Australians at War Film Archive

Anthony Keech - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Tony, thanks very much for participating in the archive project. If I can ask you to start by giving us a brief summary of your life and your service history ...**

Sure. Brief is probably a bit difficult, but I was one of six children and we were all born in Bathurst, New South Wales,

01:00 and raised in Bathurst. I have four brothers and one sister. I'm the second youngest. I was born in June 1942 in the middle of the Second World War, so to speak. My father at the time of the war was a munitions worker in Bathurst, which precluded him from going to war as a soldier because he was in what they referred to as 'essential services'. My mother was a housewife with five kids at that stage of the game.

01:30 I remember great memories of my childhood. We all sort of went to school ... we were Catholic, so we went to Catholic schools; went to primary and secondary schools. We had a great family life. When I got older and I remembered much more about the family, my father went and became a shearer, and then later on in life a

02:00 shearing contractor. But we used to go to school - sometimes walk, sometimes catch a bus. It was about a mile and a bit to school both ways when we were in primary school and in secondary school. And we'd walk to school and come home. We lived in a fairly substantial house. Not that we were in any way rich in that shape or form, but it was an old golf club house and of course there were six of us, so we needed

02:30 plenty of bedrooms. We had a vacant lot on our right hand side as we looked towards our road. We lived in Browning Street, up towards the Bathurst Jail, so that always posed an interesting area with all the activities that used to happen in the jail - and sometimes there was a jail-break, and we'd get excited and things like that. But we'd go to school normally and come home. We'd throw our bags wherever we threw them and go out and play. Obviously, television was not around

03:00 when we were kids. So we were always industrious and children of endeavour. We'd make our own billycarts and race them up and down hills and all those sorts of things. Not far from where we lived was Mount Panorama - the current and very internationally known racing circuit, and of course they used to have racing cars and motorbikes for the Easter weekend - as it was then - and of course we used to go up to the Mount when

03:30 we were old enough to be allowed to go, and pick up bottles. And of course in those days you used to get sixpence or twopence or threepence for a bottle, so we'd go and pick up all the bottles and take them back and get the refund. Well that was the Easter weekend, and not long after that was the Bathurst Show. So we'd earn our pocket money for the Bathurst Show - and you could earn up to twenty pounds. Saturday was the bikes and the Monday was the cars; and as I said,

04:00 you could earn up to twenty pounds each picking up bottles and things like that. And that's all you did. I can remember later on in life some of the good racing car drivers and motor bike riders and all those sorts of things. It used to be exciting. And also, not far from us used to be an agricultural experimental farm, and they used to grow all the experimental vegetables and fruits and things; and of course we used to sneak in and pinch the fruit and things like that - things

04:30 that kids used to do.

Tony, I might come back and talk more about your childhood. Would you just be able to give me a summary of where you served in the army, and when you joined?

Sure. OK, when I left school I went and did an eight month course with the PMG [Postmaster General] as a telephone technician. I left that in 1958 and joined the railways for a couple of years. I didn't like that, being cooped up as a booking clerk, selling tickets in the railways - didn't like being cooped up, being a kid from the bush.

05:00 So I decided I'd like to join the navy to start with. So I applied to join the navy because I had a little bit

of technical background from being involved with the telephone technician side of things. But I got a knock-back from the navy, so I applied to join the army. Then in 1961 I was accepted into the army and went to Kapooka in January 1961. On completion of training I was allocated to infantry and went to the infantry school at

05:30 Ingleburn and finished my core training there … recruit training was three months, and at the end of the core training in July of 1961, most of the soldiers I was with were allocated to 3RAR [3rd Royal Australian Regiment] , which is in Enoggera. And in those days we only had three infantry battalions. One was in Malaya. One had just come home, and obviously one was getting ready to go, because it was a two year cycle. And 3RAR were just getting ready to go, because they were on rotation.

06:00 So, two years in Enoggera and then we were posted to Torenda in Malaya, as part of the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, which consisted of Australians, New Zealanders, British, and all the support. We spent two years in Malaya and in those two years the general task of the units were patrolling the areas around the Thai-Malay border because of the communist

06:30 terrorist activity - smuggling and doing all sorts of nasty things. Not all that high-profile, but you know, little ambushes here and shooting people there - people of importance like village chiefs and things like that. We did a lot of border patrolling and patrolling in the bush. Then in February, the brigade was deployed to Borneo because of the Indonesian confrontation with Malaya, and we went … 3RAR were deployed in

07:00 February of 1965. We spent five months in Borneo patrolling the border between Kalimantan, which was the Indonesian side of Borneo, and Sarawak, which was the Malaysian side of Borneo. On completion of the tour of Borneo we returned to Torenda, then the battalion was due to return to Australia. And of course in the meantime Vietnam had happened, and we deployed one of our battalions to Vietnam.

07:30 So we returned home as members … they split 3RAR in two and formed 7RAR. Because of the escalation of the Vietnam conflict, they'd increased the Australian Army size from - at that point in time - three battalions , then they raised 4RAR and then 5RAR, 6RAR and 7RAR was raised in 1965, when we returned from Malaya. We were sent to Puckapunyal where we enjoyed our time in Australia from September '65 til February '67,

08:00 when we were deployed to Vietnam. 7RAR spent twelve months in Vietnam then returned home in '68, and went to Holsworthy. Because the Vietnam conflict was obviously still happening we were warned that we would return … or that the battalion would return in 1970. So I stayed with the battalion and returned back to Vietnam in 1970, returning home in '71.

08:30 I was then posted to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, where I spent five years as a warrant officer/instructor, on infantry-related subjects : minor tactics, weaponry, and all that sort of stuff. In June of 1976 I was posted to the 3rd Battalion, which was the battalion I'd joined as a young soldier, as the RSM [regimental sergeant major] . I spent eighteen months as the regimental sergeant major

09:00 of the third battalion and was then posted to the Infantry Centre, which was then at Singleton. Two years at Singleton in '78 and '79 and then I was posted to the First Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka as the RSM. I spent three years there. On leaving 1RTB in 1982 - the end of - then in the beginning of 1983 I was commissioned to captain and went back to the Infantry Centre at Singleton where I spent two years.

09:30 At the end of those two years, in 1985, I returned to the Royal Military College as the ceremonial officer where I served for another two years. Then in 1987 I was promoted to major and was sent to our Head of Corps - the Director of Infantry - where I was in charge of all the careers of all the corporals, sergeants, staff sergeants, WO2s [Warrant Officers] and WO1s. I spent three years there. At the end of 1989 I was posted to Headquarters PNG, the F.Murray Barracks in Papua-New Guinea.

10:00 I spent three years there - '90, '91, '92 - and at the end of '92 I went back home and was posted to the Royal Military College as the officer commanding the Administrative Support Wing, which provided all the supporting elements to train the cadets. In March 1996 I retired from the service, after having served for thirty five years. That was the sort of start

10:30 to finish of my service career over thirty five years.

That's wonderful Tony, thanks. Well done. It's not easy to compress it all down, is it? I just wanted to ask you some questions about Bathurst and your childhood. What sort of effect that you can remember did World War II have on the town?

I don't remember all that much about it because I was only born in '42. So for '42, '43, '44, '45 I have some recollection of the end of the conflict in '46 when the soldiers

11:00 were coming home from New Guinea and places like that. I can remember seeing the newspapers reporting the soldiers returning home, and the big welcome home parades in the cities and things like that. But no, I don't have a great recollection of personally remembering what happened in that period. Sort of '47, '48 when I was

11:30 five or six, I do remember how Bathurst was. It was a great place to live. It was a big place, but it

wasn't, you know, a robust city like it is now. We had great times as kids in Bathurst. There was always something to do or some mischief to get up to as kids, and as I said we had a fairly large house and area we lived in. The house was set back probably twenty five

12:00 metres from the footpath, and we had two very large trees in our front lawn and we had a row of pine trees either side. It was probably almost fifty yards across, the frontage. And it was a very deep block. We went up the back and in those days the clothes line was a wire strung between two posts with props of wood and that. And then we had - because my Dad

12:30 was a shearer and a shearing contractor - up the back we had sheep dogs. And they were very precious to my father, and he looked after them probably as well as he looked after us. Not that he neglected us. And we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and all that sort of stuff. A couple of times we had horses and goats and things like that. The lady over the back of us, she had horses, and you know, we were

13:00 involved with that. And then later on, Dad got involved in racing dogs, and we had a couple of greyhounds when they were spelling, and things like that. But no, we always found things to do and mischief to get up to and things like that. We never wanted for anything. We were always well looked after by our Mum and Dad. We were always - probably as kids - we always fought one another, and we always played together.

13:30 We did all sorts of things, got into mischief, as I said, as normal kids do. But later on - when I was in high school - the discipline in the family was fairly strict. You know, we were never allowed out at night and things like that, not until we were older, and the first time I ever went to an evening movie theatre was when I was fifteen. It didn't really seem any different to the normal

14:00 lifestyle of all the kids we used to play with and associate with and went to school with. Everyone seemed to be really well respected with their parents and their elders. We sort of had a rule in our household that we were never allowed … when I was at high school, I went to St.Patrick's de la Salle School in Bathurst, which was almost in the centre of the CBD [Central Business District] as it's referred

14:30 to now … we always had rules that you were never allowed downtown when we had finished school. We had to go straight home. We knew just about everybody in town because Dad was very prominent in the church and in activities. He was always a sort of ever-ready handyman to do all sorts of things, so you know, the family was fairly well recognised; and I always remember our police

15:00 sergeant - Bill Sharkey - and one afternoon when I was in high school and we sort of ventured downtown … and he knew that I wasn't meant to be downtown, and he gave me a swift kick in the backside and sent me home. Then he rang my father, and Dad was waiting for me. So I got into a bit of trouble there. So those were the sorts of things that happened when we were kids. Saturday afternoon was always a treat. We'd go to the movie matinees

15:30 at the local pictures theatres. It was sort of sixpence to get in, so we'd get a shilling to spend and we'd buy up all the goodies - as kids do - but generally, life was pretty good when we were kids. And of course, the interesting thing was that my Dad's sister lived on a farm out at Mount Pleasant, and we used to go out there quite regularly. When we were old enough we'd ride our bikes. It was about five miles. We'd ride out there and spend the weekend there and chase the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s

16:00 and sheep and cattle and everything around. And when we got older we went out there and did the chores on the farm, milking cows and rounding up sheep and doing all sorts of things. It was a very, very interesting childhood.

What sort of punishments were there at home if you misbehaved?

Well, I don't want to sound like we were all saints but there wasn't much punishment dished out because we very rarely misbehaved. Neither my Mum nor my Dad ever hit us or smacked us

16:30 or anything like that. We knew if we played up we would get punished - either sent to bed early or things like that. Evenings at home were normally … we'd sit at home in the lounge room by a fire and listen to the radio. The things that were on the radio were serials like Green Bottle and Night Beat with Randy Stone and those sorts of things. Probably similar to Days of Our Lives or Neighbours on the television these days.

17:00 We'd sit and talk at the dinner table. We'd talk at dinner time if we were all there. Mind you, my Dad was very rarely there because of his job as a shearer, to start with. He'd go away and do sheds all around New South Wales. He'd go north, south and west as far out as Bourke or Brewarrina and as far down as Jerilderie Narrandera and all those places. Not all that much up north except for the north west of New South Wales, because there weren't too many

17:30 sheep farms around there; but yeah, when we were all home we sat around the evening table and had dinner together. There was always the understanding that children should be seen and not heard and you never spoke unless you were spoken to. Later on, obviously, when we got older, we joined in the conversations. Being a mad racing family - my Dad was a bookmaker - everybody was sort of interested

18:00 in horse racing, so we used to talk about horse racing. Probably the only one who wasn't interested in horse racing was my sister, so she'd get up and leave the table and we'd sit there and talk about the

breeding of horses, and how they run their last start, and what they'd done, and what they were likely to do, and which was the best horse … and later on, my younger brother was a jockey, so we had a very great link with horse racing for quite a long time.

Where were the prominent horse racing venues then?

18:30 In those days, horse racing … there was a track in Bathurst, but we sort of followed the horse racing in Sydney. When Michael first became a jockey he went to Orange, and there was a very good racetrack at Orange, and he was apprenticed there. I can't think of the name of the trainer that he was apprenticed to in Orange, but then he came to Sydney, and he went to Hawkesbury to a trainer by the name of Billy McNabb,

19:00 and Michael rode generally Hawkesbury. He went bush when the trainers took their horses to the bush. He had a couple of rides in the Sydney Metropolitan area, at Randwick and those sorts of place. We often used to come down to the races at places like Canterbury when I grew older, because my mother's brother - uncle Max - he used to live in Sydney, and was very good friends with a number of well known bookmakers and trainers.

19:30 We used to go to the races just of interests sake - even when we were kids. You know, at fifteen or sixteen you could go to the races and you know, just have a great time, wandering around.

How did your dad's bookie business work?

Oh, he'd bookie generally at the greyhound racetrack at Bathurst. Normally he would bookie there and at the local horse racing; or maybe go to Orange. He never operated outside of the sort of Bathurst-Orange- Lithgow area.

20:00 He'd just go to the dogs and bookie on the interstate races, of course. Or maybe just bookie on the dogs if there were no interstate races on. It wasn't a huge big time business like the bookies these days. You know, it was good fun though.

How did you help him when you went to the track?

Well, you'd often go round and see what the other bookies were betting, in case there was a plunge on a horse. And later on, a brother older than myself - Brian - he' got interested and did what

20:30 they called 'pencil' - you know, you'd take down all the bets when they'd have a bet on a horse. Dad would take the bets and Brian would put down in the journal what they'd had, and whether they were winning or losing or what have you. But no, it was great fun.

How lucrative was it?

Oh, wouldn't say it was terribly lucrative. They weren't big time like the Waterhouses and that now. He'd win a hundred pound one week and lose fifty pound the next week. They never sort of put themselves in

21:00 a situation where there'd be massive losses or massive wins. If he had a good day they'd win maybe five hundred pound. But in those days - in the late fifties - that was a nice sum to win on a week.

Are the tracks still there in Orange and Bathurst?

Yes, yes they are. At Bathurst the racetrack is called Tire's Park. It wasn't there when we were kids. It was another track out at Eglinton I think. Later on they built the track out at Tire's Park whilst I was in the army -

21:30 or before, I'm not sure. Orange racetrack is still there. I don't think the greyhound track is still there in Bathurst. I'm not sure. And there's a big trotting venue at Bathurst, at the Bathurst Showground. We got involved in the trots as well. Dad would sometimes bookie on the trots. Yeah, the 'Sport of Kings' - horses, dogs, trotters … it sort of ran in the family.

22:00 **How did your dad end up in Bathurst?**

I'm aware that they initially came from Mudgee. Dad's sort of parents and that lived in Mudgee, and the reasons they came to Bathurst I don't know. I've never sort of done a biographical research. My niece has done a bit of research into the family tree, but I haven't.

22:30 Most of our aunties and uncles and grandparents at some point in time lived in Mudgee. Then they came to Bathurst … I think Dad and the family must have moved to Bathurst because himself, his sister - aunty Molly and uncle Bruce - they were living in Bathurst as long as I can remember. But I remember we used to go to Mudgee every now and then

23:00 to see the Keech's in Mudgee. So I think that's where they formerly started, sort of in the local area; and maybe Dad came to Bathurst for work or something like that. I'm not sure. But we seemed to be well established there when I was growing up.

What sort of division was there between Catholics and Protestants in Bathurst?

Well, there was never an antagonistic division. There was sort of a fun division.

23:30 You know, we got called the 'left footers' and we used to call the kids the 'Proddies' and that. But it never got down to the stage like you see now, where the schools have very big fights and riots and that. You know, the disposition or the geographic location of the Catholic schools as opposed to the high schools were fairly well set apart. So you rarely encountered one another in groups. You might pass

24:00 the high school students or the junior school students on your way home on your way to school, but never as a major group. You know, there was never inter-school sports or things like that, other than when you got to playing your major sports. I mean, I played rugby league when I was a young fella. We went away on carnivals and that sort of thing, but they were Catholic school organized carnivals, and we'd go say to Orange, and we'd play all the Catholic schools from the Bathurst,

24:30 Orange, Wellington, Molong, Parkes area. We'd go to Orange and play rugby league in a carnival. Then later on, when I was about nine, I switched over to hockey because I was disinterested in rugby league; and I played hockey for a long time, which I enjoyed very much. In actual fact I played hockey until I was forty two. But yeah, you know, I suppose there was the odd fight here and there between the Catholics and the Proddies.

25:00 But it never really got to the stage like you see today with the very big conflicts between the different schools. Because Bathurst wasn't very big; and in actual fact, quite a few of mates later on in life, they'd gone to the public schools, so you know, we never worried about. And when I played hockey I played for a club that was a non-Catholic club so to speak. Bathurst St.Pat's had a hockey club

25:30 and I went and played for the Waratah's club, which was non-Catholic in orientation. But there was a lot of Catholics played for them because it was decided that you shouldn't all go and play for one club, you should spread the talent out a bit. It was like the salary caps you have today where you don't have all the good players playing for one club. You know, it never, ever got to the stage where it was terribly vicious or feudal type of confrontation with the others.

26:00 **What role did religious education and religious worship play in your upbringing?**

Very much so. The Catholic education system - when I was at primary school - they were all nuns. They were the teachers. It was a way of life. I became an altar boy sort of when I was able to … in late primary school and early secondary school, right through secondary school. I became an altar boy and used to go to Mass every day. But we always went to Mass

26:30 as a family on Sunday. Of course, being six in the family there was an age difference of maybe twelve or fourteen years, so when I was twelve my oldest brother had left home. In actual fact he joined the seminary to become a priest. He spent four years at the seminary in Springwood. But there were never of eight of us at home

27:00 to go to mass on Sunday together because the elder boys were away doing something. But the younger brothers - Michael, myself, Brian, and Anne, we'd go to Mass every Sunday. We'd normally get up for the six o'clock Mass on Sunday, and Dad was involved in the church in those days, you know, providing assistance. So you know, religion played a very big part of our lives - all of us.

27:30 **What did you have to do as an altar boy?**

I don't know whether you're familiar with what goes on with Mass at a Catholic church, but the priest says Mass, which in those days they used to say it in Latin, so you had to learn Latin. We did that at school. You know, the ceremony of Mass is about a celebration of the life and death of God and those sorts of things. So you were there to serve the priest in the little ceremonies like the ringing of bells at what they called the 'Sanctus' and with the mixing of the water and wine to simulate the death of Christ and those sorts of things.

28:00 So you did that as part of the deal. You know, it was almost expected that you become an altar boy. You know, there were a number of churches around the place, and as an altar boy you would - to put it crudely - you were on a roster. You know, the Catholic diocese had the presbytery and all those sorts of people, and they would put out a roster showing which alter boys would serve at the Assumption Church and South Bathurst and

28:30 the Cathedral and St. Michael's and St. John's and those sorts of thing. And you know, you might draw say, a weeks altar boying at The Assumption. So you'd be up there serving Mass every week morning at six o'clock, and on Sunday you might get the Cathedral, or you might get South Bathurst, so you'd have to pedal down on your bike - we used to ride our bikes then - so we'd ride our bike down to church. And you know, you'd have your favourite priest because he was very good and very quick. Most of

29:00 the kids used to hate the bishop because he was terribly slow and went on and on and on and on. But you sort of had your favourite priest to serve mass to and you had your dislikes as you do in those sorts of things. But you know, it was one of those things that was expected of you, and nobody ever thought twice about doing it.

What about confession?

29:30 Oh God yeah, we used to go to confession once or twice a week, because the normal timetable at school … when you're in primary school wasn't sort of strict, because you know, you're only little kids and you never got into much mischief. But when I went to secondary school we used to always have the first

period in the morning for Religious Readings and the Catechism. We'd go to Mass three or four times a week

30:00 depending what time of year it was - you know, times in the church when you have Lent and Christmas and Easter and all those; but yeah, we'd spend a lot of time on religious training and religious teaching. It was part of the curriculum in the Catholic system - as I'm still aware it is.

What sort of sins were you confessing to?

Oh, you know, the normal telling white lies and fibs and things like that … pinching the fruit from the agricultural centre and those sorts of things.

30:30 But you never got into too much mischief; and you know, I can't speak from experience because I'm not at school today, but I've got my niece's kids - Bradley's now left school and he's an apprentice chef and Alanna is doing her HSC [Higher School Certificate] this year; and Gemma is in Year 10 I think or may 9 - but the promiscuity of kids

31:00 in my day was never the same as it is now. And I say that from experience because of the jobs that I've had in the military and the trouble I've had with the soldiers under my command with their kids and things like that. But we very rarely got into any sort of mischief or misconduct that was anything nasty or immoral or things like that. And I can assure you that if my father caught you swearing - saying 'bloody' and 'bastard' and things like that - they were words that you never uttered at home.

31:30 You'd get a clip across the ear for that, because not swearing was a way of life. Swearing was unheard of when we were kids. I know there's a bit of nonsense going on about Adrian Ryan and what she said at the school in North Sydney. But that sort of thing you'd never see or hear in the days when we were kids.

32:00 And of course, when you were in the playground at school the Brothers used to walk the playground, and if anyone was swearing they'd get taken aside and given a couple of cuts with the strap and things like that. Corporal punishment was still in vogue in those days; but you know, you probably swore a few times, but you'd never do it at home - not with my Dad or my Mum. I'm not saying we were prudes or anything, but it was just the way we were brought up, and everybody

32:30 in those days were brought up that way. Even the Proddie kids that I used to knock around with. They rarely swore. It's just something that didn't happen. It's not that we were little angels or anything like that, but it just wasn't part of the vocabulary in those days.

In the ten to fifteen years after the war, what do you remember about returned servicemen and Anzac Days in Bathurst?

33:00 I can't think of the name of the park, but it's a very big brick structure, which is in a park, which is a block by a block by a block. So it's obviously a big place. McCaddie Park? No, not McCaddie Park. Anyway, there's the War Memorial on one side, there's the Carillon - which is a huge thing with bells and everything in it - and on the other end there's another bit of a War Memorial; and I always used to go and read with interest

33:30 the names of those who'd been to war from Bathurst, and those who were killed. But I don't ever remember much activity on Anzac Day. Probably one of the most major days I remember was St. Patrick's Day because of the parade. And of course, being at St. Patrick's School when we were kids in the secondary years, it was one of the big days in the town, because it was a Catholic celebration - that was the best thing: it was a holiday

34:00 from school! And of course later on, when I was about twelve or thirteen, I became the drum major of the band; so you know, I used to have all the drum major gear - the little mace - and I used to twirl that around and lead the band. That was probably the instigation of me joining the services because I got interested in marching and things like that. But you know, I do not remember much about Anzac Day

34:30 other than … my uncle was a returned serviceman, and I remember talking to him about the war and he used to tell us how awful it was and things like that. But it was obviously a part of our geography and history at school. We learnt about the Anzacs and the history of Anzac Day and those sorts of things - the Japanese in New Guinea and all those sorts of things. And of course

35:00 around Bathurst there were a lot of my Dad's workmates and friends and confidantes who'd been to war. As a matter of fact I always remember having a very, very in-depth conversation with one of Dad's very good friends - a bloke by the name of Ben Hackney - who owned a couple of very large sheep stations around Bathurst. He called one 'Wonalabi' and one

35:30 out near Oberon which was 'Eshington Park'. He named Wonalabi after one of the native girls in New Guinea that saved him. He was captured by the Japanese - Mr Ben Hackney was his name - and he was captured by the Japanese and he escaped; but what they did to him, they slashed the soles of his feet - they did it to all the prisoners in the camp he was in - to stop them running away. Anyhow, he escaped and crawled through the jungle,

36:00 and this native lady - Wonalabi was her name - she sort of rescued him and took him and hid him from the Japanese until he was well enough to get back to his own lines. And of course he named his property

just outside Bathurst Wonalabi in honour of the woman who had saved him from the Japanese. I had many in-depth conversations about the conflict in New Guinea and what went on up there. So you know, it was a

36:30 very interesting time, and that was when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, when I was a little more interested in that sort of background to history.

What sort of a man was he?

He was a wonderful man. He was a very astute man. I wouldn't say 'religious' but he was a very strict man about what happened around the place. Dad sort of got involved with him both socially and work-wise.

37:00 Dad used to often go out ... if he wasn't sort of shearing seven days or if he wasn't away at a shearing shed ... Dad had a sort of one man shearing stand that he had available to go out and use for people who had a small number of sheep, to shear them or crutch them and things like that. Dad used to go out and help all his mates who used to live on farms around the place with spraying of blackberries

37:30 in the bushes and things like. They were an absolute curse on farms. We didn't mind because we used to go and pick the blackberries and take them home and eat them, but no, he was a very astute individual and a very well respected man in the community, Ben Hackney. Because he had two very large properties he employed a lot of people, so he was a very strong figure in the community.

38:00 That's the way I think I can remember most of Dad's friends and workmates.

Did you have a natural interest as a child and teenager in military history?

No I didn't. Not in military history, no. I was interested in Australian history, you know, the history of Australia. But I never got to the stage when I looked feverishly into the history of Australians at war. I must admit I had very keen interests in where they'd been and what they'd done. Like, you know, you often

38:30 used to hear people argue about whether the Boer War was the first conflict that Australians were involved in. Well, I was always one to sort of check history, and the first conflict that any of the Australian forces ... and in those days it was 1863 and the Maori Wars, and then they went to Sudan before they went to the Boer War; so I always sort of like to have that as a little back up and contradict people when they used to say

39:00 that Australia's first conflict was the Boer War. Well, it was the Maori Wars, and in those days I think they were the New South Wales Rifles or something like that, because in those days the Australian Federation hadn't been formed. It wasn't formed until 1901. But Australian or New South Wales soldiers had gone to the Maori Wars and then to Sudan. But yeah, I did sort of have ... I don't know that I was sort of as passionate as I was later on, but in the early days

39:30 as I said, I used to talk to my uncle and talk about things that he experienced; and my mother was always a very keen student of a lot of the heroics of men all around the world, and of course Sir Roden Cutler was a distant relative of my mother's, and of course he won the Victoria Cross in Palestine as a young artillery officer when he lost his leg. You know,

40:00 he became probably one of our most famous Governors in Australia, and probably one of the most well liked Governors, ever. But yeah, I don't say it was a passionate interest in the Australian war history, but I did have an interest in the history of Australia.

Tape 2

00:30 **Tony, can you just tell me a little about the primary school that you went to?**

Primary school was St. Philamina's in South Bathurst, and it was run by the nuns, and I'm not sure what Order they were, but I always remember the sister that stuck in my mind was a sister named Sister Anastasia. And she was I suppose ... as a kid

01:00 you always had great affection for someone who sort of looked after you at school. The nuns were very good at school. When you were at primary school you were obviously only a kid, but you know, they always looked after us and they always spoke nicely and gently and there was never any you know, rousing or harassing or anything like that. At primary school you can have a lot of rowdy kids, and lots of screaming and that goes on, but the nuns never seemed to get phased with that at all

01:30 at the primary school. But of course, that was probably one of the most interesting times of your life because ... there's about two years difference between all of us in the family, all the kids. Michael's born in May, I'm born in June, so Michael's sort of twenty three months younger than I; and I'm twenty three months young than my older brother, so that's sort of the way we went. But when we were kids and we used to walk to

02:00 school, we used to have great fun. The only time we'd never walk to school to go to primary school was when it was raining, and even sometimes when it was raining we'd walk to school or home from it when it was raining. And I remember one day, Michael and I were walking to school and it had been raining, and we were devils I suppose in that as soon as we got out of sight of home we used to take our shoes and socks off - because of course we used to run around at home in bare feet most of the time. So we'd take

02:30 our shoes and socks off and sort of walk to school and before we got to school we'd put them back on - so that we never appeared at school without shoes and socks. But we were coming home one day and it had been raining and the gutters were full of water, and Michael and I - as kids do - we had our shoes and socks off and we were paddling in the gutters. And Michael stepped on a piece of glass and cut his foot. Well, you reckon we didn't get into strife when we got home, because we had to explain how he got a cut foot when we were supposed to have our shoes and socks on.

03:00 So there was a few fibs told, and we were sort of trying to avoid the truth, but that's the sort of thing we did as kids. And you know, when we … when we went to the secondary school, it was down in the CBD, as I said, and the school bus used to go from just over the hill. We sort of lived on the side of the hill, and you walked down over the hill to where there was a bus stop down on the corner. And we used to go to school mainly by the bus. But sometimes we'd walk to school if we felt like it. As I said it was about a mile to either

03:30 the primary school or the secondary school, so they were about equal distance from home. And you know, we never thought anything about walking a mile to school or home again. Of course, we never had the - shall we say 'capacity' - or the way you see the kids walking around today with those backpacks on today with all their schoolbooks in them. If we'd have had that sort of weight to carry to school, we'd never have walked.

04:00 But we always found it was great fun to walk to school, and you know, we'd meet some of our mates on the way, and pick them up, and the same going home. Sort of, they'd drop off before us because we lived the furthest away of the kids in our area. But you know, we always met up with someone going to from school.

What kinds of things did you do for fun with your brothers?

Well, as I said, we'd get home and I basically … I can remember, it was

04:30 about three thirty when we used to get out, and by the time we got home it was four o'clock or thereabouts; and we'd just sort of race in and throw our school gear off and throw our school bags in, and get changed into our sort of mufti kit, and race out and play. As I said - build billycarts and race the billycarts and play with the dogs and climb the trees. We had three very large trees in our front lawn.

05:00 There was an elm tree, a willow tree, and a pine tree. We used to climb up and down the trees and play hide and seek, and sort of do normal things that kids do. And we had some toy cars and things and we'd sort of go and play in front yard. Yeah, we occupied ourselves until just on dark, when Mum would call out that dinner was almost ready and we should come in. But we always had a number of tasks that we had to do when we

05:30 got home. We had a chip heater that would heat the water for the bath by a chip heater. So we used to have a wood heap out the back, because all the fires in the house were wood fires. Mum used to have a wood fire stove in the kitchen, so we had to cut wood for that - or for the fire in the lounge room. As I said it was a fairly large house, so we sort of had two … there was the lounge room

06:00 and a dining room inside, as well as the kitchen. And we had to cut wood to make sure there was plenty of wood for the winter. If it was summertime then it wasn't a problem. But yeah, we had tasks to do. There was lawn cutting to be done in those days. We had a push mower, so that used to be fun. We used to always argue about whose turn it was to cut the wood or mow the lawn or do the tasks that needed to be done.

06:30 But apart from that, life was pretty simple in those days. You know, there was no … Mum never had a washing machine. She had a copper - a gas fired copper, which she used to boil up for the laundry. It was a pretty laundry. She'd do the washing in there and that was all done at school anyway, so we never got involved in that. And at night time, if you ran a bath, you had to go and light the heater

07:00 and keep it going and look after it and things like that; but you know, there were six or eight of us in the family, though as I said we were very rarely all there at once when we were kids because the elder boys were away; and then my sister went nursing and things like that. So there was only probably three or four of us; but yeah, it was great fun. You'd go out and play til you sort of fell over. So there was never any worry about

07:30 coming home and not wanting to sleep.

Could you describe what the home was like?

It was a very, very large home. As I said, it was an old golf club. It was set on a bit of a sloping hill. The front veranda … there was a veranda at the front which ran the whole length of the front of the house, and it was glassed in, and there were windows all around. And around the side there

08:00 were one, two, three, four, five concrete steps - probably they sort of concertinaed in from the bottom to the top. And they were probably … at the base they were probably ten yards across. They telegraphed in til they got to the door. Then just inside the verandah on this end … around the corner

08:30 there was one, two bedrooms; and in the bedroom that the boys … there were two boys slept in one bedroom; and my other brother slept in the other room. Round the other end of the verandah was the bathroom and toilet. And the bathroom was fairly large. The bathroom was probably twice as big as this room. There was a linen press

09:00 and a number of other bits and pieces in there; there was an area where Dad used to shave and where the older boys used to shave; and there was a toilet there with a door. And then the next room was the bath, which was sort of enclosed; and the chip heater and the bath was in there. Then inside - it was up a step - to the right, was the inside dining room, which was fairly large. There was a big table where Dad had

09:30 all his bookwork and things. It was sort of the office as well, and there was a big round table, and there was a big open wood fire with a mantelpiece all around it with a big grandmother clock on it. Then the left-hand side was another bedroom where my sister used to sleep. Then … and those rooms were bigger than this room - probably a little bit wider but longer.

10:00 Then, the next set of rooms were the inside lounge room with an open fire, where we had lounge chairs and single chairs and things. And there was what we called the radiogram - we had a radiogram in the corner. And of course it had a radio and a gramophone and all that sort of thing in it. And inside was the major bedroom for Mum and Dad. Then outside that was a sort of back verandah type of area

10:30 and around the corner from inside the inside lounge room we had … in those days we had ice blocks, and then we graduated to kerosene fired refrigerators later on. But we had an ice box and different bits and piece there. And then down in the corner with a door that Dad used to lock, was Dad's tool shed; and Dad used to have an enormous amount of tools. He was - being a shearer and a shearing contractor - he had all his shearing gear in there, and all his bits and pieces. And he had

11:00 those in army ammunition and weapon boxes - all these cooper handpieces, which shearers, obviously, used to shear the sheep; and all the accoutrements that went with the shearing. But also in there, we all - when we were old enough - we all had rifles, because we used to go out on the farm that my aunty had and shoot things

11:30 like rabbits and foxes and things like that. But we were all taught to shoot when we were very young. They were .22 [calibre] Bruno's. We were all taught very young to shoot, along with all the safety precautions about carrying rifles and using rifles and things like that. And Dad had a number of shotguns and an old Martini-Henry and a Winchester 44-40 and all those sorts of things; but of course, Dad used to take them when he used to go shearing out into

12:00 the backblocks - to shoot sheep and things … because Dad used to kill the beasts for the shearers to eat. You know, they'd kill a beast and butcher it and hang it up and do all the things that normally happened. And on the left-hand side going up was just an open area and there was a flat area, and then there was the kitchen. Up there obviously was where most of our meals were taken. The kitchen had the wood fired stove and all the flues and things; and then through the kitchen was the laundry.

12:30 It was probably as big as this room or even bigger; and the copper was in the corner there, and there were two concrete washtubs along with all the bits and pieces that Mum needed. And then out the back door - so to speak - there were plum trees and fruit trees all around the house; and out in the back yard on the left-hand side, further up … and as I said, we were on a rising block, so on the left-hand side there was a fence that separated the house from

13:00 the back yard, and a sort of a gate to keep the dogs behind the gate. Dad had sheepdogs because obviously he was a shearer and later on a shearing contractor. And in the corner on the left hand side was the wood heap. He'd take a trailer or a truck out to my aunt's farm and pick up wood from time to time, and bring it back in and just store it in the wood heap. And we'd, you know,

13:30 use axes and tomahawks to cut up the wood, there. Then the back yard consisted of the clothes line and you know, it was very deep too. And there was a little shed where we had hay and things to feed the horses and whatever we had in the paddock next door. And obviously the dog kennels and those sorts of things were there too. I suppose the block was probably fifty metres deep

14:00 and maybe fifty metres wide; and the block next door was about the same size, although of course it was vacant. So we had plenty of room; and our next door neighbours who were over beyond the spare block, and it wasn't until later on in life that someone moved in and built a house next door to us. There was a vacant block on our left-hand side as well, and

14:30 there was a house on the next block over. And the lady who lived there, she had an enormous number of cats … and we also had BB guns - slug guns - as kids; and we used to sit in our bedroom by the window and shoot the cats off the fence, because they used to sit on the fence on the other side of the fence and scream and carry on and fight at night. There must have been fifteen or twenty cats on this block, so we used to sit there and fire at them.

15:00 We never used to fire at the cats - we'd fire at the fence, and of course the slug would hit the fence and scare the cats. But yeah, we were probably bits of devils in that case.

How long would your dad be away for when he was shearing?

He'd been away for six to eight weeks at a time, depending on where he went to. When I was about to leave school in 1957, he went down to a shed in Jerilderie. If you know where

15:30 Jerilderie is … it's in New south Wales, down around Narrandera and Junee and those types of places. The property down there was owned by two sisters - the Fitzpatrick's - and there was thirty five thousand head of sheep down there. And we were there for about six weeks. He had a fourteen stand shed with fourteen shearers and all the rouseabouts and cooks and wool-classers. But yeah, he could be away for six to eight weeks at any one time. And he could go at any time. He'd come home Friday and be gone again Monday.

16:00 **What were the conditions like for shearers in those days?**

Oh, the conditions for the shearers in those days, they were pretty primitive. They were nothing fancy, but it was all very comfortable. They had what the Americans would probably refer to as bunkhouses. Depending on the size of the shed … there was never any more than two people to a room, you know, so the shearers used to bunk together; and all the shearers that Dad used to employ when he was a contractor,

16:30 you know, they were the same crew who'd come out and off they'd go. But yeah, the conditions for the shearers was never plush accommodation and things like that. Most of the shed we went to, the ablution blocks were away from the living quarters; and then there was a big mess-hall kitchen type of thing where the cook used to sleep. He'd do all the cooking there, and there were tables and chairs and things like that.

17:00 Obviously that was some distance from the shearing shed, because that was comfortable to get away from the shed - because at night time you'd need to yard the sheep for shearing first up in the morning if it looked like rain or something like that. So you didn't want it too close to the shearer's because the noise of the sheep would keep you awake all night. But it was a pretty solid day. They used to start shearing at about seven o'clock in the morning and they'd go til five at night; and you know, the gun shearers used to shear between

17:30 a hundred and eighty and two hundred sheep a day; and when I went shearing, I had a go at shearing, and it nearly killed me. Obviously I was not fit to shear - you know, when you're leaning over all the time … but obviously, once you got used to it, it was OK. But I did a bit of rousta-bouting and was tar boy and that sort of stuff. I'd help pick up the wool and set it on the table for the classers to class it. And I helped with a bit of wool pressing and things like that. But no, the shearing sheds as I said were primitive

18:00 but pretty comfortable. And the cooks, you know, with the hard working shearers, they used to have to cook a pretty substantial meal for each of the meals. Morning tea used to get taken to the shed by the cook. He'd prepare sandwiches or whatever. Lunch was pretty substantial, and of course the evening meal was always a roast dinner of some description. And as I said, my Dad used to slaughter the sheep or

18:30 cattle or something like that for the cook to cook - depending what was available for the shed. That was part of the contract. The shed had all that sort of thing was available, and the cost would come out of the cost of whatever the quote was to shear thirty five thousand head of sheep.

What was a tar boy?

The tar boy's the little bloke who runs around the shed, and if the shearer happened to nick the sheep - you know, cut too far into the sheep - he had

19:00 a little bucket with a brush, and he'd brush the cut with tar to stop it getting infected.

In terms of the equipment they used for shearing, what were they using?

Well, my recollection, and I saw my Dad shear at one of the local shows, and he had a pair of hand clippers which he operated by hand. But that was much more primitive than what was available.

19:30 They were generally a motor driven shearing stand with what they call … there was a tube coming down from a drive wheel to the handset, and the handset was operated by a rotating disk. The cones and covers used to flush across a comb, and the comb was this broad thing; and the cutter was a little thing - the same as

20:00 hair clippers - you know, you've got the stability of the comb and the brushing of the cutter, and they'd shear that way. And it was driven by either a diesel run motor or an electric run motor, depending on what the shed had, whether it was up to date modern or … not that there was any difference between the diesel engine driven or the electric driven. It varied from say,

20:30 two or three stand sheds to fourteen to twenty stand sheds for twenty shearers. But you know, all the

conditions in the sheds were what they called 'the board' - which was wide enough for the machinery, and each shearer had a tunnel to put the sheep down when he finished shearing it, and the yards over there, and when he finished shearing it, he'd pull a rope that would rotate the drive shaft

21:00 and cut off the machinery, and he'd go and get himself another sheep, come back out, drag it onto the board; and meanwhile the tar-boy and rouseabouts would pick up the fleece - the shearer used to do nothing but shear the sheep, and the rouseabouts would pick up the fleece once he'd finished, and obviously you had to pick it up the right way and take it to the wool classing table and throw it on there; and the rouseabouts were also responsible for the tar, so if you were in the middle

21:30 of picking up the fleece and someone yelled, "Tar-boy!" then you had to quickly get rid of that fleece and get back to the tar-boy. There was more than one rouseabout in each shed. Depending on the size of the shed you might have three or four rouseabouts.

Tell me about the breakouts at the jail ...

Oh, the breakouts - every now and then they had this alarm system. It was a sort of siren; and there were a couple of breakouts. It never used to worry us much.

22:00 People would say, "Aren't you frightened they'll break out of jail and come and knock at your door, or so something like that" but you know, the bloke that lived next door in actual fact was a warder who worked at the jail. But you know, Mum and Dad used to say, "Look, if they're going to break out of jail then they're not going to break out and just walk fifty yards down the road and hole up in a house near the jail. If they break out they'll run." But you know, yeah,

22:30 at one point in time ... I don't know if you ever remember the name of Doovan and Meers. They were notorious criminals who were locked up in almost all the maximum security jails around the country. But at one point in time, they were in the Bathurst Jail. That was an interesting ... I mean, no big deal was made of it, but they broke out of a number of jails and got captured again. But you know, petty criminals ... the jail

23:00 obviously had a big cyclone fence around it with all the trimmings on top - the barbed wire and the guards boxes all the way around, so to speak; and on our side it fronted onto Browning street, and directly across from us was a Bathurst factory which was ... and when I said before that my Dad never went to war because he worked in a munitions factory, well, that's what it was. That was the munitions factory during the war. But of course it had been taken over by some other mob

23:30 and you know, I don't know what they were making in there. And that was on one side of the jail, but the rest of the jail bordered the golf course - the Bathurst Golf Club; and the front of the jail bordered the Orange road - the road that went up to Orange. But yeah, there was a lot of minimum security people in there. I suppose they were minimum security types like those who reneged on their maintenance and things like that. So they weren't a great threat to anybody; so they had in the jail system all the farm -

24:00 they used to tend their vegetable patches and all that sort of thing. They had, you know, very big vegetable patches and there were animals there. And of course you know, one or two of the less violent criminals would hop the fence and run. You know, every now and then you'd hear the siren go off and you'd say, "Oh yeah, someone else has made a break," and they'd normally pick them up on the Blayney Road or the Orange Road hiding under a tree somewhere down the track.

24:30 But I went through there one day with our neighbour, and he sort of took us up and gave us a guided tour of the areas we were allowed to go to. And it was very interesting, you know. The front of the Bathurst Jail is a very big imposing entrance of sandstone, and there's a lion's head sort of embedded in the top part of the structure with a big key in his teeth; and the governor of the jail's residence is on the left hand side in front of the major jail area which is surrounded by a large fence. Yeah, it was

25:00 interesting. They've got two sort of gates to enter and you know, you ring the bell, or if you're a warder you just walk in through this little gate. But there are two big heavy sets of doors - the front doors - and a gap in between where, you know, the business ... the supply trucks and that pull in there and they do a bit of a search there to make sure there's no smuggling going on,

25:30 both in and out. Yeah, it was always an interesting part of life. People would say, "Where do you live," and you'd say, "Up near the jail," and you'd get the cracks like, "Are you sure you're not living in the jail." But yeah, it was an interesting time of life; and of course the factory was over the road, and it was surrounded by a cyclone wire fence as well. We used to dig a hole underneath, and we'd climb through and walk around and have a look at what was being made. They used

26:00 to make aluminium cans and things like that, but you know, it was never anything interesting. But being nosey kids, we used to sneak in and have a look around.

Did your dad talk about what he did in the munitions factory?

No, he didn't talk about it once. It was just one of those things. He used to go to work in the munitions factory but not that I could ever remember. You know, I was born in 1942 and I think he'd stopped working in the munitions factory when I was old enough

26:30 to realise what was going on.

What did you want to do when you were a kid at high school?

I never ever gave it too much thought. You know, we were having too much fun as kids in those days. As I said, I played rugby league for the first three years I was in senior school, but I got sick of that if not for any other reason other than … it wasn't too rough or anything like that

27:00 but we … I played in what … they used to run them by 'weights', so I played in the five-stone-sevens. Our trainer or head coach was a bloke by the name of Brother George. And he was bald, like me - I almost am now - but we used to call him Baldy George; and we used to have a very good side. I played half-back, and the three seasons we played, we won every game for three seasons. But it became boring, you know - I wasn't enjoying it at all. You'd go out and play and you know, we won a number of games by

27:30 over a hundred points - you know, it was terribly boring. So I then got talking to - later on, when I was nine or ten - I got talking to some mates who never went to my high school. They went to another school, the public school. So there was the Proddies and Catholics collaborating. Anyway, they told me they were looking for hockey players, and of course my mother played hockey and so did my mother's brother - uncle Rex. They both played hockey at a high level. They'd gone to the country level championships and things like that. So I went home and said to my

28:00 mother that I'd like to play hockey. So I told her and that wasn't well-received - playing for the opposition and that. But anyhow, it got to the stage where I went and joined the Waratahs Club, so I played hockey from the time I was nine til the time I left school with Waratahs. And then I played on for many years after that. And I never really gave it too much thought, until … they had what they called 'Vocational Guidance Officers'

28:30 who came to school when you were in sort of second and third year. You know, they'd give you a presentation on what was available outside and you know, what the general employment status was, and try to fire your interest up. And a group came in one day from the PMG - you know, about telephone technicians and all that sort of thing. And I became very interested in that. You know, I wouldn't say I was mechanically minded or technically minded

29:00 at school - it was never anything that sparked any interest, but I sort of had a great list and I filled in a few forms, and about September I think it was in 1957 when I was in third year, and I got notification that I'd been accepted to go to the PMG Telephone Technicians Training College in Strathfield. And you know, that sort of posed a bit of a problem, because you know, it was away from home

29:30 and I was sort of fifteen. Anyhow, the deal was … they sent all the detail about how the trainees would stay in boarding houses and you know, would be looked after by well-respected and well-credentialed individuals who ran the boarding houses and all that sort of thing. So you know, yeah, it was an adventure and I was allowed to head off. And my first home was in Parramatta. That was a boarding house in Parramatta

30:00 and it then meant travelling by train from Parramatta to Homebush. You know, it was easy - straight off the train at Homebush, walk up the end, and there was the technicians training school. But after about three months, the boarding house closed. I got shifted from Parramatta to Ashfield, and the boarding house there was opposite Ashfield Park. I was there until about August or September. They had a decrease in the number of trainees, and so, I suppose being

30:30 a boy from the bush and costing them money to live in a boarding house, I was cut back. So I thought, "Yeah, that's the way this goes," so I went back home quite disappointed, thinking that my world had fallen apart, and got home and a good mate of my father's - Harry Adams - worked on the railways, and they were looking for a trainee booking clerk at Bathurst Railway. So I applied for the job and got the job as a trainee booking clerk.

31:00 So obviously when I got finished I was a booking clerk selling tickets to people in Bathurst to travel on trains. Yeah, it was interesting job, but not my cup of tea - in an office all day, and there was no outside life at all. And being a kid from the bush, it didn't suit my style at all, so having had the training for eight months on the technical side of things, and reading newspapers, and seeing things, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper for radar technicians

31:30 in the navy. So I had a talk to my Mum and Dad and convinced them that it'd be the way to go, so I applied through the recruiting centre to the navy. Then I went and did all the technical tests to enter, but they said, "No, no - you're not up to scratch," so to speak. So once again my world came tumbling down

32:00 so I thought that while I was here at the recruiting centre, I'd apply to go and join the army. So I applied to join the army and that started off, or started the ball rolling, to my career in the army. I was eighteen and a bit at that stage of the game. So in December of that year I had to come to Sydney to do all the induction techniques and testing and all that for the army.

32:30 **Before we go on and talk all about that, I just want to ask you, what did you learn as a telephone technician trainee?**

Well, it was very interesting … the telephone system in those days was run on relay systems, and when you dial, a relay used to operate with an impulse track at the back. And your number, if you dialled 'one'

say,

33:00 it would impulse 'once' and it would connect. And then as the numbers were dialled - four, five, six or whatever - it used to impulse and connect you through the line to the exchange. So as a telephone technician you would obviously install telephone and do the normal installations on walls and things. In those days, which were fairly … I'd say basic, but in 1958, I think the dial system had just come in. I may be wrong - I'm not sure - but you had

33:30 to install phones and you know, patch your phones onto a board, so if you were in a small exchange, so you could hook up a number of phones; how to repair phones - the Babinski System of wiring into a telephone - you know, the lead cables and all those sorts of things; how to hook up a line. It was just the technical side of telephones in those days.

What did the telephones look like?

34:00 I don't know if you see any of them around today. The wall mounted phones were a big black plastic thing with the handset sitting on the top. Of course, the technical side of the telephone were the two spring loaded levers, and they would connect your handset to the line, so you could either dial for an operator, or, if it was operator-assisted, you could immediately get

34:30 onto the operator. Then there were the different … the fancy phones were coming in then - the desk mounted phones. Once again, they were black - you know, sort of not as rounded as they are today. They were very sharp-edged, you know, big heavy hand sets. Of course, inside the hand set, in the mount piece, there was a mouth-piece that had to be checked and taken out.

35:00 The ear piece was a little perforated contraption that used to connect - like a light bulb - when you inserted it into the hand set, it would make contact with the contact points in the hand set. The operation of phones today is a little different, but basically, technically the same.

What was it like living away from home for the first time?

Very interesting. I thought, "Hello, I'm free,"

35:30 and my first sort of … I'd been to Sydney a couple of times - probably more than a couple of times - but always with my Mum and Dad and things like that. But here I was, free as a bird so to speak in 1957, just having turned fifteen. So a couple of us, we used to jump a train and go into town - go to the park, go to the zoo, go to these places that were totally foreign

36:00 to us. When I was at school I learned dancing as well. I learnt tap dancing, ballet, and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, I learnt dancing, and you know, participated in eisteddfods and things like that with the dancing school I learnt dancing with. So you know, I was

36:30 pretty interested in that sort of thing. So a couple of us got interested in learning how to jitterbug and jive and things like that. We used to go into town two or three nights a week, and I think it was the Les Murray School of Dancing. I turned out to be pretty good, because I was pretty good at dancing anyway. I'm not patting myself on the back, but I learnt it for nine years and was in eisteddfods and things like that - tap dancing. I didn't do much ballet in eisteddfods

37:00 but I learnt ballet and jazz ballet at the school. But I did a lot of tap dancing and things and I enjoyed that immensely; and sort of, I became very adept at ballroom dancing, and that was sort of the way I spent the eight months in the Sydney area. I can remember a couple too, a couple of weekends where we started playing cards one Friday night and we finished Monday morning in time to go to work,

37:30 or rather school. And that was interesting.

What was the reaction to boys learning to dance at that age?

I used to cop it at school, when I was back home at school in Bathurst. I used to go to Gannon's, which was the premier dance school in Bathurst. I used to cop it for a while, but after a time the blokes didn't care. They'd lost the attitude of, "It's for sissies," and things like that,

38:00 and you know, there were a lot of very good dancers around in those days; but yeah, I enjoyed it immensely. And of course, when I became accomplished - because I learnt it for nine years - it was very good; and they sort of went from being a little bit teasy, to being a little bit admiring. But I enjoyed it immensely.

What prompted you to learn to dance?

38:30 I don't know. I have no idea. It just sort of happened one day. I was pretty good on my feet. I got interested … I think a couple of friends of mine introduced me to Max Gannon. The studio was only a block and a half from where I went to school. I went down one afternoon and had a look around, and I watched the two guys that sort of introduced me to it,

39:00 and thought, "This is pretty neat," and there were a lot of girls around at this stage of the game doing dancing, so I thought, "This is pretty good," so I took it up and it became more than a passing interest - it became an obsession really.

Did you have any dance heroes?

Gene Kelly, yes, of course. And Fred Astaire. There were a couple of people around the circuit at the time who I tried to emulate. And of

39:30 course, once I started, we used to go and sit in on eisteddfods and sit in on dance lessons and classes by some pretty senior and well-endowed dancers. I supposed I used to imagine myself being a bit of a Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly. I never got around to that, but I enjoyed it immensely.

So where would you go dancing in Sydney?

To the Les Murray Studios in the city itself. I think it was in George Street up towards …

40:00 I don't know whether you remember the Trocadero, or remember anyone talking about the Trocadero, well, they used to have in George Street, down from the Trocadero … they were well established and well sign-posted in those days. There were quite a few of them around. You'd go in and learn all the dances - the jitterbug and the jive and all that sort of stuff; and we used to go in, just to dance.

Tape 3

00:30 **Tony, I just wanted to ask you what PMG stands for?**

The Post Master General. That was the old Telecom or Telstra; that was what it used to be called. We used to refer to it as, "Pigs Must Grunt." But yeah, it was the Postmaster General's Department.

Back in Bathurst, was there a Communist Party?

God, I couldn't tell you. I don't really know. Never heard of them. I do only remember that my father was

01:00 a very staunch Labor man. Of course at that point in time we had a Labor Prime Minister - Ben Chifley. And I do always remember when he died, we were on the road not far away up to the Bathurst cemetery. And I remember when they had the State funeral for Ben Chifley and he was buried in Bathurst, there were an enormous number of people at the funeral, and there was all the pomp and ceremony

01:30 that surrounded a previous Prime Minister's funeral. But no, look I couldn't tell. I don't suppose I heard of the Communist Party, but I never knew if there were any cells around Bathurst. I was never interested anyway. If someone mentioned the Commos you'd sneer, "yeah, Commos," or "Reds" and all that sort of stuff. But it was never part of our conversation at home. The good thing about the political side

02:00 of the family was, there was never, ever the forcing of politics down anybody's throats; you know, we knew he was a Labor supporter - he was Labor man, he supported the Labor system and he voted Labor. And I think the local Labor man at the time was a bloke name Luketty … I think. But you know, there was never any discussion about politics at home

02:30 and as I said, we mainly talked about horse racing and horses and things like that. Oh, Dad would talk about his work and what was happening at different sheds and things like that. A lot of the family discussion, as I said, was about horse racing. We had heroes like Neville Sellwood. He was one of the top jockeys in Sydney at that time, and he rode a number of Melbourne Cup winners; and he lived not far away from where Dad used to go and work a shed in Cudal,

03:00 and you know, that sort of interested us because the shed at Cudal was next door to the shed was Neville Sellwood's property. He had a horse there called Silver Phantom. He was a champion galloper in his time and he was retired, and the owners gave him to Neville to look after on his property. He was a beautiful big grey horse, and I can remember many photographs of Silver Phantom winning many big races. But you know,

03:30 politics and that sort of thing never entered my head until later in life.

What details do you remember about the day they buried Ben Chifley in Bathurst?

We always talked about those important occasions, and I remember that Ben Chifley was born and bred in Bathurst and a local train driver there. There were meagre beginnings of a very famous man; and we were told one day that the funeral was and … I'm not sure

04:00 what church the funeral was on at, but the cortège came up the Orange road towards the cemetery. We were told what time it was on, so we raced over the back of our place to the road - which was the Great Western Highway - and just watched the cortège go past with the gun carriage and the coffin. I remember all the escorts and all the pomp and ceremony that surrounded it. You know, it didn't stop. It was on it's way

04:30 and there were people all along its route. But we were told when it was going to happen.

Was it something that the whole town stopped for?

Oh yes. You know, it was a very big time for Bathurst. It's not every town that had a Prime Minister, and obviously we were very proud of Ben Chifley and his time as Prime Minister. You know, we all turned out to farewell our locally born Prime Minister.

What do you think it was about him that endeared him to his true believers?

I think it was his meagre begins and that he was a hard worker;

05:00 that he worked on the railways as a train driver; that he was a pretty common individual - and I don't mean that in any sort of disrespectful manner, as being 'common'. He was just one of the local Bathurstians. And there he was - he'd risen to the highest office in the land

05:30 **If we can go back and talk about your enlistment - you mentioned that for the navy there was testing for the radio technicians, what sort of testing was there for the army?**

The army … they gave you a psyche test, obviously. The psychologist sat there asked you questions and things like that; but you had sort of a general entrance exam. I suppose there was a bit of maths involved, and there was a bit of the motion type things - mechanical type things, like, you'd get a diagram with a set of wheels

06:00 and pulleys and things and they'd say, "If you turn wheel A then what way will the cogs on wheel D turn," and you'd have to work out what went which way and so on. It just tested your general aptitude. And there was probably a bit of general knowledge - you know, "When was Federation?" and "Who was the first Prime Minister?" and that sort of stuff. Stuff you learnt at school and were probably expected to know.

06:30 **What did your parents think about you enlisting in the army?**

Yeah, they were sort of very supportive. I think initially when I wanted to join the navy it was a bit of a shock to their system, in that … as I said, my uncle had been in the Second World War, but nobody else had been involved except for my two older brothers who did the compulsory national service in the fifties -

07:00 between '54 and '59 I think. I was rather looking forward to that, and they sort of told us what they did. My second oldest brother was a pretty good boxer, and he told us about a number of boxing bouts he had when he was in national service; and I was rather looking forward to that happening when I was old enough for it. It was national service, so everybody got called up. I think '58 was about the last intake

07:30 for national service, which carried on to '59. When it stopped I thought, "Oh well," and I was a bit disappointed, but when we had the recruitment for the navy and I got knocked back and of course … the thing that bothered Mum and Dad about the navy was that initial enlistment for the navy was nine years, so you know, that was it: you had to enlist for nine years. And in the long run

08:00 I'm glad I didn't got involved in the navy, if for no other reason, if you got involved you were caught for nine years before you got out, unless you played up or did something silly - as I learnt about later. So the army then became interesting because of all the promotions and I went and saw the recruiting centre; and they paint … I probably shouldn't say this, because I got involved in … well, I wasn't involved in recruiting, but

08:30 I worked with the recruiters and helped them look for the right guys; but they painted a very rosy picture of the outdoor life, and all the attributes of being a bronzed Anzac and all that sort of thing - and that was very appealing. That was one of my motivations in applying to join the army.

Now of course for the Defence Forces there are highly sophisticated ads for it on television …

Oh God yes - it's very eye-catching

09:00 and imagination-capturing adverts of the soldiers in their modern equipment and all the very high tech stuff. It's very good. I sort of got involved in that a little bit when I worked in our Head of Corps, you know, doing recruiting ads and things like that. And then of course, when I was the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] at Kapooka, it was very important to have an impact in what the recruiters said to the soldiers

09:30 because we got them in every week to train them, and if we didn't get the right people coming in because of what they told them then it was very expensive, because they'd probably fall by the wayside very quickly. But you know, it was disruptive to them. You had to make sure that what was in the ads was fair dinkum, rather than the real rosy pictures of the egalitarian soldier.

10:00 **So how were they advertising in the early sixties?**

Well, it was newspaper ads and things like that. And of course the recruiters would around to the country towns and set up their recruiting caravans, so to speak. They had a caravan and they'd set up their recruiting caravan, then you got told that it was in town. It became a little bit inquisitive, and it was one of those things that you'd say to one another.

10:30 I'd left school at the time, so it wasn't among the school kids; but you know, workmates and mates playing hockey and things like that. You know, you'd get a word like, "Oh, did you know the Combined Forces Recruiting caravan is coming to town. Do you want to go down and have a look see." So you might go and see what was interesting about the armed forces. And that was sort of a throw back from being knocked back from the navy, and then I heard about the Recruiting Centre,

11:00 and there it was. So I went to see the army and they were very convincing.

What sort of questions did you have of them and what did they tell you about the army?

Well, from my recollection - which is probably not all that good because it was so long ago - but I asked them what life in the army was like, and what you could expect from the different corps within the army, because there was an indication that there were many corps - the technical side

11:30 and the old foot flogger side and so to speak, and the armoured side. But I didn't have any great interest in being anything other than an infantryman - for what reason I don't know - but that's all I asked: what the infantry did and that sort of thing. As I said, when we were kids we'd had access to rifle and we learned to shoot properly and things like that

12:00 so they sort of went down the track that said, "You get to fire weapons and you do all these sorts of things," so that was interesting and one of the reasons. Not the only reason, but the reason to get out into the bush and you know, sneak around in the bush and do all those sorts of things.

Would any of these men regale you with stories about World War II?

No, I don't think so. I'm not ... I can't recall any 'warries' - for want of a better term - being spun. My interest was the lifestyle and the

12:30 camaraderie and all that sort of thing that revolves around being in the military, and that sort of thing. Yeah, I don't ever remember being induced by talk about world wars and conflict and you know, the God, Queen, and country sort of stuff. There was never any of that sort of

13:00 nonsense. It was just, you know, it was a good vibrant life with lots of mates and that.

What year was it that you enlisted Tony?

1961. I went through all the procedures in '60 and left from Bathurst in early January '61. That was the commencement of my time in the services.

How many years did you have to commit to in the army in those days?

13:30 In those days it was either three years or six years. It was all explained to me before I signed on the dotted line. The three year enlister - I'm not going to confuse anyone here - but it was what they referred to as 'RASR-O' which was Regular Army Supplementary Reserve. You did three years, and you didn't pay what they then called 'DFRB' which was Defence Force Retirement and Benefits Fund, and that sort of stuff. But six years

14:00 meant a full sign on contract where you paid DFRB and you got all the benefits of being a RAR soldier. So I decided that six years wasn't all that much in time in those days, and they explained that the opportunity of travelling overseas was there because we had three infantry battalions; and in six years there was more likely to be that opportunity if you went to the infantry, to go overseas - to foreign places and all those interesting sorts of things.

14:30 **Was travel and foreign cultures interesting to you?**

Not all that important initially. The travel within Australia was probably more appealing than travelling overseas, because you know, they explained to me where recruit training was being done in Wagga, and they explained that the battalion locations were in Sydney or Brisbane, and one was in Malaya at the time; and of course I could sort of fantasize of going to Brisbane - because I never had any

15:00 idea that that's where I would end up. I thought, "Travel around Australia? Why not! Join the army and see Australia."

What were your expectations? I mean, Korea had only been over eight years and troops were serving in Malaya. What were your expectations of going to war?

Well, they explained to me that the conflict in Malaya was what was

15:30 referred to as just small bands of communist terrorists [CTs] active within Malaya between Malaya and Thailand; and that the likelihood of being involved in anything major was very, very limited, because of you know, what was happening there. You know, it was a couple of people here and there smuggling.

16:00 They explained to me the Malayan emergency in the fifties, where they were at really high incidents of conflict, sort of in the late or middle fifties when the CTs blew up trains and you know, assassinated public figures and things like that. But later in the '59, '60 when the British moved in with a lot of force it had quietened down very much; and the attitude of the Malayan people had change from - shall we say 'supporting'

16:30 the communists - to "No, we've had enough; we want to stop all this living in fear and terror, and starting to live normal lives." And of course the Prime Minister at the time was a bloke by the name of Tunku Abdul Raman, and he sort of stood up, and can I can recall people saying, "Well the current Prime Minister of Malaya is a very genuine individual who wants to get rid of all this shall we say 'anti-British' anti-colonial views

17:00 and instead welcome everybody there to a nice, peaceful life.

You mentioned that you can't remember the Communist Party in Bathurst and politics weren't really talked about at the time, but by the time you joined the army, what concept did you have of communism in Asia and the 'Domino Theory'.

Well, I don't think the Domino Theory was a point of discussion at the time. The Communist Party - well, communism in Malaya was raised, and I'm trying to think of the movie I saw ... it was about

17:30 a bunch of British soldiers in Malaya that ... Virgin Soldiers was the name of the movie, and I'd seen that a couple of times; and it was about the uprising in Malaya and how the communists had assassinated a few of the local ... well, not the 'local' - the British sort of were managers or owners

18:00 of the rubber plantations. They employed the locals as rubber tappers and that sort of thing. And the tin mines - and there's a lot of tin mines in Malaya. So it was all about protecting workers from the CTs, and I think the name of the guy who was the head of the communists in the country was a bloke by the name Ching Ping - it might have been Ting Peng, I'm [Chin Peng]

18:30 not sure; but it was the sort of dominant name that was running around at the time. And I always remember this movie where the virgin soldiers were ... they were obviously young soldiers who'd never been initiated into any sort of conflict at all when the uprising occurred, and there was a lot of assassination and murder and that sort of thing that went on. And they were sent in to quell it. And at that point

19:00 in time, Malaya itself was still open and the people were still living in their little villages around the place, and when the uprising occurred and the communists sort of hit right around the country the government were caught short, and the government couldn't protect all the people out of their farms and rubber plantations and in the tin mines. So they decided to move the people into what they called the 'Defended Villages', so the British came in and set up and defended all the villagers,

19:30 and that sort of introduced me to communism and what that was all about - shall we say 'dominating' a culture and things like that. So that's where I got to learn all about communism.

In the movies?

Yeah, basically in the movies. But of course, you know, we were getting reports in the newspapers about the communist uprising in Malaya because we had soldiers over there. We had soldiers in Malaya from 1954,

20:00 and in those days they weren't concentrated like we ended being in Malacca, in the Torenda garrison. They were spread out in company locations around Malaya itself.

So how did you get from Bathurst to Kapooka?

I went from Bathurst to Sydney. My Mum took me down by train and handed me over to the Eastern Command Personnel Depot which was at

20:30 Watson's Bay on South Head. I arrived there and I had all the papers and there I was, enlisted into the army on the ninth of January, 1961; and obviously the call-up was designed to have all those people who wanted to join there at the same time to travel together to form what was called a 'platoon'.

21:00 I arrived in Watson's Bay and they took me up and gave me my military gear, and that first night in the army I was what they called the 'fire picket'. They had boilers that you had to keep stoking with coal to keep the hot water hot all night so people could have hot showers and things like that. So I was the fire picket on my first night in the army. The next day ... I'm not sure how many days - it might have been two days I spent in Watson's Bay while we waited for all the New South Welshmen and Queenslanders to come and join us - then we got on a train

21:30 and went to Wagga. We were under command of a corporal and we played cards on the train and chatted generally. It was quite amicable and pleasant on the way down. When we got to Wagga we got off the train and onto a bus that took us out to Kapooka. It arrived at Kapooka and everyone was all nice and chummy and things like that, and we got off the bus, and the bus disappeared, and then they were into us.

22:00 Well, everybody changed from being Doctor Jekyll to Mr Hyde, so to speak. The sociable corporal became the mean and nasty corporal. We were pulled into gear and taken down to the barracks and issued with our bedding and all that sort of thing. Our huts were the old igloo type of huts and there were ten of us in a hut, and all you had was a bed, a mat, and a steel locker. And this was in January.

22:30 so it was very hot in Wagga. And as I said to Bronwyn yesterday, when we arrived, we saw all the trainees that were there when we got there, they were all walking around with water bottles. And we

sort of said to the corporal, "What are those?" And he said, "Oh, they're fire pickets." And we thought, "Oh yeah, how are we going to put out a fire with a water bottle?" We later found out that the water bottle was for you, and the fire you were fire picket for was bushfires.

23:00 You had all your other equipment stashed away. So first night in Kapooka was rather daunting. We had corporals and sergeants and officers wandering around the barrack blocks giving you all the … telling you what was happening and what wasn't happening. Then the next morning they came and blew the trumpets and sounded reveille and called the roll; then you got dressed and went down to the mess hall for breakfast. Everywhere you went you had to march everywhere and

23:30 then we formed up and marched down to the Q-Store and got issued with all our kit. And in those days - and I say 'in those days' because later on it became a fairly technical operation to issue the equipment to the soldiers - but we were … they'd just say, "Here you, this'll do you." And if it was too big or too small you then had to take it back and change it. And you know, we then went and did the rounds to the RAP [regimental aid post] where they inoculated you,

24:00 and took you to the dentist for a dental check, and all those things, and then life at Kapooka began.

What were your initial impressions of the other blokes in recruit training?

A lot of them came from the bush where I did, so therefore we had a lot in common; and obviously as time grew on we became very good mates. But yeah, it was interesting having spent a couple of nights with them at

24:30 Watson's Bay before we got to Kapooka, and then the first night we were there were, shall we say 'shell-shocked' - we weren't game to say much to anybody on night one or night two, but as we got on in training we became pretty good mates, as we still are today. But yeah, it was a different shall we say 'type' of people there - some from the city, some from the country

25:00 but you know, we didn't care where they come from. We had ten in our hut, and we all sort-of got told that it was all to do with teamwork and you had to all work together; and obviously, the first thing they showed us how to do when you got into our hutchie was … every morning when you got out of bed you had to strip your bed off, and of course you had a couple of blankets and a coverall

25:30 and a pillow, and you had to do what was called a 'bedroll'. You had to fold your blankets up and you changed your sheets every day; so you'd fold the blankets and things up and then wrap the coverall around it, so that it formed a nice little neat thing on top of your bed and all that. I don't know if you've seen the movies where they'd bounce coins off blankets and things like that - well it was basically that. But we had a bed, a mattress, and a locker … and a tables personnel.

26:00 You know, it was all part of looking after one another, because it became obvious very early in the piece that the standard of your hut relied upon, shall we say, the lowest standard. You know, if one person in the hut got into trouble then everybody got into trouble because you weren't helping one another as mates. So we learnt very early in the piece: (a) self-discipline; but (b) teamwork.

26:30 **So what was the team penalty for say, domestics not being up to scratch?**

We had to say, stand by our beds later on that night when we could have been up at the canteen having a soft drink or something like that - or a beer, because we had access to beer. The soldiers canteen was fairly accessible to everybody, regardless of how old you were. I was eighteen and a half so that wasn't a problem

27:00 in New South Wales because you were allowed into the hotels when you were eighteen. You know, some of the guys were seventeen, but it didn't matter because you didn't have to show any ID or how old you were to get a beer in the canteen, because they reckoned that if you were old enough to be a soldier then you were old enough to have a beer. Anyway, you'd get penalised by having to stand by your bed at seven o'clock at night for a room inspection or something like that, or you'd get taken on a run around the block.

27:30 If you really played up and you got charged and you fronted say, your company commander, then you got what they called CB. That was Confined to Barracks. Then you had to put all your gear on - your webbing and everything - and you'd have to front up to BHQ [battalion headquarters] and you get a half an hours drill, and then you had to report back that night to do all sorts of chores. Generally, group penalties and group punishment was dished out to make sure that everybody in the confined area of your hut looked after one another, so you didn't slacken off and let your mates down.

28:00 **Tony, you went on later in your career to become an RSM, and army bastardisation is certainly something that has had a lot of press in the last five years; can I ask you to comment on what it was like back when you joined?**

Yeah, I … I don't remember any bastardisation so much as … I'll just comment on this: I found the discipline

28:30 in the army less harsh than what it was at home, in as much as we were fairly well disciplined at home, as I've explained, and I found nothing over-awing about disciplined - you know, having to do these tasks, being in places at different times time - I found it no different to the sort of discipline we had at home, so it never came as a bit of a shock to me. And I don't think it came as a bit of a shock to any of the guys

in those days because, you know,

29:00 society was totally different; and I'm not decrying society today, but society in our day when we were kids was totally different to what it is now - you know, regardless of where you were brought up or how you were brought up, that anybody found discipline in the army terribly difficult. There was obviously the odd one or two who went off the rails because they had a difficult childhood or things like that, but most of the blokes I joined the army with were bushies or things like that

29:30 and they'd probably been through the same sort of lifestyle as I had. You know, they'd been born and bred on a farm and worked on a farm and therefore hard work wasn't a terrible, you know, burden to them. They were fairly well self-disciplined to start with. And you know, as I said, I'm not decrying people today, because that's society-driven, but we didn't find it all that difficult.

How did the army deal with a recruit who wasn't, say, undisciplined, but who couldn't perform physically as well as some of the other recruits?

30:00 Well, yeah, that was an interesting situation because what we used to do … you know, we had a few people in the platoon - there were about thirty or forty of us in the platoon - what you used to do if somebody was weak in any subject, what the group used to do was say, "OK, what we've got to do is get you either:

30:30 (a) fit, or (b) a little bit more competent in what you do, whether it's your personal administration - if your weapon training wasn't up to scratch or your drill wasn't up to scratch, and things like that. So we pitched in and helped one another. And you know, there was obviously the odd one or two who fell by the wayside, and probably wasn't cut out to be a soldier anyway, because it was a pretty strenuous life to start with, and a pretty well-disciplined life.

31:00 There were a couple of people who were discharged because they couldn't handle it, and what happened, if someone fell behind the rest, and there was nothing the group could do to help bring him up to scratch, then they would either: (a) get back-squadded - which was to go back, say … if we were in week four of training … or maybe up to week five. They never sort of did much to anybody before week five. And in week five … see, it was a twelve week course;

31:30 week five you got four days leave, what they called the mid-term break. But that was the stage where they'd say, "OK, you're not up to scratch, you're not up to scratch, you're going to have to get back-squadded to week two." So the platoon that came in three weeks behind us were in week two of training, if you weren't up to the level of training required in week five, then they'd probably back-squad the guys to week two. There were obviously a number of people who

32:00 weren't suited to the military way of life, and they were counselled and psyche tested again, counselled again, and if they didn't suit, they were discharged. If someone was a bit of a rebel and they were continuously in trouble then they were confronted and told that if they didn't pull their socks up they'd be discharged.

What sort of yelling was there?

Lots, but it wasn't belittling yelling. It was a way of life.

32:30 When you've got thirty or forty guys, let's say forty - in ten man huts, so you've got four ten man huts … we were 4 Platoon A Company at Kapooka; so if the corporals or platoon sergeants wanted 4 Platoon on parade then they had to advise the four huts that they wanted you on parade, so they'd just stand outside the middle of the four huts and scream out, "Four Platoon! On parade!" There was a lot of shouting, but dare I

33:00 say 'controlled shouting'. They … you had to shout … when I say 'had to shout' I mean you had to use your voice on a parade ground, because you had to give clear and concise orders so that soldiers could understand what you're saying. If you use a good tone of voice, then a lot of people can't hear you, because there's a lot of other people around. Let's say the parade ground … it could be two hundred yards wide by two hundred yards deep. You might have a squad of soldiers of ten in each corner,

33:30 and you've got four NCOs [non commissioned officer] shouting words of command. To be heard you've got to be able to project your voice to that squad. You normally didn't face one another, you sort of faced in the corners, angled away, so you faced away from one another. But yeah, there was a lot of shouting. Some controlled, some uncontrolled.

34:00 **As a former RSM then, can I get your perspective on how these allegations I guess, and anecdotes of organised violence have evolved?**

For as long as, I suppose, any group of people have been brought together in one way or another - be it schools, colleges, universities - there is always shall we say, some type of bastardisation - for want of a better term.

34:30 I must admit I don't condone any of it, in that nobody should ever be taken advantage of by any one or group of people, for not being able to do what the others can do or are expected to do. And I suppose a typical example of it today is the way that young lady in the Australian Rowing Eight was basically - for want of a better term - bastardised because they thought she didn't pull her weight in the race in the

[2004] Olympic Games. Did you see that?

35:00 And that sort of thing. But that aside I don't condone it , but I say there are probably different levels of bastardisation, and that is individuals or groups of people at the same level - I don't say 'bastardising' but probably 'indoctrinating' them into the way universities go. I don't know if you've

35:30 seen any of the nonsense things that are carried on at the universities around the world - you know, the things that are carried on at Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard and Princeton and those sorts of places, where, if the group doesn't think you're up to standard … I suppose a typical example is the movie Harry Potter, where you see the kids in the dining room being, shall we say - for want of a better term - 'disciplined' for not being up to scratch.

36:00 Now I don't condone bastardisation in any way, shape, or form, but I think there is a lot of incidents … shall we say 'released' or 'leaked' to the press that aren't bastardisation acts as such, but probably more a case of someone being given a hard time because they've been probably a little bit disrespectful. Now I don't condone it in any way, shape, or form, and in my involvement with it

36:30 in my service over the years, we have quickly come down on it and squashed it very rapidly, because it was not what is needed. What is needed with regard to that sort of thing involving those sorts of people is a lot more understanding and a lot more coaching and encouragement for them to be what they should be in the group. Bastardisation in the term that a lot of people use in the military

37:00 for instance is not really bastardisation - it is pranks. And you know as well as I know that pranks are pulled by people at all levels where, you know, they plant things in drawers at workplaces and things like that. It's just that somebody may be a little different to others in the group and they are picked on. It shouldn't happen but it does. I know it happens because one of my corporals at Kapooka when I was the RSM, we had to remove

37:30 him from recruit training because he was bastardising recruits. And you know, it was the type of bastardisation that should never, ever be condoned anywhere, in any way, shape, or form. It was forcing soldiers to do things because he was a corporal that he had no right to force them to do, but they did it because he was an NCO and they were soldiers.

What was he forcing them to do specifically?

Well, he was shouting at them and he was making them do things outside the normal practice

38:00 of disciplining soldiers; and there is a Code of Discipline within the army organization which says that you must not belittle soldiers in any way, shape, or form, either individually or in front of their peers; and the same goes all the way down. Officers and senior NCOs should never belittle NCOs or soldiers in front of anyone else. Now, that's probably a fairly loose term in as much as I've probably done it myself, in that,

38:30 when you're doing drill, and you've got a soldier who's got three left feet, or two right arms, and you're giving commands, and he's not performing the way that he should be, you are tempted to sort of, you know, I suppose belittle him in front of the rest, by saying, you know, "Blogs, have you got two left feet?" … and that goes on. And as I said, I've probably been guilty of it yourself. But, I think

39:00 that everybody understands that as - shall we say - a wake up call to the bloke, telling him that he's not doing what he's supposed to be doing. But you know, to downright belittle or abuse anyone in any way, shape, or form is not on.

Can you give me an example of what that corporal was actually doing?

Yeah, he was slapping guys - you know, giving them a clip under the ear and telling them to get down and do that, or, "Give me ten push-ups," and things like that. And you know, that is done,

39:30 quite legally - let's say in a PT class. Someone might be bludging - for want of a better term - or slacking off, and the PTI [physical training instructor] says, "Get down and give me ten push-ups," or something like that, but to hit somebody and then give to him a punishment like that when you're not entitled to do that, then that's not acceptable, and that just doesn't… you know, that just doesn't stick with me.

How did you become aware of that?

One of his fellow NCOs dobbed him in; and we don't call that 'snitching' -

40:00 we call that being militarily responsible, because you can't have that occur. If somebody does that - particularly in recruit training - and I don't say there's a degree of separation between recruit training and trained soldiers, but what you've got in a recruit is someone who's been brought in off the streets, and has no knowledge of military discipline. And if you've got somebody who abuses their right to discipline

40:30 that soldier in an illegal or unregimental way, then that soldier, if he ends up getting through, and nothing is done to the NCO or soldier who abuses him, then he is going to think that is allowed. And later on, when he maybe becomes an NCO or whatever, he may think that is quite legal and acceptable, when it's not. So therefore you can't allow those sorts of things to happen, because it destroys the ethics of the military, in that,

41:00 it's all done in teamwork, and you've got to support your mates, and you cannot take advantage of your rank.

Tape 4

00:30 **I just wanted to ask you Tony, about the daily routine that you had in training?**

OK, the daily routine started at six o'clock. Fortunately we were in summer, so it wasn't all that difficult to roll out of bed at six o'clock. But it was stand by your beds at six o'clock, and what you had to do was

01:00 to take your sheet off your bed and throw it over your shoulder. It was one of the routines that made you … well, you had to change your sheets anyway, everyday. You had to change your sheets, but it meant that you stripped your bed when you got out. And the NCO - the duty NCO from your platoon - he had to come around and check the roll, so he'd just walk through the huts because there was ten per hut, and if there was a bed missing because someone was in hospital, obviously, you knew that.

01:30 Then you know, a quick check of the roll to see if everyone was there. Then you were given sort of … we always had a daily program or a weekly program of what was on first up. First up obviously was to get out of bed and go and shower and shave and get dressed for the day. The next activity that we had to do, and everybody was required to fall out in front of your hut on parade, for what they called 'mess parade'. That was for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And whether you wanted to go and eat

02:00 or not you still fell out on mess parade. And then the orderly sergeant - the whole recruit training battalion had one orderly sergeant - but your platoons had one duty NCO who looked after the platoon - but the orderly sergeant would could down and check the mess parade and you know, sometimes they'd come around and check your hands, your nails, and all that sort of thing, to check that you'd had a wash and to check that you'd had a shave, and then you would be marched up to the mess hall

02:30 and fallen out … if you didn't want to go to mess then you were fallen out up there and you could go back to your line. But they took you up to the kitchen. The mess hall, from memory … this is very vague. I don't know why it's very vague, because I can see the mess hall down there now from when I was an RSM … but as a recruit, it was a tin shed, anyway, and I always remember the cooks. The cook sergeant was a big fat guy

03:00 and he always stood at the start of the mess parade, and it was a, shall we say 'buffet' type of thing, but it was served, and what they'd do, if you didn't want to go and eat, they'd get you inside the mess to be a server, where you know, you'd dish out the toast and eggs and whatever the case may be. I can always remember the cook sergeant. He was a big fat bloke and he'd stand there with a cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth - not behind the thing where the food was - but off sort of to the right.

03:30 He was there to there to cast a critical eye over what was being served for breakfast, lunch or dinner - and to take any complaints, if you were game to complain. But yeah, you were marched through, got your meal, sat down, ate your meal, went and washed your gear up. When I say 'washed your gear up', you'd you know, scrape your plate and put your thing … you had your own utensils - knife, fork and spoon, and you got your plate at the servery; and you'd go back to your lines until

04:00 your first parade. Normally, it would be a drill parade, or depending what the training cycle was, it would be half past seven; and listed on your daily program or your weekly program would be what your first parade was. If it was say drill, then you fell out with your rifle, side arms, hat and all the rest of it done up in inspection gear - you know, everything cleaned and polished, your boots polished, your gaiters …you know, we had boots and gaiters.

04:30 We had Blanco, so you'd Blanco your canvas gaiters and your belt; and your belt, its brass had to be polished; and we were issued with what they referred to as KDs - khaki drills; and you had your shirt or your bomber jacket. The bomber jacket had press studs on the pockets, and the press stud thingo on your pockets were brass, so you had to polish those. But you couldn't get the Brasso on your jacket, so you had to devise a way of polishing the studs without getting Brasso on it.

05:00 Then your badges and buckle and chinstrap and all that had to be polished, and your rifles had to be cleaned. We had what they called a 'sling' on your rifle and each end where it was fastened it was brass, and those had to be polished. First thing they would do when they got you down the parade ground was to have a rifle inspection. So there was a drill where you brought your rifle up from the position of attention - bring it up so you had it an angle where you could cock it. Then you'd hold it open

05:30 and you'd put your thumb inside so the NCO or the officer would walk down and have a look down your barrel to make sure you'd cleaned your weapon. They'd check to see that you'd cleaned and lightly oiled your weapon; your woodwork had to be nice and clean and everything. Then you'd go through maybe forty minutes of drill; and depending on what stage of your training you were at it may be basic drill or advanced drill. So you got ready for basically your march out parade, which you used to go all the drill - march past, slow time, quick time, present arms and all those types of things.

06:00 The cycle of training was graduated obviously from the basic level up to the greater intensity lessons.

As I said, your first five weeks was … you had no leave whatsoever. It was all in camp. There was a bit of map reading, a bit of character guidance, and these sorts of things thrown in. You know, you didn't spend all day on the parade ground. You had weapon lessons - your basic weapon lessons on your SLR [self loading rifle] . And we had

06:30 the Bren Guns, and maybe some lectures about military history and formations and those sorts of things; military law and what it was all about and how you were required to abide by it as a soldier; what constituted a legal command and what constituted offences under what was then the ALM - the Army Law Manual. Generally, the basic background to induce you or rather induct you into the army.

07:00 At the end of the five weeks we were given some leave. And that sort of was the routine for weeks one to five. It went sort of the same for the rest of the twelve week course. Through those next few weeks we went out in the bush and did what they called field craft and battle craft. We learned how to patrol; learned how to move through the bush quietly; learned how to camouflage and conceal; learned the principles of what it was to pick

07:30 out features - what to look out for in the bush to distinguish soldiers from the bush - and you know, general field craft : living in the bush; living off rations; how to set yourself up a hutchie, and how to be comfortable in the bush - as comfortable as you can be. All those sorts of things.

What were some of the tricks of the trade?

I don't know if there's any tricks of the trade. Being a bushie is being … you know, its coming from the bush.

08:00 Living in the bush, surviving in the bush … when I say 'surviving', it's not too hard about surviving when you had ration packs and all those sorts of things. There was never any sort of any 'live off the land' eating the bush tucker, eating grubs and all that sort of stuff. We always had our rations. But I suppose, the little things about living in the bush was when you set up for the night, you'd clear a little area away from where you're going to sleep so you know, if there were any bugs or snakes or things, you'd clear a little area to make sure there were none of them

08:30 close by - cause you know, you slept on the ground. You had a ground sheet and then you had … well, you didn't need much because it was summertime. But you had a groundsheet which you put on the ground. It had canvas on one side and rubberised the other - which protected you from dirt and that sort of stuff getting in your gear. You never took your boots and socks off,

09:00 because if you got called to 'stand to' at eleven o'clock at night you had to just roll out of bed and grab your webbing - that was basic webbing like your belt, basic pouches, water bottle and shoulder strap. Your full webbing was another big pack in which you put your sleeping gear and everything else you carried with you. So if you had to 'stand to' you just put your basic webbing on, which had ammunition magazines in either of your basic pouches. And you just put your hat or helmet on and manned your weapon.

09:30 **What did you enjoy most about that training?**

Oh, I just think learning, learning to be a soldier. You know, there was always a challenge, and you competed not only against yourself but against your mates to see who was the best in the group. And I can assure you that the competition was hot and strong. You know, we had awards for the best soldier, and the best at PT, and the best at rifle training, and the best at weapon handling and

10:00 all those sorts of things. It was really good. And of course we did a lot of range practices. It started off with the .303 and then we graduated to the SLR, and we had the Owen gun and we had the Bren gun. And they were the three weapons that we learnt; but we threw grenades, and we fired grenades off our rifles and things like that. We used to go to the range

10:30 and they had what they called 'zeroing practice' where you were issued with a rifle - an SLR or a .303 - but your SLR which later on became your personal weapon. But you had to go and zero it, which meant you had a front sight which rotated up or down and a rear sight which travelled left or right and up and down … so that your weapon … see, not everybody's got the same eye through their sights. So what you'd do is go and lay

11:00 down on the mound at a hundred metres or twenty five metres, depending on which ranges were available, and you'd zero your weapon. What you'd do is you go through very, shall we say, intense firing - go through all the cycles and there's a technique in firing a weapon : breath in, breath out, or hold it halfway out; and you squeeze the trigger not snatch it;

11:30 and you fire at the target. And your point of aim, you've got what they call a 'mean' point of impact. It didn't matter where your MPI was, so long as you used the same aiming point each time you fired your rifle then they could adjust it. And of course you had an aiming mark on your target to fire at. Sometimes the weapon may fire, say, high and right, so you'd adjust your … the NCOs would teach you how to adjust your rifle

12:00 to bring the fire down to the centre of the target. Once you'd zeroed your rifle then you were ready to do range practice. They had introductory range practice which got you used to firing ; and of course the SLR, was … I wouldn't call it a scary weapon to fire, but it used to 'kick', and of course it didn't … if you

weren't used to firing a weapon and you didn't hold it right, then when you're lying down and firing, a lot of guys used to

12:30 come back from the range with a bruise on their cheek, because they would probably hold it too tight and it would kick, or they'd hold it not tight enough and it would kick. So it was just a matter of being comfortable and firing the right way. Anyway, in the introduction you were a hundred metres, then you'd go back to two hundred metres and then you'd go back to three hundred. You'd work up to the stage where you'd get what they called the 'qualifying practices'.

13:00 That gave you a qualification and a level of ... excellence with your firing. So you were an A Class shot or a B Class shot or a C Class shot. And that done over the whole of the twelve weeks with all of the weapons that we had. And weapon handling consisted of a number what we called 'T-O-E-Ts' - Tests of Elementary Training. That included stripping and assembling your rifle, because all weapons you can strip down to their basic parts

13:30 for cleaning. You had a time limit on stripping and assembly, and a time limit on loading magazines with ammunition in clips, which you had to take out of the clip and put into the magazine; then you had ... later on, you had ammunition that you'd load with the clip and a magazine filler - and you'd just put it on top of the magazine and punch the clip down, which is much quicker than ... but you had time limits on all those sorts

14:00 of things; and your level of efficiency was graded on how quick you did your tests and how well you shot. The PT was the same - in the gymnasium PT you had your endurance marching and what they called your 'fireman's carry', where you pick up a guy and threw him over your shoulder to carry him if he's wounded on the battlefield. You had the climbing ropes and obstacle courses where you'd jump walls and crawl

14:30 under barbed wire; and you know those sorts of things were the training, and they just intensified as you went through the training from week to week.

What did you find the hardest part of the training?

I suppose in the beginning it was all probably hard because it was foreign,

15:00 inasmuch as I had done a lot of marching, but I hadn't done much drill the way the military teach drill and the way the military drill. It's to do with coordination - hand-eye coordination and things like that. And I suppose being a dancer and having played hockey, which is a very intense hand-eye coordinated sport, that I didn't find

15:30 it a great difficulty in learning most of it. Or ... I don't know, I may have just been cut out to be a soldier. I never got any CB while I was a recruit - confined to barracks for being caught for anything, and I never did any extra training on any of the things. I was told my platoon commander, who was

16:00 an armoured corps lieutenant by the name of Carl Lewington, whom I think had the biggest hands I'd ever seen on a man in my whole life. I'm sure his fist was that wide. We had a guy on parade one day and this young fella was playing up. And Carl walked up to him - Carl was his name but you never called him Carl as a recruit - and he stuck his fist up in front of this guys face and it covered his face; and he just sort of physically

16:30 threatened this guy who was being an absolute idiot; and you know, the platoon commander just decided it was time to wake this guy up. He never touched him - he just stood in front of him and said, "Wake up son!" But yeah, Carl was armoured corps and he wanted me to go to armoured corps. He said, "You're good enough to go to any corps you want. You're one of my top recruits." I'm not bragging, but the

17:00 pegging of your efficiency gave you the opportunity to go to whatever corps you wanted to go to. I'd already decided I wanted to go to infantry anyway, so it didn't matter you know, he couldn't bribe me into going to armoured corps. It was interesting. We had an infantry corps sergeant and an armoured corps platoon commander, and of course they were always telling us which was the best corps to go to. They were all - shall we say 'lobbying' - to get most of the people to go to ...

17:30 and of course, most of the people from that platoon of forty, sixteen of us went to infantry, because that was the corps that needed the most troops. And you know, there were lots of them who had the aptitude to go to the technically orientated corps like vehicle mechanics. You know, we had guys who had been mechanics, so they were more suited to go to something like that. But he said to me, "You can go to whatever corps you want."

18:00 And I said to him, "I'd like to go to infantry." He was a little disappointed, but later on when we ran into one another, he'd commanded the armoured corps and I was a warrant officer somewhere, we had great old chats. Yeah, obviously, new things are always hard to learn but I never found it beyond my ... you know, a lot of the guys were that way. Without bragging, we were a pretty good, red hot platoon.

18:30 Or we thought we were anyway. We used to challenge each other. If we had any spare time we used to challenge one another in the huts - you know, stripping and assembling our rifles blindfolded - I suppose you've seen or heard of people doing that, blindfolded. We used to challenge one another at ... at

Kapooka there's Mount Kapooka and there's lots of bush around there, so we'd grab a map and a compass and go off for a walk and a bit of a look

19:00 because map reading was one our subjects; and of course the orientation of map to ground and compass and working out how to read the compass - we used to do that. You know, we had a pretty good, cooperative group of guys in the platoon, and we'd challenge one another.

Why do you think you took to it in the way that you did?

I don't really know. I suppose it had a lot to do with attitude. And as I said, being a bush kid and loving the outdoors, the attitude was, "Gee, this is a great way of life you know." It was all to do

19:30 with the outdoors and 'blokey' things, I suppose you'd say - roughing it in the bush and having a weapon in your hand. Weapons didn't hold any fears for us, you know, we were kids before that, and we used to go out rabbit shooting, so we didn't have any fears about that sort of stuff. I don't know why I took to it. It was just one of those things. I was just obviously cut out to be a soldier.

20:00 **What did you do on your leave time at Kapooka?**

We got leave and it was Easter time in 1961. And this may sound silly to you, but my Mum and Dad were in Sydney - they'd gone down to the races. So I went to Sydney and we went to the races at Randwick, and it was what they called The Epsom. And there were a couple of horses racing that we'd been following.

20:30 I used to have a bet at Kapooka. One of the corporals ran a book. But he wouldn't let me bet after a while because I took too much money off him. But yeah, we met and went to the races, and I was in uniform because you had to wear uniform. So we went to the Randwick Racetrack, and the winner of the race was Fine and Dandy, which was one of our favourite horses. Mum backed it

21:00 and it was fifty to one. And the favourite for that race was Sky High which was a very, very good horse. But yeah, we had a great time, and of course the next day was … well, we were there for Good Friday, and in those days on Good Friday, everything shut - nothing happened. But the Royal Easter Show was on, so we went to the Royal Easter Show on Good Friday. And yeah, we had a great time. We only had four days off, so I left Thursday, got to Sydney on Friday

21:30 and went to the Show; Saturday we went to the races, and Sunday we just lolled around before I went back to Kapooka on Monday.

What did you do at the Show?

Oh, we just wandered around. I had a few mates with me as well. They came to Sydney with us as well. We just wandered around and went on some of the rides and had a look at all the exhibitions that were at the show. There was nothing else to do. In those days, Sydney closed down on Good Friday. Nothing opened - no shops, no movie theatres, nothing.

22:00 The Show was the only thing to go to.

That would have been the first time you were walking around …

In uniform. That's absolutely right …

How did that feel?

Proud. Yeah, it was great. And in those days we had the khaki. Later they changed to the greens and then to the camouflage gear. But we were in khaki and yeah, I was quite proud.

22:30 **Do you think people treat soldiers differently when they're in uniform?**

I think in those days they did, because there wasn't a great deal of conflict or animosity in society, in the early sixties. You know, there was none of the anti-Vietnam nonsense then. You know, I think a lot of people respected the man in uniform. I didn't matter what it was or how it was, it was just, at the time,

23:00 you know, people used to come up and say, "G'day," and asked you what you did and why you were in uniform, and yeah, it was great.

Why did you want to be in infantry?

Well, it was to do with the bush. I must admit, I guess I had a bit of an affinity with the bush. You know, when we were kids and would go over to our aunt's farm

23:30 and we'd go and wander down to the river and fish and do all sorts of silly things in the bush on our own. It never held any fears to me, and I suppose I probably had a bit of affinity with the bush.

Why was it particularly infantry though as the corps to go for?

Well, I suppose I didn't take to any of the other corps because it didn't

24:00 seem to be clear-cut in what they did. Infantry was glamorous I suppose. When you saw the movies …

see, they used to show a number of movies at Kapooka, on leadership and things like that. It was always the infantry side of things that … I don't imagine I was taken to the mad shootings and war and things like that, but it just seemed to be the … seemed to be the macho thing to do.

24:30 I don't know whether that was really the case, but it just seemed to be more appealing than any of the others. I don't know, riding around in a tank seemed … we used to have discussions in the hutchies about who and where we'd like to go to; and we all decided … and one of my very good mates who joined the same day as I did … and there were about five of us who've remained very good friends since then to now. Our regimental numbers are beside one another.

25:00 And Jake Blake - who was a very good friend of mine - came from a little place called Cassilis, up around the Mudgee area; and we used to always egg one another on and say, "Yeah, where are you going?" And one would say, "Rome," and another would say, "Nahh, no way. You couldn't go there," and that sort of stuff; and we'd just egg one another on because we'd say, "Nahh, we're goin' Infantry. We gotta sock it to 'em in Infantry." And of course, our platoon sergeant was Infantry. We used to call him Bugsy Moran

25:30 because his name was Moran - Sergeant Moran. He had ribbons and he was a World War II man. And we had four corporals, or rather, NCOs. We had a bombardier and three corporals. We had one from Armour, one from Artillery, and one from Infantry. And you know, it was always the hard sell by the different corps to try and convince you to go to their corps. And we always liked our platoon sergeant because he was

26:00 the best. So you know, infantry, I sort of decided I was going to go to infantry when I joined anyway, so I didn't need much convincing of myself and the others that it was the best thing to do.

So once you finished at Kapooka, where did you go for further training?

When we left Kapooka there were two platoons marched out together, because the other platoon was 5 Platoon, and we sort of had a bit of a competitive spirit with

26:30 them at Kapooka. The infantry guys - I think there were fifteen or sixteen of us from our platoon and about the same number from 5 Platoon; and we all went to the Infantry School at Ingleburn. We then got introduced to what they called 'Corps Training', which was the corps-related subjects of improving what we learned at Kapooka dealing with the infantry side of soldiering.

27:00 It was like, more efficiency in your weapon handling, and we got taught about scouting, and about being a rifleman within a section; and what a section was, what it consisted of, and how it was made up of a section commander, your 2IC [second in command] , a scout group, a gun group, and a rifle group. In other words, it was the more intimate details of infantry.

Were you marked out for a role at that time?

No, we just fitted into a platoon organization and throughout corps training they tried everybody at everything,

27:30 other than the section command. We had regular NCOs and section commanders during corps training, but we were all given a go at the capabilities of being a scout, a rifleman, a machine gunner, a section 2IC and things like that. And everybody was given a go to see who had the aptitude or expertise to know how to be a good scout or a good rifleman

28:00 or number one rifleman, number four rifleman, section 2IC [Second in Command] , or number two on a gun, or a gunner …

What were the living conditions like at Kapooka and Ingleburn?

Well, the living conditions at Kapooka were pretty basic. We had what they called 'igloo', which was a tin or galvanised iron hut with a board floor, and no carpets on the floor whatsoever. You had an iron bed a mattress on it and a locker and a table personal. That was the contents of

28:30 your hutchie at Kapooka. Ingleburn, they were wooden barracks and were a little more modern. The Kapooka ones were built in '34 I think. Ingleburn was probably a little more modern than Kapooka. They were wooden huts and fairly well done. But they had the same

29:00 thing : a bed, a locker, table personal and a mat. That was it. You had very little personal gear anyway, excepting all your uniforms. The civvies you had at Kapooka were what you arrived with, and they told you before we went to Watson's Bay that we should wear civvies and bring underwear and socks and things like that; but, not to bring too much civvies, because you won't need them and you won't be able to use them anyway. But you know, so we got all our

29:30 uniforms at Kapooka, and when we left Kapooka we got to Ingleburn we had the uniforms we had, and after a time we were allowed to go on leave … by the way, we were allowed to go out on leave after weeks one to five at Kapooka. After the four day leave at week five we were allowed weekend leave in Wagga. We'd go in civvies. And it was the same deal at Ingleburn. We had all our military uniform, but we were allowed weekend leave

30:00 after about three weeks. We were allowed weekend leave and night leave and things like that. So we were allowed to use a few more civvies, once we'd been at Ingleburn.

What would you do in your time off?

Time off, we'd go into town and do something. A couple of times I hitch-hiked home to Bathurst to see Mum and Dad. See, from Kapooka it was fairly difficult to get to Bathurst over a weekend - it would just take too much time, because nobody had a car in those days

30:30 But yeah, as mates a group of us would go into town and do something - movies, Luna Park, and those sorts of things.

At that stage of your training, how were they instilling the history and traditions of the Australian army in you?

Well, we used to have lectures on military history and traditions and those sorts of things. But there wasn't a great deal of emphasis placed on the history.

31:00 Like, they didn't drum into about Gallipoli or the Somme or the First World War, Second World War or anything like that. It was certainly referred to when you learnt about the traditions of the service - where those traditions came from and where it was all born; and how the Australian soldier was revered and respected all around the world and things like that, because of the history of things like Gallipoli and the Somme and Malaya and Korea and the Second World War

31:30 and New Guinea and all that sort of thing. But they never sort of stood up and rammed down your throat the imperial history of the Australian military and things like that. It was just part of your lecturing on where the Australian traditions came from.

Did you have a sense of the importance of the Anzac tradition at that time?

Most certainly did, yes. It was ... I suppose it was part of our folklore about the traditions of the Anzacs at Gallipoli,

32:00 and what it all stood for. And you know, even though it was a battle that they lost, you know, it was a battle, shall we say 'etched in blood, it was part of the history of Australia and New Zealand. And you know, that's where it all came from. And it as certainly a proud tradition to try and emulate. And it certainly stuck in everybody's minds about the traditions of Anzac.

32:30 **So tell me about leaving Ingleburn and your first posting. Where was that?**

When we finished our corps training at Ingleburn, and, I might add, that it was a pretty difficult time ... I ruptured my ligament in my knee at about week five of training, which meant that it restricted my participation in all the activities that allowed me to train and

33:00 qualify to march out with all the guys. And at Ingleburn we had a platoon sergeant and four sergeants. We had five sergeants in the platoon, as opposed to Kapooka where we had a sergeant and five corporals. And our platoon sergeant - after I'd done my knee and was in plaster from hip to toe - he restricted me from doing a lot of things. Drill was one, and obviously marching was another, for a period of five weeks.

33:30 The platoon sergeant said to me ... you know, I became very good friends with him later on in life - Bill Lapthorne - he was at Kapyong, and we were destined to go to 3RAR, which was the battalion that fought at Kapyong, and he said to me during training, he said, "You know, we're probably going to have to back-squad you," which meant that I'd have to leave my platoon that I'd been in at Kapooka and the first five weeks at Ingleburn, and go back and join another platoon who I didn't know,

34:00 and I didn't think that was a very good idea, because I didn't want to lose my mates. So I said to him, "If I can keep up with all my training with the exception of those things that required manoeuvrability on the legs, can I still march out with the platoon," and he said, "Well, we'll see." So I continued on and trained as much as I could, to maintain my efficiencies with all the things that were required to keep me up with the rest of the platoon. I obviously became fairly

34:30 difficult when we got to the ranges. A number of the practices on the range were walk-ups. We'd start at three hundred metres with whichever weapon you had - be it your rifle or machine gun, and you'd walk up. And whichever targets appeared you'd drop to a firing position on the ground and fire at your target. Obviously with a leg in plaster that became difficult. I was allowed to do that, and I did that

35:00 and you know, I passed all of the requirements. Anyway, that was a bit of the history because I got my leg out of the plaster and I marched out with all the guys. And the majority of the platoon that we had - which was about thirty of us at that time - we all got posted to 3RAR. The reason we got posted to 3RAR was that in those days we had three infantry battalions. We had a battalion that was in Malaya, and we had a battalion that had obviously just come home, and another one that was just getting ready to go.

35:30 Obviously the priorities in the battalions were for those that were just about to go or were getting ready to go, rather than those who were just coming home. So 3RAR we got posted to - all of us. As I said, 3RAR being involved in the Battle of Kapyong got a Presidential Citation -a Unit Citation from the President of the United States. So when we joined 3RAR at Enoggera in Brisbane, here I was, joining the army and seeing Australia.

36:00 It was great. So off we toddle to Queensland and … at that point in time 3RAR was also a pentropic battalion, which means a big one - thirteen hundred or something soldiers, which is an organization that … see, there's tropical and pentropical. That's the big battalion. There was five platoons in a rifle company, five rifle companies in the battalion, plus a support company, plus a weapons company, and you know, the whole shooting match.

36:30 Anyhow, our first six weeks in 3RAR as reinforcements, we had to do what was called an 'induction course'. We had to be inducted into 3RAR and learn the idiosyncrasies of the battalion - learnt about the Battle of Kapyong and when and how and why; because all the soldiers in 3RAR wore a blue citation on their shoulder, to signify that they'd been awarded the Presidential Citation. So before were entitled to wear that, we

37:00 had to get inducted into the battalion. So we spent six weeks training in what was then Echo Company, undergoing what was probably advanced, advanced training, and learning all about the idiosyncrasies of pentropic battalion, 3RAR - what it meant, it's history, traditions. At the end of the six weeks - which was basically

37:30 just an advanced sort of corps training … we didn't do anything other than what we did in corps training except perhaps at a higher level. We certainly did a lot more route marching - a nine miler every two weeks with full kit on. But when we finished our induction training we were then ready to be members of 3RAR, so the CO [commanding officer] came around and they gave us our citations; and we were allowed to wear the citations as members of the third battalion.

38:00 **What did you know about the Battle of Kapyong before you joined 3RAR?**

Before I joined 3RAR - a little bit; because as I said, the platoon sergeant at Ingleburn was at Kapyong; and he was different to … the only difference between him and the others at Ingleburn was that they all wore a set of war stripes - but he had the blue citation. We wondered what it was, so he told us all about the Battle of Kapyong. And it was a battle that 3RAR were involved with in the Korean War

38:30 on the twenty third to the twenty fifth of April in 1951, where they were caught … well, they weren't caught, they defended a hill against the attacking Chinese, when the Chinese broke out across the Yalu River. They came down into the south and were overrunning the place, and 3RAR with a battalion of Patricias from the Canadian Army and A Company of the 72nd Heavy Tank Battalion from the American Army

39:00 were in a defensive position on the hill, and they withstood the advances of the Chinese for two days, and during their two days in combat with them they were awarded the Presidential Citation for Gallantry.

So what did it mean for you?

Well, it meant heaps. Here we were as members of the Third Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment with a citation that had been won by our forebears at Kapyong. It was a great honour.

39:30 **Tell me about the ceremony of receiving that citation …**

We had a full colonel as our commanding officer, a gentleman by the name of Bill Morrow, and he came down and reviewed the parade and told us what an honour it was to be members of the third battalion, and the significance of what we had to uphold as members of the third battalion. In those days, when most of the units in the country, when you went on leave,

40:00 you wore uniform. You also had civvies, but you also had to wear uniform on certain occasions. And you know, to be identified as a member of 3RAR because of the citation, you know, you could not let the battalion down and you could not disgrace the battalion. We were physically handed our citations by the CO and the RSM, which you know, for a young soldier, that was magic.

40:30 Here was the commanding officer handing out citations to thirty odd soldiers who had just joined the battalion.

Tape 5

00:30 **Tony, can you tell me about the battalion being posted to Malaya and what the role was, given that the emergency had officially ended?**

When we got post to 3RAR we were obviously aware that 3RAR were next to go to Malaya. We were also made aware by people within the unit

01:00 that they were building a new garrison barracks at a place called Torenda [?] , which is just outside Malacca, because previously the battalions that were in Malaya were spread across an area of the country up north, at Sungei-Siput and a number of other places I can't remember at this time. But they were in company groups - they weren't sort of congregated as a battalion, they were just in company groups, engaged in

01:30 surveillance and to be there if anything did happen. They then decided - under the South East Asian Treaty Organization - that they would establish a Commonwealth Brigade Group at Torenda. It cost heaps and heaps and heaps of money building the brigade, and we obviously throughout the years from when I joined 3RAR - from '61 to July '63 - we did all our training, based on CRW: Counter Revolutionary Warfare,

02:00 because that's the type of warfare they anticipated would happen within Malaya because of the CTs. So we operated I suppose, within the training manuals of counter revolutionary warfare, which were written by experts, or supposed experts from years gone by. So we just honed our skills doing jungle warfare and that sort of stuff. We initially kicked off, as I said, as a pentropic battalion,

02:30 but because that was not the organization that was going to Malaya, later on we reduced from a pentropic sized battalion - which was thirteen hundred - down to a tropical unit which was about eight hundred and fifty or nine hundred soldiers. So we left some of the soldiers that we'd been training with behind when we were deployed to Malaya in July '63.

What does CT stand for?

Communist Terrorists.

03:00 **I just wanted to confirm that?**

Sure. I suppose we get so used to using acronyms and things in the military that we don't understand what people are talking about.

OK, what does 'pentropic' mean?

Pentropic was an organization that ... I've no idea where the name came from, but it was the unit of organization that we were under when the battalions in Australia were under pentropic organization.

03:30 Which as I said was probably something conjured up by someone, somewhere; it meant that we had a larger unit organization to combat the circumstances. It was based on five rifle companies, five platoons in each rifle company, a support company, and an admin company. This was obviously bigger that a 'tropical' battalion, which was based on three platoons of a rifle company, four rifle companies,

04:00 and a support company, which reduced the size from about thirteen hundred down to about nine hundred.

What specifically were you taught in the CRW?

CRW obviously related to jungle warfare, to fighting in the jungle and the tactical side of close country fighting, because you know, we obviously had training films and films of Malaya

04:30 and the density of the jungle in Malaya, well, you couldn't see more than a foot in front of you in some areas, it was just so thick. And being soldiers, you never used tracks - formed tracks - to move along, because they were great ambush areas. We sort of made our way through the jungle and you sort of had to cut your way through. So that's the sort of tactics we had to learn

05:00 to adapt to the situation of very thick jungle with a limited view and very closed up formations, because if you were spread out you might get lost, which happened on a number of occasions in some areas. And of course the tactics employed in jungle warfare and revolutionary warfare were probably the same as applied in Vietnam. But earlier on in Malaya you

05:30 were only likely to run into, you know, a couple of guys moving to a village carrying messages or to smuggle something in ... maybe groups of four or five would be the largest size you ran into, so that was the type of jungle warfare we were training for, not very large groups. So therefore we could operate in small groups as well - we could operate in platoon groups rather than in platoons of about thirty guys.

06:00 Here's an example for you: if you're a platoon of thirty and you ran into say four or five, it might sound stupid, but you'd be prepared to take them on. And that was discernible by the type ... if you had a contact. And you listened to the type of fire that you were getting back. If there was one automatic weapon you might say, "OK, that's just five or six or seven people." As a platoon of thirty you could handle that. But any more than one automatic weapon and you might have run into a platoon yourself. So you never worked

06:30 on taking on the same sized group. If there was more than one automatic weapon then you'd probably need a company group to take it on. They were the general guidelines of the tactical situation. You know, you never went into a battle presuming that if you ran into the same sized opposition you were going to win. You always liked to have the advantage. So you know, they were the sort of principles of jungle and counter revolutionary warfare in that climate.

07:00 **What sense was there Tony, that this type of warfare was a new, emerging type of combat technique?**

Well, it was different totally to what had been used in the First World War, the Second World War, and Korea, because most of that combat was in basically fairly open situations. It was a type of warfare

where tanks and infantry moved at more spread out distances, and you could see for a long way and direct artillery and mortar fire,

07:30 and whatever was available from great distances. In counter revolutionary or jungle … basically jungle warfare - counter revolutionary warfare can be in any location; but jungle warfare particularly was a situation where you basically couldn't see around the corner. It was no good having heaps of artillery and air support available because you couldn't see to use it. If you got in to close combat with the enemy in jungle warfare, you know, you had artillery available,

08:00 but it was very difficult to employ, because you know, of the proximity of the enemy to you.

How closely could you simulate the geographic conditions of Queensland, to Malaya?

Well, the jungle training centre at Canungra was very much so - this was obviously why it was called the Jungle Training Centre. It was very similar in the Kumar area and in the valleys they had up around Canungra.

08:30 It was close country and fairly thick undergrowth and that sort of stuff. There were a number of other training areas as well. Tully was an area that was fairly close jungle-type country, and that was about as good as you could get to the Malaya type jungle.

The instruction you were getting in jungle warfare, was that from veterans of the Malayan emergency?

09:00 Yes it was. It's obvious to anybody that if you've got someone who's got expertise in one type of thing or another, and you're going to train for something, then you're going to use their expertise. We obviously had training films and training instructions from Malaya for a long period, because as I said, we had troops deployed to Malaya in 1954. Of course, they'd operated in the whole Thai-Malay area for a long time. Plus of course we had the Second World War experiences

09:30 of the Malayan campaign, you know, when the Japanese landed on the east coast and swept down through the Malayan Peninsular and captured all the Australians and British, because they came in through the jungle. That's not what they expected.

What information was conveyed to you about what to expect from the CTs - what sort of equipment they had available and how competent they were?

10:00 Yeah, we had all the updated information obviously, because of all the intelligence that had been gathered from '54 to '60-'61; and there was still a battalion - 2RAR - in Malaya while we were still training to go. So we were getting intelligence reports back from them telling us what was going on in the jungle where they were. Obviously the weaponry they carried

10:30 changed because of their acquisition of different weapons and things like that; basically their weapons were similar to what we had. On the Chinese Communist side they had things like Tricoms and Kalashnikofs and things like that. But you know, there were also pockets of CTs that had very primitive typed weapons. There was information given all the way through that they were never going to be in very great numbers.

11:00 The most you could probably run into was say ten or twelve. You were never going to run into a large force of CTs when the emergency had been called off, because they had been shall we say 'forced off' from their major base areas by the intensive patrolling that had been done by the British, Australians, New Zealanders and whatever. Most of their jungle camps had been destroyed, so they'd gone off in little groups.

11:30 So they were only going to be active in small groups that had nuisance value, and notsomuch a threat to a major force.

Can you tell me about the journey over to Malaya and how you got there?

Yeah, we flew from Sydney to Singapore by Boeing 707, no, from Brisbane to Singapore via 707; and oh, it was great - here we were in the

12:00 Big Bird, the first time I'd ever flown in anything other than a DC3. And here we were in a 707 on our way to Singapore. We left in July, so it was sort of winter time in Brisbane, but Brisbane winter is nowhere that bad. But we were wearing our battle dress. Anyhow, we arrived in Singapore and got off the 707, and I thought, "My God, I'll be glad when we get away from the plane." The heat of the engines was just intense, and there was perspiration pouring off everybody.

12:30 And when we cleared the …we got off on the tarmac obviously. They didn't have all the modern techniques of tunnels and things to get onto the aeroplane. So we got off on the tarmac and cleared the aeroplane and got closer to the terminal, and I thought, "God, it's got nothing to do with the heat of the engines, it's just the heat of the country." And I thought, "This is going to be a tough old couple of years living in this heat." So we then got off the 707 and flew to Malacca

13:00 by Fokkas and other such type of aircraft. We got off the plane at Malacca and got bussed to Torenda, which was an amazing sight. we drove up to the front gate which was controlled by Malayan and British military police and whatever. It was a totally secure area, inasmuch as there was somebody on the gate.

13:30 The whole place was brand new. 2RAR had moved into Torenda just prior to coming home in July' 63 and we arrived in July 1963 and it was brand spanking new. It was a huge army base. It had accommodation for three infantry battalions - the Australians, the Brits, and the Kiwis. There were married quarters on base for a bot of people. There was a town centre which had a

14:00 shopping centre and a centralised swimming pool, and a movie theatre, and a Crown Inn, which was you know, the sort of the local hotel and bar-restaurant. The lines were beautiful - brick buildings, and most modern. There were four men to a room and each of the rooms had ceiling fans. There were one, two, three, four … no eight … no six four-man rooms,

14:30 and at each end was a single room for the corporal - the section commanders; and in the middle were the shower blocks and toilets and all the rest of it. Each hut had a veranda all the way around. There was a hut per platoon. So there

15:00 were three hutchies in the company area plus another one for the company headquarters and the administration staff. The company headquarters building had an orderly room which was what we referred to as the 'Administrative Office', which was where the clerks looked after all your paperwork, then there was the OCs office, the 2ICs office, the CSMs [company sergeant major] office. And then there was what we called an 'Arms Coat' which was where all our personal weapons were secured overnight. You had to hand your weapons into the Arms Coat.

15:30 You held onto the operating group - like your bolt for the SLR. All the machine guns - that's the light machine guns - they went into the Arms Coat. Your personal weapon, if you were a section commander, like I was, you had an Owen gun, so you handed your weapon in but you kept your bolt. The Arms Coat was manned all the time - twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. If you had to get your weapon you had to go

16:00 down and sign for your weapon; and of course at the end of each working day the Arms Coat report had to go to the CSM to say that all weapons were accounted for, because you couldn't afford to lose a weapon - that was what we called a 'Prevalent Offence', which secured you a charge and you had to go before the OC, and pretty stiff disciplinary action taken. But yeah, it was great; and at the entrance to each of the battalion areas, and you know, they were quite significant in their design,

16:30 and they were separated by a defining point, each battalion area had a guardroom, and there was a picket on the front gate at all times, manned by the guard - twenty four hours a day. But during the day you only had one man there on the front gate, and at night you had sentries patrolling your area. Armed, but not with live ammunition. There was live ammunition in the guardroom, but not on your sentry - he had his rifle with a bayonet and a magazine, but there

17:00 was no live ammunition in them. We did issue live ammunition on a couple of occasions, when we had a couple of scares. Well, a couple of warnings, so we armed the sentries. There was on our right … you know, it's difficult to explain the geographical layout of the brigade area, but on the … there was the British battalion area, the Australian battalion area, and the Kiwi battalion area. There was

17:30 obviously the artillery units and all the supporting units involved in a brigade - artillery, armour … when I say 'armour' they were light patrol vehicles. They didn't have ranks or anything because they were no good in the jungle. But they had scout cars and things like that, and all the transport vehicles that could move the brigade from point A to point B. And there was all the technical support like the RAMY - the technical support for the vehicles, and yeah … it was just brand spanking new.

18:00 You could have survived as a garrison there for two years without moving outside, if you were, you know, that way inclined. They had the entertainment and … we were on the coast, so there was a beach club for each of the ORs, the 'other ranks', the senior NCOs and the officers - all of those ranks from all of the units were allowed to go there. There was the British Military Hospital Torenda, which was a very big, modern military hospital with modern equipment. So we were basically self-reliant, self-supporting.

18:30 **What was your position?**

When I first got to Malaya I was a lance corporal clerk in the orderly room in the company, and then I went to BHQ - Battalion Headquarters - as a ration clerk, doing all the paperwork for the rations for awhile. And then I got promoted to corporal, which was the greatest day of my life, and I went back to 3 Platoon A Company and commanded a section.

19:00 **So can you tell me about the first time you went out on patrol?**

The first major …there was a lot of minor exercises as you do in different climates. They were what we called 'acclimatisation exercises' where you know, we went local and did a few section/platoon/company type thingos. Then the battalion deployed to Quan-Tong in November of 1963, and I'll never forget it because we were out in the bush when [US President] John Fitzgerald Kennedy was

19:30 assassinated. And we listened to it on dictation news on what we called a '510 Set'. So we were out in the bush in the Quan-Tong area, which is up the east coast of Malaysia, and we heard on the dictation news on the 22nd of November that John Fitzgerald Kennedy had been assassinated. But yeah, we did a very large exercise in that area. When I say 'exercise' I sort of … it was a bit battalion exercise to familiarise the whole battalion to operating as a unit

20:00 in the jungles of Malaya. And yeah, it was probably about three of four weeks long. November was monsoons - our first introduction to the monsoons of Malaysia which, you know, it didn't matter what you did or where you were, you got wet. You know, you could almost set your clock on the timing. About three o'clock in the afternoon and down it would come. It didn't

20:30 matter if you were inside your hutchie - which was your tent - you got wet, because it was just such, you know, heavy monsoonal rain.

What sort of hazards were there from wildlife and insects?

Yeah, everything in Malaya was sort of family size - the scorpions and the centipedes and the spiders and those sorts of things. There were, as we found out later, tigers in the area.

21:00 In actual fact, there was an incident of a Kiwi being dragged out of his tent one night by a tiger. But yeah, there were tigers and there were snakes galore. There was a small cat called a Cepit cat - probably like a bobcat ... no, not a bobcat, more like a feral type cat, but it was vicious. One of our blokes saw one up a tree one day and went to pull it down. He thought it was a domestic cat. He had the heck scratched out of him. There were elephants ... but sort of, when we

21:30 went on exercises, the section commanders carried live ammunition. We had a magazine taped across the top - a magazine full of live ammunition - for protection, in case we ran into any animals or things like that. Obviously, if we went to an operational area, an 'active' type area, then we went to patrol the borders from the CTs then we had live ammunition. But in general,

22:00 you know, you got the information ... the information was coming down through the intelligence organizations about what was in the area. You were given the warnings of what was in the area; you always slept under mosquito nets - you never went to the bush without your mozzie net. We were all given a controlled issue of malarial suppressors - you know, it was no good if someone didn't take their anti-malarial drugs and got malaria; that's be a soldier down.

22:30 So the platoon sergeant or the section commander - when you were out in the bush - he had to ensure that everyone was taking their malarial suppressors, and had to see that they were taking it, and sign them off in the book.

What sort of local communities were in the vicinity of the Torenda barracks?

At the front gate there were three bars, or two bars that I remember: the Serrano Bar and the Sydney Bar, where most of the guys would go down after work - or if they had leave - and have

23:00 a few beers or you know, whatever they were drinking; and sit there and talk ... I suppose everyone was on a first name basis with the bar men and bar maids. The lifestyle in Malaya was unbelievable. What used to happen and ... don't think we were all booze artists or anything like that, but you know, we spent a lot of time in the bush. For the first year and a half we were there we would have spent

23:30 thirteen months in the bush. You'd go out for ten days, come back for two; go out for ten days, come back for two; and in those two days you'd, you know ... because we never had any alcohol in the bush whatsoever, until we got to the border, and then we used to get a ration of rum, which was part of the British system. They used to send in a demi-John of rum for a company; and you got a little bit of rum. But that was only towards the end. Obviously we were supplied with our

24:00 rations. If you go to the bush for six weeks then obviously you can't take six weeks of rations with you. So you used to have a re-supply. It would come in by helicopter or by road and things like that. But anyway, you'd go into the bar and you might, say, buy a bottle of scotch. You'd have some scotch and dries or whatever, and, if you hadn't finished it when you were due to go, then you write your name on it and hand it back to the bar. And it would be there the next day if you wanted to go down. And this

24:30 was common practice at the two bars near the base. One bar was the Aussie bar and one bar was the Kiwi bar - and never the twain shall meet. But we had access to Malacca, which is a very, very old part of Malaya. It was a Portuguese part of Malaya and you know, there were Portuguese temples and churches and that sot of stuff in there. the architecture in Malacca was Portuguese. And all the way through from Torenda Garrison into Malacca itself were all communities of Malaysians.

25:00 And it was great. We had an absolute ball. The locals themselves were an incredible bunch of people. We ran into all sorts of ... the Malays themselves were what was referred to by the Malaysians as the 'Buni-Putras' - they were the local native Malays. Between Torenda Garrison and Malacca itself there were a few rice padies and a few

25:30 you know, vegetable gardens and things like that. They had, you know, stalls on the side of the road; and the villages always had a lot of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s around, and you had to be very careful if you were in a taxi to never run over animals. You could run over people and they didn't seem to care - I'm not being flippant - but if you ran over a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK or a pigs and the taxi stopped then, oh, they'd probably haul you out and string you up. That was you know, that was their lifestyle.

26:00 So there were lots of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s running around the place, and pigs, and that sort of stuff. They weren't primitive. No way were they primitive or anything; it was just their lifestyle. The

villages were very clean and tidy; they lived in nice places and there were lots of areas ... in town they had ... I don't know why, it seems strange, but they had places they called 'cold storages' where ... see, there wasn't a great deal of fresh milk. There were no dairy bars or things like that. You couldn't walk in somewhere and have

26:30 a milkshake. But you could at the 'cold storage' because they had, you know, they had cold storage. But you know, there were plenty of bars and you know, places you could go. Obviously, when you'd come back from the bush, being six weeks in the bush, you'd need a haircut. And there were plenty of barber shops around where you could get a haircut, and they'd massage, you know, you know, your neck and shoulders and that - ah, it used to be great fun. And they had boot boys who would polish your shoes while you were getting your

27:00 hair cut, and you know, it was just incredible. It was a totally different culture to what we'd seen before.

It would have been a period of, I guess, uncertainty for them - in terms of terrorism and their own sovereignty. Did you get a sense of how they felt about the this massive multi-cultural interest in their region?

I never sort of gained any impression that they resented us.

27:30 I suppose there was a resentment to the effect that we were considered affluent and very rich, because of the difference in pay. And even, they had a difference in the charges. We were probably paid a lot more than the British soldiers, and there was a different ... like, a taxi ride from Torenda Garrison into town would probably cost you say, five to ten dollars - ten dollars for the Australians and maybe five dollars

28:00 for the British. They knew how much we got paid and how much the Brits got paid and how much the Kiwis got paid. So they scaled their charges on what they thought you could afford. Which didn't worry us because you know, when you spend thirteen months out of fifteen in the bush, you didn't spend a great deal of money a lot of the time, so you know, we obviously had

28:30 plenty of money to spend, so to speak, in town. And of course there were lots of places to go to - you know, tailor shops and things like that. We often got ... you know, five of us would often jump in a taxi and go to KL - Kuala Lumpur, or to Singapore, for say fifty dollars. So for ten dollars each you were out of Torenda and into KL or Singapore, and you know, access to the tailors and all those glamorous things that Asia is well known

29:00 for now. But we didn't know that until we got out amongst it.

How would you prepare for going on a border patrol?

Well, obviously you got your orders, say, whose turn it was to deploy to the border. Or if there was intelligence to indicate that there may be some activity on the border

29:30 then they'd deploy you to the border, so you would be given your orders and the company would deploy, or maybe the battalion. If the battalion deployed then all the battalion left Torenda. Obviously you had to leave some people behind on what they called the 'rear details', and the rest would deploy. So, just let's say in a platoon you had thirty guys, so you'd leave five behind to look after the normal duties that had to be carried out, because you couldn't let the camp deteriorate while you

30:00 out on exercises while you were out on operation. So they would say, "OK, this is what is expected in the situation ... bla bla bla bla possible enemy threat from bla bla; smugglers expected from Thailand to Malaya; groups of no more than three or four; groups of ten or twelve." So all that would regulated what sized group went out. If it wasn't a change in situation then we deployed companies to the border - the three battalions deployed companies to the border almost regularly, so you were reliving one another in some part

30:30 of the Thai-Malay border. Your preparation was pretty normal. You had your orders and the situation was ... you had what was called the 'Normal Rules of Engagement' under the Status of Forces Occupying ... Agreements ... you know, and things like that. And you know, you couldn't just shoot anybody that was in the area, you had to be you know, very careful. You were given all the intelligence details saying, say,

31:00 that there was a curfew in this area between say five o'clock in the afternoon and say seven o'clock the next morning. And anyone in the area in that time could be considered to be enemy, or be considered to be up to no good. So you had the authority to challenge them. And if they stopped then you could, you know, question them, because we all had interpreters with the platoons.

31:30 You couldn't speak Malay, but over a period of time most of us got to learn the basics of Malay - you know, the sort to interrogate somebody. But if they stopped and handed themselves over and they were available for interrogation, then OK. But if they were challenged and they didn't stop then you know, the Rules of Engagement were - depending on the circumstances prevailing - that you could open fire. But you know, you had to be very careful

32:00 because you didn't know what was beyond them or what was around them. So we didn't have carte blanche to shoot anybody who was in the area in non-curfew times. And we patrolled; and we didn't just pull up and wait for somebody to come. We patrolled and had a look around and see what was going on.

I think in the whole period of time we were in Malaya - in Malaya itself, not Borneo - on operations, I think we had

32:30 three contacts for the whole battalion.

Can you walk me through the first patrol you went on where there was contact, step by step, and what intelligence you received prior to going on that patrol?

Well, your intelligence indicated to you that there was a possibility - that there could be smugglers … that was what they generally referred to.

33:00 Smugglers or operatives in the area. The first one that we ended up having a contact with was … the intelligence and the briefings weren't any different to the others. They were stock standard that you could expect activity in the area. We were on the border … we were always on the Malaysian side of the border.

33:30 We never went to the Thailand side of the border. And oh, it was … I suppose it was afternoon. It was most unlikely that you'd have any activity in the afternoon because normally their activities occurred in the hours of darkness, obviously, to give them maximum protection from observation. We had one of our patrols - it wasn't my patrol - it was

34:00 others in our location. It was in the area and the radios were available … radio contact was made that activity was observed in the area and the command to 'stand to' was given; and there was a couple of people in this patrol, in this group, and they obviously heard what was on. They had a couple of buffalos with them and it was, you know, fairly obvious that they were in the area.

34:30 They were challenged and they ran. The patrol opened up and killed one of them. As was normal with the situation, there was a court enquiry, and those sort of investigations went on to ensure that everything was fair and square and above board, and to see that it wasn't just cowboys firing at anybody that was in their area.

35:00 So everything was fairly well controlled - and you know, when I say 'fairly well controlled' you had to be certain that it was fairly well controlled. But you know, the restrictions placed on us were, you know, fairly strict. As I said, you couldn't just be cowboys and shoot at anything in the area. The Rules of Engagement were observed very strictly and you know, the Rules of Engagement were very severely controlled.

35:30 **How would you go about actually challenging someone?**

What we did … obviously the intelligence you were given would indicate to you this track or this area was known to us - the 'good guys' for what of a better term - that there was activity constantly using the track coming from Thailand into Malaysia for whatever reason.

36:00 And the only reason that there's constant use of a track from one country to another or one area to another by the CTs or whatever was for reasons of no good. So therefore, you know, platoons and sections were stationed in those locations to observe - first off, to see if the information was correct, and then, if the information is proven correct, then you try and prevent or assess what is happening. And of course, the best way to assess is to challenge somebody in the area.

36:30 If they are locals just going about their normal routine then they will, you know, just stop and say that they're in the area for whatever reason. But if after challenging they turn and run then there's obviously something suspicious. In this case it was determined that these two were smugglers and they were smuggling weapons and information from Thailand into groups in Malaya.

So when did you first have to fire a weapon at a suspected CT?

37:00 I never did in Malaysia.

So what did you do in your role as section commander? What did that mean?

A section commander was responsible to the platoon commander. In my opinion a section commander's job was probably the best job in the army, in that you commanded nine soldiers. A platoon commander could probably say that he commanded thirty soldiers, and he did, technically, but

37:30 realistically he commanded three section commanders. He would issue orders to the section commanders, but it was up to the section commander on the spot to exercise control over the nine soldiers. And obviously, you were responsible under the orders issued by battalion command and the platoon commanders that the task you were given was carried out to the best of the ability of the soldiers under your command.

38:00 Obviously it reflected on your platoon commander if your section mucked up, or the section commander if your soldiers mucked up. So you were responsible for the normal tactical deployment of your soldiers and the normal principles of deploying your troops. Depending on where you were you had your rifles and your machine guns and things. So you'd deploy your machine guns and rifles to the high ground, so that everybody in your group knew … say you had high ground on your right

38:30 then the machine gun would be there; if the high ground was your left then it would be there, so

knowing that, you knew that your machine gun was there [gestures] and the rest of your section was there [gestures] . And all those sorts of things. And you coordinated from your position because you must be able to observe all your soldiers so that you would be able to control the fire of your machine gun; what your soldiers were doing; what they could see, and what they could see, you'd tell the platoon commander so that all

39:00 the information flows smoothly, so that there's no mess ups.

How do you set up an observation post in the jungle?

OK. If you're in close country and there's no tracks and things like that, then you don't really set up observation posts, because the principles of setting up an observation post are that you must be able to see them, so that they don't get cut off without you knowing. So, an observation post is probably… they can see ground in front

39:30 of them - which is very rare in jungle, but you know, you'd set one up if you could. But they could see and observe in front of your group, so you wouldn't get surprising by people coming in. Obviously you can't set up a three hundred and sixty degree observation post area, but the obvious ground … see, it's no good if it's totally thick jungle to set one up there because you're never going to know if someone's going to come that way.

40:00 We used to go into what we called 'all around the fence', or a 'harbour', and around the perimeter you have people alert, so that you can't get surprised in your group. But if there is an ability to send someone forward to observe the front of you, or whatever, then you would do it.

Tape 6

00:30 **Tony, I just wanted to ask you, when you're out in the jungle for that length of time, how are you living and surviving?**

Well, you carry what you commonly refer to as 'your house on your back'. You carry … and obviously in the tropics you don't need to carry much because it doesn't get cold, so therefore your bedding is not a great requirement.

01:00 But we obviously all carried a single hutchie or a tent-half shelter as their correct nomenclature is in the military, and it's big enough for you to camp under if you want to sleep by yourself, or, if you want to join them together then two of you can get in it. But normally what we did in Malaya, because of the type of topography we were operating in, you could cut yourself some sleeper poles

01:30 We had a little stretcher base thing that's made of the same sort of material. It's a sort of plastic based thing, whatever. It's very strong, and you could cut yourself some poles and build yourself a stretcher off the ground. You'd do that obviously in the wet season because you used to get flooded out all the time if you didn't. But it was also secure in that you were off the ground and away from all the creepy, crawly nasty things that crawl around. And you could keep yourself dry in the wet season, and

02:00 you didn't need any expertise to build it. You know, you just cut yourself some stretcher poles to go through it, because it had sections, so you'd cut lengths of wood - you know, cut small trees down and you know, build yourself up a hutchie. Normally what we'd do, we would stay in one location - particularly on the border - we'd stay in one location for a week,

02:30 so you'd set up all your gear and make sure it's up off the ground so that if it's the wet season it doesn't get wet. And you'd rig up a bag to catch water, so you didn't have to worry about the resupply of water. But generally life itself in the bush was fairly comfortable. Sleeping on the ground was not a problem either. You all got used to it. You'd put your stretcher cover down or your mattress cover down and sleep on the ground and away you'd go,

03:00 because normally at the end of a day you were fairly tired anyway, so it didn't take a great deal of rocking the bed to go to sleep. Obviously at night times in the jungle you had your patrols. There was always somebody awake, so obviously every man in your section had a turn at sentry, or every man in the platoon had a turn at sentry, and so it went on. But we used to … obviously if you're out in the bush for six weeks you needed resupply of all sorts of things.

03:30 You had renewal of clothing and footwear every seven days, which was part of the deal when we were in Malaya. We used to wear a canvas type jungle boot with a rubber sole, and after seven days in the bush anyway it would be just about wrecked because of perspiration and heat. The canvas used to deteriorate. But you know, you didn't always get a resupply of footwear, but you always got a resupply of pants and jackets every seven days. And of course

04:00 you had to carry your own socks and underwear and that sort of stuff. You'd make up what we called 'section admin bags' if you were away from a fair time, and what you'd put in there would be spare socks and spare underwear and things you might need. You carried all your own rations for … let's say if you were resupplied every five days or three days - depending on where you were or what the situation was - you were issued your rations which would

04:30 last you for the prescribed period of time. We used to operate on the British/European ration, which was a good ration pack. But a lot of the guys, when you first get your rations, you'd go through it and pull it to pieces and you'd what you like and what you want; then you'd go and get extra gear - your chillies and your garlic and that sort of stuff, depending on what people's tastes were. But yeah, the rations were quite good and they'd sustain you

05:00 for the period of time you were in the bush. Depending on what you drank - some people drank coffee, some people drank tea. You got to the stage where ... most of your milk and sugar was provided in your ration pack. Milk was normally a condensed milk in a tube and sugar was normally in packets that were waterproof so it didn't sort of get destroyed. You learned to have sugarless tea and sugarless coffee so it meant that you carried

05:30 less little bits and pieces. It was up to individuals to carry the stuff that they wanted to carry. You know, we used to go to the local markets and buy chillies and things like that. You could take dried chillies out with you - additives that, you know, enhanced the taste of the local food. We had what we called our little stoves - the X-Mine - and we had the X-Mine tablets, which were a solid fuel tablet which when you burned it

06:00 it provided heat to cook up your gear. We carried rice. You know, rice became a staple diet. So you'd cook up some rice and make a curry or a casserole or something like that. You know, you had all the utensils you needed in your field pack - dixies, and ... you know, a lot of people brought their own little camp ovens and camp things like that. You never

06:30 got inspected to say that you had to carry this or that. People carried what they wanted to. So long as you had the right weaponry and that sort of thing. A lot of people carried burghers, which carried more gear than people who had less gear. It was up to you, so long as it didn't slow you down and impede your movement through the bush.

How would the resupply be done?

07:00 Resupplies were normally ... you know, if you were in an inaccessible location you would normally provide an LZ [landing zone] for a helicopter, then move to the LZ, collect your gear, then move back to your site. That was for a static location. If you were on the move all the time then you would ensure that on the day you needed your resupply you would move to an area that was accessible by a helicopter and do it that way.

07:30 **How accurate were the helicopter drops?**

Oh, they'd come in and land, mostly. It was, you know, you're never wrong. With your map reading you had to be as accurate as you possibly could. Because of the movement of other patrols, it was no good blundering around in the bush and running into one another, because as has happened on many occasions you could end up with conflict between

08:00 two friendly groups, depending on the status of readiness. But yeah, you had no problem because everybody had maps and compasses. You'd find out where you were and you'd navigate from point A to point B. If there was a track junction around or a place where the helicopter land, then you'd just give them the grid reference and they'd just turn up. You'd secure the area before anyone gets there if you happen to be in the jungle; or if it's a road then you don't really have to secure it

08:30 because the locals move on it with their vehicles. They drive vehicles the same as we do - little trucks and lambrettas and oxcarts and stuff like that. So you'd organize a grid reference and secure the area when the helicopter arrives. You'd become as inconspicuous as you could. You don't sort of park yourself in the middle of the junction of the road and stop everything coming by, in order to take your resupply.

09:00 You sort of become unobtrusive, down the road or off the road. You know, you camouflage the vehicle. Helicopters - you don't have much trouble. You secure the LZ for the resupply, send out what you don't need, and away you go.

Tell me about the ration packs. I'm interested by you making curries and casseroles in the jungle.

Yeah, well as I said, a lot of people used to carry their own little cooking pot, and therefore you could take some rice with you; and you had

09:30 canned meat in your ration packs - you know, Irish Stew and Beef Casserole, and things like that. So you'd take a bit of curry and a bit of chilli and you'd spice it up a bit. That was it. Some people would buy sort of dehydrated stuff. You could buy dehydrated stuff around the place - dehydrated onion and a bit of dehydrated meat and stuff like that. So you'd throw that in for a bit of extra beefy stuff. The ration packs

10:00 that we got were generally suitable to survive on.

What were in them, exactly?

You had a breakfast menu which could be anything from a small can of say eggs and bacon - it was, I suppose you could say, like an egg and ham omelette - and you could heat that up by either (a) putting it

in water, or (b) punch a couple of

10:30 holes in the tin and stick in on the stove and heat it that way. You had, you know, all the varieties of canned meat like Irish Stew and Mince and Beef 'n' Potatoes and you know. There were grades of menus like the A Pack or the B Pack or the C Pack, and they had different things in them. In the British ration pack, which was basically what we were under because we were under, you know, the administrative support of the Brits, they had big bags of

11:00 boiled lollies in them because of the glucose and the energy you got from the boiled lollies. There was always a Mars Bar in there, and of course, blokes used to go around and trade their Mars Bars for something else, or whatever. But you know, there was all the bits and pieces in there and you could survive quite well. If you happened to be six weeks on a border patrol and things like that it would work out that on the fourteenth day we might have a hot box meal come in.

11:30 That depended on where you were, obviously. If you were on the road then the cooks would come out and provide you with a hot box meal - you know, a normal barracks-cooked meal. But yeah … normally if you spent that much time in the bush your tummy shrunk anyway, and you didn't eat, you know … you'd get back to camp and get served up a mixed grill and you could probably only eat a third of it because your tummy had shrunk.

What did you do for showering and so forth?

12:00 Normally, in the wet season there was no trouble at all because you could collect a river of water overnight. You'd get up in the morning and have what was commonly referred to as a 'bird birth'. But there were plenty of rivers and creeks around there where if you were out long enough you'd work it in details. You'd take the boys down to the creek or something like that and put your sentries out and have a bath - you know, a wash in the river.

12:30 You know, wash yourself down, because it wasn't all that unhygienic not to wash over a long period time; but then if the tactical situation demanded that's what you did then that's what you did. And there was nothing you could do about it. But the major thing … you know, everyone was sort of hygienic in the field. That was one of the major lectures you used to get all the time - in the field, how to make sure your feet

13:00 were dry - where you possibly could you would dry them off. You always had a can of foot powder and things like that. You carried anti-mite and mosquito repellent with you. Before you went out you normally treated all your gear with anti-mite because of all the mites that were around. You had to stop them getting through the seams and your trousers and the tops of your trousers where they fitted into your jungle boots and things like that. We used to shave daily. That was part of the requirement.

13:30 Later on in Vietnam we sometimes didn't, but in Malaya we shaved daily, excepting one operation we did in Borneo, but that's, you know, another story. But no … there was always plenty of water where you could keep yourself clean; and of course, when you had a resupply you had a complete change of clothes and things like that. So, you know, people could have a bird birth almost nightly.

Did people get sick?

14:00 You know, there were lots of … there were a variety of viruses that people picked up. Just, you know, people might get malaria even though we took malarial suppressants. Some people were probably more susceptible. Or if you were a bit run down in your immune system then you might get bitten and pick up some strange bug. We had a number of what we called 'medivacs'.

14:30 Someone might get crook, so you'd call in for a medivac by road or helicopter, depending on where you were. But yeah, people got sick.

Tell me about what you were looking out for on patrol? What kind of evidence of the CTs?

Well, in your training … particularly in our training to go to Malaya they'd teach you the signs to look for : footpads on the track,

15:00 broken bushes - you know, obvious avenues of people moving in the area. If you've got a completely thick jungle then it's fairly obvious if someone's been moving through there because of broken branches and things torn. You see in movies, you know, where the branches get broken, and you see the black trackers or whoever they might be, tracking somebody and looking for footprints and things like that. That's all it is. It's an ability to see the signs of a jungle that's been disturbed.

15:30 You know, like you might run across the footpads of elephants, and generally, just by a process of elimination work out old they were or how long it's been since they moved through there. You know, there's a lot of four legged animals in the jungle. If you could pick them up then you could follow them, if you wanted to follow them. But obviously, people make a different track, and with cunning, some individuals

16:00 could disguise them or cover them up. So you had to be alert. Of course, it was fairly obvious in areas of jungle. If there's a creek, say for instance, in your area, and you've had reports of movement in your area and you're having trouble finding them or their signs then the obvious thing to do is to go down to the creek line and

16:30 branch out where you are, because obviously people go to the creeks for water or some other reason. So you know, if the reconnaissance up and down the track or the creek has indicated that maybe someone was there, you'd follow it up. If you can't find it then you've got what is referred to as an 'area of responsibility' or an AO - an Area of Operation. And that becomes your area.

17:00 So, if you're told that you've got to search grid squares 11-12134567 then you've got a square on the map that you've got to search, so what you do is you plot a course so you completely zigzag across that particular geographical location on the ground, looking for any signs of activity.

How do you learn to move quietly through the jungle?

With a great deal of practice.

17:30 It might sound stupid but it is - it's a great deal of practice. You've got to employ the stealth that you need and it's all done through feel on the jungle floor. You know, if you step on a branch then you obviously break the branch, and if somebody's close by and they're waiting for you then they can hear you coming. So, once you've got a firm hold with one foot then you sort of feel around with the other foot until you feel firm ground, without any obstruction or impediment on there, and you move that way.

18:00 You've got to watch out that you don't get hooked up in any vines or things like that so you make a noise. You move very slowly. It might take you thirty minutes to move a hundred yards. Depending on the type of terrain you're in, what you're looking for, and the situation on advised enemy activity, it might take you thirty minutes to move a hundred yards or it might take you thirty minutes to move ten yards. But you do it as

18:30 quietly as you possibly can.

What about talking?

Talking's done by what we call 'field signals'. You know, there's a number of field signals like "no talk" [demonstrates the field signal] , or '"section commander come to me" [demonstrates the field signal] and so on. And then "that's the machine gun" [demonstrates] and "that's the rifle section over there" [demonstrates] or whatever the case may be. And if you say [demonstrates] then that means "platoon commander, come and have a look" or whatever.

19:00 So there is a method of talking by using sign language, or field signals.

What would be the sign for say, a CT?

[demonstrates] ... yeah?

That's obvious!

Yeah, they are obvious, but, you know, the enemy sign is there, and maybe this [demonstrates] for "you hear enemy coming", or [demonstrates] for "you can hear enemy talking".

19:30 You know, you can do a lot without speaking the general things you need to do. Obviously silence is not required once contact has been made because there's going to be a lot of noise if you're firing, so therefore you can use your voice. But also, there may be too much noise for your voice to be heard, so you can still use all your field signals.

How strange is it not to talk for that length of time?

20:00 Not strange. It's all to do with the training regime. You can go all day without talking. But if you have to talk by virtue of the fact that you have to talk - like, if you're a radio operator - then you've got to learn to talk very quietly. If you must talk … if someone calls you on the radio and unless it's critical, then you don't answer and you ignore, then what you do … there are a number of degrees of

20:30 awareness that you've got to be on. But you might say, OK, orders for the operation are maintain radio silence until contact has been made - so therefore, until something happens and silence is broken you don't talk on the radio or anywhere. You turn your radio off.

You mentioned that there weren't many contacts while you were there on the border. Why do you think that was?

21:00 I think, you know, the emergency had been declared over a year or so before we got there. Therefore, obviously, to us, the designs of the enemy or the anti-government, or view by the enemy … maybe they'd lost interest, lost heart; maybe they'd been knocked around too much by the forces that had been there before us. And you know, the whole situation had changed

21:30 so therefore there wasn't too much enterprise on behalf of the enemy to get involved in what they were say, in the mid to late '50s when the whole country was in uproar.

Do you feel your purpose along the border was prevention?

Yeah, that was basically … they were the orders for basically all the troops that went to the border. It was a border patrol. You know,

22:00 it wasn't meant to seek and destroy, so it speak - it was, shall we say, a screen to (a) prevent infiltration from Thailand into Malaya - you know, the intelligence we had was that there were CT camps in the southern part of the Thai-Malay border. You know, our major target

22:30 was to patrol and prevent infiltration. And of course they obviously knew … it was obvious that sometimes we used to deploy from Torenda by train. There was a local train station at Tamping, and we'd sometimes deploy to the border by train. Or close to the border by train. And we'd sometimes sneak out of Torenda at eleven o'clock at night,

23:00 and quietly without any fanfare go down and jump on the train at Tamping, and quietly arrive somewhere up the track at Pandang-Bazara or somewhere like that. We'd be supposedly 'secretly' getting there and there'd be a band there playing Waltzing Matilda or something. They knew we were coming. But you know, there was intelligence on both sides of the fence, and obviously they knew when we deployed out of the task force area at Torenda. You know,

23:30 there were local Malays that worked in the area. There were Malays living in the area. They'd see us when we go out. You know, it was a commonly held joke. You'd go down and have a haircut, down say at the Sydney-Sydney bar area - you'd go down for a haircut or whatever - and you know, the barber would tell you, "You going to the bush next week," and maybe we hadn't even been told. So, their intelligence was probably just as

24:00 effective as ours in terms of when and where in general we were going - not, say, specifically where - but you know, if we deployed out by train then they knew we were probably heading for the border. And so, activity from Thailand into Malaya was probably reduced. I'm not saying it didn't occur many times while we were there. But you couldn't cover every inch of the border,

24:30 and as I said, the jungle was so close at times that ten yards away you could probably get a hundred people go past and probably not see it. So you know, it just meant that their intelligence was probably just as good as ours.

Tell me about the bands playing Waltzing Matilda?

Ah. We deployed … this was one particular operation we deployed to the border on, and you know, it was supposedly all hush-hush or whatever. We drove from Torenda to Tamping. Down the road there was a railway station there,

25:00 and we jumped on the train and pulled all the shutters down and off we headed. And I suppose there were a number of people who knew we were getting on the train, because there was all the station staff. But yeah, we got up the track to Padang-Bazara or somewhere up near the border, and there was a little band on the thing playing Waltzing Matilda as we pulled in. So, you know, … they knew.

25:30 And of course, what they used to do - and of course the enterprise of the locals was very good - you know, they used to have the char-wally, you know, they'd have a little trolley with cups of coffee or tea and little nick-nacks and eats and things, and they'd be there on the station; so you know, they knew we were coming.

So the band members, were they communist sympathisers?

Oh God knows … who knows. You know, they were just what might be referred to as a 'rag-tag outfit' - three or four people trying to put the tunes of Waltzing Matilda together or something like that, on you know, very strange and innate musical instruments.

26:00 But ah, you know, I suppose we played games with them and they played games with us; but you know, there was never anything sinister about it, I imagine. It never created a security problem as far as we were concerned, anyway. You know, on many of our trips to the border, if we were to spend six weeks on the border, after fourteen days, we might go into Padang-Padang

26:30 and have a couple of days off. Or go to a base this side of Padang and have a couple of days off there. It didn't matter, really.

Were there ever any accidental contacts between allied forces, in terms of friendly fire, or incidents like that?

Not that I can recall in our trips in Malaya itself. There were a couple of friendly contacts in Borneo later

27:00 on in our tour. The situation was totally different. It was full-on active operational service where there was a defining line for us and the enemy. People were moving around and of course, having the configuration of the group that we had in Borneo, there was, you know, probably a lack of communication or people got lost or strayed off line, and they ended up running into the back of or front of

27:30 on of the friendlies. And of course it happened, not while we were in Borneo, but … do you want me to go on to Borneo?

Yeah, we might ask you how that posting to Borneo came about?

Well, it was about March or April 1964, and the Indonesians landed some commandos on the coast of Malaysia at a place called Kluang, just down the road from where the garrison was at Torenda.

28:00 So, you know, they were fairly quickly rounded up and taken into custody, and there wasn't a great deal of damage done. But what that did was heighten the alertness of the whole South East Asian group - the Malays, the Brits, the Australians, the Kiwis were put on a higher degree of alert. So what they instituted then was a higher degree of coast watching. We were sent out in groups from the brigade or task force

28:30 brigade - the 28th Commonwealth Brigade - out in groups along the coast of the Straits of Malacca, which faced Borneo, to keep an eye on fishing boats and that sort of thing. We were set up at strategic points, with you know, fully armed soldiers. One particular place … one of the rivers … and I can't think of the name of it … but there was a river where all the

29:00 fishing boats from the village used to go out the river into the Straits of Malacca and do their fishing. We were based there for a period of time and we had a big MOBAT [motorised battle tank] - which is a big sort of anti-armour weapon. But what we had, we didn't have the live ammunition, we had what was called the 'training rounds', which was a wooden based thing. But a wooden round through the hull of a ship would sink it quick-smart.

29:30 We used to observe all the fishing boats that would go out in the morning and when they'd come back at night. We'd count them and we had all the registration numbers of the boats and everything; so we were what they called 'coast watching'. We did that for a period of time, from sort of landing at Kluang until things started to hot up in Borneo. The Indonesians started incursions by crossing the border between Kalimantan - which is the Indonesian side of Borneo - and the

30:00 Malaysian side of Borneo. So under the … the Brits were the first to deploy to Borneo, and they deployed a number of battalions from around Malaya. The Brits had battalions of Gurkhas and Greenjackets and Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders - I suppose, don't quote me on this, but they had probably six or seven battalions of British infantry in Malaysia, plus what was at Torenda with the Australians, the Kiwis, and the Brits.

30:30 They had plenty of troops to deploy to Borneo, which they did; and they deployed to strategic positions along the Indonesian-Malay border in Borneo, and set up defended locations. And obviously, negotiations went on between Australia and everybody else, and it was agreed that we could be deployed to Borneo. So, in February 196, 3RAR was deployed to Borneo.

31:00 **That coast watch work that you were doing, what was so significant about the fishing boats?**

They were worried about infiltration from the Straits of Malacca. See, the Straits of Malacca was not wide at all, so it was not incomprehensible that you know, if the Indonesians had landed their paratroopers in Kluang in 1964, then if they wanted to invade, it wouldn't take much to infiltrate the fishing fleet, and send

31:30 troops in, you know, in the fishing boats, disguised as Malay fishermen. So we were there and we were strategically located so that all the villages that had fishing fleets - and there were a lot of them on the coast there, because their staple food was fish and rice - obviously, the major method of entry into Malaya, apart from using landing craft and things, would be to infiltrate using fishing boats.

32:00 So al the villages along the coast handed in the registration numbers of their fishing boats, because they all had registration tags on their boats and all their identification, to us, as coast watchers; and what we did was counted them out in the mornings and ticked off their registration numbers. And when they came home again we counted them, because they operated on a curfew. To be exact … well, I'm not sure what time it was, but let's say it was 'seven' at night;

32:30 so anybody going out before seven was considered to be breaking the law and we'd pull them in. And if anybody came in after the curfew closed at say five, they could possibly be considered as infiltrators, and we could, you know, open fire on them. So that was the idea of the coast watching patrol, and that was set up in a specific location at the closest point between point between Indonesia and Malaysia.

33:00 The rest was covered by the Malaysian Navy and the British Navy - the British Navy had a big base just off Singapore. They used to patrol the Straits of Malacca, but we sort of supplemented the naval patrols.

Did you ever come across any infiltrators?

Nah. You know, there were a few suspicious people around looking a bit suspicious. We had one occasion where somebody fired the MOBAT - the big gun - they fired it at one vessel which had no registration

33:30 and you know, no visible signs that they belonged to the fishing fleet. But you know, they sunk that, but nobody got hurt. It just put a hole through the boat and they swam ashore. But they weren't Indonesians. They were just people who'd strayed away from their own village and hadn't had the right registration numbers.

Did you sense the mood among the local Malays about what the crisis would mean for them?

34:00 They were fearful of the Indonesians because there were so many of them. There'd been lots of stories about what had been happening in Indonesia, and at that point in time there was a lot of internal strife in Indonesia as well, because of General Sukarno, and the strife with the Sulawesi and such things. And of course, we got a lot of news by virtue of the fact that we had you know, radio broadcasts

34:30 and news … local news about the strife in Indonesia and the Sulawesi uprising; and General Sujewong [?] , who was the general of the army, you know, he was a Sulawesi, and he was anti this and anti that. They were generally fairly scared, and of course, when they landed, the commandos

35:00 in Kluang, the air of alertness was very well heightened; and they were scared that there was going to be a major conflict.

How long did spend doing the coast watching?

I suppose … to be honest, I can't recall. But it seemed a long time. We went out and came back and went out and came back.

35:30 We went out in groups of sort of eight or ten, and if you break that down between an eight hundred man battalion, three times, plus a few other groups, it may have been two or three months. Don't quote me on that - I'm not exactly sure. We were out and back and out and back.

Were you still based at the barracks at that time?

Oh yes. We were operating from Torenda and we'd go out and set up an observation post area. We had, you know, what we might call a 'pillbox'. We built a bunker with a machine gun and a cover on it; and field glass

36:00 and all the radio contact with our command post back at Torenda. But yeah, we were up and down the coast.

When you were committed to Borneo, how secret was that deployment, back in Australia?

I don't know, to tell you the truth. We got the message …

36:30 or when I say 'we got the message', it was orders to deploy in … we knew we were going in, I think it was late-January/early-February … we were all given orders … they despatched an advance party which I was part of. There was a couple of plane loads of us went across - sort of members of each group. There was a section commander here, a rifleman there, a radio operator here - you know, a made-up group.

37:00 And we were deployed forward to a base called Stass, which was occupied by the 2/7th Gurkhas. They were the battalion that 3RAR took over from. So we went to Stass and we went out on a couple of patrols with the Gurkhas to familiarise us with our area of operation and to introduce us to the local population - the Dyaks, that were on the Malaysian side of the border. You know, just down from Staff itself - our base camp - was the village of Stass.

37:30 But on the … in my briefcase I've got a little map of where we were. But on our south-west flank was a big mountain range called the Gudang-Reia, [?] and that was the right flank of our area of operations, and the border sort of zig-zagged its way up from the south west to the north east. And obviously A Company was given an AO

38:00 and B Company was given an AO, and so was C Company. And we went in and deployed with the Gurkhas and they took us around and showed us the major areas. And of course, the jungle in Borneo is somewhat similar to Malaya, but there are a lot more tracks, because the locals used to go into the jungle a lot more. They'd go hunt and fish there, and there were a

38:30 lot more dedicated tracks. And there were these sort of log bridges; and it took some time to learn to walk across these narrow log bridges across the water - be they large streams or small creeks. And we sort of found our way around the place and had a look at what was happening; and that was sort of our introduction to Borneo. And as I was starting to mention earlier

39:00 about our contacts with the friendlies … the Gurkhas … I don't know if you're aware of the reputation of the Gurkha soldier, but he was probably recognized as one of the fiercest jungle fighters in the world. He was the guy with the little bent knife known as the kukri. He used to sneak around and be very nasty to the enemy, and chop his head off or cut his throat. But anyhow … we never went out in a patrol under platoon strength in Borneo

39:30 but the Gurkhas we operating in patrol sizes of ten. They'd go out at all hours of the day or night and have a look at the border and come back in. Anyhow, one day the Gurkha patrol from the base we operated from at Stass, they were on their way home, and they were coming back into Stass. And there was one of the local villagers who was a sort of spy for … well, he used to sneak across the border and spy

40:00 on the Indonesians. He was a school teacher in Stass, and he was on his way home one morning … normally he wasn't out and about in the mornings - he'd be either holed up somewhere or he'd come home in the middle of the day. He was coming home as the Gurkha patrol was heading out. And they thought he was a bad guy and they shot him. And of course that wasn't received very well by the locals

in the village

40:30 because he was a very well respected school teacher, and he was out on his spying trip, and of course the Gurkhas hadn't been told. And of course, being the soldiers that they were, they reacted rapidly and shot him, which was unfortunate. But yeah, there were a couple of incidents of friendlies running into one another, but not all that bad.

Tape 7

00:30 **Tony, how was the border marked in that region?**

Well, certainly there was no sort of marking stones that said, "This is Kalimantan and this is Malaysia." It's certainly marked on the map, like you see on maps of Australia where the border between New South Wales and Queensland is marked by dots and dashes on the line. It's a matter of

01:00 getting to the grid reference and making sure you know exactly where you are, to know that this is the border. Normally, borders are made up of natural features anyway. They don't just walk into the middle of somewhere and say, "This is the border; you know, a line straight along there is the border between Rome and Italy or Rome and Greece," or whatever the case may be. When these sorts of things have been identified there is normally a physical, geographical thing on the ground, be it a river, a mountain

01:30 range or a hill or something like that. So yeah, we had you know, the technical ability to identify the border between us and the Indonesian side of Borneo.

How did the local villagers figure in the intelligence gathering around the border and what the Indonesians might have been up to?

If you appreciate the villagers were, shall we say … ah, it's a bit hard …very natively oriented.

02:00 They lived in, I suppose, villages that their parents and their grandparents had been living in … thatched huts, houses, and long houses that were what we might call the 'community centre'. But they lived in their thatched villages built up on stilts because of the tropical

02:30 geography of the place and the climate. Because you know, you don't build anything on the ground where you get monsoons. You might get three or four inches of rain a day. But their villages were you know, they were primitive, but there was certainly education in villages, as I mentioned about the school teacher that was shot by the Gurkhas. They had their own sort of, shall we say 'lifestyle' to live,

03:00 and their village elders and their village chiefs handed down the traditions of their village. They were fairly … I don't say 'prehistoric', but they were shall we say 'within their own lifestyle'. They weren't worldly people and they probably didn't know much about the outside world other than where they lived. Certainly the Dyaks themselves,

03:30 which was the local name for the people who lived over there, the Borneo people, they were wonderful individual people. They were just lovely people that you … you wouldn't want to meet nicer people. We had two Iban trackers with us, and you know, Engel and Blon were their names, and they were just two great blokes. But we got to know the people at Stass you know, and we had

04:00 great shall we say 'affinity' with the local people. There were certainly probably spies in the village. I don't know. But I think from their experience and our experience that the spies were more on our side than the opposition's side, because you know, they'd come back and tell us of Indonesian movements. And you know, there wasn't a great deal of infiltration like you see today with the terrorist organizations that come in. They were army sized groups.

04:30 They were military and they were dressed in military uniforms. And they operated the same way that we did - they patrolled to their border and we patrolled to our border; and there was you know, more contact with the Indonesian army there than there was with terrorist groups. If you ran into them they were dressed in military uniforms and they were easily identifiable as the enemy.

05:00 But no, the local villagers were wonderful. They'd come up to our base camp. Our base camp was a defended post with dug-in bunkers and barbed wire all around; and it was open during the day because we could man it the same as you'd man the camp here. But at night it was closed down and there was a curfew, so anyone sort of sneaking around at night got shot. But no, they would come up with their local produce - their fruits and

05:30 bits and bits and sell us their fruit. But you know, they were a great bunch of people.

Were there any patrols that crossed the border?

Yes.

Can you tell me about those?

I'm not sure that I should. I suppose … I suppose it doesn't really matter. But I'm not sure that the location was generally known, but we had a very major contact on the fifteenth of June 1965; and we were, you know,

06:00 probably not on 'our' side of the border … for want of a better term. But the previous night, our base camp at Stass had been mortared by the enemy, and on their way back to wherever they were going we ambushed them. We were in ambush. Not that we knew they were going to do the night before. This was part of the normal patrolling that we did. But we ambushed a major force of Indonesians, and it was about

06:30 ten to two on the fifteenth of June 1965. The reason why I know it was that particular date was that it was my birthday. But yeah, we ran into a very large concentration of Indonesians and we were in contact for about an hour and ten minutes. We were supported by artillery fire from a place called Kro-[?] Kon, which is back beyond our base camp. We had two soldiers wounded in my section - my 2IC and one of my

07:00 section soldiers was wounded; and we bugged out back to the border and had the two wounded guys evacuated, and then set up base camp on the border.

How were they wounded?

My section 2IC was shot through the knee, and one of my machine gunners - I had two machine gunners which I was lucky - and one of my machine gunners was wounded with a piece of shrapnel in the leg.

So you mentioned that your base camp had been mortared. Were you out on patrol when that happened?

07:30 Yeah, we were out on patrol when that happened.

So what the communication between the base and your patrol?

We had constant … we had radio communication with our base camp all the time. They had what they called a CP - a command post, and when anybody deployed, well, you know, it was manned all the time anyway. But when the troops deployed into the field … you know, we never got out of communication range

08:00 with our radio sets. We had 510 sets and different types of sets that had the range and we'd throw up aerials and things like that; and you know, that gave us communications all the time.

So Tony, if you could walk me through step by step in as much detail as you can remember about what happened from the time you received communication from the base camp that there had been a mortar attack …

Oh, we didn't receive communication from them inasmuch as we heard it. Because they were in the distance. We heard the base camp reporting back … see, we were a company group and they reported back to our headquarters

08:30 that they were being … the base camp itself never took a hit. But the general area … they were off-target; but they mortared the area of the base camp, and you know … well I don't know if you do know, but you can hear mortar primaries - that's when it's fired. And obviously you can hear them when they go off. And of course they reported that they were being mortared, but weren't taking any direct hits. This was the night before.

09:00 And we could hear their conversation between our superior headquarters and the CO at our CP. And you know, they then told us that the Indonesians were in the area - or you know, enemy were in the area; so we were just more alert.

So did you make the decision then to follow them?

Oh, we didn't follow. We were on an ambush patrol. The specific orders for the platoon was to ambush

09:30 a particular order on grid reference such-and-such. So we set up an ambush in that area. It was our third day in ambush. It was a daytime ambush only. At night we pulled back to a firm base some distance away from where were ambushing, but we were given a specific grid reference on the map to ambush. We went in two days prior to the contact, set up a base camp, sent reccies [reconnoitre] forward to have a look at the area were going to ambush,

10:00 and the platoon commander drew up his plans. We then moved forward on the first morning to a base camp directly in rear, and moved forward in section groups to our ambush locations. We set the ambush for the day and were there from just after first light til just before last light. We pulled out on day one, back to our base camp in rear, and then back to another base camp. We did the same on the morning of day two - went for the full day with no contact. We pulled out, and that night

10:30 the base at Stass was mortared. We heard all the, you know, radio conversation going on, so we moved back into our ambush the next morning, and we were there from just after first light til about ten to two in the afternoon when we sprung the ambush. It was the … well, we presumed it was the group that had mortared the base camp because of the weaponry

11:00 that they were carrying; because once the ambush had been sprung and all things occurred, we never stayed behind. Once contact was broken we pulled out. We never went in, as is the normal procedure in an ambush when you go in and check the ambush site and see what's happened. Once contact was sort of broken, we fled - well, we didn't 'flee' - we withdrew.

What were the specific plans for the ambush?

The specific plans for the ambush were to inflict as much casualties as we could on any enemy that came into our area. You know, the mission

11:30 of an ambush is to kill or capture the enemy. Our mission was to kill him.

So was the idea that you would be over the border ambushing parties that had been …

Yes. The idea was … obviously, it was most unlikely that we would get the infiltration of a large body of enemy from their side of

12:00 the border to our side, so the idea was that … see, the activity of the Indonesians was to come forward to ambush or to mortar or to inflict casualties on our guys in our bases, because we had Stass, we had Surekin [?] , and we had Bukit-Nakal [?] , which were the three company bases on the border. And of course we used to operate out of those, and our AOs overlapped, to ensure that we covered our whole area of operations on the border.

12:30 And of course, they would come forward to the border or just inside our side of the border and harass, mortar, fire whatever weapons they could fire, and then bug out. Our mission was to ambush those sorts of patrols. And fortunately … when I say 'fortunately', I don't know whether you can consider it fortunate or not … the Indonesians probably didn't consider it fortunate … but the mission of our patrol was to ambush the enemy, and we were able to fulfil that mission on day three of our ambush.

13:00 **What were the enemy like?**

Very good. We … I suppose tactics in the military system is one of those things where sometimes the 'normal' works and sometimes the 'abnormal' works. We probably set up the ambush in an abnormal position and one that, if you looked at the map

13:30 and decided which location you should put the ambush in, you probably wouldn't have put it where we were, because we were on the downslope of the track that we were ambushing. Now, that's normally not very sensible because it gives the enemy the high ground. But the geographical layout of the ground - the topography we were in - was that it was full of sort of ripples and things, so therefore the …

14:00 the plane of the ground was not as it appeared to be. You know, you could there [gestures] and the level of the ground is the level of that trunk, but we were down below and to either side, because of the rolling plane of the topography; so that was why the platoon commander decided to lay the ambush where we did; and therefore it took the enemy by surprise because they were back on their side of the border and were not as alert as they probably should have been. And in actual fact, there was a lot of them

14:30 walking along with their rifles over their shoulders. But as soon as the ambush was sprung they reacted fairly rapidly and got some fairly good fire to bear on us. But fortunately for us they were unable to anticipate the lay of the ground and their fire was normally going above our heads. Therefore that was probably why we ended up with only two casualties. And Harry Engel would probably tell you tomorrow as I tell you today …

15:00 Harry was lying to my right. He was the platoon commander's radio operator. And I was the section commander of the left flank section. We were probably ten or fifteen metres apart, and a grenade landed in the jungle between us. It was fairly clear. It wasn't all that dense. And we saw the grenade land and sort of, there was an amazed look on both our faces as we were trying to sort of discover

15:30 a place to sort of protect ourselves from the grenade exploding. Fortunately - touch wood - it didn't explode, it didn't go off.

Amazing.

Amazing.

What sort of casualties did they suffer?

We didn't have any idea. We knew their casualties were pretty severe because … you know, everything was at our advantage. We had Claymore Mines set up, we had machine guns, we had rifles - so they walked into us completely unaware that we were there.

16:00 We were never able to determine how many were killed or wounded, because as I said, we were over the border, and once contact was broken we left, because it was probably you know dangerous to stay around. We didn't know if there were any reinforcements close by. We left, but, sort of … vague intelligence said that it was the heavy weapons company

16:30 of one of the Indonesian battalions. The indication was that they suffered severe casualties of maybe fifty or sixty percent, which could have been upwards of fifty or sixty people killed. But yeah, they were

completely taken by surprise, yet within a very short period of time they replied with some pretty heavy and accurate gunfire.

17:00 **So at what point did you pull back?**

Obviously with amount of firepower that we had available, and with the artillery that was brought in, and the casualties that they had taken, they obviously decided to break contact. When they broke contact, or when it appeared that the retaliation was lessening, I indicated to the platoon commander that I had two wounded soldiers, he then told me to get my section out and take the two wounded soldiers with me, back to the border,

17:30 to where … every time we did an operation on the border, we had a back-up platoon on the border somewhere close behind us. And the normal procedure was that you know, you never backtracked on your same tracks unless we had contacts. So the normal procedure would be that we would go the same way home to our side of the border, but because we'd had contact we went back the way we knew … because if you try to navigate

18:00 whilst you're under fire then it's a little difficult. The way we come in, well that was standing orders, and the way we went out was the way we came in. So I picked up my section with the two wounded guys and we went back to the border, closely followed by the platoon later on. We arrived back at the border at … well, the Iban trackers led the way back until we got close to the border, then I pulled them back

18:30 because they - being locals - our platoon on the border might have thought they were the bad guys, so I pulled them back and put my guys up the front. But we were in contact with the platoon on the border anyway. So we got back OK and then the platoon followed us back.

How frequent were the transporter patrols?

To be honest, I don't know. And I'm not dodging the question for any other reason than I don't know. You know, we did a couple. I don't know if any of the other platoons did.

19:00 We were never … we were only given general information on location - the general location of the platoon. But to be honest, I don't know. I don't know whether the DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs] or someone is going to say that you can't include what I've just told you in [the archive] … but there is After Action Reports on our contact. I don't know whether they stipulate that we were over the border or not. I don't know. But our platoon commander was awarded a Military Cross for the action, so … somewhere along the track the record of the ambush is stored away, so,

19:30 but I don't know whether it's releasable or not.

Were you aware of … was there any secrecy imposed on you after that major contact, particularly given that people were wounded?

No, no. In actual fact … I don't suppose it's hilarious, but it was quite, I suppose 'humorous', at the time; but they evacuated both Albie Kyle - who was an Aboriginal Australian - he was wounded with shrapnel

20:00 in the leg; and my section 2IC - Jack Enzy - he was evacuated back to BMH Singapore - that's the British Military Hospital in Singapore. And you know, it hit the headlines in Australia when the comment was passed by Jack that it was "just like shooting ducks", so Jack was commonly referred to afterwards as 'The Duck Hunter'. I suppose it was probably a flippant thing to say. He was laid up in Singapore

20:30 in the British Military Hospital commenting about duck hunting.

What was it about your platoon commander's actions that led him to be …

Well, the overall success of the ambush - the method of deploying the troops, the position we were in, you know, the lack of casualties on our behalf and the indication of heavy casualties on their behalf.

21:00 It was considered to be a very successful, major operation. The command of the West Brigade, who was the Argyle and Southern Highlander Brigadier came and congratulated the whole platoon and company on the action, so you know, it's obviously not secret, but still, I don't know how far they want to admit that we were over the other side.

21:30 **We've interviewed other people who've admitted it**

Oh well, you know. But I honestly can't tell you how many other operations went across the border.

You mentioned when you were back in … operating on during the Malayan … that you'd listened to the assassination of John F. Kennedy …

We got what was called 'dictation news'. I think it was one of the British … somewhere in the Far East anyway,

22:00 and you could listen to the dictation news most nights. You could do that on the 510 sets because of the capability of the thingo. And we used to listen in at night, if you were hutchied up of course. You know, we rarely moved at night, anyway. But it was about six o'clock, and they used have the dictation news. And when I say 'dictation', they used to sort of go through

22:30 sort of the headlines - headline news. And one of the radio operators … you know, you had to have a radio operator on the listening post all the time, he just passed the word around that John Fitzgerald Kennedy - or JFK - had been assassinated. And I remember … it's one of those occasions and situations where you remember exactly where you were because something in history had happened.

23:00 **I think the President of South Vietnam was also killed around that time?**

Yeah, President Nguyen … oh, what was his name? I can't recall his name.

What concept did you have of the escalating situation in Vietnam?

Well, we were pretty aware of what was happening before we even deployed to Borneo. We were, shall we say, kept abreast of the news. You know, there was TV in Malaya.

23:30 We weren't living in a sort of backward country or the middle of the Amazon jungle. We had access to TV and all that sort of thing, so we kept fairly well abreast of what was happening. And of course, in 1962, Australia deployed advisors to South Vietnam, so you know, we were interested in what was happening in South Vietnam; and as things with the Americans started to build up -

24:00 it just didn't happen overnight, it happened … this was 1964 … '65 so to speak, late '64, things were starting to get, you know, the Americans were sending more advisors. We had advisors there and we kept abreast of it because you know, there was the suggestion and the rumour that troops would be deployed to Vietnam. And, we imagined and we initially thought that it would be us, because we were already in an operational environment and we'd already been there

24:30 a year and a bit. We were probably the best trained, geographically and topographically-wise to be deployed to South Vietnam. So we were getting a bit excited that we might go to Vietnam. You know, the rumours were running around that the Australians were going to be committed to Vietnam in late '64 or early '65. And then, when we were

25:00 deployed to Borneo, that obviously blew that story out of the water. But one of our platoon commanders went over to Borneo for a familiarisation trip. And that's what gave us the indication that we might have been deployed. He came back and told us that, you know, what it was all about and what was happening over there.

25:30 And you know, geographically and topographically, it wasn't any different to Malaya. But of course, then when we were deployed to Malaya, that of course stopped that rumour and 1RAR were deployed in around April or May 1965.

When you returned to Australia after Borneo, how adept did you feel you and the company were at jungle warfare?

Ah, we were top of the tree. We thought and we imagined that we were

26:00 the best jungle fighters around - as well as the British of course - you know, because we'd spent the two years in Malaya and Borneo, and that's all it was. It was jungle warfare. And we'd been fairly adept at the fighting in the jungle from the day we'd arrived in Malaya. We had learnt and learnt and learnt; and the expertise in the battalion … all of the troops, you know, were jungle trained; and you know, we felt quite confident that we could handle any situation

26:30 that arose with jungle fighting.

I'm going to fast-track Tony to when you were in 7 Battalion - we've still got to talk about Vietnam - but sort of preparations did you undergo in 7 Battalion for going to Vietnam?

OK. On return from Malaya things completely changed for me because I was promoted from corporal to a sergeant anyway. The situation had changed.

27:00 But we were obviously aware … the Australian Army had been increased from three battalions as we were in Malaya, because of the escalation of things in Vietnam. 4, 5, and 6 Battalions were added to the regiment whilst we were over in Malaya and when we arrived home we became the 7th Battalion. We were then …

27:30 the 7th Battalion was raised at Puckapunyal in Victoria, which was the home of the armoured regiment, and the armoured centre, and the cavalry was there - the APCs [armoured personnel carriers] . So we were raised down there because basically there was nowhere else to raise a battalion; and I suppose, we came back from Malaya, and half of 3RAR - the majority of which were single -

28:00 were deployed, or rather were posted, to 7RAR. Obviously there were some married men in the battalion, because you know, the NCOs and senior officers - the captains and majors that were there - were obviously married; well, not 'obviously', but more likely to be married. So therefore we then formed the nucleus of 7RAR, which was then reinforced by new recruits into the Regular Army, and also with intakes from the National

28:30 Service. So we then started the training cycle in preparation for deployment to Vietnam, which was obviously going to happen. When, we didn't know. But we soon got the message that we were going to

be the next battalion to be deployed, because 5 and 6RAR had already be warned for service, so 7RAR was the next cab off the rank. So we then started our preparations for our deployment to Vietnam.

29:00 **In order to prepare, what sort of integration was there between the nasho's [national service] and the regular army blokes?**

Well, to start with, the National Servicemen were probably more mature than a lot of the recruits we got from the regular side of the services, because I think, they started off by being ... well, not 'selected', but they were able to pick and choose; because at that stage there wasn't a full out commitment. So at that stage we got an intake

29:30 from National Service ... and I'm not sure which intake it was, but in 1966 we got an intake of National Servicemen - the number I'm not sure of - to start training. 6RAR were the next to deploy, and they were still doing something else, so we got this group of National Servicemen up, to train up from recruit training to corps training level, like when I first came into the army, and did corps training. So we did that and then sent them

30:00 off to 6RAR. Once that had occurred then we started to build up again with National Servicemen, sort of middle '66 - June, July, August, September '66 got National Servicemen in - bearing in mind that we were warned to deploy in February '67. You know, we were built up to full strength by September '66

30:30 because you couldn't expect to get any new recruits in - or new National Servicemen in later that September '66, because of the lead time you needed to integrate them into the battalion and prepare them for all the DP [?] Training required, and that sort of stuff. So we were probably at full strength in September 1966, when we started major exercises in Australia, which they did in Shoalwater Bay. That's now our major training area. It wasn't

31:00 much good for jungle training because there wasn't much jungle in the Shoalwater Bay area, but the battalion was put to the test on their readiness, and then in early '67 we went and did exercises in Canungra - the jungle warfare school, which was obviously more to the likings of the topography in Vietnam.

So when the National Servicemen joined the battalion, had they completed basic training?

31:30 They had done their recruit training at ... during the build-up to the increase of National Servicemen, they did recruit training at Kapooka, and they raised a second recruit training battalion at Puckapunyal, where we were. So that was a specifically raised unit to train National Service recruits.

When you were in pre-deployment training for Vietnam at Canungra, how did that compare to the preparation you received before Malaya?

32:00 It was the same because we went to Canungra to prepare for Malaya, because it was the jungle training centre. You know, the similarities in the jungle in the Canungra area to Malaya, and then later on in our experience to Vietnam ... the jungles of Malaya were much more dense than the jungles of Vietnam - in some location. I don't say 'all' because we never got to see the northern areas.

32:30 **What sort of a concept did you have of what the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the Vietcong were?**

When we first arrived back at Puckapunyal, the CO then - Colonel Eric Smith - he started what he called 'NCO and Officer Training'. And we used to go every night, we would go and get briefings and lectures from people who had just returned

33:00 from Vietnam; from people who had been there from 1962 onwards, with the training team; training videos from you know, movies taken by the trainers in Vietnam. So, we were fairly well prepared by the time we went to Vietnam. You know, we were fairly well familiar with what it was like on the ground, what the situation was, what the disposition of the South Vietnamese Army was; the Allies;

33:30 the North Vietnamese Army; the local VC [Vietcong] ; the local carders, and all the ... for want of a better term, the 'rag-tag organizations'. We'd gone from being told that they were pretty ill-equipped and armed, to being well-equipped and armed by the time we got there. They'd gone from having you know, home-made weapons to having Tricoms and AK47s and Russian weapons and RPGs [rocket propelled grenades] and all those sorts of weapons.

34:00 So you know, we had no impression that we were going to fight some rag-tag organization. We knew that they were well-armed and that they knew their country very well. We'd seen by the fact of what they'd done to the French at Dien-Bien-Phu, and what they'd been able to do to everyone else that had been in Vietnam, that were weren't going to fight some, you know, rebel organization that was going to throw in the towel and surrender very rapidly.

34:30 **What was the message coming back to Australia in '66 about how the war was going for the allies?**

At that point in time I think they were convinced that we were on the winning side, and probably no doubt in our minds that in '68 and '68 that we were getting the better of the enemy - because they were suffering heavy casualties, and they weren't profiting from anything they were doing in the south; because the political situation

35:00 outside the country itself hadn't yet imposed its views on the military. The military were doing the job as the military saw it. And don't get me wrong - I'm not sort of pointing sticks at anybody about who was interfering, but obviously as the war went on and the political situation changed, then so did the attitude of the soldiers, and so did the intensity of what you were able to do and

35:30 how you were able to do it. But yeah, in that period - '66. '67, '68 - there was no doubt in our minds that we were on the 'up'.

In '66 in Australia, what was the public knowledge of the war at that stage?

We were in Puckapunyal, obviously quite close to Melbourne, and we used to go to Melbourne quite regularly for weekends and things like that. And Melbourne … for want of a better term, Melbourne was a 'hotbed' of

36:00 discontent for the anti-war movement, because of the involvement of the universities - particularly Monash University. I'm not singling Monash University out for any other reason than they singled themselves out by being very much to the forefront of the protests of the … all the things that happened as the anti-war movement grew. So we ran into quite a lot of protest as the anti-war movement grew in Melbourne.

36:30 And you know, it was fairly obvious that we were soldiers because of our physical appearance. It wasn't hard to work out who were soldiers. And you know, we encountered a number of … I won't say 'nasty' situations, but you know, we encountered a number of large protests in Melbourne where they sort of, you know … it was what you referred to as the 'argie-bargie' bit of protesting

37:00 where there was a lot of pushing and shoving. There was never any physical violence on our behalf, but there was a lot of shouting and pushing and the placards and things like that, because they knew the locations that we congregated in to have a drink or to you know, do things. And the atmosphere of the public at that point in time, we considered a little bit unfair. You know, it was disconcerting to the young soldiers

37:30 particularly, who saw an anti-Australian Army sentiment being exposed, particularly on the TV and in the Press and at all the rallies that they held in Melbourne, particularly - because we were in Victoria - but also in Sydney and Adelaide and all the cities around the country.

What kind of things were on placards and what sort of things were shouted at you?

38:00 Well, you know, "Down with War," and you know, the peace symbols. There was none of the … I can't recall any of the "Baby Killer" and that sort sentiment being exposed at those particular incidents we encountered in Melbourne - but later on there obviously was. But you know, the normal placards: "Down with War," and "Make Love Not War", and that sort of thing. You know, "Bring The Troops Home," or "Don't Go" and

38:30 all that sort of stuff. Or, "All The Way with LBJ Is Not OK" and you know, that sort of stuff. There was none of the anti-vitriol that appeared in '68-'69 era when it got quite violent, you know, where there was all the draft card burning and things like that on the steps of Town Halls and things. You know, it was probably what we considered as disparaging

39:00 views rather than 'anti' … well, you know, it was 'anti' obviously, because of the size of the marches, but it never got to the stage where you wanted to go out and say, punch somebody. At that point in time. Later on it did, I can assure you of that.

Given how much Australia had celebrated its Anzac history and its World War II history, did that public sentiment surprise you initially?

39:30 It did yes. I suppose for no other reason than because of the direction of the protests. It was designed to draw attention from the political groups that were involved, rather than at the soldiers themselves. But you know, the thing that sort of amazed us all at the time was the sentiment towards the soldiers, who at the time were only doing

40:00 what they were told to do, because they were soldiers. There was certainly an opposition to National Service being instigated by the Government. But you know, because of the commitment that was made, and because of the situation that had developed in Vietnam, that the requirement for more soldiers was there. But it was probably disconcerting for the soldiers

40:30 to be made, you know, the target of the rebut of all the people who were protesting. Maybe if it had been more directed at whoever … you know, we got involved in a number of nasty incidents. We were surrounded and harassed and you know, shouted at and that sort of thing. I thought, "You know, I can't see the point in that, because it's not our fault." We were doing what we were told to do by the Government of the day.

41:00 You know, we couldn't just lay down our arms and say we're not going - you know, that's just not on, regardless of what you thought of the situation of the time, because regular soldiers don't do that; and soldiers in the service of the country just don't do that, regardless of, you know, whether you agreed or disagreed. And ninety nine percent of the National Servicemen that we ended up with, they agreed that

it was a requirement of their commitment to the country to do what they were told to do.

Tape 8

00:30 **Tony, I just want to go back to Borneo for a moment and ask you a few more questions about that experience. What level of casualties were there for the Australians during that time?**

Ah, the exact number of casualties I can't give you, but I do know that 3 Platoon had two of their platoon sergeants killed, both by mine actions - mine incidents. A number of other soldiers were wounded.

01:00 The number killed I don't know. We never lost anyone killed in our organization - in our company. I really can't tell you, excepting obviously the two sergeants that we lost; they were fairly synonymous of the occasion, and it hit pretty heavy on the company. They were two very well-liked individuals.

How were the Indonesians armed?

They were well armed. They were as well armed as we were. They had

01:30 American M16s - or M15s or AR15s I think they were. We got issued with the AR15s before we went. We had the British MAG38s, which was the British version of the M60 machine gun. But you know, they were as well armed and equipped as we were, really. They were getting all their equipment from the Americans, anyway, so you know, it was one of those things. They were well armed and well prepared.

02:00 **So what was the level of contacts during that campaign?**

Apart from our contact there were a number of minor contacts in our area - and a few other bits and pieces. But there was an occasion where an Indonesian force crossed the border to our north - further up ... I think it was occupied by Malaysian Army ... or somewhere up there. I think that may be wrong actually.

02:30 I think it was a police station. There were Malaysian police ... they had what was called the Police Field Force, which operated in the field - obviously - but I do remember a Malaysian police station was attacked and the whole lot was killed. They sort of crossed the border and killed everybody in the police station, and a few of the locals, and that was sort of the message sent by them that they were quite capable of doing whatever they

03:00 needed to do. But I don't that there were any major ... there may have been some contacts with Malaysian forces ... and I do know with the Gurkhas, before us; and I do know they had a number of contacts and were pretty effective in their extraction of justice on the enemy. But you know, we didn't really get a great deal of reporting with regard to a lot of the activities, because were sort of isolated out where we were.

03:30 **So compared to the CTs that you were looking out for in Malaya, how did this compare?**

Huh. This was full on. This was full on operation service with conflict expected, probably daily. You know, they observed shall we say a degree of, I suppose, 'security' and stayed away from where we were; not that we did the same. We patrolled

04:00 the border almost daily with one group or another; and you know, it was probably more bad luck than good management that we ran into different situations. They certainly never embarked across the border all that often, and neither did we - as far as I know. You know, I may be wrong. But yeah, we went out and set up ambushes for seven days straight.

04:30 On one of the ambushes I almost blew myself up with a trip flare.

How did you do that?

Well, we were in a position and it was the wet season - April. And we'd taken the platoon out into the field and we were in ambush. We had a section ambush deployed - I was the section commander - and we had a trip flare. Obviously, for illumination during the night. Anyway, it was time to pull out

05:00 so we withdrew the ambush, and I retrieved the trip flare. A trip flare is a magnesium pot which, when ignited, illuminated everything around it. And of course, it was on a stake in the ground, and we were on the forward slope of a little hill. So I retrieved the trip flare and disarmed it and disconnected everything, and picked it up on its iron stake and was walking back up the hill. The ground was slippery because it was the wet season, and I tripped and fell when I was carrying

05:30 the trip flare in my hand; and it hit the tree that was in front of me and ignited. I sort of burnt myself up the right hand side. That was pretty uncomfortable, and of course we couldn't get any air evacuation because it was the wet season, so I was carried from where we were back to the base area. I was carried mainly by the platoon commander - Doug Byers - and our medic. And then I was evacuated to the hospital in Kooching where I spent

06:00 some time, recovered, and was out the day before Kapyong Day, which was the twenty third of April I think I was let out of hospital. But you know, it was just one of those accidents that happened.

What level of burns was it?

Well, it burnt all the right hand side of my face, but as you can see it never left any permanent scarring. I had some corneal damage done, but

06:30 apart from that - touch wood once again - I must have had the angels looking after me.

How were you carried out?

On the platoon commander's back. In those days I wasn't as heavy as I am now. But to rig a stretcher ... we never carried stretchers. But if you needed to you could rig up a stretcher

07:00 because of the equipment we carried - just cut down a couple of saplings and feed the poles through the mattress cover and carry out that way. But it seemed more convenient for the platoon commander to carry me on his back - he was a big man.

What kind of assistance did you have from the local Dyaks?

They ... as I said, we had two trackers, 'Iban' trackers as we called them. They were from the local Sarawak people and they knew the area we were in very well. They belonged to the Malaysian Army - they were

07:30 what were called the 'Sarawak Rangers', and each organization was provided with these trackers that knew the areas we operated in and could speak the language. But the local people, they were just such a gentle race of people it was unbelievable. And when you consider the dramas and conflict that they'd gone through with the Japanese,

08:00 when they landed in the Second World War, you know ... they were just a wonderful bunch of people - happy for us to be there, always friendly. You know, we never found any trouble with them at all.

So how good were the local trackers?

Excellent. They were first class. They could read signs that you or I could never, ever, ever find ourselves

08:30 capable of reading. As I said, there were bridges, but they were bridges made by the locals. They were a tree trunk about yeah-wide by yeah-wide [gestures] over little streams and tracks. And they could tell you how many people had crossed a particular footbridge. Whether they were the enemy or not, it didn't matter - they'd say, "Fifteen crossed this today."

09:00 They were very rarely wrong. It might have been fifteen from the local village crossing into the jungle to collect whatever they were collecting. They collected things like sago palms and stuff and went hunting and fishing.

So tell me about the base where you were. What was that like?

The base at Stass was bunkers all dug into the ground. They were built by whoever we took over from, or by whoever initially started the base.

09:30 They were dug in. We slept in the bunkers, which were big enough to sleep sections, I think ... or maybe platoons? I'm not really sure now. But they were fully dug in with overhead protection, sandbags, the whole shooting match. They had ... you know, they could withstand mortar fire probably. Artillery fire would have been different probably, but you know, we were pretty safe from any attack

10:00 that the Indonesians could provide initially. Obviously if we stayed there long enough and took enough hits you'd probably start weakening the defences; but no, they were you know, secure enough. And we had our observation posts and sentry posts within the village itself - that was Stass - but everything else was underground.

What kind of terrain was it?

Fairly hilly. I've got a map there.

10:30 I'll show you later. But it was fairly hilly, fairly well, you know, close jungle, and lots of rivers because of the tropical climate. Some places were open. On our south western flank was a very big mountain range, and we had observation posts on the top of the mountain range. You know, just to sort of observe

11:00 air activity on the other side. You could look down into Kalimantan from there, and you know, look into the jungle. You couldn't look through the canopy, of course, but we could observe any helicopter or air activity that way down south of us.

So how often would you go out on patrol?

Probably spent no more than three days at one time in the base. The rest of the time we were out on patrol. We might go out for seven days, come back for three, go out, come back for one, go out, do a

little patrol. You know, we didn't spend a great deal of time in the base camp at all. The

11:30 majority of our time … I'd say eighty percent of our time was spent out in the bush.

So how long were you based in Borneo for?

For … from February to July.

And when you left, what was the security situation like?

12:00 We were replaced by another battalion of Gurkhas. We took over from a battalion of Gurkhas and they replaced us. And when we left the situation hadn't changed at all. The deployment to Borneo continued until about 1966 I think, when the Australians pulled out of Malaya - out of Torenda - and went down to Singapore.

12:30 **So just going to back to talking about preparing for Vietnam, you were talking about the protestors early, what do you remember about leaving Australia for Vietnam, and the level of protest there was when you left?**

We were probably fortunate - when I say 'fortunate' I don't suppose you could really call it fortunate - but I flew over in an advance party, by aeroplanes, so I flew out from Mangalore,

13:00 which is just outside Puckapunyal. So they didn't know we were going. We flew to Sydney, jumped to a plane in Sydney, then to Manilla, and then to Saigon. But the main body of the troops flew or caught a train to Sydney and then got on the HMAS Sydney and come over by ship. I don't know that there was any … well, there wouldn't have been because they left from Garden Island. There was probably protestors outside Garden Island - I don't know.

13:30 **So where was it that you were surrounded by protestors?**

In Melbourne. You know, there were heaps of street protests while we were at Pucka. You know, we'd go down to Melbourne and all of a sudden there'd be a bundle of protestors in the street, marching up and down, protesting "Peace Not War" and all that sort of stuff.

Did you have an understanding then about what was causing the divisions about the war in Vietnam?

14:00 Yeah, probably, because we were given briefings from army intelligence about who the major agitators were. By 'agitators' I mean the major organizations. There was a cell in Monash University who were quite vociferous in their protests. They weren't you know, backward in coming forward and telling them. They were sort of indicating that they were raising awareness about our involvement, and they were sending good wishes to the Vietcong and those sorts of people.

14:30 You know, it was quite disturbing as far as we were concerned that this went on, because you know, this went on. Later on we were advised that they were collecting money and sending parcels to the North Vietnamese. You know, that upset us no end. And then of course, while we were over in Vietnam we had you know, protests by the wharfies that stopped stuff being unloaded, and protests by the posties in not delivering and you know, the common catch-cry was

15:00 "Punch a Postie or Wallop a Wharfie." You know, they were the sentiments of all the soldiers, because we relied on communication from home by mail to keep us informed about what was happening. And of course, it was clear that Australians were being kept informed of what was happening in Vietnam by the news coverage - the 'war in your lounge room' so to speak - but you know, we were quite disconcerted

15:30 about the wharf labourers not loading the ships with supplies and things like that. And then they commissioned the Jeparit into the navy and it became the HMAS Jeparit . But yeah, you know, it was quite disconcerting. And of course, having access to the American TV sets and the Armed Forces Radio and the Armed Forces TV operating out of Saigon, we were seeing all the protests going on

16:00 in America. So you know, it was most disconcerting as time went on. '67 and '68 weren't all that bad. But later on, '70 and '71, that was horrendous. There were five hundred thousand odd marching in Washington, and there were the riots they had in universities and those sorts of things. Yeah, it was quite disconcerting as far as we were concerned.

16:30 **What can you tell me about that trip over in the advance party and what your role was at that time?**

I was just part of the group. I was a section commander in the mortar platoon; and they'd picked out a number of people to go over and become familiar with what was happening in 5RAR, who we were relieving; so I went over as part of the group. To tell you the truth I don't know how many - there was a plane load of people went to Vietnam. They weren't all 7RAR of course.

17:00 There were people from the Task Force Headquarters area; maybe AFV [Australian Force Vietnam] Saigon, and things like that. We went via Manilla. We had about four hours in the bar in Manilla. We weren't allowed out of the airport. You know, we weren't cleared through customs and things like that, so we sat in the bar at Manilla and drank San Miguel beer … not all the time. But then we went and

flew into Saigon.

17:30 Then we got on a Caribou from Saigon to Nui-Dat and got absorbed into the local area. We just acclimatised and familiarised ourselves in the task force base area … went out on a couple of local patrols with the 5RAR guys and looked around; and then it was time for the 7RAR guys to arrive. They arrived and 5RAR went home.

When was it that you went to Vietnam the first time?

18:00 February 1967.

What were you first impressions as you came into Saigon?

Coming into Tan Son Nhut it was quite scary. We flew at a very high altitude that you probably wouldn't do now because of the safety restrictions on aircraft. But we flew at very high altitude until we got close to Tan Son Nhut - or Saigon airbase, and the we descended very quickly, obviously to minimise the engagement

18:30 of the aircraft, because it was a Qantas jet, so it was fairly obvious that it wasn't friendly - you know, anything heading into Saigon airport wouldn't have been considered friendly by the enemy, anyway. But it was quite scary, because it was a very rapid descent into the airport and then we landed, and we were out. Tan Son Nhut airport was just gigantic. It was breathtaking to see

19:00 the number of people and the number of aircraft there. Of course, there were also American Air Force fighter planes there. Everything was basically … anything that was to do with the military was sandbagged. There was lots of troops roaming around in trucks and jeeps. There were MPs [military police] and local Vietnamese Quancam - which their military police - and things like that.

19:30 You know, it was just mind boggling to see the number of people they had there at Tan Son Nhut airbase.

And how did you get to Nui-Dat?

We got into Caribous and flew down to Nui-Dat. They were operated by the Royal Australian Air Force. Nui-Dat was … it was a very impressive sort of a place. Even though it was very new, it was established … the exact year I don't know. I think it was about '66, and I think 2RAR - it might have

20:00 been 6RAR, I'm not sure - anyhow, one of them built it up to what it was when we got there. There was only two battalions there, plus all of the task force, you know, support. But there were two battalions. That was 5RAR and 2RAR. 6RAR had gone home in August or September the year before, so there was two battalions there right up til December 1967, when the third battalion arrived to build the task force up.

20:30 But yeah, it was impressive. You could see as you flew into Nui-Dat that it was fairly flat area, with the exception of Nui-Dat hill, which is a little hill. There was big mountain range to the west of Nui-Dat base. It was nowhere in any sort of range. You'd maybe need Long Tom guns to get there - maybe thirty or forty kilometre guns to get there

21:00 and I don't even know if they'd have got there. Further out to the west there was a few small hillocks and things like that, but it was mainly a very flat area. There were lots of rubber plantations in the location. As you flew in you could see the rubber plantations, because they had a very distinctive profile. There was lots of jungle with a very distinctive profile, and a number of identifiable roads - mostly dirt - in and around Nui-Dat itself.

21:30 There was obviously a number of major roads - Route One from Saigon. Down to Vung Tau was bitumen. The road from Vung Tau, sort of Route One, out to Xuyen Moc , which was out towards our south east, it was bitumen. There was a lot … when I say a 'lot' there was very identifiable roads, but not all that many of them. There was a number of what they called 'fire breaks'

22:00 which they obviously used to fight fires if they needed to, but they were very discernable along power lines as well. There were a number of geographical locations that you could identify, and there was Nui-Dat, which was built almost … well not almost - it was built in a rubber plantation. Nui-Dat hill was obviously out of the rubber plantation. The local airstrip

22:30 at Nui-Dat was bituminised and it was long enough to take a C130 Hercules. There was cavalry and other supporting troops. An artillery regiment was there. Yeah, it was a big area, the task force base.

What did the blokes from 5RAR tell you about what they'd experienced and what the experience in Vietnam was like?

23:00 Well, we'd already had that given to us by entry reports sent home to us by the battalion and by people who'd returned home from 5RAR early because of their time was up. Intelligence had started to come home to brief the battalion, so we really had a pretty fair idea … we also had film of what the base looked, and what the living conditions looked like, and a number of films

23:30 on operations and activities around the area. So we had a pretty fair idea of what it all looked like. It

was just a matter of personal experience when you arrived. It was quite scary to start with, to know that you were there, in an operational area that required you to be on the alert twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. You weren't sort of walking down the main street of Sydney or the main street of Randwick, or the main the street

24:00 of Coogee - you were in an area where you could be killed, any day of the week.

So what were you told in those pre-deployment briefings about what the situation was in Vietnam. At what stage were we in the war?

Well at that stage of the war, you know, the build-up by the Americans had obviously been going on, and they were in the vicinity of a half million troops. The South Vietnamese army was in the vicinity of a million and a half. The advisors were sort of spread across the length and breadth of

24:30 South Vietnam, and the bases were in … there was Nui-Dat, north of us was Black Horse, which was occupied by the 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment, which was an armoured personnel organization, made up of three hundred and fifty armoured personnel carriers. They had their own tanks and helicopters. Bear Cat was

25:00 not far away from them. The American 9th Divvy, which was the full 9th Division … you know, it was just incredible to see the size of the American bases. Long Bin was just up the road. There was thirty five thousand in Long Bin, which was one of the big American bases. Bear Cat, you probably had fifteen thousand. Then across the road … when I say 'across the road', just up the road

25:30 was the US 24th Infantry Division; and sprinkled throughout our sort of operational area of Phuoc Tuy there were the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] organizations. 18th ARVN Div was just up the road from Bear Cat. There was RF - the Regular Force post; there was, you know, a multitude of minor and major units all across the place.

And how was the war going for the Americans when you arrived?

The war was going pretty well at that point in time. You know,

26:00 major contacts were not all that regular, but when they were … if you believed the Americans - which you did, because it was fairly well documented - then the casualties on the North Vietnamese and Vietcong side were fairly heavy. And of course, everybody relied on what they referred to as 'body count'.

26:30 For want of a better term, you never filed a report unless you could count the bodies 'on the spot', so to speak. So the war was going pretty well at that point in time. You know, there was … it is probably difficult to explain the amount of support you could call in if you got into trouble. If you had a contact as a company group or a platoon group …

27:00 but you never went out as a platoon, but you might have been a detached platoon by about two or three hundred metres. But if you made contact with the enemy, you almost had unlimited support: fire support, air support - you name it. There was sort of no limit on what you could ask for if your situation demanded it. There was also times when naval gunfire was provided by battleships off

27:30 the coast. So you know, it was like there was nothing you could ask for that would be refused.

So when 7th Battalion got there, what was the role of your unit?

Well, we were occupying and operating in Phouc Tuy Province. Obviously, the major role of the battalion and the other battalions in the task force area … the roll of

28:00 the Australians was, I suppose, to suppress VC and NVA activity in Phouc Tuy Province. The hearts and minds of the … you know, you can't win that sort of a war without winning over the local population. As was fairly obvious during the Second World War with the collaboration of the French, you know, if you've got the locals onside then you can almost

28:30 control what goes on. So therefore, it was our major aim I suppose to control the locals - the villages - you know, to win over the hearts and minds of the villagers, to enable us to prevent resupply and harbouring of the enemy by the locals. If you don't have methods of supply then, you know, you can put the run out of the will to fight. So therefore, if you controlled the locals in your area then you really controlled the

29:00 activity of the VC and the NVA in your area. This was the major aim of what we were there to do, plus obviously, in the situation we were in, the aim was to find and kill the enemy.

How difficult was it to determine the infiltration of the VC and the NVA in the villages?

29:30 Well, it was fairly well known by the local South Vietnamese organizations of who were and who weren't VC, or the suspicion of who were and who weren't VC. They, for want of a better term … you might have seen movies of people skulking around in black pyjamas and this sort of thing … yeah, that certainly was, but if you'd shot everybody wearing black pyjamas and those little cane type hats

30:00 then you'd have shot everyone that you saw, because they all wore that. For want of a better term, the local 'intelligence organizations' within ARVN - the army of the Republic of South Vietnam - they identified who was and who wasn't sympathetic to the VC. It was quite understandable that almost everybody was sympathetic to the VC

30:30 at night, because they would come in at night, and if you opposed them they would just murder them - assassinate the village chief or your wife or your daughter or your family. So you know, there was the common understanding and the common acceptance by all of us … when we weren't there and controlling what was happening in the local areas, then the locals would provide support to the VC because they were under the threat of being shot

31:00 or whatever. We knew that, and everybody in the country knew that. There was knowledge to us through the locals that there were villages that we could trust; that there were villages that were pro-Allied; and there were villages that were totally pro-VC and anti-us. So you know, we used to do what was called 'cordon and search', where for want of a better term

31:30 you'd say, "Right, there's a village there, we're going to cordon and search that village tonight." So you'd move in and surround the village - because you now, these were villages that you could surround with eight or nine hundred men - you'd lock it off completely from any external activity, so they were surrounded and the cordon and search was in place, then everybody would move to the centre of the town square. There were what we called 'SI-OPS [?] ', where a plane would go across

32:00 and drop all the pamphlets telling them that they were surrounded and that we were conducting a cordon and search, and that we were only after the local VC. And of course, you know, they would just become the villagers of they were VC. Then the local ARVN area command intelligence officers would come in. We'd do a 'cordon and search' - you for want of a better term - and look for weapons caches, food caches, that would identify the villagers who were sympathetic to the VC; they would come in

32:30 and you know, they would interrogate the locals and identify the suspects and take them away - and what they did with them, we don't know. But yeah, we did that on many occasions. We resettled a lot of villages from north of us. At one stage of the game- which was a major operation - villages that were in the path of the VC migration, we moved the local

33:00 villagers away from that area and set them up in another location fairly close to us; and you know, that left a corridor for us to operate in without exposing the locals to danger.

Can you talk specifically about a cordon and search that sticks specifically in your mind?

Yeah. OK, I suppose … directly to the south of us, bordering on the task

33:30 force area, was a village called Ha Long. Numbers in the village … I don't know - two, three, four hundred - I've got no idea. We never sort of did a count. But we cordoned and searched them - or that village - probably three, four, five times. The southern border of the task force area constantly reported enemy activity to their … you know, on the border of the local village.

34:00 But every time we went and cordoned and searched the village we couldn't find anything. Because we had local people - local villagers - working in the task force area, to do something major like that without giving away our intentions would have been difficult - because they knew, they watched our activities. They knew who the COs were, they knew who the commanders were, they knew what was going on. It was like when we were in Malaya.

34:30 They knew when we were deploying on operations and things like that, so it was almost impossible to carry out a successful cordon and search operation. You had to issue orders and people sort of moved - so if there were any VC in the villages then they would leave. One time we came back from operations out in the AO … in the larger Phouc Tuy Province area. We came back to Nui-Dat

35:00 one afternoon at about two o'clock. We used to close the gates to the base around five thirty -depending on the time of the year - because of the first light/last light situation. Anyhow, after we'd sort of closed down and mounted what we called 'stand to' - which was the time of day in the task force area where we changed from day routine to night routine - then we got a warning order.

35:30 They called in all the commanders and told them to do a cordon and search of Ha Long. So therefore, the ability for the news about the cordon and search to leak out, was gone. Their informants had left the task force area. So we deployed about eleven o'clock that night. The cordon and search was in walking distance - we could walk out of the base and surround the village, and we only had to surround three sides of it

36:00 because the fourth side bordered on our task force base - so you didn't need to cordon that, because it was already cordoned. So we moved in to cordon it and got there about three in the morning. And the road that used to run through the village - which was Route 2 - it ran from north to south and ran straight through the village. It went through where the task force was. So when they established the task force area they built a diversion road around the task force to link Route 2 to

36:30 Ha Long and Dat To - which was the sort-of province headquarters. That was generally referred to as the 'engineered road'. So therefore, we cordoned the place off - you know, A Company, B Company; I'm not sure exactly who was involved; but I went out with Support Company, which was my company. So I

was in the cordon with the company sergeant major of Support Company, and we were in a sort of ditch beside the road, which was about

37:00 three feet lower than the ground the village was on. And of course, the village was also surrounded by a sort of barbed wire fence, but it wasn't cleared like our bases were - it was sort of overground with weeds and bushes. So you know, we arrived anyway and the cordon was set and at first light the SI-OPS aircraft went over and advised them that they'd been cordoned and that they should all move to the centre of the square

37:30 and so forth. So obviously … we'd caught them. Because there was a lot of activity. The CSM and I heard rustling in the barbed wire fence in front of us, and we sort of … we'd laid a Claymore sort of at the fence. Anyhow, we heard the rusting and we heard the wire move, so obviously someone was trying to break out of the cordon. So, we

38:00 were watching, and when we saw these two guys break out from the barbed wire fence to run - because they would run across the ditch, then across the road, then into the jungle. So when they broke out into the open, the CSM fired the Claymore, which got one them; then one bloke ran across me and I fired at him as he ran across. But that was one of the incidents of the cordon and search. Then obviously we went inside. We rounded up about twenty seven VC,

38:30 as opposed to nil on all the other searches we did. And that was because they didn't have the ability to know that we were going to do it.

The two men who were fired at, were they killed?

Oh yes, yeah.

And the twenty seven that were captured …

They were captured and handed over to the Vietnamese.

How did you identify the twenty seven?

You know, they were in the … the local intelligence people came in. The locals gave them up because it was the old 'survival of the fittest'

39:00 thing. We were in control that particular morning, so instead of them getting into trouble, they dobbed them in. Within the area we operated in there was the Cho-Dook company, which was the area we were in. Well, they belonged to the Cho-Dook company. Then there was D445, which was the local VC battalion; then there were the regular NVA regiments operating in our task force area as well,

39:30 which were D274 and D275. So you know, by a process of elimination we ended up with these twenty six, twenty seven people.

What were they wearing?

They were wearing similar sort of … you know, the black pyjama things. They all dressed pretty much the same. They just changed their paddy hoes for AK47s.

How heavily armed were they?

Oh, they were heavily armed. When I say 'heavily armed', they were sophisticatedly armed with AK47s, RPG2s, RPG7s and that sort of stuff.

40:00 They didn't have it on them when we caught them; you know they had obviously planted them. But you know, they were dobbed in by the locals, and were sort of left 'holding the bag' so to speak.

What was their demeanour like?

They were probably disappointed that they'd been caught, and they were angry - the were uncooperative. You couldn't get them to dob anyone else in. The VC were, you know … they wouldn't, shall we say, snitch. They just adopted the 'say nothing, hear nothing' approach.

Tape 9

00:30 **Tony, what was the behaviour of the villagers like once the cordon started?**

They were very subdued. They sort of … obviously they objected, and weren't happy that we were there at first light in the morning dragging them out of their beds, but I imagine they were quite used to. After the SI-OPS helicopter or plane had gone over

01:00 and told them we were there, they knew what to expect. I won't say they acted like robots, but they sort of, you know, picked up their gear and headed off to the town centre or village square. Then the intelligence staff from the ARVN moved in and started identifying. And we used to search their huts and all those sorts of things. And I don't know if it's comical or not, but I always remember one of the

searches we did

01:30 in one of the villages … but we were doing a search one day, and of course it was, you know, the old 'look under all the things' … and the hutchies they lived in were pretty basic - you know, just maybe a dirt floor - very few of them had wooden floors, and if they did it was pretty basic. They had a thatched roof, that sort of thing … there was no sort of timber buildings, maybe excepting the town gathering centre and things like that; but you know, there were all the

02:00 normal, shall we say, 'workers in the village' - you know, the undertaker making the coffins and things like that; and you know, the local people grinding up the … they operated as a community, grinding up the rice into rice flour and things like that. So we were going around doing our best to do conscientious searchers - checking under all the little nick-nooks and crannies and things; and the old trick … we got to the undertaker,

02:30 and I don't know whether it's comical or not - I dunno - but we thought, "Aha, gotcha!" because there was a coffin there, and it was obviously the place for weapons and all sorts of things in the coffin; and we were poking around and sort-of having a look, and it was nailed down. "Aha!" So we opened the coffin and you know, obviously to our surprise there was a body in it. So you know, you can outsmart yourself at times. You know, occasionally you found something that should not have been there.

03:00 Maybe one of the locals had a pistol hidden in their hutchie somewhere, under a secret little door or something. And you know, when we got further away from the base area and we cordoned and searched those villages that were probably more subject to infiltration by the VC than normal, there were found food caches and all sorts of good weapons caches and things like that. And we ran across a number

03:30 of camps in the jungle itself that were abandoned, because obviously they'd detected we were coming. And you know, we'd find great, huge caches - you know, silos of rice. We went and cordoned off one of the little places down on the coast – Long Phuoc Hai I think it was - and they were the fishing village, so they had all the fish oil and this sort of stuff. Anyway, we found

04:00 hundreds and hundreds of thousands of, you know - money. It was obviously handed over to the locals but it was hidden in one of the vats of fish oil. They were all plastic-bagged up and everything. You know, those sorts of things. We found in the training camps, you know, we came across a lot of training camps in the jungle - they were obviously training camps by the way they were set up. We found, you know, maps of areas and orders and those sorts of things. We'd surprised

04:30 them and they had to leave quickly, so there was still rice cooking on the stoves or something like that.

How organised do you think their underground system was?

Very well organised. Extremely well organised right across the country. As far as their communication … initially, we didn't play the game at their game.

05:00 We played it at our game which wasn't up to their standard because, you know, they'd been doing this since before the Second World War. You know, they were in the Second World War. The Japanese invaded and then the French were there and then we were there, so you know, they were rather good at what they did because they had plenty of training. But yeah, their communication system was very good. You know, they were inauspicious people that moved from point A to point B. Of course, you couldn't completely shut down the province

05:30 so that nobody moved - there were the rubber tappers that had to go to the plantations for their work, and there were the people that had to go to the jungles to cut wood for their villages; so you couldn't stop movement in the area. There was certainly no fire zones, where you couldn't fire because people were moving, but there was also no access zones to the locals, you know, they knew they weren't allowed to go into this or that area

06:00 at particular times, so you know, there were haves and have nots on both sides. But yeah, I'm quite sure that their intelligence and underground organization was as good if not better than ours.

So in terms of those no-go zones and the curfews and the infiltration, how difficult was it to ascertain who was enemy and was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time?

In daylight hours it was always difficult because you know, they were allowed to go out and forage for wood

06:30 and things like that. Night time wasn't a problem, because basically the whole country was under curfew from daylight to dusk. You know, from as soon as the sun went down, there should be no movement. Anyone outside the villages in the night time were considered as enemy, and they knew that as well as we did. So you know, it was just a matter of anyone moving around the area at night, you know, they were 'fair game' so to speak.

07:00 **Do you remember any incidents where that 'seed of doubt' was particularly poignant?**

What? With regard to identifying who they were? Yeah. As I said before, there were a number of fire trails north of … there were a number of fire trails all around the place, which were basically cut through rubber plantations, and they may have been fifteen or twenty yards wide

07:30 and you know, you rarely patrolled on the fire trails because you were vulnerable to ambush there. If you were anywhere near a fire trail - and they were usually marked on your maps fairly clearly - then you'd patrol off the edge of the fire trail, in the jungle. Quite regularly you ran into one, two, three people along the fire trail, and you know, there might be a woman, a couple of kids

08:00 or a man, a woman, a child or something like that. And it was sort-of, you know … rules of engagement were that you had to be particularly sure during the daylight hours who were the enemy. Of course, if you see three people coming down the fire trail carrying maybe axes and things like that, you don't know whether they're VC or not.

08:30 So it was always a judgement call by whoever was in control of the patrol as to what you did. And normally the rules of engagement prevented you from opening fire on them, without exposing shall we say your self or letting them see or hear you, and you'd tell them to halt and stand where they are and put their hands in the air, so if they were innocent people just out about their work, then you didn't open fire.

09:00 But then there was also the possibility that they may be shall we say 'dummies' - they might have known you were in the area so they might think, "Oh well" … there were, you know, they were quite willing to sacrifice people if that would expose you to ambush or contact.

So how did you deal with that grey area in your platoon? Can you give me an example?

09:30 I operated as a mortar fire controller so I was fortunate in that I didn't have to make that decision. I don't know whether I would have or could have made that decision. But it was one of those areas that, from experience, it backfired maybe twice in the whole time I was there. Once, in that one of our guys was shot, seriously but not critically. He was shot through the hip by someone posing as a rubber tapper, and he had a pistol hidden in his, you know, his gear.

10:00 We called a halt and they put up their hands and went through the normal SOP that you had to do, and of course, as we broke from the jungle and appeared, this bloke pulled out his pistol and shot the guy in the hip. And of course, he got killed for that. The reaction of the group we were with - shot him immediately. That rarely happened because I think they were aware

10:30 that we operated in Phouc Tuy in force. The smallest number of troops that were out in the field at any one time were fifteen. And that would only be in the case of a fighting patrol or an ambush, where you would take fifteen men out for a specific purpose , knowing specific intelligence that something might be there, or you know, you wouldn't take fifteen out if you knew there were going to be more than four or five people there.

11:00 You know, if they knew we were there and they found us then it would be in groups of twenty five to thirty or bigger. In other words, they knew, after a period of time, obviously, our SOP [standard operating procedures] .

What size group were they likely to ambush though? Or booby trap?

11:30 Rarely did they ambush anybody in our area … the ambushes were sprung by the major units, like 274, 275 Regiment, or 33 NVA Division. The D445 might ambush a local ARVEN patrol because they might go out with only six or seven. The D445 was a battalion of four or five hundred people, so they might ambush the local thingo, or it may attempt to ambush maybe a platoon of ours, but they rarely operated in less than

12:00 a company sized group.

So principally, what was the role of the VC in that area?

Disruption. The VC themselves would just disrupt and create a great deal of mayhem within the province. Obviously, when the major activity occurred in Long Tan, the task force base

12:30 had only just been established, so they - from their intelligence - assumed that it was fair game because there wasn't the number there that would make attack by two thousand troops - that's what they came in, that's the size that they came in - it was estimated at fifteen hundred to two thousand and when D company ran into them

13:00 that's the size they were in; but they rarely … earlier on they did. They ambushed the Americans quite regularly, astutely, and cunningly, with very, very large numbers of NVA. And of course, there was the odd ambush set by them - section and that - that would probably pick up our TAOR patrols. We would have a platoon

13:30 out in the TAOR, which is our 'Tactical Area Of Responsibility' at all times when we were deployed back at base, and that was almost permanently that we had a TAOR - and that operated on intelligence provided by all the groups; so if there was known activity happening up there at a particular point of time we'd just send a TAOR Patrol out with a view to capturing, ambushing, or killing some of them. But you know,

14:00 ambushes were rare. We ambushes in company sized ambushes - say a hundred of us, in known areas of

where VC activity was. It was you know, almost 'known' that we operated in that strength, and they operated in … well, they didn't have that much strength in the area at any known time.

How did you operate within the platoon as the mortar fire controller [MFC] ?

14:30 Well, I … as the MFC … we operated as a company as I said, but the platoons might deploy say two or three hundred metres from the company headquarters group. We have, say, your company headquarters here [gestures] and a platoon here and here and here [gestures an imaginary map] , not so far removed from your company headquarters that if they got into trouble they could get back and give assistance too. As the MFC, I would move with the platoon headquarters and if the platoon …

15:00 we always operated … if I wasn't on the mortar net - because the mortars had a range of about four thousand five hundred metres, depending on where we were. If we operated on a TAOR then we were close to the mortar … range; but if we were outside mortar range and I went out on a TAOR patrol then I'd switch to the artillery net, which gave me a range of nine, ten, twenty five thousand metres, depending on what was needed. But you know, I was there to provide instant fire support if we

15:30 needed it in that group, but normally I would coordinate with company headquarters with the 'forward controller '- or the 'fire controller' - from the guns. And you know, we would coordinate when we stopped with what we called 'DF' - and that was 'Defensive Fire', laid on obvious approaches of the enemy, so that if something happened during the night, we would just get on the radio and say, "Fire F1", and they would have a gun or a battery or a section of mortars laid on a DF for the night.

16:00 **So if a platoon or a company was going out on a patrol, you moved with the patrol?**

Well, in general, depending on what sort of mission you were on. If it was 'search and clear', then the likelihood of contact was not all that high; and you normally moved, depending on the topography of course and the thickness of the jungle, but you normally

16:30 moved single file, so you'd have a forward scout, then a second scout, then maybe your section commander, then the rest of the section - all in single file. And you know, you would move fairly slowly, with the scouts looking left and right for any signs in the bush of movement. As I said earlier, we might move a hundred metres in thirty minutes. If the area opened up a bit then you might spread out into

17:00 a formation we called 'arrowhead', which was sort of forward scout there and the rest of the section tapering back. It would cover more ground but you could see one another. That, obviously, was difficult if the jungle was close. And then, that travelled back through the platoon via three sections. Or if it was the company, moving as a company, then the company headquarters, then the platoons behind them. It was all dictated too, by what you were doing. 'Search and Destroy', OK,

17:30 that would be you were looking for the enemy and wanting to kill him. So therefore, you know, the situation was totally changed. Your formation would be dictated obviously by the ground, once again, but your main aim was to find the enemy and kill him, rather than make sure the area you were in was clear of the enemy. And this all depended on your intelligence as you got it back, to know what the likely

18:00 situation was, in your area of your operation at the time.

How soon after arriving in Vietnam did the company suffer its first fatality?

God, I couldn't tell you. I don't know, to be honest, I don't know. I know that sounds silly. I do have recollections of contacts and things like that, but you, contacts happened away from where we were

18:30 if we were in contact then someone else may not be, or whatever. No, I can't tell you how long it was from when we arrived til we lost our first soldier killed. I do know that we had a very large contact in August of 1967. 'A' Company was ambushed - the whole company ran into a large VC force and we lost

19:00 six killed and seventeen wounded. And that was out north and east of the task force area at Nui-Dat, towards a range of mountains - the Nui-Tuvis [?] - and yeah, they ran into a fairly large enemy force which was later sort of you know discovered to be 274 - one of the regular NVA regiments in the location. They took a bit of

19:30 a pounding that day.

What that your first contact with NVA?

I don't know. It was always difficult to determine who you ended up contacting. It normally was the local D445 or the Cho-Dook company. The NVA were normally locally north and east of Nui-Dat

20:00 in the Mai-Tow mountains area - that was sort of an area they could control. We got deployed on a number of large operations, you know, combined operations of thousands and thousands - American divisions and the 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment and fifty odd APCs; and we got deployed into a number of operations that went nowhere because the enemy sort of faded away into

20:30 the jungle over a period of time, because someone was late moving in. But yeah, it was normally at major times the regular NVA, but normal day-to-day activity involved the 445 Battalion or the Cho-Dook company.

What sort of impact did it have on the soldiers when a company was ambushed and there was the death of say, six soldiers?

21:00 Oh, devastating, you know. And of course not every single soldier can hear, but every single soldier knew. I was with Charlie Company at the time and we were operating north and west of A Company. You know, we were close enough to hear. And you know, the sound of gunfire travels a fair distance regardless of the type of terrain you're in, and when you have a contact, the contact report is sent over the radio. So the company net

21:30 hears the contact go back to the battalion, which goes back to task force, and then the company commander's net passes the information down to the platoons to tell them, "Call Sign One, Contact." Which meant that A Company were in contact. Then you hear the volume of fire and the amount of noise that's coming the contact area. And you know it's pretty big. It's fairly reasonable to discern the difference between their weapon fire

22:00 and our weapon fire because of the different calibre and types of weapon. You can tell the difference between automatic fire from an AK47 to an M16; and between an M60 machine gun - which we had - to the RPG7s and you know, those sorts of things. So it was easy to tell from the volume of fire about what size enemy you'd run into. And of course they had RPG2s and

22:30 RPG7s - which were you know, rocket-propelled grenades; whereas we had M79s and that sort of thing. Certainly mortar and artillery fire we had. They had mortars - you know, eighty millimetre mortars, or eighty one millimetre mortars, or eighty two millimetre mortars. They were very cunning. They had mortars that could use our rounds, but we couldn't use theirs. They had eight two millimetre mortars and we had eighty one millimetre mortars.

23:00 We had large gun fire, and they had hundred and twenty millimetre mortars. We didn't have any of that size. So you know, it was always easily identifiable when you had a very heavy contact.

We talked to a veteran of the Battle of Long Tan who said that the impact of the death of soldiers in that battle didn't really hit him til

23:30 **he got back to camp and looked at the blokes' things in the tent, and I'm just wondering how you personally coped with the death of soldiers once you were back in camp?**

It was always, I suppose, soul destroying to hear that you'd lost one of your mates … it was … [difficult to continue] … pardon me … some of the guys that were killed in

24:00 the 'A' Company thing, they were with us in Malaya [very difficult to continue] … sorry …

That's alright …

… and they were good friends of mine … oh dear, I'm sorry …

That's OK, Tony …

Yeah, but y'know, that's difficult, because they were very good mates of mine.

24:30 But you know, I suppose all of them that we lost … we lost sixteen killed on our first tour, and seventeen on our second tour, and I suppose they were all mates, but these particular guys were personal friends of mine … you know … and it was fairly difficult to handle … and it was also fairly difficult to handle guys that were killed around you and wounded around you … you know, and had … all sorts of terrible injuries occur while you were

25:00 sitting around … well, not 'sitting around' - while you were lying around fighting alongside them. So you'd see blokes with terrible wounds and things like that … but you know, it was, yeah, it was soul destroying, just to hear that … it was always the first question you would ask somebody when a contact was reported : "Did we lose anyone?" You know, it was almost always the first thing that anybody asked when, "A Company's had a contact - did they lose anyone?" You know, B Company, C Company, D Company …

25:30 they've had a contact : "Did we lose anyone?" And it was always soul destroying …

Can you tell me about some of those mates that were important to you, Tony?

Yeah. There was three of them in A Company that I knew very well : Gabby Hayes, Pete O'Connor, and I … can't think of the other guy's name, but you know, they were in our company in Malaya, and we'd been through Malaya and Borneo

26:00 together, and you know, Gabby Hayes was a very good mate of a lot of ours - you know, we were all very good mates. We used to knock around together in Malaya and go to town and do all sorts of things together. You know, it was, … it was just like having your arm cut off when you lose a mate. You know, you never see him again. But you … you obviously don't get over it, but you've got to put it behind you and get on with doing

26:30 what you've got to do while you're there.

So what would you do personally when you got back to camp?

Well, it would … I suppose … seventy to eighty percent of the time, the normal procedure … you know, you had a routine, depending on where you were operating to, and whether you came back

27:00 by APCs on the roads or whether you flew back by helicopter … there was always a method of transport - you never walked back. You were always that far away that if you walked back it'd probably take you three days. So you come back in and SOP was that you immediately went back and you sat down and you had a debriefing of the whole operation - what had happened, what you'd noticed, the intelligence about different things.

27:30 Then you went back, obviously got out of all your gear, scrubbed and cleaned all your gear, reloaded everything that you had, packed it up, and stacked it inside your tent, ready to go on the next one - which could be tomorrow, could be two days. You were very rarely more than say, three or four days back in camp.

I've obviously never been in that situation so I'm curious how you steel yourself to go out again if you've lost good friends from previous campaigns?

28:00 I suppose that's what all the training was about. You know, it's part of … training can't remove your emotions. You know, it's not much good being an emotional basket case when you've got to go out and you know, look after your mates - as I said before, it's all to do with team work. If you're the weak link in the team then the team will break,

28:30 so therefore, you know, you have your cry, and you say good bye to your mates, and you get on with it.

Were there padres in the camp?

Yes, we had denominational padres: we had the RC [Roman Catholic] , the OPD [other Protestant denomination] , and the C of E [Church of England] padre. So we had three padres in the battalions at any one time - and maybe more. We had the Sallyman there …

29:00 the padres were brilliant. They were absolutely outstanding, our padres. They came out on operations with us. You'd go to mass before, during and after, and all those sorts of things. They were all absolutely brilliant individuals, our padres.

You'd experienced minimal casualties in Malaya and Borneo, Tony, and you said on that first tour that sixteen were killed. Was there a

29:30 **point where you actually personally thought that this surpassed what I expected, in terms of what we would suffer?**

Oh, I think if we'd lost one it would have surpassed what you hoped for. I don't think I ever 'expected' a particular figure. We obviously expected that we were going to take casualties, and we always hoped that they'd be minimal, and we always prayed that there'd by none - but you know, that was being

30:00 fanciful to think that in the conflict that we encountered for twelve months there'd be no casualties. Either way, be it casualties from falling over down a weapon pit … you know, we had a number of people trip over and fall down weapon pits at night and get medivac back home because they broke a leg or something. You know, you always hoped and prayed every time you went out on an operation that you wouldn't have anyone killed.

30:30 You hope that if you had casualties then they were minor. But you were probably kidding yourself that that was the case. So you know, I don't know how you prepare yourself for those sorts of things, excepting that your regimental training taught you not to disregard but to quickly get over what had happened and soldier on, because you were no good over as a basket case -

31:00 I'm much certainly more a basket case now when I have those recollections and reminiscences about those sorts of things than I ever was when … you know, I think the challenge of putting to practice what we'd been practicing for so long, proved the point that we were probably the best soldiers that were ever deployed in Vietnam. But you know, that still didn't prevent us from losing good men. It was just one of those unfortunate aspects of war.

31:30 But it was. It was hard to take.

What thoughts did you have about your own mortality?

I was terrified every time I went out. I think everybody was. But I always thought, "Well, if my time is up then my time is up." But I never took any uncertain risks or anything like that. There was always that thought that if you do what you're trained to do and you do it the right way

32:00 then you have a less chance of being injured or killed. Every time we went out on operations I'm sure everyone was terrified, but you know, when things happened, they happened automatically.

Did the terror increase as you got to the end of your first tour?

I think the terror always increased as you got to the end of anything. The first operation or the last operation, you know,

32:30 there was always that that thought : "Gee, I've gone so long now; maybe I'll get shot now?" That was probably in your mind every time you went out. But it was one of those things, I suppose, the impact of leaving the base, hitting the jungle be it via helicopter or, when you went out on a TAOR patrol you might walk out. But once you left the security of the base and things like that,

33:00 for a time you were extremely alert and conscious of that, and then I suppose, somewhere along the track the window came down on being scared and then the alertness reverted to be being trained what you were trained to do. It became, I suppose, automatic. Certainly the heart began to race when a shot was fired, but I suppose, after a time, when the

33:30 contact was fully flowing, everything shut down and you got on with doing what you were doing - what you were trained to do and meant to do.

What do you remember about '68 and Tet?

Yeah, huh, it's quite vivid in my imagination … I mean, it's quite vivid in my memory. It looms I suppose, as a super-human challenge to us.

34:00 We were being deployed outside of our province area in the first major commitment of Australian soldiers outside of Phouc Tuy Province. It didn't sort of pose any mountainous challenge, except that the intelligence has said that there was an extreme build-up of enemy right across the country. There was the view by the intelligence that there was going to be a

34:30 major push from north to south, in huge numbers. They talked of hundreds of thousands, and of course, I suppose - not being flippant here, but Phouc Tuy was a fairly controlled area; because I believe the Australians had done what they were there to do, which was to control the movement of the enemy within the province, and therefore we'd achieved our aim.

35:00 But now we were going to another area that we hadn't served in before - that we hadn't been in. So we were given the task - and particularly Charlie Company - were given the task of relieving an American company from their task where they were. We were to secure and set up the reception of a fire support base - an FSB - which we set up and deployed every time we deployed every time we set up outside our task force base.

35:30 We'd set up an FSB to provide fire support to the companies and platoons that were operating in our area. So we set up the fire support base - or secured it. 'A' Company then flew in and set up not far from where we'd set up. They were not far away, down a slight hill. And when we took over from the Americans we said, "What's the situation here?" And they said,

36:00 "Oh, we've been here seven days and there's not been a great deal of activity at all." So we thought that it was all pretty secure and pretty tight. And of course A company flew in and moved across the creek, and I suppose within sort of a couple of hours, they'd had twelve contacts. So the Americans hadn't moved a particularly great distance from where we'd taken over from them, but we set up a secure area and moved the fire support base in, and that was sort of around the

36:30 twenty ninth of January 1968. And there was supposed to have been a complete country-wide cease fire for what was referred to as the 'lunar new year' - their new year. And everybody had the message that they were going to break the truce and have all-out conflict across the country. So we were deployed, and we were north and east of Bin-Wa Airbase, which was the biggest American airbase

37:00 in the whole of Vietnam. And we were sort of setting up as a blocking force or screen type area around Bin-Wa airbase. Anyway, we secured the fire support base and the guns flew in and we were placed under the command of task force defence group 'Harrison' - they gave fire support bases names.

37:30 So we were given the name 'Harrison' and placed under the direct command of the 2IC of the 4th Field Regiment. Anyhow, we stayed there until … I think it was three or four days. And in the meantime - in December that year before - the task force was increased in size by one battalion, and 3 Battalion had arrived to boost the task force into a fully fledged organizational task force.

38:00 So we had three infantry battalions on the ground. When we deployed on 'Covert' - which was the name of the operation - the 2RAR and 7RAR deployed, and 3RAR were still going through their acclimatisation and familiarisation 'in country'. So we flew in, secured the fire support base, and then 7RAR and 2RAR operation out of fire support base 'Anderson' - there were the names of some of our generals. Anyhow,

38:30 we were in there for three days I think it was and then they decided they would relieve us as the fire support base defence company. Charlie Company 3RAR flew in and relieved us, and we then moved out of the fire support base and became the task force 'Ready Reaction'- or rather the 'Ready Deployment Force', and we sort of conducted a bit of patrolling and some seek and destroy and that sort of thing.

39:00 We picked up a few enemy wandering around the place, and had a few contacts; and then around the fourth or fifth of February we were redeployed south and west of fire support Harrison, and we encountered a number of enemy, that was obviously to us by their firepower, larger than the normal group that you run into - because they had .50 calibre heavy machine guns and .762 machine guns. So we

39:30 knew we'd run into something bigger than you normally ran into in the bush. So for the next two or three days we did a bit of probing and had a few more contacts and things, until on the seventh of February, at about twelve or twelve thirty, we were relieved from the task force and given back to the command of our own battalion; and 9 Platoon then ended

40:00 up in a massive contact. So we withdrew from that and evacuated some of our wounded, and then we moved down to the south west. Then we swept around and come back up to where we'd had our initial contact two or three days previously. Anyhow, we were moving in a fairly open formation because it was a fairly open area - we weren't in sort of totally dense jungle - and Charlie Company

40:30 ended up contacting ... well, huh, ended up in contact with heavy machine guns and all sorts of small arms fire, and we then went to ground and deployed in coupled-up formation and so it went on for seven hours. We were in contact with a very large force of enemy firing grenades and RPGs and heavy machine guns and light machine guns and all sorts of things, at us.

41:00 And we called in all sorts of air strikes and fire support from guns and mortars. The platoons were, you know, fairly well pressed. We had the battalion 2IC come in and drop a resupply of ammunition, and you know, this went on until about seven o'clock at night, when the enemy broke contact, and we then evacuated all our casualties ...

Tape 10

00:30 **Tony, we might continue the story you were telling. You'd got to the point where you were evacuating casualties ...**

Yes. I think fortunately we didn't have anyone killed in that phase of the contact. We'd lost a bloke earlier on; but in that seven hour contact we were fortunate we didn't take a hell of a lot of casualties,

01:00 because they were firing rocket-propelled grenades into the trees, which were exploding and dropping their shrapnel down onto our blokes. And I think at seven o'clock - it was getting close to last light - and we called on the 'dust off' which was the casualty evacuation helicopter and they came in and we evacuated sixteen blokes I think - sixteen of our more severely wounded.

01:30 We never had time to get everybody out. And it was all done above the canopy because there was nowhere for the choppers to land. So they winched them up into the choppers. So that was the end of a very long three days in contact with a very large group of enemy. Early the next morning, when we'd secured our position overnight and ... not many people had any sleep that night, and we were all a bit jumpy; but during

02:00 the day there was lots of screaming and talking and yelling and trumpet-blowing and whistle-blowing by the VC. And you know, we had all sorts of support come in - air support and close gunship support from the helicopters, and artillery and mortar support. We had mortar fire to within thirty five metres of our flanks - that's what I was doing : bringing in the mortar fire. The guns came within seventy five metres.

02:30 It was what we referred to as 'minimum safety distance'. We were breaching minimum safety distance on all of our major support weapons because of the closeness of the enemy.

What does that mean, 'minimum safety distance' ?

Well, you're not meant to bring your fire close to your own guys. You had a minimum safety distance of a hundred metres with the guns and I think it was fifty or seventy metres with the mortars. But by virtue of the fact that they were closer than that to our flanks and front, that we

03:00 had to bring them inside that - which was quite acceptable ... well, when I say 'quite acceptable', the company commander was prepared own casualties from fire support because of the closeness of the enemy. But anyhow, fortunately we didn't have anyone wounded by our own fire support; and of course, during the process of the afternoon the fire control ... or rather, one of the fire controllers from the artillery

03:30 was lying to my left, and he got shot across the top the head ... which ... in hindsight it's not very funny, but at the time it just looked like one of those western movies, you know, where they part your hair with a bullet - well, he was parted across, from ear to ear. And I was lying next to him, and I could see the blood dripping down the side of his head, so I rolled over and put what we called a 'shell dressing' on his head. And Mick was evacuated later on. Unfortunately, he's since died, just recently.

04:00 But you know, that was the type of casualty we had. We had gunshot wounds, we had shrapnel wounds, we had all sorts of wounds. But we got them out. Then that night we set up a secure perimeter - you know, closed ranks ... that night I think we had within the company, we had about ninety sentries on that night, because I don't think anyone got any sleep. So the next morning we called in the engineers to assess the size of the area of occupation by the enemy

04:30 and they worked out that it covered an area of about two hundred metres by about five hundred metres.

We worked out that there was something in the vicinity of eighteen very well constructed bunkers and twelve less-well-constructed bunkers. The well constructed bunkers were about eight foot by eight foot and they had four foot of overhead protection. A number of artillery shells

05:00 with delayed rounds land on those bunkers and they did no damage at all, rather than shake a bit of dirt out. It took nearly all day to bring in enough explosive to demolish the bunkers. We had visits by brigadiers and generals from all over the place, who came in an checked out the size of the contact. We sort of pulled out of the area then. They destroyed the camp location. It was estimated that there was probably a full NVA

05:30 regiment engaged there over the three days. Whether they were there all the time, we don't know; but you know, it was considered that because of the … you know, the … everybody's impression was that, you know, Ka-Sun was on and the American Embassy was overrun and … it was considered to be a minor battle, but later on it was considered to be one of the major battle that

06:00 the Australians were ever involved in - including the Battle of Long Tan. But however, you know, we didn't seek to re-transgress on history and things like that. We didn't particularly want any recognition. It was just one of those things. It was an enormous three day battle - over a period of three days, not continuous; and you know, I think that proved to a lot of people -

06:30 particularly all the commanders at all levels - that there was probably no-one better than the Australian soldier - because you know, they stuck to it for three days on and off, in continuous contact with a very determined and very heavy armed enemy. Anyhow, we redeployed back to Nui-Dat after Tet sort-of … I don't say 'blew up', but the enemy suffered enormous casualties right across the

07:00 whole theatre of South Vietnam - they reckoned that they … you know, the Americans tend to exaggerate, but you know, they reckon the enemy lost forty five to fifty thousand killed. And that was supposed to be a conservative estimate. But you know, that was neither here nor there. They'd suffered fairly heavy casualties in the long run, over the period of the Tet Offensive. Anyway, on the tenth of February we deployed back into Nui-Dat, and sort-of

07:30 proceeded to … I don't say 'wind down', but we were running pretty close to the end of tour, so we were preparing to redeploy back to Australia; but you, obviously didn't let up on operations. But of course it was always the thought that you'd go out on your last operation and you'd lose somebody. You know, we were pretty fortunate that we didn't lose anybody in those last couple of weeks.

08:00 **I might just ask you a little more about your involvement in the battle. When something like that is happening for seven hours, what do you remember of where you were and what you could witness?**

I was directly behind the company headquarters group, sort of, you know … if you can picture … the platoon on the right was 9 Platoon, deployed in a half or quarter circle formation with soldiers forward and soldiers back.

08:30 I think 8 Platoon were deployed on the left front. Company headquarters were sort-of in rear of those two - by 'in rear' I mean fifteen or twenty metres behind. And I was immediately in rear of the company headquarters group, directing mortar fire onto the right flank of the position, or directing it … I was given directions by the soldiers and the platoon commander of the right flank platoon;

09:00 and we were just there … my recollections of it, you know, you could see the enemy in front of us, moving. They were operating from behind the bunkers - if you can imagine a bunker is a hole in the ground, then built up above the ground, then they were firing from behind the built up bunker-area on the ground. You could see them … occasionally. We were fortunate in that we were in folding ground, and it wasn't fairly

09:30 you know obvious where we were. We had a number of trees protecting us as well, so you know, but we were fairly well exposed to fires from right to left flank. But I think the enemy were concentrating more on the soldiers they were engaged with, and that were engaging them, rather than anyone who was 'in depth'. It was just a matter of, you know, keeping your head down and your tail up and carry on … but you know,

10:00 I was very busy on the radio. We had a mortar section which was in close proximity to us, and I was directing the fire of the mortars, and it was just a case of 'keeping on keepin' on', so to speak. I was listening to the FO [Forward Officer] directing the artillery fire. We were controlling … well, 'we' weren't, but the company commander was controlling the air support. It was what they called 'danger close', so we threw smoke on the perimeter of our forward positions

10:30 when they brought in rocket and napalm and gunfire from the gunships and aircraft; and you know, it was just a matter of 'toughing it out' so to speak.

How far away was the enemy, distance-wise, do you think?

Forty or fifty yards.

So when the aircraft were dropping the napalm, how frightening was that?

Quite frightening. Fortunately it was on their side, not our side. You

11:00 know, it's a frightening aspect of war.

So what are you seeing when that's happening?

You see the flame obviously, because it's liquid propellant and fuel; but you can feel the heat. We were probably seventy or eighty metres away from where it hit. And of course, being in the jungle you've got trees and canopies and things,

11:30 and of course they can disperse and divert artillery fire and mortar fire. You have 'tree bursts', even though you have delay-fuses on your ammunition which are meant to go off after it hits something … after it impacts on the nose of the round there's a .5 of a second delay, but you still had some tree bursts. And of course the rockets fired by the aircraft, and also the rockets and gunfire from the helicopter gunships … but it's all part of the 'crescendo' - shall we say - of what's happening at the time.

12:00 As I said, I suppose the brain goes into automatic after all this has been happening for a time, and I think fear is exchanged with doing what you're trained to do and getting on with it. There's always the thought of, "I hope someone doesn't sneak up behind me and shoot me," but no, there's much too much happening. The mind is kept occupied by providing the support

12:30 and you know, giving information and that sort of thing.

So, as mortar fire controller, what sort of gear are you carrying? Are you carrying the …

I'm carrying a radio and all the gear on what was referred to as an 'A Frame' - most of the soldiers had dropped their packs and just had their basic webbing on, whereas the mortar fire controller had to have the radio so I couldn't detach the radio from my pack or I'd have no way to carry it.

13:00 So I had the radio on my back, lying down flat on my face, so to speak - with the radio and the antenna up so that we could maintain communications. And you know, I had an M16 in one hand and the handset in the other hand, transmitting information and fire orders to the troops.

What's the noise and activity like when you're in that kind of battle?

13:30 Oh, thunderous. You know, the explosion of eighty one millimetre mortars, and one-o-five artillery, and one-fifty-five artillery, and rockets … look, it's ear-numbing, mind-numbing.

How could you get to the injured if this was going on?

Oh, look , what was referred to as 'fire and movement', you know, hip-hopping between trees and things, you know. You moved. I didn't move - I didn't have to move - I was getting

14:00 information from the section commanders and the platoon commanders, and they were giving me information and directions and telling me to lay down a fire mission at a grid reference - you know, where the front of the platoon was. So I'd call in the fire mission. We'd make sure they called what we referred to as 'danger close' - so that all the information that was given to the mortars - the 'lane' of the mortars - you had to make sure it was correct and double-checked. They'd fire the mortar and we'd say,

14:30 "Where do we go from here," and the section commander might say, "OK, go left and drop," because we had what we called "Line OT" - Observer Target. And it's all a bit technical to explain, but mortars and artillery guns have what they call a 'plotting board', and the centre of the plotting board is the location of the mortar or the gun; and what they do is to plot me on the ground where we are, and I give them a grid reference of where I am, so that they know when I give them a bearing on a compass - let's say

15:00 a compass is sixty four hundred mils, in the prismatic compass - and I say, "OT," or 'Oscar Tango' as it's referred to; so I say "OT one five hundred," then they know from where I am on the ground, that it's fifteen hundred mils from me to the target. They then translate that back from the target to where the mortars are, and they have all the bearings and elevations to set … to make sure that the round that I want

15:30 lands on the target, where it says. And then, if it's out by five or ten metres, then that's what we call 'adjusting the round', or 'adjusting fire'. So then the bloke up front tells me that we want to go, say, fifty left of where we are and down one hundred, then we just plot it on the plotting board, take it fifty metres to the left and drop one hundred; and the round - we hope - will land at that position. And that's what we did, all afternoon.

16:00 **How spread out were the other troops?**

What, the soldiers in our company?

Yeah.

Oh, the front of the company was probably … it maybe have covered a hundred yards or a hundred metres across from right to left. And there was another platoon sort-of back behind us, and they weren't sort of a single file like a line on a map - they were sort of one forward here and one there and one over there, they were sort of 'in-depth', so to speak.

16:30 It just depended on ... I couldn't sort of give you a specific diagram of where they were on the ground, but you know, when the contact occurred, the immediate thing to do was to get down, crawl, and observe the enemy fire. So you sort of get yourself into a position that is secure from enemy fire coming in, if you can. So you know, soldiers would have been in a bit of a gaggle up front, but able to direct their fire at the enemy.

17:00 **When you are in a battle like that, how quickly can people get to the injured, and kind of evacuate them?**

Probably you don't until there's a lapse in the fire. You know, if somebody's injured and ... I was fortunate when Mick got wounded, in that I could roll over because he was fairly close, without exposing myself ... I could slip my radio off

17:30 obviously when we got into the heavy battle, because I couldn't move with it on my back; but I rolled and kept the handset close to me. SOP was that you had your shell dressing always strapped to the rifle butt or on your straps here [gestures] so that you didn't have to go searching through your packs and things to find them - you just cut them off with your knife and cut the tapes on the water-tight container and strapped it around him. Then I went

18:00 back to my position and he stayed there all the way through the contact - wounded - and he even stayed there until his relief came in, and he made sure that he understood what was happening, before we evacuated him.

You mentioned earlier that you'd come across VC training centres. What was the system like when the fighting ceased? What was the scene like where they were, when people came to inspect?

Well, this particular contact was what we called a 'bunker system'. It was

18:30 like when we talked about Borneo, and all the people lived underground. Well the bunker is system is like when you've been there for a long time. You had time to dig the holes six or seven feet deep and reinforce the top with wood and trees and fill it in with dirt. Probably each layer of dirt was the size of the trees you used on top;

19:00 and they had, you know, four or five feet of protection, and they'd probably lay a sheet of plastic to reinforce the compacting of the overhead protection. But there were eighteen of these bunkers in a tactically sited situation that measurably supported each other. One could support the another bunker, which meant that you couldn't over run one bunker without it being supported from another.

19:30 With these large bunkers - eight by eight - and twelve or thirteen other ones. So they were tactically situated so that they were in all-rounded defence.

And what happened with the dead of the VC?

They dragged them away, which was very common with what they did. They very rarely left a dead body on the battlefield. At the Battle of Long Tan, they counted two hundred and forty three bodies, but they say

20:00 there could have been another thousand killed. In one of our operations we captured a VC - one particular VC - and what they had strapped to their pack was a meat hook ... apparently the SOP of the VC and NVA was, when you were leaving ... if they had to withdraw from the battlefield and a body was lying under the ground, they'd throw the meat hook under the chin and drag them off that way.

20:30 **Why do you think it was so important for them to do that?**

Well, psychologically, you know, it didn't give us any idea of (a) how many we'd killed, and (b) the size of the force we'd encountered. You know, it left it as all guesswork for us. A common intelligence report after an After-Operation Report was, you know, "Contact; three blood trails ..." and things like that. That was all you'd see in a Contact Report or an After Ops Report, because

21:00 rarely ... unless it was a completely successful ambush, we never discovered how many actual enemy we'd killed because that was part of their SOP that they'd drag off the battlefield every possible casualty that they could. It denied us the intelligence of how many we'd killed and what size force we'd encountered.

So when you got back to Nui-Dat, what was the atmosphere at camp like then?

21:30 The atmosphere was pretty sullen. But I think overall it was pretty buoyant in that we'd successfully achieved the aim ... there was a number of reports in between the 8th and the 10th, before we redeployed back to Nui-Dat that you know, that there was very heavy contact with the enemy and that they were withdrawing north and east of

22:00 Bin-Wa airport. At one point in time the NVA - or rather 'the enemy' because we didn't really know who they were - the enemy were on the end of Bin-Wa airport, firing at the planes as they took off. The planes were firing back at them as they took off. So that's how close they came to overrunning Bin-Wa airbase, which was the biggest airbase in South Vietnam.

22:30 And the same thing with Tan Son Nhut airbase - you know, it was nearly overrun. The American embassy in Saigon itself was partly occupied by the enemy. But you know, after the thing settled down, the enemy were 'on the run' so to speak, and there was reports of very large concentrations of enemy being engaged by air strikes and artillery and mortars and that sort of stuff.

23:00 So, you know, the mood in the battalion was (a) that we'd proven ourself in fairly heavy contact, and (b) that the enemy at that point in time had been defeated and routed. You know, it was pretty buoyant. There was no bragging or anything. I think the Australian soldiers there had convinced themselves that they were as good as their predecessors. And the reputation of the Australian soldier therefore was intact.

23:30 **Given that there had been intelligence that there had been a build-up for this battle, were you surprised by the intensity of the action?**

Yes. Whilst the intelligence had indicated that there was going to be a move right across the country by the … that's why the, the you know 'free world forces' were deployed as they were - to sort of intercept and prevent

24:00 all of what was expected. But it was far in excess of what was anticipated. But nevertheless the response by the good guys was very good. And you know, for a time, Ka-Sun - which came under heavy attack - it was almost overrun three times because of the enemy. And Da Nang - the capital - it used to be the historical capital of South Vietnam, and it was almost overrun.

24:30 But it was all beaten back, and you know, it was considered to a successful routing of the enemy. But of course it didn't last all that long in that in 1973 they came in with tanks and took over the capital. But you know, that's another story. But yeah, I think everybody was surprised at the intensity and the numbers that were deployed across the country,

25:00 because intelligence had (a) indicated that there was heavy movement of VC and NVA down the Ho-Chi-Min trail … but I don't think anybody had anticipated … they had obviously come down long before Tet, to avoid detection, and therefore there were more enemy in South Vietnam than they'd ever anticipated - but you know, it held up, fortunately.

25:30 **When you'd come across their training camps earlier, what had you seen of their capabilities and how they were set up?**

Well, it was normally only identifiable as a training camp in that wasn't permanently occupied. You know, there were areas that you could see that had been used as theatres or lecture areas, or areas that they'd been using as shooting ranges. You could see from the impact on trees and things that they'd been using them as firing ranges. And there were

26:00 areas where you could see that cooking had been done by small or large groups. There were areas of where people had established hutchies or living areas, But you know, it was always … if they weren't dug in somewhere and there was hardly any disturbance of the soil or anything, then it was considered to be either (a) a staging area, or (b) a training area. It was just one of the things

26:30 that the intelligence people determined from the reports that came in.

So tell me about returning to Australia. When was that?

We came home in March 1968. I came home on the advance party. I don't know why. Probably because I went over on the advance party and they thought I needed to come home. But I came home

27:00 on the advance party and if I remember correctly we came home via Perth, in Qantas. Once again it was a fairly rapid departure from Tan Son Nhut. We took off and headed straight up until we cleared sort of the … 'fire zone' you might call it; and then we headed home and landed at Perth. We disgorged the soldiers that were due to be (a) discharged,

27:30 because a lot of the National Servicemen were due out at the time … then flew on to Sydney. We were … we were sort of obviously disembarked from the aircraft and cleared through immigration and customs … they gave us a pretty good going over too, I might add, in the customs, to make sure that we weren't smuggling anything back; and then taken to an area where we were sort-of paid. Then most of us went on leave. So I then went into town. I think I spent

28:00 a night in a motel, and then the next day I headed back home to Bathurst. It was a fairly sad return to home, because my Dad had died on the sixth of January that year, and in all … I suppose in hindsight it was a good thing that I wasn't allowed to come home. I'd applied for emergency leave to come home for my Dad's funeral, but by virtue of the army regulations, there were

28:30 five other brothers and sisters back home in Australia looking after my Mum, so they said you know, it would be not suitable for me to come home because (a) it would take a day to come home and a day to go back and I only had seven days - that was the maximum number of days they would give you for emergency leave. I was totally disappointed at the time, but in hindsight I was pleased I didn't, because it would have been very difficult for me to come home and then sort of five or seven days later jump back on an airplane and go back to Vietnam. That would probably have not been very good for Mum.

29:00 But anyhow, it was a sad reunion to come back home and I was, you know, a bit heartbroken that my Dad had died while I was away; but yeah, we got on with life. We had some great times back in Bathurst, before I then had to report back to Holsworthy, where were then … where we started it all over again.

Did you know at that stage that you'd be going back to Vietnam?

29:30 Oh yes, I knew very well that I'd be going back.

And how different was it the second time you went back? When was that?

Well, we spent '68 and '69 once again re-kitting and re-establishing the battalion up to full strength, and doing the normal training that we had to do previously. We then redeployed back to Vietnam in February 1970. We went back to the same location we were in during '67 and '68.

30:00 **How had the mood in Australia changed in those years?**

We became more associated with the - shall we say 'anti-war' movement in that it was quite visible in the country on television. It was most visible in America via television - you know, the involvement was being run-down by all the opposition parties and you know, politicians,

30:30 and public officials and people in universities. The average individual I think got caught up in the hysteria of the moment and you know, maybe they did, maybe they didn't understand what was happening or what we were trying to do. But I think the thought or the vision of war being conducted in everybody's lounge room was a little bit disconcerting, so therefore it was easy for

31:00 the anti-war movement to gain a good foot hold in the country.

Had the protests increased by that time?

I don't know whether the protests had increased - well, put it this way: I don't think the protests appeared to increase. There were certainly demonstrations by the conscientious objectors burning their draft cards on the steps of, you know, town halls and places like that; but to me

31:30 there didn't appear to be all that many marches in Sydney. There were gatherings rather than marches - like they had in Melbourne earlier. There were a lot of marches then. But in Sydney, I don't know whether we got involved … whilst we were in Sydney - I might add - you know, we provided Victoria Barracks guards for Vic Barracks just up the road in Paddington, and things like that. You know, soldiers were required to man the gates at those places,

32:00 but I can't remember getting too involved in it, other than on television and reading about it in the newspapers.

When you arrived at Nui-Dat the second time, what sort of feeling did you get about how the war had changed?

Well, I suppose the briefings we were given … the second time I went back, I was a company sergeant major, so I went back on board HMAS Sydney. It took us about four or five days to sail from Sydney to Vung Tau

32:30 and you know, on the way over it was all great fun - the crossing of the line and all that sort of thing; we went past Krakatoa, and we arrived in Vung Tau, and we were lifted off the ship by Chinook helicopter and flown to Nui-Dat. And obviously my role was a totally different role, but, the briefings that we'd had and the

33:00 you know, feelings that were being passed around, were that we were probably losing the war … or we weren't doing as well as we were when we were there in '67, '68. Of course, the political influence on the war was more in evidence than it was in '67, '68, with the you know, I suppose, the growing comments of the major politicians,

33:30 and the major political parties around the world even. You know, everyone had their sides, and that time … I don't know whether Richard Nixon was the President of the US or whether Lyndon Johnson was still the President. But I suppose it didn't really matter. We had the visions of Jane Fonda visiting North Vietnam and shall we say 'collaborating' with the enemy, and that wasn't taken very kindly.

34:00 People didn't like her very much, and didn't like any of the outspoken people that pointed the finger at the soldier rather than pointing the finger at the people who were controlling the soldiers. That was probably the most disappointing thing about the involvement in the war, that you know, the soldiers were wearing the brunt of it. I suppose you had to blame somebody,

34:30 and the soldiers were in the forefront of people's, you know, contact; and therefore they were easy. We copped a hell of a lot of flack when we were in Sydney. If you were in uniform and they saw you in uniform; so normally we stuck to ourselves and never went out in uniform unless you had to; and you know, obviously, you adapted to the situation as it was.

What did you personally experience in Sydney in terms of backslap from the public?

35:00 Oh, we never got into any sort of personal confrontations with them. You know, in those days it was probably easier to melt into the crowd. It was such a big place. In Liverpool, we were stationed at Holsworthy, so Liverpool was the nearest 'city', so to speak - or the nearest civilian contact that we had; but there, we never really had a great deal of confrontation with people. It was …

35:30 yeah, I suppose, you know, the odd snide remark was passed if they knew you were a soldier, and things like that. But we never got into any confrontationalist situations. We stuck to ourselves. We drank … if we went into town in Liverpool we drank in the Railway Hotel or the Collingwood Hotel. All the opposition, so to speak, they never went near the place, because they would have needed to come in great force, and you know, it would have created

36:00 too much trouble. But no, we never had any major confrontations with them. In general, there was the odd clash here and there. But we avoided it. We were advised and encouraged not to get into involved with it in any way, shape, or form. When we went into the city we had our own little areas that we went to. We used to go to the areas like … a couple of my mates ended up … you know,

36:30 we all hooked up with some girls and we went to St.George and Bexley and Bondi and those sorts of areas. I had a girlfriend who lived in Bondi and we used to go down there for the weekend and things like that. And you know, we were all pretty well absorbed into the community.

When you were in Nui-Dat and back in Vietnam, you mentioned the politicisation of the war. How did that translate for the troops on the ground? What kinds of differences were there in terms of their support?

37:00 What, the soldiers?

Yeah, in terms of what equipment was available and what firepower …

Oh, the same sort of equipment was available. You know, we were well equipped. But the difference in provision or what you could do with regard to when you encountered the enemy, it changed a heck of a lot. In the first tour, as I indicated, you could call for almost anything that was available, and maybe some things that may not have been available. But if they had it,

37:30 then they'd have given it to you. The second tour, it was fairly well-controlled on the type of air support and fire support … you certainly weren't lacking in anything, but the circumstances had changed. It more or less got to the stage where, on the second tour, you almost had to be in contact and taking casualties in order to call for anything other than your normal direct support artillery. You know, to call in an air strike, you couldn't just … on the first tour, if someone shot at you

38:00 from three thousand metres away, you could call in 'all hell' so to speak. But on the second tour, you had to be in close contact and having a fairly large fire fight before you were given the support of the aircraft.

Was that because there simply weren't as many aircraft?

No, no. There were still the same number, I believe. I didn't go and do a sort of count of the aircraft. But I think it was to do with the political side of the vision of what was happening.

38:30 Because there was so many reporters 'in country' who were covering major airbases, and those sorts of things, and they basically had tabs on everything that was happening. You know, if there was a major contact then they would … they'd sort of get the mood that it was in, because the aircraft would take off from Bin-Wa, or up in Camran Bay and up in places like that; and you know the word would get around. So therefore commanders were sort of … I don't know - I'm only guessing

39:00 that commanders were sort of given 'directions from afar' to be very, very careful in how you are seen to engage what might be an enemy or what might be locals. They didn't particularly want to see what you saw in the initial phases of Vietnam, you know, like the little child running down the road with the napalm burns, and things like that. They didn't want any of that contrary publicity.

39:30 You know, they didn't want any more Ka-Sans, they didn't want any more Mai-Lies and things like that. But I'm only guessing that was the direction, but that's the feeling we got : that we never had the level of support that we had the first time, in terms of availability. The support was there I suppose

40:00 but we weren't allowed to call in what we were allowed to call in on the first tour - but that's only a personal observation.

Tape 11

00:30 **Tony, how were your operations different on that second tour?**

I suppose the focus was different in that … well, the initial operations were no different. You know, we still went out on patrol, but the intelligence indicated that we still had a fairly - I don't say 'passive' - but Nui-Dat was

01:00 still a fairly quiet province compared to a lot of the other provinces. Even though the incidents that occurred in the province over a period of time included a number of major incidents, but really, the province appeared to be I suppose - without being too straightforward - really, the province appeared to be under the control of the Australians. You know, there were obviously areas that

01:30 we had no control over, because we weren't present there all the time. But when we did venture out into the province and come across villages and things like that, we were never treated badly there. They might have resented us but they never outwardly shunned us and things like that. And you know, the operations continued in similar fashion with the same sized groups. We still went out on TAOR patrols with platoon sized groups

02:00 Or rather, 'they' went out on patrols. As a CSM I didn't go out on the platoon sized TAOR patrols, but I went out with the company sized groups, and we did the same sort of - shall we say - 'acclimatization' period. We were given fourteen days to acclimatize, and we did little stints here and there. We did our familiarisation exercise once again up into the Courtney Rubber to introduce all the soldiers

02:30 to the type of terrain they would operate in and the sorts of vegetation they would encounter. And then we started the more extensive operations outside of close proximity to Nui-Dat. And then … I don't know why, but the role of our battalion seemed to change - inasmuch as we operated solely and wholly from Nui-Dat. That was the major task force base area,

03:00 and there was a company based at a place called the Horseshoe because of the nickname of a horseshoe-shape feature nearby. It was just a little southeast of the Long Tan Rubber, and east of Nui-Dat. Anyhow, we were then given the task of moving the battalion headquarters down there,

03:30 and from then on the majority of the battalion operated out of the Horseshoe. And we were given tasks of setting up little base areas away from the Horseshoe. We sent A Company down to Long Phuoc Hai, which we called NDP-ISA. NDP meant a Night Defensive Position. But A Company moved down there. And we moved the pioneers up to another little base

04:00 and we did some things on the second tour that we never, ever did on the first tour - in that we did some roving night fighting patrols. They were mobile and the operated around the Horseshoe area. The first tour, we never moved at night. Once we got into a base area we stayed there unless contact occurred and we had to pull out. But we never did fighting patrols at night. Whereas this time

04:30 we took night fighting patrols out of the Horseshoe - groups of ten to fifteen. You know, the Horseshoe was in a sort of cleared area, and there were paddy fields around, so there was a lot of cleared area. So we did a lot of mobile night fighting patrols and set ambushes around the Horseshoe, rather than operating solely out of Nui-Dat. We still had our major base back there in Nui-Dat, and the companies went back there from time to time for a bit of a change

05:00 of situation and things; and we still had all our transport and so forth located at Nui-Dat, but we operated the majority of the time out of the Horseshoe. And companies … we ended up with C Company and B Company there. I think A Company remained at Nui-Dat and operated out of there, but there seemed to be a change of focus in what we did. We

05:30 also had a Div locating Battery - which is an arm of the artillery, which had a radar capability of pinpointing and picking up moving people. It was because of their radar ability. And with the mobile patrols operating out of the Horseshoe, we would be in contact with this 31 Div Lock Battery, and they would tell us if we were moving. I went out on a number of these night fighting patrols and they would be able to us that there

06:00 were two or three enemy, or 'unknowns' - well, they had to be 'enemy', because of the curfew - moving to our northwest say two or three hundred metres away, say, heading south. So if we were able to, we would then move in that direction with the aim of either (a) ambushing them, or (b) chasing them away. And that was a different focus to what we had been doing in the past. So I don't know what brought about the change in focus and in the way we operated

06:30 but that was sort of a different thing. But aside from that, we still mounted major operations from out of the Horseshoe/Nui-Dat.

By this stage of the war was there a noticeable change in the mood of the local Vietnamese villagers?

I think that there was detectable opinion from them that … like … they seemed to know that we weren't going to be there much longer.

07:00 You know, you'd talk to some of the people and they wouldn't 'brag' about it but they would say, "Ah, you go home soon, you go home soon," and they were obviously being told by the Vietcong or by Communist party officials from their villages that the war wasn't going well for the Allies and that the pressure was on them to leave.

And what about the American forces given the massive amount of public protest that there had been in the USA?

07:30 Yeah. We had less and less to do with the Americans on the second tour. We still did operations with them, but we had … well, I must sort of reclassify that. We had an American artillery battalion located with us at the Horseshoe

08:00 and they were eight inch - one seven five millimetre - guns. And their attitude was a little different. I don't say this lightly, but the Americans had a lot of trouble with drugs in Vietnam, and of course there were times that we were suspicious that these Americans were on drugs. And you know, it was a bit frightening that we were relying on this artillery organization - and I don't mean the whole American Army here -

08:30 but this particular artillery battalion were visibly using drugs. You know, they were sort of goggle eyed and carrying on like they were infected with drugs. So it was a little disconcerting to our troops that they were relying on these eight inch one seven five heavy artillery for fire support when those personnel might be on drugs. Our commanding officer wasn't too impressed. He braced the two officers in command of the battery up and you know, sort of basically said

09:00 to them that they must take control of the people under their command. But you know, they were a little reluctant because basically, I think they'd been threatened by the people.

Were you aware of what sort of drugs they were taking?

Probably marijuana. That was basically the majority of the drugs that were available. You know, I don't know if there were any other drugs available, but we had confrontations with people when we went to Vung Tau. The blokes would come back and say that someone was trying to sell marijuana there

09:30 in Vung Tau. But I don't know if there were any hard drugs available and being used. The Americans in a number of units … you know, the old 'fragging' … the rumours used to go around of fragging, and that meant they'd throw a grenade in your tent; you know, many officers were frightened that they'd get fragged by their men. There was a lot of distrust among the Australians toward

10:00 a number of the American units. And there was distrust among the American officers with their soldiers because you know, they didn't know whether they were going to get fragged. It got to the stage where American officers would open a drawer in their office and a smoke grenade would go off, and there'd be a note in there too, saying, "The next one will be a frag." That meant a 'fragmentation grenade'. So, you know, there was a lot of internal

10:30 trouble within the American organization because of the attitude of the protest movement and things like that.

So, how 'out of control' do you think they were at this stage?

Oh, I wouldn't say they were 'out of control'. They were a threat to the good order of military discipline because all you needed was one guy to kill his platoon commander, and it would create a great deal of mayhem within the organization. So you know, they weren't all out of control

11:00 to the extent that, you know, they were unreliable and things like that, but you needed to be sure that who you were dealing with were in control of their faculties, because you know, it's no good having someone firing eight inch or one seven five artillery guns - all they needed was to be was maybe ten mils off line back there, and it would translate to a hundred yards off line where we were. Instead of landing over there [gestures] it lands in your lap here. So, it became

11:30 a little bit disconcerting because it was still … you know, we were still doing our job and we didn't get too wrapped up in it. You saw what was happening via newspapers and … we used to get the Stars & Stripes and Armed Forces Radio and TV, and they never played up too much of the 'in-country' turmoil. You only heard it on the grapevine, you know - if someone was fragged, or you know, someone went off their rocker because they

12:00 were on drugs, or something like that.

Did you ever use Hanoi Hannah?

Yes we did, inasmuch as it was … say, sometime you might be in Vung Tau or maybe Saigon and you'd hear it via another net. We never got it … she never came on Armed Forces Radio, which was controlled by the Americans - or Armed Forces TV.

12:30 But you know, you always heard Hanoi Hannah and the propaganda. In actual fact, we probably saw it more via American TV coming back into Vietnam, because they used to play it in America - you know, Hanoi Hannah going off her brain about the airmen that were shot down, being paraded through the streets of Hanoi, and those sorts of things. And that would be replayed back through Armed Forces TV in Vietnam to show the troops

13:00 there, but you know, we never listened to any of her propaganda speeches, so to speak.

You mentioned that this was a 'media war' and that people were getting the war in their lounge rooms - how did that contribute to your knowledge about the progress of the war and what was happening?

Well you know, I don't think it was terribly difficult to project the progress of the war, because during the period of time when we came back to Australia there was all the confrontations that were going on in America

13:30 and the peace talks that were going on in Paris - we got all of that through Armed Forces TV. But while we were over there we got updates on Armed Forces Radio about how the peace talks were going and what was meant to be happening and that sort of stuff. So therefore, we weren't sort of 'kept in the dark' about the progress of the war - we were well-aware

14:00 that the pendulum was swinging away from an Allied victory, to being forced out by political opinions and the protest marchers and the general attitude of the American public. You know, it was weighing very heavily on General Westmoreland and all the commanders in Vietnam. You know, they used to address the troops

14:30 on Armed Forces TV and, not that they said, "Look, we're losing the war and we're going to go home," but you could see by their general attitude and the way they spoke to the soldiers - you know, in '67, '68, they were all bubbly, you know, "Here we are showing off the forces to the then President of South Vietnam, Wien Kow Ki [Nguyen Van Thieu?] ." You know - the bloke with the beret and the sunnies and all that sort of thing. And you know, everything was all hyped up.

15:00 He came to Nui-Dat and we took him to the mortar line and showed him a mortar and things like that. But you know, the interaction between the public and what was happening was totally different to what it was in '67, '68. It was fairly obviously - to anybody - that things weren't going well.

How does it affect a soldier when they're going out on operations and risking their lives when peace talks are being conducted?

15:30 Well, I think the peace talks were a good fillip to the troops, because they thought that if they declared peace then nobody would lose and there'd be no carrying on about who won and who lost and that sort of thing. I think everybody by this time was sick and tired of the war anyway - including the soldiers. But they never, ever turned around said, "Look, we're sick of this." They were still doing their jobs

16:00 as they were told to do, but I think all of us very quietly were hoping and praying that the peace talks would succeed. Because you know, where were we heading? You know, there was no decisive victor or vanquished at the time. We were all just hoping that someone would see sense at the peace talks in Paris, and say ... because we saw lots of vision of the peace talks. There they were. All the groups heading to sit own at the peace table.

16:30 And you know, I think that everybody just hoped and prayed that it might end up declaring peace.

In terms of their equipment and capabilities, what did you make of the ARVN soldiers?

I suppose like everywhere, there were the good and the bad. And I'm not quite sure that there weren't VC sympathisers within the ARVN ranks, who were, you know, passing information and intelligence to the enemy.

17:00 **What makes you say that?**

Well, most of the South Vietnamese had fled North Vietnam when there was a big upheaval in Hanoi. You know, North Vietnam was predominantly Buddhist, and the predominant number of people in the South were Roman Catholics; but you know, you could see the disposition of the different villages. Like, we had a particular village to our north in Long Bien that were devout Roman Catholics, and they hated the North with a passion.

17:30 If they could've, the would've walked to Hanoi barefooted and strangled every NVA person that was around. Originally, they had basically been thrown out of Hanoi by the Buddhist-practicing northerners, so to speak. The village of Dat To on the other hand was probably predominantly Buddhist. It was one of the bigger villages ... and anyway, that was the sort of attitude. The majority of the people in the South were thrown out

18:00 of the North by the Buddhist-practicing Vietnamese - that was the opinion you got, anyway, because we spent a couple of times on the tour, up in Long Bien providing support to one of the little outposts up the track. They told us that they hated the Vietcong and that sort of thing. And you know, you could tell that they were genuine in their speech because of their feelings, and you know, you could tell

18:30 that they hated them with a passion. And yet others, you know, you got the impression that they couldn't care either way.

So looking back, given your experience, what do you think the war was about for the Vietnamese?

That's a difficult question to answer. I suppose, for the majority of the North, it was all about beating the ... it was a totally Communistic country, and run by the Communists. A lot of the people in the South - and I don't say all of them, because I didn't have contact with all

19:00 of them - but it appeared that a majority wanted to be a free democratic country and practice their religions and do what they wanted to do. That was because they didn't like Communism. I suppose

that's probably a bit of a play on words, because of the Communistic view and the domino theory and that sort of thing. But that was the impression I gained, anyway. I don't know whether that was true and up front,

19:30 but that was what I thought.

So how do you feel about the necessity of that war, now?

It is marvellous in having hindsight, isn't it, It's a wonderful thing, hindsight. I wished it had never happened. You know, in hindsight. But at the point when we first deployed to Vietnam, I considered that we were doing a great service to the people of South Vietnam, because they - and I emphasize 'they' - they were the ones who

20:00 appeared to need help. And when the first President was assassinated - and I suppose once again that hindsight is brilliant - but one might have thought that Madame Nu, who was the wife of the assassinated President, but you know, it appeared that he was going to be a supporter of the Americans, because he was having a great deal of interaction with the American President Kennedy

20:30 and all those sorts of things … so, it is difficult to assess the situation, but my assessment of the situation at the time when we got there was that they wanted to be free of the North and the Communists, and they wanted to be a Democratic Republic of South Vietnam. But probably, it'd my view that it is still the view of a lot of the South Vietnamese, but of course, when you're a conquered people, you don't have

21:00 a great deal to say about it. In actual fact there's a possibility that I may go back to Vietnam next year, just to have a look around. A lot of my mates have been back. And one of our members who was in 7RAR; and he went back and married a Vietnamese, and you know, they tell stories of the sort of re-education and indoctrination camps. They were set up

21:30 when the North took control. And they moved all of the pro-American figures in there for what you called 're-education'. You'd probably refer to them as Russian 'gulags' or 'concentration camps' to re-educate them back into the Communist way. But whether that's true or not, I don't know.

22:00 That was just some of the views that came back. Other guys who've been back to Vietnam say that it's a wonderful place. And, we're in the throes of producing a pictorial history of our two tours of Vietnam, and the two major project officers of the book were back in Vietnam on the thirteenth of August. They were there for ten days, and they met up with a lot of the VC from the province of Phouc Tuy and they said all they wanted to do was to have a chat

22:30 and have a beer about it all. They said there appeared to be, on the surface, no animosity between the two groups. So therefore, it is difficult. But you know, in hindsight, I wish it had never happened.

Why do you want to go back to Vietnam?

Just to see what it's like. You know, I don't know whether I'll be surprised or shocked.

23:00 There's still a certain degree of control of where you can go and what you can do - you know, like, one of our guys - Graham Edwards - he's a member of parliament with no legs. He had his legs blown off. He's been back twelve or thirteen times, and only by virtue of his influence through the diplomatic corps can he travel to some of the areas he wants to go to. Some of our boys have been back and want to go to - and I can understand why, because, you know,

23:30 people live in the villages around Lon-tan and things like that. So you just can't sort of arrive in Saigon and take a train, plane, bus or whatever the case may be, down to Nui-Dat and go out to Long Tan where the cross for the battle was. You've got to get permission from the local village chief and the local chapter of the Communist Party, and things like that. So there's still those sorts of things. But I'd still like to go back and have a look and you know, console my soul, and …

24:00 I know that it was probably all in vain but you know, I just have a feeling that I'd like to go back.

Why do you say you 'know it was all in vain'? What has convinced you that it was in vain?

Well, nothing was … the only thing that was achieved was a huge loss of life on both sides. And for what? You know, the Communists ended up taking over the South, and really, on face value anyway, it doesn't seem to have done a great deal

24:30 of damage to the country. You know, I don't suppose it's the Riviera of South Vietnam, or the Riviera of Vietnam, but certainly it is a very popular tourist attraction. Lots of people go there I'm told, and they have a number … you read in the travel brochures where you've got a lot of guided tours that fly to Hanoi, then come down to Saigon by train, with stopovers in Da Nang and Hue and all those places;

25:00 on the way down, and people have told me that you can stop and get off the train and go for a bike ride and visit the villages and things; but you know, is it all so bad? Was it all worth it? You know, as I said, hindsight's brilliant isn't it?

So if you believe it was all in vain, how do you reconcile the deaths of your friends?

I don't know how I do. I don't know that I ever will. But only the death of my friends.

25:30 The Americans lost fifty eight thousand. I've got no idea of how many the South Vietnamese lost - somewhere, probably, five or six hundred thousand. I've no idea how many the North lost … five or six hundred thousand? And when you have a look at that extreme waste of life in hindsight then what did we achieve? A lot of orphans. Maybe a lot of South Vietnamese

26:00 that are suffering from Agent Orange or whatever the heck you want to call it. And maybe a lot of our guys suffering from Agent Orange, or their families … their kids … who knows. The health studies done by the DVA and all have revealed inordinate numbers of disabled births and you know; and cancers and all sorts of things like that. So what the heck was it all about?

26:30 **What was it like coming back to Australia and resuming an non-operational role in the army?**

I suppose it was a mental attitude of blocking it all out. As I told you, I came home from Vietnam in '71 and went to the Royal Military College, which was probably the prime, premier posting in Australia. It was

27:00 probably a location where … the environment was totally different to anything I'd experienced before because there was the academic side of the Royal Military College, and the regimental side of the Royal Military College, and there was the involvement with the cadets and their enquiring minds. They were more alert than the normal individual because academically they were in the top ten percent

27:30 in the country. When I got there I was were made aware by all the people who had been there for a time that when you gave lectures to the cadets - which we did - we gave lectures to the cadets on lots of different things, like infantry-minded tactics and map reading and air photo reading. We gave presentations on weapon handling, we taught them weapons, and we taught them practical things for the field - all the things I'd learnt as a soldier.

28:00 Therefore, someone said to me that you must be very correct in what you say, and you must be very 'pure' in what you say. If today you stand up and say to a half of the hundred forty cadets in Fourth Class, "The Sun rises in the west," and tomorrow you say to the other half, "The Sun rises in the east," someone will say to you, "But you told Fourth Class yesterday that it rose in the west." So you know, it made me more alert and aware

28:30 that there were very enquiring minds and very bright minds facing me in the class. So you know, it was a very, very rewarding experience to go and get involved with all these smart young men. They were terribly ambitious and terribly dedicated to what they wanted to do. So therefore it wasn't terribly difficult to achieve the aims of what you were meant to do at the college.

29:00 **We've talked to lots of Vietnam Veterans who've had varied experiences in terms of life after Vietnam, and how it's affected their everyday life and their relationships and things, and I just wanted to know what your personal experience has been?**

I suppose, you know, after we came home the second time there wasn't a

29:30 great deal of time in between the tours to sort of sit back and recollect what it was all about and what I felt and things like that. I know I felt sorrow for the guys that we'd lost and things like that, but I never had an opportunity to sit back and shall we say 'gaze inside' at what was happening in me. And when I came back the second time I got involved - maybe for want of a personal reason - I blocked it all out and got involved with other activities,

30:00 and maybe I suppressed it all. I suppose in the long run that was the worst thing I could do, because you know, without … you know, I've had a number of sessions with psychiatrists and things like that. And I've had a number of self-examinations with a few mates and we've sat down and cried our eyes out and things like that, and sort of wondered what it was all about,

30:30 and why we feel this way. And I suppose I've become very withdrawn. I you know … I do associate with a lot of my mates occasionally, and particularly with Harry. I have a lot of contact with Harry, but we sort of … the banter that we carry on with is probably another front. It's probably something that we're not game to admit to each other - that we're suffering. But you know, I can tell you I now

31:00 can't go to bed at night without a sleeping pill. I can't remember the last time I went to bed at night and had a good night's sleep without taking a sleeping tablet. And I … you know … I get very angry, very quickly, about lots of things, for probably no apparent reason. Now whether that has anything to do with what's happened in the past I don't know,

31:30 but I can't ever, ever recall myself being aggressively angry - particularly with members of my own family - which I have been. I have been, I have been very snappy and snarly at times for no reason whatsoever. And you know, that doesn't disturb me, but it worries me.

What's particular about Vietnam in terms of the post-traumatic symptoms, do you think? What was it about that war?

32:00 Well, I don't know. How long is a piece of string? I don't know that you can put your finger on it anywhere other than … I suppose the disappointment in doing what we did and achieving nothing -

other than, as I've said throughout the interview, you know, we proved that the Australian soldier was probably one of the best fighters on the planet. But for what? What end result did we achieve?

32:30 We didn't achieve …. I suppose that's the most disappointing thing about the whole effort in Vietnam. We never achieved one ounce of what we set out to do - and that was to prevent the spread of Communism in South Vietnam. Whether it was a Domino Theory or not, it doesn't really matter to me. It was a matter of … I don't know whether I was indoctrinated into believing

33:00 that there was a Domino Theory or anything, but you know, we had heaps and heaps of briefings on what Communism was about, and they showed us the spread of Communism, and the way Communism treats different people, and you know … the thought of going over and being the knight in shining armour and saving 'a people' from being taken over by the Communists was something that was fairly forward in my view at the time.

33:30 I suppose you believe your own propaganda if you want to. But yeah, I suppose the disappointment is in knowing that all the efforts that were given by all the soldiers from all of the countries that were involved in Vietnam, both on their side and on our side … even though the country is know 'one' it is under control of … you know, it's a Communist State, and

34:00 it probably doesn't matter. It's probably better than a terrorist state. But once again that's easy to say because of what's happened in recent times. But I don't know, you know. It just … it's like building a swimming pool and then filling it in before you get to swim in it. You haven't achieved anything, have you?. And that's probably a crazy analogy, but you know, it's something that sort-of always sits in the back of my mind now, when I think about it,

34:30 I don't consider that anybody did the wrong thing anywhere - because at a certain given time, at a certain point, for whatever reason, things have to be done. Like, you know, the thinking at the time when they sprayed all the jungles with Agent Orange - all the defoliant - that was considered by those in command and those in control that this was the best thing to do at the time,

35:00 because it would deny the enemy the cover of the jungles and things like that. And you know, it was like dropping the bomb on Hiroshima. It achieved its aim … but really, you know, the end result: what has it done?

You went on and had a career beyond twenty years in the army after Vietnam. How does it impact on your concept of war?

Yeah, I think I probably placed myself in a state of self-denial that the war had affected me.

35:30 I used to sort of talk to and read about and listen to people talking about post-traumatic stress, and being this, and being that, and having all these sorts of things. But by virtue of the fact that I was still involved with 'The Firm' - so to speak - I probably didn't let myself go and admit my dislike of what had happened.

36:00 Not that I disliked my career, but … I enjoyed my career in the army because of a number of things that occurred as an adjunct to my career in the army; but you know, there's always somewhere where you can turn around and say, "Maybe that shouldn't have happened?" But anyhow, that's the way that it is, and that's the way that it's turned out.

What would you like to say to one of those protestors if you had the opportunity to talk to one of them now?

36:30 I don't know. I think I probably have spoken to some of them, somewhere along the track. I suppose you've got to think of where they were coming from compared to where I was coming from at the time. My total sort-of, for want of a better term 'training' was dedicated to the military. I was a trained soldier. I'd been in combat in Borneo before I came back home and encountered the protestors.

37:00 It was something that appeared to me to be UnAustralian - you know, that cliché that has been buried and murdered completely - but you know, it didn't appear to me … I suppose you go through the thought that, "Everybody's entitled to free speech," but you know, there's a degree of being able to have free speech, and who's been the instigator of you having the ability to have that free speech: it's a soldier who's fought for

37:30 your country to ensure that you can have that free speech. I don't really know what I'd say to someone who walked up to me tomorrow and said, "Look, I was one of the protestors who was in Sydney," I would probably say, "You had your views at that time of your life and I had mine. I was a regular soldier. I had volunteered to join the army and I was therefore committed to doing what I was told to do by my Government."

38:00 And I must admit that there was a challenge in my life that I was a soldier who'd enlisted voluntarily: that I wanted to see if what I'd been taught was effective, and I could do what I was trained to do … at the expense of a few of my mate's lives, but yeah, but I'm sure we were all convinced that we could do what we were trained to do. And do it well.

38:30 **Tony, we're running out of time on this last tape, and I'd like to ask you one last question.**

You'd grown up impressed by the mythology of the Anzacs and you know, we're facing the prospect now of how in twenty five years time there'll be no World War II veterans ...

Well, they're in their eighties. In fact, I've got a very good mate who I see weekly. He's a World War II Veteran, and yeah, they're in their eighties, so yeah. Soon we'll be running out of them, yes.

39:00 **What do you think the legacy of Vietnam Veterans will be?**

I have no idea. I really don't know. It will be up to the historians to, you know, tell the story of what we did and why we did it. As was the case in Gallipoli. I wasn't around it occurred, and I was unaware of what was happening in the Second World War. It has all been learnt from history, and those sorts of things.

39:30 So I suppose it will be the way the historians paint our involvement in Vietnam that will determine what that legacy will be.

How would you like to be remembered?

I would hope we are remembered as dedicated Australians, and nothing to do with the political side of the war. You know, we were young, blue-blooded Australians who were told to go to battle, and we did, and we upheld the traditions of the Australian soldier that were handed down to us from Anzac.

On that note Tony, thankyou very much. It's been an absolute pleasure to talk to you today. Thankyou Tony.

INTERVIEW ENDS