Australians at War Film Archive

Ron Cashman - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2008.

01:11 My arrival in Korea - I flew from Japan in the old DC3 Biscuit Bomber with a group of other

01:30 diggers and we arrived at the airport outside of Seoul. There I was loaded into open trucks and shuttled up to the battalion very quickly, we had absolutely no contact with the Korean people whatsoever at that stage. Then we were tossed into the battalion for the business end of Operation Commando.

02:00 My very first impressions was, Captain Reg Saunders, an aboriginal officer, took myself and another chap, Peter Sertapavia [?], allocated us this fighting pit and indicated three different directions and he said, “Now this is where the Chinese could come from, here there and there.” which did nothing for our nerves whatsoever and that was our initiation

02:30 into the battalion. Straight out of the cesspits of Japan and into the fighting pits of Korea: I never had a great deal to do with Reg Saunders but my

03:00 first and lasting impressions of him, he was a very fine and sure of himself officer, he knew his game and he had, I just can’t describe it … his company were very, very keen on Reg. He was a top soldier and a likeable chap and he was a credit to the battalion. I don’t think

03:30 anybody could pick fault with Reg Saunders as a fighting officer and a gentleman. The best way to describe Korea is seeing it from the air where it’s basically one never ending chain of mountains interrupted by the odd valley and

04:00 flat portion of ground. From the air I’d say eight percent of it is mountain range, the remaining twenty percent would be agricultural level ground, river valleys and what have you. Navigating your way through it in those days was strictly by dirt roads or tracks and the infantry of course fought on the mountain ranges and

04:30 the work there was extremely difficult. It was hard work. You couldn’t climb the mountains to attack the enemy on a sheer face, approaching them by ridge lines was basically the only way to go. It’s a country like no other I’ve ever seen. In the winter

05:00 we were blessed with many feet of snow, the further down the mountain you were the more the snow. When you were in the valleys you could be, at times in the paddy fields up to your, top of your thighs in snow. That used to be a bit of a problem too on the sides of the hills where we were constantly waging war against each other.

05:30 You might be going down a hillside and the next minute you’d disappear into a shell hole which was four feet full of snow or something like that which made things interesting to say the least. The ice, that was a constant problem, it made things very slippery if the snow froze over. You could never walk on it, you had to slither or slide your way down.

06:00 That’s about all I can say really, it’s something you have to sort of experience.

06:30 Coming from Melbourne, which was the coldest place I’d ever been into and arriving in Korea for my first winter was quite a shock to myself and everybody else from Australia really.

07:00 The winter was preceded by the cold winds coming down from Siberia in the autumn. We used to get a very severe frost and one of the first signs of winter approaching was when your nose was continually running and froze on your upper lip and if you had a moustache like me that was quite interesting - an icicle covered my ‘stache.

07:30 Then when the snow started falling it was, it was bone, bone-searing cold really for us people from

Australia, very, very hard to handle. You couldn't touch bare metal or anything. The clothing that we had to wear to try and keep warm was a problem enough carrying the weight of that around. In fact we

08:00 frequently used to have about half a dozen sandbags over each leg pulled up and tied under our knees to try and keep our feet a little bit warmer. When the snow came down, actually we were warmer in the snow; you could shelter in the snow and keep a little warmer. You were away from that icy blast from Siberia, it froze everything.

08:30 We had eggs very occasionally; they were always frozen, as solid as any stone you could find. They had to be boiled for a considerable time until you could break them open and actually cook and eat them. Our rations came in a small tin, they likewise had to be pre-heated for a considerable time before you could open them and

09:00 actually cook and eat them. They were mainly baked beans I might add, and ham and lima beans too. The water in your water bottle, if you sat the water bottle down somewhere when you went to pick it up it was frozen solid so you carried your water bottle with you at all times and your body heat and your coat kept it liquid so you could drink it. It was

09:30 a complete shock to the system for the Australians. It took us a long time to learn to handle it but eventually we did. We had a few cases of frostbite. I remember one very amusing incident. I was sharing a bunker with a fellow by the name of Dixon and of course we had to sleep in our sleeping bags with our weapon to stop it freezing up and you always of course wore your boots.

10:00 But Dixon this night took his boots off and we had an alert, the Chinese came to visit us and I rushed out into the fighting pit and no Dixon. I scurried back to the bunker to see where he was and here I find Dixon with one of his boots in one hand and a candle in the other busy trying to thaw out his boot which had frozen solid. He couldn't get the boots on. That sort of thing

10:30 used to happen with anything that you left laying around it just froze solid. Weapons were the main problem, as I say you slept with them, slept with those snuggled up beside you. When you were out on patrol, ambush patrol particularly we were laying still and quiet. In my case the Owen gun, I had to keep the Owen gun cradled inside my parka to stop it freezing

11:00 up and every now and then you'd move the bolt just to make sure that it was still active. The fellows with the rifles, they had a bit more trouble than us. The Bren gunners had a serious problem because it was a bit large to tuck, inside their coats. So keeping your weapons mobile in that cold was a big problem. Keeping yourself from freezing was another problem.

11:30 We wore copious layers of clothing which we acquired from the Americans and the British. The first lot of boots the British sent us were circa the Norwegian campaign early in the Second World War. They looked fine but sitting in the stores all those years the stitching had rotted and we found our

12:00 very fancy boots falling apart on our feet which was quite disconcerting and then they came out with a better issue. We got a lot off the Americans but made do with what we could get, improvised.

Tell us about trench warfare, living in trenches,

12:30 **any anecdotes would be good.**

When the mobile phase finished after Operation Commando, 3 Battalion had taken Hill 317 then it was unfortunately lost by our

13:00 British comrades, very heavy attack from the Chinese and we were forced back to what became the final line virtually for the next two years and then it became trench warfare. Trench warfare on our part, mainly underground on the Chinese part, they dug underground towns. We lived in trenches and we had what were referred to as hoochies which was a

13:30 foxhole dug into the ground. You either dug it in from the side of the bunker and burrowed in like a rabbit. As time went on and things became more stabilised we would dig more elaborate bunkers, to wit, we'd dig down from the top maybe go down about eight feet, possibly eight feet square, put in a couple of bunks dug into the wall and

14:00 then we'd make a roof with logs, sandbags and tarpaulins or whatever we could get to keep the rain out and then cover it with soil and hopefully camouflage it again. While we were doing this the Chinese were watching us anyway, they knew where we were. And then we lived in there and there'd be two, three men to a foxhole. In the platoon and company headquarters they had bigger bunkers.

14:30 There might be four or six in some of those. The front line diggers, there were two or three in a foxhole. You'd come out of your foxhole and probably on the other side of the trench if not directly opposite, very close by, would be your fighting pit that was dug forward from the trench. It might be two or three feet forward and then it would spread out left to right. We made them as small as possible because you didn't want a big target for the Chinese

15:00 mortars to lob in so they would average probably about six feet in length, eighteen inches, maybe two feet in width. Depending on the terrain you'd try and go down about four or five feet so that you could fight from it but the deeper you could get it, the better. You could always have a firing step if you

wished. If they were too shallow well they weren't protected

15:30 enough. Sometimes they were camouflaged, depending on the area we were in, have sandbags with shrubs and dirt thrown over the top of them so it wasn't, if we were being attacked it wasn't obvious that there's a row of sandbags there so that's got to be a fighting pit. We tried to make it as inconspicuous as possible and there we lived alternatively between our foxhole and our

16:00 trench and our fighting pits.

Tell me about having to fight there, in those trenches, about the sorts of conditions that you experienced in trying to, just to survive -

16:30 **the senses that you developed, the situation with being fired on all the time.**

Probably the worst sector of our line was called Little Gibraltar, Hill 355, the Chinese desperately wanted it and we desperately tried to retain it. We were very, very close to

17:00 Hill 227 and that was occupied by the Chinese and they could snipe at us from there in the forward trenches so we used to have camouflage over the top of them and you also moved very quickly up and down the trench. The Chinese had everything on 355 zeroed in perfectly, they were absolute experts with their mortars and their mountain artillery was pretty good too.

17:30 They could literally drop a mortar into a fighting pit they were so good at it. So you lived on virtually a razor's edge. As you got past the early days of learning which mortar was coming close and which wasn't or which was shell was going by and which wasn't, they make a different sound and you learn very quickly otherwise you get carried

18:00 out in a bag. So your nerves and your reflexes were so razor sharp, when a mortar was coming in immediately in your proximity, you get the tiniest split second, it makes a 'phzt', that's the only warning you have. If that mortar makes that noise it's landing within a few yards of you and if you're standing up, you're dead. So

18:30 the troops develop the reflexes so that when they got that little 'phzt', they hit the ground and basically you hit the ground at the same time as the mortar and you lived. If you didn't, well, you were another casualty. With the mountain artillery which they fired you could sometimes hear it being fired in the distance before it reached you, sometimes you couldn't. Once again if it was landing in your close proximity

19:00 you had the slightest fraction of a second to hit the deck, if you didn't well you were gone. If you could hear plenty of noise that meant it was going past or hitting somebody to your left or right, the more noise you heard the further away it was. Coming in your proximity, very little warning. So everybody's nerves were on edge all the time, day and night, and so you

19:30 developed these cat-like reflexes and you reacted to the slightest noise. Even when I came home I was standing in the kitchen and my mother walked from the lounge room and put her foot on the lino behind me and I was over the sink doing some dishes and I swung around into a fighting crouch as if I had an armed gun and dropped them both, the dishes that I had in my hands because I was still

20:00 so attuned to being like that for the previous two years. It took me a long time to get out of that.

Talk to me about DDT [Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane – synthetic pesticide] and just the physical conditions of those hootchies and the sorts of things that would affect yourself and those others who were forced to be there.

Well our biggest problem was lice,

20:30 we used to get them on our bodies and in our clothing and what have you, and then we had the rats and mice and they carried a flea which caused a dreadful, usually fatal fever. Our nickname for it was Manchurian Fever, that's not the medical name. The only combat we had against these things because living in the line both winter or any other time for that matter, there was no washing

21:00 facilities available so you more or less stayed in the same clothes for a couple of months, changing your underwear and your socks as you could. The only method of combating these pests was the DDT, they used to issue us with a rubber bomb with a nozzle on it and you squirted your clothes, you squirted yourself, you squirted your hootchie, you squirted everything that might possibly harbour these

21:30 lice and fleas. So we literally lived in a world of DDT and in those days of course. nobody knew the slightest thing about the harmful effects of DDT. Well, I've lived this long so obviously it didn't polish me off but no doubt a few fellows suffered from it because it was just part of our daily ritual. In some of my photos you can see the DDT sprayed all

22:00 about the wall in the foxholes, in the bunkers and our clothes and ourselves. We used to shave our heads occasionally if things were very bad, shave hair off our other body parts and keep the seams of our clothing well doctored with DDT. It was the only way, otherwise you were driven stark raving mad by these lice. The rats and the mice they were another problem. The DDT didn't do anything

22:30 with them but they used to get into our foxholes and fossick around amongst our foodstuffs and our gear and nest in our equipment if they could. The rats, they were particularly unsavoury. They used to feast off the dead bodies that may be laying around out the front and come back and bunk in with us which wasn't a very pleasant experience.

23:00 I think the rats were probably the most hated and loathed thing in Korea, even more than we loathed the enemy actually.

Tell me about the enemy and your perception.

I don't know that I ever fought against the North Koreans; they were a particularly savage and brutal group,

23:30 the stories of their atrocities are endless. I fought against the Chinese basically for the two years and for one period against the Mongolian regiment which was in front of 355. They were apparently a hand-picked regiment something like a British Guards unit, well they weren't all that crash hot either because we never received any

24:00 prisoners back from them on a couple of incidents when I know they had prisoners. None of them came back from the prison camps and nor were our bodies located the next day either after the clashes with them. The Chinese on the other hand they were an honourable enemy, very honourable. They committed the odd indiscretion

24:30 like … one fellow got twenty-nine bullets pumped into him when the Chinese decided not to take him prisoner - he was wounded. They shot him twenty-nine times and he lived. Most of the time they were very honourable with the casualties. I know of one incident where one of our wounded was actually sheltered by the Chinese from incoming

25:00 fire from us, they did things like that. They were very good with the casualties after a battle. They'd have a ceasefire, we'd go and collect ours and they'd go and collect theirs. They'd allow our unarmed stretcher parties out without firing on them to collect the casualties, and likewise we'd do the same with them.

25:30 There were a couple of incidents where things went wrong. Once the Chinese, after a big clash in the Samashon Valley [?], they had a lot of casualties and we had a few and they invited us to collect ours which we did unarmed and then the Chinese in turn came out with a very large force, unarmed, with white flags. They were busy collecting their wounded when a neighbouring unit,

26:00 which best remain nameless, opened fire on these unarmed Chinese with their Vickers guns and caused quite a lot of casualties amongst them too. So that caused a bit of hate from the Chinese to our side for some time, I think they realised who did it. I don't think they ever took it out on us, but things were a bit dicey for a while after that.

26:30 They did once issue a warning that anyone caught carrying a phosphorous grenade, which they feared, it would be used on them, and I do know of one incident when I was attached to the Durham Light Infantry for a while on 355 where they captured a Brit soldier wearing one and they tied him up and

27:00 pulled the pin on it and barbecued him with his own phosphorous grenade but they had issued the warning, so I suppose all's fair in love and war. Pretty barbaric but basically they fought well and they were a good, honourable enemy. I think the most

27:30 feared weapon that the Chinese used against us was the mortar, it was a weapon that gave you absolutely no warning. If it was landing in your immediate vicinity all you got was a split second noise and it was no more than 'phzt' and that's it. Were you standing at the time you're history, you're another casualty

28:00 but you developed, your reflexes became so acute that the average digger could hit the ground at the same time as the mortar. If he got that split second sound he had enough time to hit the ground and survive. The newer members of course, the reinforcements that arrived, if they were unlucky that first mortar may get them which it did, quite a lot of our

28:30 casualties were reinforcements. The longer you were there the more acute your reflexes and your nervous reactions and actually you'd react to any darn noise after a while. Many is the time there'd be two or three blokes hit the ground because somebody's coat, you're walking along a trench and your coat would brush against the side of the trench and it gave a similar short noise and the next minute everyone around

29:00 you hit the ground. Well that was the way you stayed alive. So people became so attuned to this that you never consciously reacted at all, it was just an automatic reaction to a noise. If a mortar or a shell was going to miss you by any distance you heard plenty of noise. A la the movies you hear a shell scream in and then it explodes, but that's rubbish, if you hear a shell

29:30 scream in, it's gone past, it's hitting somebody else. If it's coming into your immediate proximity once again you get the barest of warning, once again just a 'phzt' and it's there, it's exploded and you can beat it to the ground if you're quick enough. So they were more trouble than, more trouble than the

actual man to man combat. We lost more casualties

30:00 through the mortars and artillery. I think we were all pretty well frightened of them because the Chinese were so damned accurate with them. We used to have observation pits and you'd have somebody in the observation pit all day long with glasses and peering around keeping an eye on Charlie [the enemy] and what he was doing. And after a while Charlie would be doing the same from his area and he'd spot this pair of glasses peering

30:30 over and then they'd zero it in and you can rest assured they'd drop a mortar straight in that pit. Time and time again they'd do that. So we had to alternate our observation pits for this simple reason. If you used it two days in a row, the third day there'd be a mortar in it. So you alternated around with your observation pits to confuse Charlie a little. But he was pretty good, he could drop those

31:00 damn mortars in the trenches time and time again. He put one through the doorway of my bunker once which I wasn't in fortunately. Two other blokes were. They got buried alive. They were a pretty fearsome weapon the old mortar.

Tape 2

00:44 Your most important sense was your hearing. More important than your eyesight …

01:00 To stay alive your most important sense was your hearing followed very closely by your nervous reflexes and then your eyesight came third. Most of the combat was done at night once it became a static war and of course the artillery or mortars would be any time

01:30 but your hearing, you could hear a mortar firing in the distance. You could hear an artillery shell being fired in the distance which alerted you to the fact that something was coming, but when it was landing in your immediate vicinity it was your hearing that saved you, certainly not your eyesight, hotly pursued by your nervous reflexes. Same applied

02:00 on patrol clashes where you may walk into an ambush or bump into somebody out in the valley. Your hearing first alerted you to something going on. One of my favourite subjects used to be the frogs in the paddy fields. If you were laying up on an ambush or on a reconnaissance patrol or whatever the case,

02:30 there'd be countless thousands of frogs croaking away in the paddy fields and you were quite happy listening to the frogs. Once the frogs in your vicinity ceased croaking that's when you started to get concerned, because somebody was approaching you and as they approached you so the frogs in that area shut up. You used all these little tricks to remain alive and unscathed if you could. Sometimes if you

03:00 were about to walk into an ambush and somebody in it was careless, they might cock a weapon which you could hear maybe twenty yards away. You might hear some bloke cock his weapon so you reacted accordingly. On one particular occasion when I was in a very, very awkward situation I almost blundered into a Chinese outpost and they had a field telephone in this outpost and it

03:30 just made the tiniest little tinkling sound as somebody rang them, from headquarters presumably, just the faintest little tingle, but I heard it and avoided walking into the outpost wholly and solely because my hearing picked up that little tingle. So you depended on your hearing pretty well to stay alive most of the time. If you could see it, they could see you and it was every man for his -

04:00 whatever, but of a night time your hearing and your nervous reaction kept you intact. In the day time the same applied with the incoming artillery and whatever.

Tell us about the story of your experience of being wounded

04:30 **and flown out.**

On one occasion we attacked a group of Chinese on a feature called The Mound and my patrol commander was Lieutenant Gargate - Slim. When we

05:00 launched our attack on these people there were a lot more of them than we expected and the first one to get hit was Slim, he got a burst from a burp gun, it's a sub-machine gun, across his arms, actually his Owen gun which absorbed most of the bullets saved his life. So down went Slim and quite a number of the other fellows too. So we've got a bit of a ruckus on our hands there for a while and eventually

05:30 had to withdraw most of them. Slim was kneeling on the ground, both hands badly shot up, had a grenade, had a grenade held in his hands and was trying to pull the pin of it out by the heel of his boot. So I sashayed across to where Slim was and said, "Let's get out of here."

06:00 At the same time what appeared to be the Chinese commander and his radio operator stood up in the bushes just some yards in front and he was shouting orders, I presumed to his troops to come after us, pursue us, and I shot the two of them and threw my last two grenades in the bush with them. That

brought on a lull in the shooting from the Chinese and I got Slim to his feet and I had one arm around my neck,

06:30 one of his arms around my neck, and my left arm around his waist and we were staggering down the hillside together and I heard a clatter on the ground. Once again the ears coming into action. Automatic reaction was I hurled myself and Slim to the ground and looked over my shoulder and there was a rather large anti-tank grenade coming rolling down the hill towards us just before it exploded.

07:00 As we fell on the ground Slim of course fell onto his wounded hands and he was screaming, my Owen gun was caught underneath him and then three Chinese came charging at us with their rifles and very, very long pointed bayonets and I could do absolutely nothing. My arm was jammed under myself and Slim and I couldn't get out and

07:30 they were just on the point of bayoneting the two of us and out of some nearby bushes jumped a fellow called Donny Harris and he had a Bren gun. Where he came from I have no idea but he appeared beside myself and Slim and dropped to his knee with his Bren gun, which is a light machine gun and proceeded to cut these three Chinamen down. They damn near fell on top of Slim and I and he polished

08:00 them off. So from then on we were able to, he reloaded and he escorted Slim and I back across the valley until we got to one of our company outposts where Slim was taken away by a stretcher party. It was very disconcerting watching these chaps with the bayonets I can assure you, but once again the hearing came into effect, hearing that grenade falling, hitting the ground behind

08:30 us and just automatically throwing Slim and I to the ground. If we hadn't of done that the grenade would have got us. Over a period of time living together, you had a platoon which may constitute thirty or thirty or so men and you became very matey with each other.

09:00 You had to. You depended on each other, you went out on patrols together, you did raids together. You defended your positions together and you relied on each other and you became very strong mates. And it was mateship really that bound the Australian infantry together, because basically you could go out on an action and know that if something happened

09:30 to you, somebody would look after you. If you got into a sticky situation or if you got wounded, there'd be somebody would come along and look after you and it was mateship at its best. The only time we ever lost any prisoners was when circumstances were such that it was impossible for their mates to retrieve them, literally impossible to be

10:00 retrieved except on one instance. You lived with these fellows, you lived in holes in the ground, you shared the miseries of the winter. You shared the miseries of the typhoon season when you were living in mud. Your bunkers were flooded, your trenches were flooded, your clothes were going mouldy on you. You lived in the most

10:30 adverse circumstances together. We used to laugh at each other. We smelt so much at times. You could never smell yourself because you became immune to it but occasionally you could smell your mate if he was a little bit obnoxious. So we laughed at each other and if you were short of cigarettes your mate always had some. If your food ration didn't happen to be enough, there was a mate who always had a little extra.

11:00 It was a bond that the Australians particularly achieved. I think possibly a reason was because rank had very little to do with the Australian infantry. A section commander, a platoon sergeant, a platoon commander, they had their rank, but they were respected purely on their ability not on their rank and also, they needed their mates too. I mean if a lieutenant got himself

11:30 shot up somewhere out in the bush and he had no mates to bring him in, he's one very sad lieutenant. So your mateship transcended all rank on the front line troops, maybe not so much at the rear. I don't know, I was never there. But the front line troops, your mates stuck, you know they stuck to you through thick and thin. You could always depend on them.

12:00 It was at the latter stages of the war when we were on The Hook, and I was twenty at the time, almost finishing my second year, and I was acting platoon commander, magnificent rank of corporal I might add, and I had a particularly important patrol to take out. The company commander had selected me to take this patrol out,

12:30 investigating the Chinese across the valley because they were doing a lot of attacking. So we went to the top of a hill, he showed me where he wanted me to go. Everything was fine. I went back to my platoon line, picked the men I was taking out that night and this was July, it was quite warm and midway through the day I suddenly went down with this

13:00 blinding headache and started vomiting. It knocked me around. I was just helpless and I assumed as did everyone else that I had sunstroke. Why I should have sunstroke I don't know, but anyway it was assumed that I had sunstroke. So I was unable to take the patrol. It had to be given to another, a company

13:30 sergeant major actually. Not long after that the war ceased and at the first opportunity I escaped and came home. When I got home I was very jittery, like a scared cat. Any noise or the honk of a car horn or

anything like that would make me jump. I'd spin around at the

14:00 slightest strange sound. Your body was full of electric shocks and I guess your brain also. Anyway the headaches had got so unbearable that they sent me to Heidelberg Hospital and did all sorts of tests there, lumbar punctures, EEG [electroencephalograph], the whole box and dice. They had me there for five weeks and they

14:30 could find nothing physically wrong. They decided that I had post-concussion trauma which would probably disappear in a couple of years. They gave me a monstrously large bottle of aspirin and sent me on my way, so off I went. As time went by I got worse instead of better.

15:00 The headaches were an ongoing thing all the time. The nervous reaction to any strange noise, fits of temper. I was a particularly unpleasant person to live with at periods there. I actually attacked my wife in my sleep on a couple of occasions; I tried to strangle her once. Goodness

15:30 knows what I thought I was doing, but anyway. So, at that point in time, we knew there was such a thing as shellshock or bomb-happy, which we used to call it, but nobody in the prime of life, like I had turned twenty-one just as I got home, nobody at that stage of life, least of all a gung-ho young digger is going to admit that they might be a

16:00 bit off, shell-shocked or bomb-happy so we all brazened it out and some of us paid a pretty severe penalty. I spent a lot of time in and out of repatriation hospitals including being in a straitjacket on one occasion and in a padded cell on another couple of occasions,

16:30 restrained in my bed with straps on another occasion and their only cure was pumping dope into you all the time. When they pacified you down enough after, I think two weeks or two months was my longest spell in one, and when they'd pacified you enough they'd let you loose on society once more and you'd go home and terrorise your family until your next bout. Those days

17:00 the psychiatrists didn't know much about what troubled the diggers from the front line and when you live for a year or two years on your nerves constantly expecting a projectile to come in and blow you to pieces or somebody to shoot you one night you get a bit toey.

Talk to me about the process of

17:30 **recovery and how the doctor was able to help you.**

I went for many, many years, literally with no help at all, apart from medication. I lived on

18:00 Rohypnol for forty years to get any sleep, and in and out of hospital. I didn't make life very easy for my wife and children either for that matter. Luckily I was advised of a doctor, Peter Mansey, up at the Central Coast, he'd been in the military himself, highly qualified medical practitioner, had delved

18:30 into psychiatry as well. I was referred to him and I went and saw him and spoke to him of my problems and he agreed to take my case. He did this as a hobby I might add, one afternoon a week, he began to treat me. He spoke to my wife and a couple of my children also to get a better

19:00 idea of the background. Anyway Doctor Mansey, he began by delving into me via hypnosis. Apparently I was receptive to hypnosis and he delved into my problems via hypnosis and then he, he cleared my mind, he

19:30 did a very simple thing. He asked me to think of the most beautiful place that I'd ever been and the most peaceful place I'd ever been, and it happened to be a mountain top in Korea in the autumn when the huge fogs are around, and if you're sitting on the peak of a mountain there's literally an ocean of milk surrounding you, and as the sun warms it up, so it rises, and disappears by about midday. I was sitting on this mountain top on my

20:00 own looking around at all these mountain peaks sticking out of this ocean of milk and that was the most beautiful sight I'd ever seen and peaceful at that time. So I visualised that and then Doctor Mansey trained me into climbing onto that mountain peak when I was particularly stressed out and

20:30 relaxing up there and my troubles would ease away. It was a lot more involved and complicated than that. He used to, what he used to do he'd take me up under hypnosis onto the mountain peak and then he'd bring me down the side of the mountain and he could get me down to a certain distance and then I'd go into a panic because I knew there were Chinese there in amongst the

21:00 trees. I could sense them. I just knew they were there and I was going into quite a panic under this hypnosis apparently and he had to retrieve me quickly back up the hill, through the fog, to my mountain top. He also taught me another trick whereby I took my problems a la in my kit bag and took them and hurled them over the side of the mountain. Simple, silly, little tricks but they worked

21:30 and Doctor Mansey treated me for some months and my life changed completely, belatedly forty years, forty years late, but nevertheless, better late than never. So I live an almost normal lifestyle now, but for forty years it was a bit rough.

22:00 When I had completed my first tour and was part way into my second tour the

22:30 Australian powers-that-be, decided to try and blackmail the diggers into serving on a second tour by offering them a trip home on leave. I was very put out at this so I rushed up and saw my company commander, anyway I persuaded him to send me home for four weeks leave. I was, finished my leave and waiting at the Marrickville Barracks to come back and I met,

23:00 by various means I met this young lass on one evening, I was invited to her home by her mother actually, and her name was Betty. I was trying to make advances to her cousin actually, who was a very attractive redhead. The cousin turned out to be married so all my efforts were in vain and it was time to go and Betty who had been very cool to me asked

23:30 for my address when I went back to Korea - she'd send some books. So I gave her my old platoon address, not sure that I'd go back to that same platoon. When I got back the battalion was out on reserve and we were living in tents of all things, luxury upon luxury and these chaps had just received a parcel of books and of course they were pretty rare, very rare and

24:00 it clicked and I said to one of the fellows, "Where did you get these books from?' His reply was, 'Some sheila in Sydney sent them." I said, "Ah." Anyway I persuaded him to; I told him the story about meeting this girl at Marrickville. I persuaded him to let me have the address so I could write to her which I did. I wrote to her and then destroyed the address so that they couldn't write to her. In due course Betty became my penfriend and

24:30 she used to send me parcels of books which made me very popular with everybody else and occasionally a bottle of wine inside a large loaf of bread. We became quite romantic via the mail. She sent me some pin-up photos of herself and she was a rather long-legged, busty blonde I might add, quite attractive. In those days apparently I passed muster

25:00 too, and when I was coming home via Japan I was able to send her a telegram. When the plane arrived in Mascot Betty was there to meet me. The army bus picked us up to take us to Marrickville and one of the diggers put his slouch hat on Betty's head, somebody else put a greatcoat on and we smuggled her onto the bus with us

25:30 and we duly disembarked at Marrickville Barracks where we were all given a leave pass to go for the night and I of course was taken to Betty's home and that was the beginning of, well what's it now, a forty-seven year romance I suppose.

26:00 After four months service in Korea we were entitled to five days R & R leave in Japan,

26:30 rest and recreation. So we would fly from Korea by the old Biscuit Bomber DC3 back to Tokyo, that was the main leave point, [UNCLEAR] Barracks. There we would be completely disrobed of every item of clothing, they were probably burnt, and we'd be thoroughly showered and deloused and issued

27:00 with clean clothing. Down to the pay office, draw whatever money we required in the occupation currency that we used to use, and then we were let loose on the civilian population of Tokyo and surrounds. They were quite interesting times. Most of the boys were anxious to find the nearest beer hall and they

27:30 certainly had their eyes open for the best looking Japanese maiden who happened to be strolling past. So we spent basically, I think I speak for nearly everyone else though I don't swear to this, we would spend our five weeks with as much drinking and as much romancing as we could get our hands on with the basic knowledge

28:00 that maybe the last five days we were in civilisation again, so we lived it to its full. After eight months we were entitled to three weeks, so maybe for the first week we lived rather lecherously but then by then you'd be getting tired and the money would be running low so that's when we'd take in the sightseeing and doing all the civilised things and behaving like normal

28:30 people until it was almost time to go back to Korea and then you'd probably get drunk for a couple of days then, and off you'd go. It was a much looked forward to event by all and sundry. The further a fellow was from the line possibly the less important it was to him, but the fellows from the front line were always looking forward to that R & R. It was the

29:00 saving of their sanity on many occasions and that's what we did. Well the Chinese as an enemy, they were very good, skilled soldiers. Admittedly they did these human wave attacks at times but basically on man to man

29:30 combat or patrol, patrol combat they were just as skilled as we were. In some cases they were even better; they were very good at luring us into awkward situations. They'd, I think deliberately, allow a few of their men to be seen at such and such a place maybe in a village or on a hill top or what have you, just a comfortable number, maybe fifteen of them,

30:00 and so our fighting patrols used to average fifteen or sixteen, so we'd sashay forth to do mortal combat with these chaps and frequently we would arrive upon the scene and tally-ho into these fifteen blokes

only to find that there was more like forty-five of them. They would lure us in with the smaller body and keep the larger body hidden.

30:30 They did that on a number of occasions much to our regret, but they don't have the habit of running around killing helpless victims like the North Koreans did, and like the Japanese of the Second World War. If they disabled you, they put you out of action, the chances are they were satisfied with that.

31:00 They wouldn't rush out and put a bullet in your head to deliver the coup de grace, they'd only use the bayonet on the occasion when it was necessary. All in all the Chinese were very skilled in paddy field warfare. They were very quiet. We ambushed them occasionally and they ambushed us just as often.

31:30 When we attacked them their defences were very good. We could shell the living daylights out of them and they'd be sheltering in their holes under the ground and when we rushed up the hill out they'd pop coming out of, like rabbit holes behind us, and getting us in the rear. They were very skilled at their craft, they were good soldiers. Admittedly they were trying their best to kill us as we were trying to do

32:00 to them but we were only doing our job, both sides, there was never any hate between the Australians and the Chinese. The Chinese loathed the Americans. I think that was an ideological thing really but they played a tune welcoming the 2nd Battalion into the line, or the 1st Battalion, it doesn't matter and the tune they played

32:30 as I recall was 'It's Foolish but it's Fun' and welcomed the battalion to the war and trust they kept up the standards that 3 Battalion had kept up. So they had a sense of humour as well.

Tape 3

00:42 Post World War II, Communism was the up and coming monster in those days. [Joseph] Stalin [President USSR] and his regime were spreading all around Europe and what have you, and there was a lot of fear

01:00 and also Communism was very strong in Australia. The union movement particularly was very staunchly Communist and there was a lot of ill feeling both ways, pro and anti-Communist. Anyway when the Korean War broke out and it appeared that Communism was going to spread through Asia, a lot of young fellows like myself who were

01:30 definitely anti-Communist, enlisted to fight the Communism or the spread of Communism. That was an ideological thing, but there was also the sense of adventure too with, I have to say all of us really, because if you didn't have a sense of adventure you wouldn't go over there, someone might kill you. So there was both the anti-Communist belief and the sense of

02:00 adventure that sent us there. We had our eyes opened quite considerably of course. We found that the democracy in South Korea wasn't all that crash hot anyway, and the conditions we were fighting weren't quite what we were used to living back in Melbourne or Sydney or wherever, but I think basically that

02:30 we all had a genuine belief, I did anyway speaking for myself, I had a genuine belief that we were trying to prevent Communism and its evil roots from spreading down through Asia and possibly into Australia. Indonesia was having terrible trouble with Communism at the time. So it was literally knocking on our front door and it wasn't a pretty thought so we went to try and stop it.

03:00 **Just tell us about the wounded and the chopper and whatever you can recall, take us …. take us through that ….**

03:30 **Tell us whatever you can think of ….**

We'd fought the Chinese on a feature called Concurry and got pretty badly beaten

04:00 and I was wounded by a number of grenades. They had me trapped in a nest of rocks and one of them went off not far away from my head when I was laying on the ground, so I had a head wound plus severe concussion. When we retreated from that action and staggered back through the paddy fields, I can vaguely remember I was scouting for a while until they finished up, they had to carry me on a

04:30 stretcher. My next recollection then was I was sitting in a foxhole with a bandage around my head amongst other places. I have no memory of being taken down the mountainside, but I obviously was and I can remember being put into a plastic bubble on the side of one of those little Bell helicopters. That's

05:00 all I remember, that I was stuck in a plastic bubble. Then my next recollection of the whole matter was waking up in an Indian field hospital, obviously the next morning and being fed the hottest bowl of curry I'd ever eaten in my life by the Indians. From there I was evacuated down to Weijong Bu, the American

05:30 field hospital, which I might add, and I'd forgotten about, in my sojourn there we were entertained one night by an American Negro musical unit and the hit song at that time, which they sang for us, was Jambalaya. After they'd put their show on through the various wards, racial discrimination was pretty

strong in the

06:00 US forces in those days, they went to their own little compound and they were having a drink and a sing-song around a big fire and from out of nowhere we were attacked by a rather large group of North Korean guerrillas. They slaughtered these American Negro entertainers. The poor buggers were unarmed and just sitting there drinking and singing and then they ran along shooting through the

06:30 very thin wooden walls of our wards, throwing grenades around. A young Pommy [English] fellow in the bed beside me, he made the mistake of diving out of his bed onto the floor near the big pot-bellied stove, and the Yanks used to keep a big pot boiling with tea in it, for us Brits as they called us, and it was more

07:00 like stew than tea, but anyway he dived down on the floor there at the same time as a grenade blew the boiling dixie of tea off, right on top of him so he got himself scalded from head to foot with this hot tea. It was a very exciting few moments until a nearby army unit came and chased them out but they caused a lot of trouble, killed quite a few people. So that was my recollection

07:30 of that particular time.

As vividly as you can, what it was like to hear the bugle calls of the Chinese.

Well the Chinese used the bugles and whistles …

Tell us the story ….

08:00 **…. start off with the story ….**

Well, one particularly nerve-wracking occasion was when we were attached to an American division and they had my platoon stuck out across the river on an outpost and the Chinese were desperately trying to take some real estate off the Yanks at that time, and they were launching heavy attacks

08:30 and they were attacking us at the same time. You could hear these bugles going off. It wasn't so much that there'd be a bugle or two in front of you but there would be bugles to the left of you, to the right of you and sometimes behind you as well, plus the whistles. Then usually the crescendo of artillery would follow that and then the bugles would start

09:00 rapidly approaching you, you know, and you realised that you had company and lots of it. It was a bit testing on the nerves. After a while really you sort of got used to it but the first time or two that you heard these things you thought, 'Oh my God, what's coming!' pretty frightening it was. And it suited the Chinese purpose in that fashion, they knew it was going to frighten you and

09:30 it served as their signals at the same time so it was a no loss result for them and definitely a no win for us. Psychological warfare and it worked.

Tell us about your involvement in, and set up The Hook for us ….

10:00 My particular situation on The Hook was a relatively quiet and minor one, we were slightly to the east of where the main battles were taking place and

10:30 my role was patrolling and going across and investigating the Chinese features, to try and get an idea of how many troops they had, whether they were going to launch an attack that night or what have you. So me and my mates played a relatively minor role on The Hook. We could see the Chinese building up and we were certainly on the receiving end of

11:00 their artillery barrages and we could sometimes see them actually attacking our mates and the Marines too. It was a very futile effort on the Chinese behalf, they sacrificed thousands of men, as it turned out quite unnecessarily, they had no chance of ever taking those features from us. It would have been a great achievement if they had, because they would have forced the United States,

11:30 United Nations line to fall back maybe three, four or five miles because they were the dominant features and looking over everything else, we'd have had to pull back quite a long way. So they were important to the Chinese but they were equally important to the United Nations and there was no way that we were going to let them go. So it was a killing ground for nothing.

Talk to me about the cost of …..

12:00 It's hard to put a figure on what the cost was, it was literally many thousands in respect of the Chinese. You could never say within several thousand how many because a lot of them were killed out of sight when they were forming up behind the hill our artillery and planes would hammer the living hell out of them and

12:30 when they attacked across the open fields they'd get clobbered on the way and then when they surged up the hillside they were getting massacred left, right and centre. The Chinese were always, always very good at removing their casualties, dead and wounded if they could, they'd get them out or bury them if they couldn't. So to give you a picture of how many they must have lost, they estimate there were up to three thousand dead bodies laying in the front of The Hook, in front of 2RAR and the 1st Marine, so if they left

13:00 that many behind there was an awful lot of dead men around. The United States Marines suffered very, very heavily, they lost a lot of men there. 2 Battalion got a bit of a thumping but we didn't suffer the kill that they could have because we had pretty good strong bunkers and our men could get inside them and the trenches were good and deep and strong and you could weather out the artillery

13:30 barrages to a pretty top degree and then when the Chinese arrived, well it was case of out of the ground and defend yourself, but it was a battle that you know, it was an absolute blood bath really. And our boys on 2 Battalion's front and then the 1st Marine Division did a magnificent job to hold it really.

14:00 Cost in manpower to the Chinese meant nothing to them. They would have poured in thousands more if they thought they could have taken it but they knew they couldn't so they pulled the pin then and called it quits and we all went home nervous wrecks. The public perception of the war in Korea was

14:30 almost non-existent after the initial days. I only ever saw one camera crew in two years in Korea and that was a Canadian one. The correspondents who used to do most of their reporting from Army Headquarters back in Seoul; some would venture up to the line and get some good footage. The photographers, they were

15:00 pretty rare but they appeared occasionally. We used to get copies of the Australian newspapers sent up to us by our families and there was very little reporting of the war in Korea and it had the nickname of 'the police action' which unfortunately it was brought home to me when I came home on leave that time after my first tour. Sitting in a train all tarted up with all my best gear and looking

15:30 a million dollars I thought, a young woman sitting opposite me in the train couldn't keep her eyes off me and I thought, 'This is good.' Anyway eventually her curiosity got the best of her and she leant forward and she said, "Excuse me, would you mind telling me what you are?" I said, "I'm a soldier and I'm home on leave from Korea." and she sat back with a contented smile and said, "Oh, you're a policeman." That was too much for me. I didn't have a reply to that

16:00 but that apparently was the public perception in Australia at that time. You're a policeman. Some copper.

INTERVIEW ENDS