I mean all the colonists, the French, had moved out years before. No I think that's the line they sold and they did it very successfully and they were very skilful at it

21:00 and they had military capability – did you ever read or hear of the battle of Dien Bien Phu when the French were defeated. It's a remarkable military story but they thrashed the Frenchman, they really did, thrashed them. And the French got the message and left.

So how did you apply the knowledge that you'd acquired in Vietnam to implementing a training system

21:30 **for cadets at Scheyville.**

Well I trained the cadets. My main contribution to Vietnam was training the officers to go there. None of the cadets when I was training them had been to Vietnam. Nor had I in a service position. I went later. I went towards the end of the war.

So what did you know at that stage about the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the Viet Cong and how were you using that to train

22:00 **officers?**

I had learned an awful lot about that when I was a defense planner actually. I had read books, Chinese books, not in Chinese but North Vietnamese books on tactics and techniques. I had after thirty odd years in the army a rough idea of how terrorist organizations functioned. I know basically where their weak points are and the weak point is basically always

22:30 resupply. If you can cut off their supplies they've had it. And I think I had enough knowledge but not about detailed matters. Not about pungy spikes and things like that. I'd never heard of those until a few Australians – do you know what I'm talking about? It's cause to get new boots which is a good thing I suppose. But the other thing at Scheyville is that it wasn't just about

23:00 Vietnam it was about being an officer in the army and of course a large number of cadets who went through Scheyville don't go to Vietnam at all.

Did national servicemen have a choice in going to Vietnam?

More or less. More or less. I think the vast majority if they were told they were going said OK. That's my understanding. That they didn't

23:30 have to go. Put it this way if I as a platoon commander said to my thirty good men and true we're off to Vietnam tomorrow and two of them had come along afterwards and said, "Sir, I don't want to go to Vietnam I would have arranged for their transfer or move to another unit. That's about the way it worked. There was no shame in it.

How did the ballot system work?

24:00 How did it work? Well people were very critical of it. I've forgotten what the odds were. But the country could not afford to call up all of the twenty year olds. We didn't have the facilities or the men to train them and it would have cost a fortune. Terribly expensive business training soldiers and equipping.

24:30 So they decided on the ballot system which I think is as fair as any. I don't know if anyone else has got – it's completely objective. There's no subjectivity in it at all. The dates are drawn out of a hat and the names are drawn out of a hat. What could be fairer? But it was much criticised, particularly on university campuses. Universities have gone to the pack since I left them.

25:00 **Was it possible to avoid national service?**

Theoretically no, except on certain grounds but a bit of fidgeting went on I think. The grounds were education, if you were half way through a degree, certain health problems, financial or family difficulties, things like that.

25:30 I think they were very reasonable about those things. A lot of people of course refused to come in. Some of our leading citizens would you believe were draft dodgers – we mustn't use that word though.

Who were they?

I won't mention their name, but there was an article about them in the paper two Sundays ago if you'd like to go back and have a look. You'd be surprised.

What did it mean to be a draft dodger

26:00 **in 1965 in Australia?**

It – from my point of view it was a disgrace. I am a great believer in my country right or wrong and if my country wants me I'll go. A lot of people used the excuse that they didn't think the war was right and just and so on. And ignored the countries call or order for them to come. I despise that.

26:30 I think they could have come in. They weren't necessarily going to go to Vietnam at any rate. They could have been sent to a nice ordnance depot down on the Murray River or somewhere and just filled a slot in the army, what's wrong with that? It's part of your national obligation. But some quite well known people did not avoid it. One was a great rock singer.

27:00 Gosh. He was the leading male rock singer in Australia at the time. He was called up and he said, "Of course I'll go" and he finished up as a driver in an armoured personnel carrier in Vietnam. God bless him.

What were the specific requirements for a national servicemen to go through officer training? What sort of men were you looking for?

27:30 The army has had great experience in selection people over many years and we've leant on the experience of both the British army and the US marines and the American army. Basically they've got to be of a certain intelligence level, otherwise you are wasting your time. Basically they've got to have certain psychological levels that they can stand the stress and strain and are capable of doing the job.

28:00 So those two requirements were for a start. And thirdly they've got to impress a group of objective judges that they are capable of putting up with the stresses and strains of being trained and putting up with the stresses and strains, having been trained, of being in control of a group of thirty men possibly under very dangerous circumstances. The

28:30 selection process itself is about as good as you can get and there is nothing highly scientific about it. And I don't know what the success or fail rate overall is. But at Scheyville thirty percent of the people who were selected go go fail. But it was a very tough course, a very tough course.

So what could someone fail at? Why was it tough?

29:00 They just didn't have the drive, determination, ambition, guts, to complete a very tough physical and mental course.

How was it different to the officer training you'd received at Duntroon?

Oh it was as different as chalk and cheese. These fellows worked a six-day week. They started work at about six in the morning and finished at ten thirty at night. They were living on the run.

29:30 Really hard work. I'd like you to meet one and he can tell you about it. It was tough. It had to be tough because we couldn't make mistakes. We felt that any one of our graduates must go into a unit and perform at once. And be confident and capable of doing it and there thank God – and thank God ninety per cent of them did that.

What kind of

30:00 **jungle warfare, guerrilla warfare training was there?**

Oh a lot because although it wasn't so when we first arrived, started Scheyville when the decision was taken to send national servicemen to Vietnam after we'd been going about a month, I think. Whilst we didn't have any home grown jungle we did a lot of work in enclosed country up in the state forest. Much the same.

30:30 The biggest difference was the climate but the biggest problem in jungle warfare is certainly the climate. But it is also observation seeing your enemy and engaging your enemy and controlling troops. Well you can do that in the state forest in many places in Australia but not in the same weather environment.

31:00 It's a bit hard to simulate a jungle exercise when the frost is on the ground and everyone is more worried about dying of cold than anything else.

How had Australian jungle fighting techniques changed since the days of the landings in Borneo and the fighting in New Guinea?

I left the army how

31:30 many years ago, thirty odd years ago. I'm not too sure how they've changed but the armies have become a lot more sophisticated because they are getting a lot more sophisticated equipment. So things that we did in Malaya when I was up there dealing with terrorists there they wouldn't be doing now. They'd be doing it a different way because of their equipment. One of the most outstanding improvements is communications.

32:00 **How had things changed in between World War II and mid sixties preparing officers for Vietnam?**

Preparing officers for World War II?

Jungle Fighting. How had jungle-fighting techniques of the Australian army changed since World War II to when you were training officers for Vietnam.

Very little. Very little. It depends on the nature of your enemy

32:30 really. I mean if you are going to – in the jungle fighting in New Guinea for example normally you were fighting the Japanese and as often as not they were dug into the ground and it was a very tough difficult task to dislodge them. Where as in Malaya if you ran into a group of enemy they'd fire a few shots and run for their lives. Not that they were frightened but their main tactic was terrorism and ambushing and they were avoiding

33:00 fixed conflicts. Am I making myself clear?

Yes.

Good.

How did that compare to Vietnam?

Well Vietnam finally became a place where there were large fixed battles, where the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army and other people were organized into regiments and battalions and

33:30 they put in some very big attacks. Very big attacks indeed. It wasn't anything like fighting in Malaya when I was there at any rate. It was a different style all together and the only difference that there would be on the battle field would be observation and freedom of movement. I mean that. See many of

the fighting –

34:00 one of the big attacks they put in in Vietnam was an attack on Saigon coming down from the north west. Now that was just like a battle in World War II, really, except that the Viet Cong had used tunnels to get a lot of the people there, so they arrived with a bit of a surprise. But the techniques that they were using were much the same as used since World War II.

34:30 **What was your official position at Scheyville?**

I was the commandant. I say this with pride, it started with me. I was all there was and yes I planned it and executed it and recruited the staff to do it and proudly stood on graduation parades when they left. I think there were seven graduation parades in the time I was there.

35:00 And I think finally the – I moved on to England and finally I think nineteen hundred officers came out of that place in a period of seven or eight years I think.

Do you know if many of those officers went on to have long careers in the army?

Oh yes, Yes. Several generals, a mass of brigadiers.

35:30 But they are all getting on a bit now. I got a phone call from a chap two days ago who was in the Battle of Long Tan. He is sixty-two now. He's got four grandchildren. Now I remember him as a rosy cheeked young man hopping around at the age of twenty. Yes. A lot of water's gone under the bridge.

Can you tell me about when you returned to Vietnam and

36:00 **in what capacity?**

When I went back – when I went to Vietnam when the war was on there I went late in the piece and I was supposed to be commanding the task force but they brought the task force home. So I was left with a small number of Australian advisors and training team people. And I was the commander. I lived in Saigon.

36:30 And hobnobbed with all the, you know, all the Vietnamese and American generals and admirals and air marshals and so on.

And what was the mood like at that stage?

Changeable. You know, great optimism in some conferences and extreme depression in others.

37:00 The thing we've got to remember is that the war was being lost in the streets of New York and Washington and Chicago. It was losing it's political support. People didn't want to keep Americans in South Vietnam. And the Americans were starting to take troops home. Now you know if you're a soldier on the front line and you hear that half

37:30 a million people are parading in Washington saying take me home, you are not exactly hopping up and down saying let me out then, are you? So the determination of the nation waned rightly or wrongly history will have to say.

What role did the media play at that stage in the war?

I think the media can

38:00 accept a lot of blame for stirring things up about how bad the situation was and how wrong the situation was. But it was the most exposed war on the media that had ever been fought. I mean you had television crews right up at the front and reporters taking photographs, you know, within minutes of an attack taking place and

38:30 so on. And for reasons that are best known to the commanders at the time quite often they had access to talk freely with soldiers and so on which didn't really happen very much before Vietnam.

What do you think the role of the media should be in a war?

The role of the media is to report the facts. I think they've got to be careful that in so doing they don't give away secure matters

39:00 to the oppositions and I think they should leave personal judgements out of it because they are not qualified to make judgements about military strategy and tactics which, believe it or not, are quite intricate and require a lot of experience.

Did that happen in Vietnam? Did the media – ?

Oh yes. There were fellows writing books that high about how not to do it and how to do it and so on.

39:30 This is democracy. But you ask me my thoughts about the media and that's what I think. A lot of them were writing absolutely garbage about matters they don't understand. You look unconvinced again. I'm getting worried.

What was the role of the training team at that stage when you arrived in seventy-one?

The training team's basic responsibility

40:00 was to try and transform a Vietnamese regiment or battalion or whatever into a cohesive effective fighting unit. Now the Vietnamese had built up an army very quickly and they didn't have much military knowledge or experience available to themselves to train them and they certainly didn't have much in the way of new equipment. So the idea

40:30 of training teams was introduced in, I don't know what year it was, but late fifties or the early sixties I suppose where Americans went out and they would literally train units. And I think they did a wonderful job. We joined in on that arrangement and that was the first contribution we made to the Vietnamese war with – well it was in form of twenty or thirty experienced soldiers going up

41:00 to help train. And they did a remarkable job too. Pretty dicey business really because you were going into battle with not properly trained units and so on.

Tape 9

00:31 **Brigadier could you tell me about what your impressions of Saigon were like when you arrived in 1971?**

Disappointment. Saigon used to be a beautiful city when I first went up there. I've forgotten what year it was but it was a lovely garden city. Nice wide streets, nice houses,

01:00 some fine buildings on the edge of the river. A couple of nice hotels and relatively peaceful and quiet. I think the noisiest things were the motor scooters and so on. I thought it was very nice. When I went back in seventy-one of course there was barbed wire and soldiers and restrictions and

01:30 three quarters of the people in the streets were in uniform. I think the atmosphere of the city had changed largely and I think there were a very large number of people there who made their living in every possible way from the presence of military servicemen.

02:00 It was crowded. Not that it had lost its charm.

How much bombing was going on in Vietnam when you were there?

Very little in Saigon. Not a large amount. The place we had some soldiers was hit a couple of times by mortar bombs.

02:30 But the – that sort of technique stopped some years before when they built up military strength to put in sizable attacks. Those were more acts of terror than acts of war if you follow the difference. So there wasn't really that much. The – now and again there was a rocket attack on some part of Saigon but nothing too much to worry about.

03:00 The only really big one when I was there was when someone fired a rocket at an ammunition barge that was just down the bottom of the city on the Mekong River. I shouldn't laugh but the whole city shook. What a clump it was.

How much contact did you have with the Americans?

A lot.

03:30 Because I didn't have much in the way of command, soldiers to worry about I spent most of my time travelling in Vietnam. I visited every province. I visited every sizable establishment of Korean or American on each of these visits, saw an awful lot of the countryside,

04:00 had some fascinating experiences really. I saw a lot of the Americans, a lot of them. They were good to me really. They were completely – they were always providing me with transportation, particularly helicopters.

What were your impressions about the way they were feeling about the war at that stage?

I think they were getting a big jaundiced.

04:30 I think they knew that there was no support at home. I think they knew that the South Vietnamese Army wasn't really ready to go it alone. I don't think they felt that there was likely to be a successful outcome. These are only my assessments of course. I think they were a bit depressed about the outlook. But they are very professional people the Americans.

05:00 And the servicemen that I met were very professional. And whilst they do things in a different way to us I'm not suggesting that's the wrong way. It's just that they do it differently. I went out on the [USS] Kittyhawk as part of one of my visits there. The Kittyhawk is an American carrier, eighty thousand tons. It does thirty-six knots, the crew it four thousand. I've forgotten how many aircraft onboard. And that

was a fascinating experience, me a land lover.

05:30 We were up in the gulf of Tonking and every night the planes took off to bomb Hanoi. A bit unreal really. You go up and watch the planes all go and fourteen aircraft all take off or whatever the number is. And you sit around for a few hours and then they say their coming back in so you go down and see them and there are not fourteen there. There are eleven or ten or twelve – in other words another four pilots have gone.

06:00 Very, very proficient capable people. Absolute eye opener I thought. The best military operation I've ever seen.

What impressed you so much about that military operation?

The professionalism of everyone and how serious they were. Everyone was checking and double checking and making certain that things were right. Yes. Professional.

06:30 A professional approach. I'm not saying that it is better than anyone else in the world but it is the best I've seen.

What struck you about their military capability?

Their military capability. Vast. That gigantic carrier. I had been on aircraft carriers before but this is – it is enormous.

07:00 I think, you know, the top deck – the flying deck's about as big as a football field. You know, that's amazing and the number of aircraft they've got there and the way they bring them in and get them out. Get them down below. Yes. Good stuff.

What was the purpose for you to be onboard that carrier?

to improve my military knowledge.

07:30 That was the only reason I had for going. And I had become quite friendly with an American admiral in Saigon who made the suggestion. And of course it was accepted with great speed. I didn't feel I could ask to go but I was happy to go if invited.

What did you observe about the South Vietnamese Army?

08:00 I think there were some very gallant men in the South Vietnamese Army. I think the standard from unit to unit could go in a league table of ten from a two up to a seven. In other words terribly differing standards in different areas and depending on commanders.

08:30 I think that there was an inadequate system of pay and support for them which caused a few administrative problems for them. And a few devious practises and I won't enlarge on that. I think that certain parts of the Vietnamese Army,

09:00 they – what did they call them now? I think they called them the marines actually were very good actually but they were an elite sort of group. They got the best of everything. I – they had the same sort of problems. They were not fools. They knew quite well that the world opinion was swinging against them and they were up against a big oppositions. And the Americans

09:30 were moving troops home so morale no doubt was low. I got on – they were very kind to me and I got on well with them socially. I felt sorry for them I think.

What kind of equipment and what age groups were you looking at when you were looking at the average south Vietnamese soldier?

10:00 Oh I'd say I don't know. They all looked pretty young to me. I suppose early twenties. Probably younger some of them. The officers I was dealing with were about the same age I was I would think. Interesting fellows – I was kind enough to be farewelled by the president of the palace there.

10:30 I found him an interesting and articulate man. I think he had the right ideas. But I think there was a lot of political infighting going on and I think he kept his position largely because of his support for America. All the problems that any developing country would have, in fact. I think they tried hard.

11:00 **Could you tell me about some of the visits you made to the Australians, the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] in the provinces?**

Well one I went to which was right up near the so called demilitarized zone near Hue, H-U-E. And I was particularly anxious to go there because I hadn't been there before and because Hue is one of the

11:30 famous ancient cities of Vietnam and I understand it in normal times was a very beautiful city from the architectural point of view. It was an awful mess when I saw it. But to get there I had to fly in Da Nang where the Americans picked me up in a helicopter and I remember this well the pilot said to me, "Good morning general.

12:00 Do you want to go high or low? And I said well which do you prefer and he said I think it's a bit safer going low. So we went – oh, I don't know we flew for about forty-five minutes at the height of about a hundred feet. Most of it along the beaches – as far as we could. And the thing that they were worried about the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong at that stage had surface to air missiles and

12:30 they naturally and I agreed with this, wanted to avoid them as far as possible. I met a very worried Vietnamese general up in Hue who explained in great detail the perilous situation he was in and he was in a bad situation. He was the front line [UNCLEAR with the long] and there was an awful lot of North Vietnamese and

13:00 Viet Cong pretty close to him. And we were delayed coming back and we had to fly back to Da Nang at night and I said, "Are we going high or low?" And he said, "I can't go low in the darkness. We'll have to go high." And I said, "Ok." And he said, "But I've got the flares." And there was a big Negro sergeant onboard with a large plastic container and once we had gone a certain distance

13:30 he was tossing out these flares which burst in flame and give off smoke but they attract the missiles. So the theory was that if someone fired a missile at us it would hit the flares not the aircraft. And we left a trail of smoke and flares for about fifty miles I think. At any rate we got there.

What mood were the Australians in when you visited them?

14:00 Oh they were good. I think they enjoyed their work. They were all professional soldiers. Well a few of them were national servicemen. They were all professional soldiers, yes. I think they were enjoying their work. They were training Vietnamese. And they felt they were getting good results.

Whereabouts were they mainly based at that stage?

They were based at Phuoc Tuy where the task force had been

14:30 before. I'm just trying to think how far. It's about a forty minute flight from Saigon. It would be about two hundred miles I suppose from Saigon down the Mekong. But they were in good heart and good health.

Roughly how many men were left in Vietnam?

Oh a few hundred. I couldn't be precise. There were a lot of loose members

15:00 working under, not under my direct control gathering intelligence and particularly about equipment and so on, wondering around Vietnam in those days. Interesting chaps. But they – one of them got in touch with me one day and he said, "I've got a great find here sir." And I said, "What's that?" I've managed to persuade the Vietnamese to give us a tank and

15:30 an armoured personnel carrier. Now this was a bit of a find because it was Russian equipment none of which we had ever seen and our armoured research people down at Puckapunyal and places were terribly keen to find out as much as they could about the style of armour plate, the fire precautions and the style of engine and so on. So we got that and all I paid for that was – I gave each one of the Vietnamese escort

16:00 party a mottled raincoat I suppose you'd call it. You know, one of those camouflage raincoats which they were all very pleased about. And we put them on a ship and sent them back to Australia. It was a good day from the point of view of improving out knowledge down here.

What were the main concerns for the Australians at that time in the war?

16:30 **What kinds of things were being talked about in regards to the future of the forces?**

Well this is as I've mentioned several times very late in the war. They all knew they'd be going home soon. Except for the guard on the Australian embassy which I think was about twenty men. But they all knew that were just a token gesture at that stage with the task force having left.

17:00 And I think that they were disappointed that we looked like losing the war which we did at that stage. I think they were disappointed that they had to go back to the routine of Puckapunyal or Holsworthy and so on. I think they had much more authority and it's a wrong word to use but I think they enjoyed their work there and I think they thought they were going back to some mediocre job in Australia.

17:30 So I would say one of not despondency. Just disappointed at the knowledge that they would be going home soon.

What techniques were they using to train the South Vietnamese?

Oh nothing in particular. Just Australian know how as opposed to Vietnamese lack of know how really. Just telling them how to organize a patrol, where to put your soldiers, where to put your machinegun, how scouts should operate signals

18:00 from within the patrol, security measures. All very routine but no one had properly trained the Vietnamese that were coming to them in these matters. They were, yes, they were under trained.

How concerned were the South Vietnamese about the imminent withdrawal of the Americans and the Australians?

Very concerned. South Vietnamese at the higher level are

18:30 very proud people. God bless them. But as I said earlier they are not fools and I think they knew the moment the Americans had all gone the end could come. Which is exactly what did happen. I think there was great hope that the South Vietnamese army which had beetled up to a fair size would be capable of meeting the enemy but not

19:00 much confidence in that view.

Could you gauge the mood of the civilians?

No I couldn't. The only civilians I had much to do with were the people we employed in the house I lived in whose views – they were petrified about the Australians going home but for a very insular reason, they'd both lost their job and could we find them other jobs. I never got into any discussions with them

19:30 about you know, how do you feel about things. As a matter of fact I think it is a subject that most servicemen tried to avoid when dealing with South Vietnamese civilians. I think for understandable reason.

Why is that do you think?

Well I think that if they

20:00 said anything the next thing you know the person you've been speaking to, has passed on to a couple of hundred other people by word of mouth that an Australian soldier told me that we are going to win the Battle of Dun Wun Sun [?UNCLEAR] or whatever it is and that's all. Misinformation I guess.

Travelling around the countryside what impressions did you have about the physical impact the war had had

20:30 **on the country.**

In certain areas drastic. In other areas they were completely untouched. The main areas where there was a lot of damage was where obviously major battles had taken place. But a lot of the fighting of course was in the enclosed country. In the rainforests and so on and that tended to mend itself pretty quickly but

21:00 around the towns, provincial and the larger towns where there had been serious fighting the destruction was quite severe.

What did that destruction look like?

Just houses with great holes in it or falling down and that sort of thing. Burned out buildings.

Could you tell me about how you heard the news that you

21:30 **would be leaving Vietnam?**

That I personally would leave? First of all we heard that Mr Whitlam had won the election and the next flash signal that reached me, I forget what the wording was but the message was, "Now, come home. Quick." So I think we had the bulk of the soldiery were on the plane within the week and I

22:00 followed about two weeks later simply because I thought that the only decent thing to do was to visit as many places as I could and say sorry we are leaving and good luck. Both American and Vietnamese which I did.

And what was the response?

Nice of you to come. Sorry you are going. You could detect especially amongst the Vietnamese the anxiety.

22:30 Which I understood and appreciated.

Could you tell me about the farewell you had at the palace?

There was nothing grand about it. It was just that the president heard that the Australians were going home and I was the last commander. And he invited me to go home and

23:00 asked the Australian ambassador. We sat down and had a chat for a while about how things were. And the president I think tried to give us the impression that he was full of optimism without much success. He said some very nice words about the capabilities of the Australian and the support that we had given him over many years. And that was about it. He gave me a nice

23:30 painting to bring home. Yes. That was about it.

What was the mood from the Australian embassy staff who were staying?

I think that they realized that their time was limited and I think they were a bit anxious about how to do we get out.

24:00 Knowing that probably adequate arrangements would be made. But you may recall when the American embassy staff were getting out it was absolute chaos remember. I remember seeing the films of it. I wasn't there. But they'd left it too late. They should have moved out a week before. But when the Americans were getting out you know the streets were full of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers.

24:30 **How did you feel about seeing those images of the fall of Saigon those few years later?**

How did I feel? Very disappointed. Going back to a question you asked me a long time ago. I think the war was winnable if we had gone about it a different way. I think that the Americans in particular had put in an enormous amount of effort into it and lost a lot of human lives.

25:00 It all seamed like a dreadful waste of manpower. It meant another country became a Communist state which didn't please me. I was pretty depressed about it all I think.

How did you personally feel about leaving Vietnam when you left?

Annoyed. I felt that they should have left the group that I had there up until the end

25:30 Now the end wasn't that far away but I think as a matter of prestige and honour and dignity we should have stayed till the end. And in fact at the farewell lunch the Americans had for me at which the Australian ambassador was present at he said a few words about Australian government policy and I asked if I could say a few words.

26:00 I remember saying, "It's not for me to criticize my government's policy, which is a dreadful sin for a soldier but never the less I am extremely disappointed that we are being taken back before the final outcome." And I meant it.

What was it like for you to return home to public opinion, a new government and debate about the Vietnam War?

26:30 I find that a little difficult to answer. From a strict military point of view it was the end of a very big era in the Australian Army. We had a lot of soldiers in Vietnam. We had a lot of casualties there. A national service scheme had been introduced to bolster the size of the army. And by and large the soldiers

27:00 for the previous five years or so had been living a much more intense and professional sort of life. There was a definite aim and object to it all. When we were brought home from Vietnam and almost at the same time the national service scheme was cancelled we all collapsed a bit I think. And of course, the size of the army was considerably

27:30 reduced and that's the time I decided to get out.

What made you decide to leave?

Well I felt that the army of the future won't be the same. We are on a down at the moment. I'm not being disloyal to the army really but I felt that I had had a reasonable innings and I would like to get out. So I got a job in Sydney just to

28:00 finish off there. Declined a job in the United States, I might add, to the astonishment of my friend. But Jan and I had had enough of separation from kids and school and all the rest of it. So I asked for a job in Sydney and I got it and we just slowly packed up our tents like the Arabs and silently went away.

What job did you do in Sydney?

I had a job with a headquarters called Training Command

28:30 in some building in Oxford Street, dreadful job.

What did that involve?

Oh supervision of army schools throughout Australia. It had great potential but one of the problems was I wasn't in charge of it. And I've got a bit used to being in charge

29:00 of things. If you follow that. The policy I thought was a bit screwy. Not thought through. At any rate I had made my decision to leave and that was that.

What do you think your army career gave you?

Well it certainly didn't give me a big bank balance. Get that one out of the way.

29:30 It gave me a chance to meet some wonderful people. To have some very interesting experiences both in peace and in war. To go to places I was never likely to go at all. To meet a lot of people from overseas and work with them and to get to understand them a little. For example

30:00 over all I lived in Britain for nearly four years on and off. I think it broadened my outlook and my understanding of the human race generally. I feel a bit sorry for people who are probably billionaires or

millionaires now but they've sat in an office all day and

30:30 made money. Perhaps I'm just jealous but it all looked pretty dull to me. And I think I'm essentially an outdoor man in the sense that I'd rather be working outside than working inside. The only exception to that was when I was a planner and I found that job fascinating. So my feeling at the end of that was

31:00 well it's all over. I didn't really get where I wanted to go so let's get out and settle down to a family life. But of course the kids were all leaving school then except for one of them and we came and lived down here.

What did you do after the army?

Nothing. Oh I was on a couple of committees and I fundraised for a girls' school for a while. Why I will never know but we did raise some money.

31:30 I sailed. I did a lot of game fishing. I did a bit of travel. Really when I looked back on it I should be ashamed of myself. I've done very little actually.

Nothing wrong with that.

Oh I still get up in the morning and if I haven't got some definite thing to do that day

32:00 things are bad. Know what I mean. I'm not the sort of person who can just pick up my rod and go and lie on the beach all day and hope the fish won't bite.

What did you miss about the army when you left?

Companionship. A sense of purpose and the chance to see ones – not always

32:30 of course but the chance to see one's plans and instructions carried out and successfully carried out. I've got a great satisfaction out of training those national service officers. I thought that was a great project and I got great satisfaction training these people at the school out on the cotter road. Mainly because I saw the whole thing grow from nothing.

When did you establish that school?

33:00 Services staff college. Now what year was that? Sixty-six I think it was. About then. Sixty-six just before I went to Vietnam. In fact I was posted to go to Vietnam. I was in London. I got a cable saying that you are posted to go to command the task force in Vietnam. Elation. Just the job I wanted but before I got on the ship

33:30 to come home I got another signal saying plan's changed, you are going to raise a staff college in Canberra. And if I'd had a pistol in my hand I would have gone down the road and shot the general I think. Yes. That was a bitter blow. No question about that because that was the plum job for a brigadier, absolutely plum job and my job was taken over by a chap I was at

34:00 school with. I've never forgiven him although we are still – well he's dead now poor chap. I said, "You should have declined the job and said no, let Ian Geddes have it." What a fantasy that was.

What does Anzac Day mean to you Brigadier?

I think it's the most important national day

34:30 because it's a day – it sounds a bit corny when I say it, but I think it's a day when Australia established itself as a nation that could be taken into consideration in making world decisions. Only because we'd provided a mass of young men from a small country who had performed extremely well and Anzac Day is the day that we remember them.

35:00 I think it is also extremely gratifying for the whole country, not just me, that Anzac day has had the most wonderful boost in observance over the last three or four years. I would say that there are double the number of people watching and parading now than there were five years ago. Have you got any observation there?

Why do you think that is?

35:30 I don't know. It's – to me it's a bit of an upsurge of nationalism I suppose. Pride in the country. At any rate I think it is a very good thing, very good thing. Particularly because I think the kids have taken an interest in it and they've got a better understanding of the trials and tribulations and the efforts of their forebears in establishing this wonderful country.

What legacy do you think Australia's involvement

36:00 **in the wars that you served in will have for future generations?**

I don't know. World War II think was a national tragedy because probably the finest young men we had were all killed.

36:30 I think the legacy there was it took us about twenty years to recover from that from the point of view of getting back into the hard working national organization we'd been before. I think for the people who have taken part in the wars it has built into them a respect for war, a pride in having

37:00 done something for their country, which is important and that's about it. The – all of my close friends served in some capacity in the war and they don't talk about it a lot. On the contrary they talk about it very little but on Legacy Day and Anzac Day out come the old ribbons and away they go and march up and down the street.

37:30 It's good. Good.

Brigadier, thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. It's been a very long day, so thank you for your patience.

37:41 **INTERVIEW ENDS**