

Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Yacopetti (Charlie) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 25th August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/578>

Tape 1

00:52 **To begin with, thank you very much Charles for doing this, from the Archive and from us personally, it's great pleasure to be here**

01:00 **and we express our thanks to you.**

You're welcome.

As I was just was mentioning a moment ago, we'll start with a summary and I'll take you through you life in a few minutes. Starting with your childhood, could you tell me a little about where you were born and your family?

Well I was born in a small village called Lucino in the very south of Italy, in Reggio Calabria and at the end of the First World War

01:30 my father decided to migrate to Australia, thank god he did. We've had a very happy and successful life in Australia. And the early years in Australia were spent in the south west of Western Australia mostly on a dairy farm in a place called Harvey. Then at the commencement of the Second World War

02:00 or shortly thereafter, my elder brother Larry who was the principle supporter of the farm, because Dad had a very bad accident in a coal mine at Collie and was a hunchback and he couldn't really work very much. He joined the, well he was called up to fight the Japanese in the Second World War

02:30 so we had to sell the dairy farm and we moved to the suburb called Kalamunda and then close to Mundaring which is really about 20, 25 miles or in these days about 30 k out of Perth.

What was he doing on the dairy farm?

Well

03:00 we moved onto a small farm about 11 acres and, mainly we were also subsistence farmers, we grew our fruit, veggies, poultry and a cow to milk and it wasn't new to us to milk cows and get butter and cheese out of them. And Dad

03:30 worked, casual labourer and most importantly my brother Larry sent back from his 6 and 6 pence per day, 6 shillings and six pence per day, he sent most of that back to the family to maintain us. And that's how I spent my childhood and I went to school. And one of my big claims to fame is that I was at school with Bob Hawke [union leader and Prime Minister] and Rolf Harris [singer and entertainer]

04:00 and John Stone [politician]. Do you know who those three are?

Yes, a different selection of people.

Quite. And from there I went to the Royal Military College at Duntroon.

How old were you when you joined up to go to Duntroon?

Well in 1948, I was 18.

Can you take us through how Duntroon happened then?

At Duntroon?

We won't go into detail yet, but you were there for three years?

Four years. I was a member of I think the first or second class that did a four year stint with the aim of advancing us academically to the point where we could attend the university afterwards and complete a degree. Which I did,

- 05:00 entering the engineering specialist but just before the final year there was a fairly strong demand for junior leaders and platoon commanders in Korea and we were given the option of changing from our chosen specialisation and to get a years special training as infantry platoon
- 05:30 commanders in order to go to Korea, and I chose that particular path. I graduated in December of 1951.
- Were you sent off to Korea shortly after?**
- Not quite, then I think at that stage the pace of operation in Korea had subdued a little so there was no need for me, some of us went up there straight away but there's
- 06:00 I was posted to Western Australia, to the 6th Recruit Training Company and where I met my future wife of 41 and a half years. And eventually because there was no call forward of reinforcements, we decided to marry in August and I think it
- 06:30 was in the following month I went to Korea.
- When you arrived in Korea it was very much the static phase of the war there?**
- Yes
- Can you explain where you served in Korea and what you did there?**
- Oh well I was a member of the 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment in the 28th Commonwealth Brigade. We had two Australian, two British battalions with supporting arms of course and
- 07:00 we served mostly around, the actual operations I was involved in what we used to call Hill 355 or Little Gibraltar as it was commonly known. And we were also reserve battalion for any counter attack or operations that may have been required in the Commonwealth Divisional Front. That's
- 07:30 in the period I think was November 52 to September 53, I think I was released.
- Were you taken prisoner at Hill 355?**
- Yes in front of Hill 355, yes.
- Where were you taken after that?**
- I was taken to a, should I say a hoochie, do you know what a hoochie is?
- You can explain it for us if you like?**
- A dug in
- 08:00 place where the soldiers live, when they're not actually manning the weapon pits on the forward slopes. And you know it's a hole in the ground revetted so that the soil or the earth doesn't fall on top of you when mortars and shells go off nearby. And that was on the reverse slopes of one of the features facing Hill 355. That's on the enemy side
- 08:30 **You remained in that area for how long?**
- About a week.
- About a week?**
- Six days I think it was. I was there being interrogated for about six days after which it became quite clear that some of my wounds were starting to smell a little bit gangrenous so they moved me by stretcher I estimate about one or two miles further back.
- 09:00 That's about four kilometres further back into an underground hospital where I was given some injections and some blood plasma, cause I'd lost a lot of blood. I was there for another six or seven days and then bit-by-bit I was moved by stretcher-bearers and the last phase in a vehicle
- 09:30 back to what became the POW [Prisoner of War] camp which if fact wasn't a POW camp, it was a staging post for Chinese casualties, where they had rested for a while and hospitalised and given medical attention but it was also a staging post for POWs on their way back to the big camps on the Yalu River. But because the end of the war seemed
- 10:00 fairly close they kept us at the staging camp and that became our POW Camp.
- How long did you spend in that camp?**
- Oh about two months, just over two months.
- Your release coincided with the end of the war. How did the release happen, can you take us through that?**
- How the...?
- How did you end up being released, can you explain that?**

Oh yes, when the armistice was signed we were informed that

10:30 we would be released soon, but it was almost a month before we actually were transported, this time in vehicles transported back to Pyongyang I think it was or close by and was released there. Which was a great day for all of us especially as in my case I was met there by a brother in law of mine who was also in 3 Battalion

11:00 in my battalion in the regiment. And he had a wonderful letter from my wife waiting to give me. After that I was taken into custody as it were because I was one of only two officers that the Chinese had captured and nobody was allowed to talk to me until, that is nobody other than official army representatives

11:30 were allowed to talk to me until I got back to Australia and was debriefed. By someone who's not quite friendly with Major Burton Barr. Well that's a quick version of the release.

How was your health at that stage?

The first month or two wasn't too good. After that,

12:00 I had quite a few flesh wounds and lost a lot of blood but I had no life threatening injury or wound. And by the time I was released I was at the stage where I could virtually throw the crutches away and walk on a walking stick, which was good.

After the war had finished and you had been

12:30 **debriefed in Australia, what became of your career from that point?**

Oh it's, I think I had a very normal Australian Army officer's career. I had regimental and staff appointments you know, and served with the National Service Training Battalion in Western Australia. Then I became adjutant of what we used to call a Citizen Military

13:00 Force Unit, CMF unit, because we had quite a reserve, a sizeable reserve in those days. And I became adjutant of Western Australian University Regiment in Western Australia then I served as Instructor, School of Infantry, I did a Staff College, I went to a Pacific Islands' regiment and then I went to Instructor at Jungle Training Centre in Canungra,

13:30 I've forgotten what happened, oh yes then I went to Army Headquarters, my God. And rubbed noses with all the bureaucrats and that's where I started to learn how the country was being run. Eventually I finished up as a major in the Military Operations Section of the army and was one of a small group that planned the Vietnam,

14:00 dealt with the Vietnam War. And after that I went to the Joint Services Staff College and at the end of the Vietnam War and all I could see many years of peacetime soldiering moving around with a family of seven children, every two years and we decided to call it quits and I resigned.

Did you retire entirely at that point or did you go onto something else?

No, I went and

14:30 worked for the Australian Schools' Commission, which had just been formed, I don't know whether you've ever heard of the very big educational initiatives that [Prime Minister] Gough Whitlam and his government brought in through the Schools' Commission and I got a job as the director of the general current program there. And I worked there for eight years and by this time we only had two children left at home, we put them to boarding school,

15:00 St Pats' in Goulburn and I went on the land. And I've only just recently come off the land, last year I sold the farm in Bemboka.

Back to dairy farming?

Oh no, I was too sensible for that. All that action. Never forget it once youI used to milk about six cows every afternoon after

15:30 school and before every morning I went to school. Often used to go to the little outhouse behind the house and separate the cream from the milk, manually turning the separator because we were mainly concerned with the butter fat for the butter factory at Harvey.

It's probably a little bit different to that now?

It's all mechanised and automated.

You mentioned seven children; can you tell me a little bit about your family?

16:00 Four girls and three boys and they're all over Australia. Although I now have two in Melbourne which is, before that I only had one in Melbourne and one in Canberra, I had one in every capital city in Australia, that's a result of all the moves. My first wife of 41 and a half years, well she put up with me for 41 and a half years, bore me seven children, took the brunt to bring them up too, because of the army I was often

away. Moved house

16:30 14 times, we established a new home for me and my family. They don't make them like that any more do they?

Grandchildren?

Eight of my own and I've got the five or six that come from the second marriage. So I'm very fortunate in that regard.

It must be very difficult to organise a family that large? Too many different places.

17:00 Oh no let them, give them full rein and let them organise themselves

When was the last time you were all together?

The last time we were together was their mother's death, the funeral.

When was that?

1994, January 1994.

17:30 **There's lots of gaps there but now we'll go back and sort of flesh those out a little bit. I'd like to start and talk a little bit about your early childhood. How old were you when your family left Italy?**

Nine years old, I was almost nine when I got here.

What are your memories of Italy before you came out here?

Oh, I can remember the home where we lived and now that I've been back last year, yes that has now set itself in concrete

18:00 in my mind but it was much as I remembered it. And I can remember the daily chore was to take the goats and pigs etc that we had down the paths towards the creek flats where we had holdings, that's where we grew out vegetables. We were subsistence farmers that's what we were. And if we didn't grow anything, we didn't eat because the cash economy just didn't exist. That's how

18:30 primitive it was. And that's my brother and I, that's Larry the one I was telling you about before. Actually he was in charge and we'd take our stock and graze them and look after our particular plot where we grew whatever it was, mainly lupins and broad beans, what's that type of cereal called I've forgotten now

19:00 **Which type of cereal?**

Lentils

Lentils, okay.

Because you can dry them you see and have them as food for winter. And our chief what should I say; town or centre administration perhaps was a day's donkey ride away. And it

19:30 was very steep and hilly but I can remember my mother and often coming down to where we were on the valley and bringing back the large rocks each weighing about you know 40, 50 pounds or more

20:00 on her head and that's how she managed to build the small shack we had into a reasonable home. Dad had, whilst this was going on was up here in Australia trying to earn some money to pay our passage over from Italy to Australia.

How long did he spend in Australia before you were able to join him?

Well he moved out here I think in 1921 and we moved

20:30 21, 22 then he couldn't save sufficient money to pay the fare and he had this accident so he came back to Italy for a couple, that's how my younger sister and I were born. Then he came back again because things in Italy were even worse, no better, especially in our area. And then of course the Second World

21:00 War really loomed up large on horizon so they said, "Sell everything, borrow what ever you, how much money you can from relatives, get tickets and come out." and that's how we came out.

What connection did your family have with Australia, why would your father choose to come here?

My understanding is that he considered America as well as Australia. And I think on his way out, he even stopped somewhere in

21:30 America. Didn't like what he saw or couldn't get a job or whatever and just continued and finished up in Fremantle.

Is that where you arrived as well when you came to Australia?

Yes, in Fremantle.

Can you tell us your memories of arriving in Fremantle?

I think the interesting memories are on the ship, rather than Fremantle. Fremantle was just a port.

Tell us about the ship, who was on the ship?

Don't tell the Dockers [Fremantle's Australian football team] that or you'll be in trouble.

22:00 But it was a pretty downmarket, little oh well, I won't say shanty, just a port. Well, see I'd never been on a ship in my life. I really hadn't been at school, we didn't have books or anything so I didn't know what ships and the sea was like but we soon found out and was most interesting but the real eye-openers were when we stopped at

22:30 our first port at Port Said [Egypt] and we look out the windows and there were these huge black people with great bunches of bananas, cause we'd never seen black people and Mum really got a bit worried over that. And she I think made my younger sister and I, Rose, hide under the bunk in the cabin and she took Larry out, the older brother out to find out what was going on and were we in any danger. And

23:00 this is pretty rough in places coming across the Indian Ocean and we landed in Perth and somebody who said he was Dad turned up, picked us up. I couldn't remember him; I was barely two years old when he left.

It must have been very strange for you to meet you father at that...?

Yes it was. And we moved

23:30 from Fremantle to a place near called Capel near Harvey while Dad was negotiating to buy this small dairy farm and we rented a place in Capel for about 2 months and it was all very strange. It took about a days travel in very bumpy utility. I've forgotten the friend of days that had a... came and picked us up. And brought us to

24:00 from Fremantle to Capel and it took a whole day to get there. I can remember that. And I can remember my sister sat on a bull ants nest cause we didn't know anything about bull ants and she nearly had to go to hospital because of the reaction to the stinging by these ants. And then we moved to this dairy farm, pretty close to the

24:30 Harvey River and we stayed there for 5,6,7 years.

What other things apart from bull ants, were difficult to adjust to when you arrived in Australia?

I think the only other difficult thing was in fact the attitude that a lot of the people had towards us being aliens at that stage. The fact that Dad was naturalised wasn't

25:00 of much value and yes I guess we were ostracized to quite a substantial degree at school and that continued until after the war.

What sort of things would the school children do?

Just push you or trip you or pull your clothes,

25:30 just annoy you. I can remember my first pair of shoes that I'd had in my life and Mum and Dad had bought. And coming home in the bus one day because I could see all of a sudden I had shoes, which I hadn't had before. And the little beggars tore the shoes off me and threw them out the window, out the bus window and I got a clip in the ear from Dad for letting them do it. That taught me

26:00 a good lesson in future stand up for yourself.

Was that a lesson that you'd learnt?

I suspect subconsciously that has governed my attitude to life a little.

What your father's advice or you experience being ostracized as a child?

Both.

Did you understand the political situation behind it?

No, I do now

26:30 and of course it doesn't matter, once you understand it you can cope with it. But in due course things improved. I found that if I fought back then they thought twice about having a go at me in the first place. That's the important lesson. And if you just let that develop, acceptance follows in due course.

27:00 **How tough did you find it with the language when you first arrived?**

Oh I wouldn't say that it was tough. We were encouraged by Mum and Dad to learn and through us learning they learnt too. Although Dad didn't have to, he could cope quite well. But and you know if you're 8,9,10 and you go to school and

27:30 all these things happen to you in the playground. And eventually you play football. By the time I was 13 or 14 I could speak quite well and I write reasonably well sufficiently to pass exams but there's a deficiency as a result of not learning

28:00 the language from the time you are one in your family surroundings. I mean there was a time when I was still thinking in Italian and then having to convert to English. That no longer applies, I now think in English and if I wish to speak Italian, I've now got to convert from English to Italian so there's been quite a turn around.

28:30 But I don't necessarily find it as easy as you might to always pick the right word in the right spot and that's something that you know you can't solve. Give me a minute to think about it and I'll find the word, that's not a problem but it doesn't come to me like it comes to you because the environment in your home, you listened to Mum and Dad from

29:00 the time you could walk, make sure that you develop that way.

As opposed to being conscious or subconscious, yeah I understand what you mean. What did you know of the war, when you were out in Australia?

War, what was war. I didn't know anything about the war; I just wondered what it was that Mum and Dad were worried about. Of course when I come here then

29:30 and Larry went to war and low and behold once we were in Harvey we actually got a radio, in the home. A radio, second hand of course, we couldn't afford a new one. And yes then as the news came the pictures began to emerge, there was the goodies and the baddies. That's the first impression,

30:00 I've modified that view a little since as a result of broadening my perspective and my education etc. But, yes that was there was an evil force out there and we had to knock it.

Where did your brother serve?

New Guinea. God, I forget whether it was Lae, Finschhafen and Jacquinot Bay.

Was he sending back money to the family, but were you hearing news from him

30:30 **as well?**

Oh yes got a letter but you know letters were censored but you could tell us what he was doing and whether he was well or not.

How would you describe that time for your family, was it a difficult one or a....?

I'd say a bit turbulent, changed schools that was,

31:00 I think we handled that better than perhaps a lot of others might have. Work was very hard to get, especially with Dad with his incapacity. In those days you didn't have things like Invalid Pension and what have you. We had to watch every penny. We relied a lot on what we grew on the farm to get by. We were wondering when the war would finish

31:30 and Larry could come home, yes a little bit unsettled but I don't think that it really coloured our attitude or the way we thought very much. We had to survive it and we survived.

What did you think of the general Australian attitude around you towards the war?

Oh, by the time the war was finished I was fully inside

32:00 yes there was a war and we had to win it and if we didn't it would not go well with us. Yeah I was supportive I understood the Australian concern. I started to understand what in fact war meant.

What did you understand it to mean, when you made that realisation?

I think bit by bit especially when I went to Perth Modern School

32:30 I learnt that if you wanted to get up one morning and get from point A to point B you just did it. You didn't have to apply to anybody for permission to go. And it meant that, especially at the end of the war you could throw all your ration coupons away, you could go to a store and get whatever tea or sugar, meat, milk you wanted instead of having to watch

33:00 the coupons because you couldn't. Petrol was rationed and after the end of the war you could go along and buy whatever petrol you wanted. I didn't realise at the time what freedom of speech and the capacity to write and what have you meant, that came later but they're the things that I can remember, the materialistic things.

What contact it any did your family still have

33:30 **with the wider relatives in Italy?**

Very little. There was no interchange at all for the duration of the war because Italy had decided to go on the wrong side. And it was three or four years at least after the war before

34:00 normal diplomatic relationships were established. In fact there was regular exchange of mail, by which time some of our family, I gathered had died, especially on Mum's side. And I'm not sure what happened to two of Dad's brothers. One of them came out

34:30 just before we came out. I did hear that the other one went somewhere to South America but I don't know. So there wasn't really much of a family base left in Italy. When I went back recently, I met my first cousin, she's a diabetic, but she's still alive and

35:00 I also met Rosa who was a girl apparently we used to play with. She lived opposite where we lived. Opposite means her entrance was there and ours was just here. Pretty close. And clearly I'd say she was the girl that my brother Larry or I would have married had we stayed. And well my first cousin now has

35:30 children; her sister or another cousin has children. And their children made us welcome for the week we stayed there. But there's no really broad family base left in Italy for us.

How did that affect your Mother and Father when they first came out here?

It didn't affect Dad very much he's very

36:00 flexible fellow. Copes with change, he did cope with change quite well. Mum's quite different yeah. I think, with great respect for my darling Mother, she resented the fact that she had to move, family and friends there. She didn't make friends very easily out here because really there weren't all that many

36:30 Italians where we went. Although in Harvey there's an Italian POW Camp not far away and those men often use to come out and do some work around the place. Most of the people that Mother might have made good friends with and enjoyed a normal social life were in fact in Perth.

37:00 But we were always way out bush somewhere. And in due course she learnt the odd word of English which she used when she had to. But she understood every word but her pride wouldn't let her speak it.

How did you all communicate at home?

In Italian.

Did

37:30 **you bring friends into your house at all?**

Yes,

During the time?

Oh yes. In due course I had two special friends one was Peter Crow and the other was Hedley Firth, Hedley's dead now. But Peter Crow's a surveyor, still alive in Western Australia. I saw him 3 or 4 years ago and we were often together. In those days,

38:00 we three of us were members of the school cadet force. We were allowed to take our rifles home with ammunition. You can imagine what it would be today. And we use to go out behind my place in I don't know whether you've heard of the Mundaring Weir. The weir that they use to pump water up to the Goldfields from. Well there was plenty of bush around the weir there, we spent many a weekend shooting and camping and fishing for catfish in the river or the weir.

38:30 That wasn't a problem, Mum and Dad encouraged us to have Australian friends. Dad was pretty switched on really. He realised that we had to do things to become accepted. You know make up your mind you either want to be an Australian or not. Not like today you've got to....shall I say curtail to all

39:00 the cultures and say please come and join us. Dad was very pragmatic in many ways. He said to my older brother Larry on a couple of occasions, the only way we're going to become accepted is for you to fight on our side. In fact he tried to get Larry. I believe Larry did volunteer to join the A.I.F. [Australian Imperial Forces] and it was indicated

39:30 to him "No thanks the A.I.F. didn't want Italians, wrong side. No, we don't care if you're naturalised, not on". Until of course the Japanese came into the war and they said "You're naturalised, you can come". So I don't know whether that answered your question.

We'll have to stop and change the tape.

00:30 **You mentioned you were into the cadets, what were your other interests as a young man?**

What was?

You mentioned the Cadets was one of your strong interests at school what were your other interests as a young man?

01:00 Could you repeat your question please?

What were your other interests as a young man?

Oh I think I used to go fishing, bushwalking, riding, and shooting. Other than that it was just work, as I say we had to keep ourselves mainly and just do the homework, that's quite

01:30 a busy school life because Dad wanted me to be an engineer and for that I had to have chemistry and the school I went to Midland Junction High School didn't offer Chemistry so within their very meagre means Mum and Dad paid for me to go to Perth

02:00 to the Technical College one night per week and I stayed with friends overnight and from there caught the train back to school the following morning. So I had a pretty full school life. I can never ever remember having to say gee what am I going to do now. And they were the other interests. Very normal but it fully occupied all the time, never had time to get into trouble.

02:30 **Can you tell us a bit about those trips up to Perth? That must have been an exciting thing to do?**

Oh eye-opening. Well the first thing of course was the streets and all the buildings, all the people and lights at night. You walked around the streets, and there I was on my own a youngster walking miles between where these

03:00 people lived to the Tech College, I was never accosted, never once had any cause for concern, how different it is today.

What was the Technical College in Perth like?

Huge solid brick building, dark but had chem. labs in side, I learnt chemistry.

Did you enjoy chemistry?

Oh yes so much

03:30 so that I learnt. I can remember that I learnt that if we put a penny in some silver salt, I think it was silver chloride or something like that, it would deposit silver on the penny and make it look like two shillings and the fellow who shared

04:00 the bench lab, the bloke who benched with me said why don't we make a few and see if we can..... to some fellow who had an ice-cream shop down the road, to see if we can pass it onto him and get a couple of ice creams. I was a bit hesitant but I said o.k. lets give it a go and we did that and of course the fellow looked at it. It looked so shiny and new he turned it over and said oh get out of here,

04:30 he woke up to the fact to what we've done. But yes I think it's a bit like woodwork and metalwork we did, it's something you can actually, you can experiment and do with your hands and you can relate that which is going on in here to what you're doing and that's something I like and you know

05:00 I've been on the land ever since, whenever I could be and it's because of that and you've probably walked down those stairs, I've spent the last 3 or 4 months doing a like of work, putting in that internal access which wasn't here when I bought and putting in shelves, that's me.

What were your ambitions then?

Oh, I was going to be a great engineer, as I indicated. And in fact I'd

05:30 had won a what was called, what was it? Was then called a Hackett Bursary to study engineering for 5 years at the University at Western Australia. And I'd even been accepted into an Anglican college as a resident of the, I'm a Catholic, the Anglicans took me in. And then acceptance for Duntroon

06:00 came and Dad said oh well you should go to Duntroon, it's a great education, absolutely free and I think that further his notion that these are the things we had to do if we wanted to be accepted as Australians, so I finished up at Duntroon.

How did you come to apply for Duntroon?

There was an ad in the paper, a free education and Mum and Dad said why don't you apply? And I did.

06:30 **Was it very much your father's insistence or was it...?**

No it wasn't his insistence but strong suggestion shall I say.

What were your thoughts on joining the Army?

Had you given me a return ticket in the first 6 weeks of Duntroon, I wouldn't have stayed in Duntroon. It was quite unnerving but sure we put our nose to the grind wheel

07:00 and stuck it out and no it was great after that.

Why was it unnerving to arrive at Duntroon?

I think it was unnerving because of the sudden change in lifestyle. It wasn't unnerving because of attitude problems.

07:30 My brother, the whole 65 of us knew that we were all in the one barrel, in trouble as a junior class. And oh, here was acceptance like I hadn't experienced before. I was just one of the boys, one of the team. And that's a great thing to be said for Duntroon. But there's this very strict regimentation.

08:00 We had quite a bit of it in the cadets, I was in the cadets for three years so, but not quite like it was here. We went through a bit of what is now called bastardisation. We use to call it initiation.

What was the initiation at Duntroon in those early days?

Well they use to make you put bricks in your pack so that it was really heavy and take you for

08:30 a ten mile route march at the double and then you'd get back to the gym and do all sort of things. They'd make you strip and you had to sit on the top step of one of the blocks and slip down from step to step jumping and landing on your bottom. They use to get you in the gym and get you to

09:00 walk up one of the springboards; you know a springboard in a gymnasium. Well when you're blindfolded and the room is dark you don't know that it's a springboard because you're led in blindfolded and they say right now we're going to take you up a long steep slope of a board and you're going to jump at the end and with a bit of luck you might fall in the water but you might not. And then they walk you slowly and at the end of the springboard you've walked about 2 or 3 metres but you think you've walked

09:30 about 50 metres and you're 7 or 8 foot high and in fact you're only at 2 foot high and you jump off the end and there's a mat there to catch you. But you know that sort of thing. It's pretty harmless. Physical but you know nobody. I think one of our fellows during a vault or something fractured an arm, but he might have done that doing normal

10:00 a normal exercise in the gymnasium.

What was the discipline like?

Strict. If you were caught drunk - out. If you were caught smoking, the first time you got at least three weeks confined to barracks, the second time out.

10:30 Yes if you, any major misdemeanour you were out, that's apart from the Regimental Discipline. You always walked around marching, looking smart, head up and all that sort of jazz. That's not hard to take, but it was strict. Routine was strict, you got up at a certain time, you

11:00 went to class at a certain time. A bell rang and you went to meals, and a bell rang and you went back to your room to study and you were supervised in your study. The Company commander came round, one of the senior cadets, they were called our lord and master, they were our mentors, each of us were allotted a mentor to look after us for our first year. They came round to make sure that you were studying.

11:30 You got up at a certain time each morning and you had to strip your bed, so that the orderly ops could come round and see that the bed had been slept in, whether any night emissions or whether there was you know a reason for medical attention. Yeah it was a very sudden change in lifestyle

12:00 and things were really done by the book. But on the other hand a very healthy life, very active, supervised, good education, practical aspects rather than theoretical aspects like most universities focus on.

How did you respond to that change in lifestyle?

As I said the first six weeks I would have gone home willingly.

12:30 After that well everybody else was getting on why shouldn't I.

How did you get on with everybody else?

Well.

Can you tell us a little bit about the other blokes that were in class at Duntroon?

Oh sure, in fact I suggested to your director that he might like to interview a couple of others whose experience in Korea and Vietnam were substantial and would

13:00 have quite a bit to contribute. In fact he lives up the road about 1 hours drive at Dalmeny and he was

our senior classmate, John Hooper, Brigadier John Hooper. And very friendly with someone I'm sure you know, General Digger James.

Yes.

In Korea lost both legs, mine.

13:30 Who else, I don't know whether you've heard of another fellow quite well known General John Gray, he was the Federal Police Commissioner after leaving the army. He's a member of mine, he was a Western Australian too, we were together at the Perth Modern School with Bob Hawke and company.

Where did these blokes come from, well you came from the middle of nowhere I mean?

All walks of life. Yep, yes. A lot of them came

14:00 from the middle of nowhere too. Cause it was a really levelling experience, especially the fourth class. There were sons of millionaires there but he was only allowed 10 shillings per week pocket money, like I was. Parents were not allowed to send money. You had to take 10 shillings a week out of your

14:30 miserable little pay packet you got. You had to pay for your own laundry and that sort of thing. Naturally when you went home your parents could spend as much money as they wanted but you, if it became known that you brought money back and you were spending money in order to accommodate yourself to a much more lavish lifestyle than the rest of your colleagues you were in trouble.

How did you respond to that mixing pot of different backgrounds and influences?

15:00 Very pleasantly, it just this is Australia. It's one of the things that tells me this country's worth fighting for.

Was there ever any reaction to your Italian background?

Oh yes. Some of them use to say which opera are you going to sing now Charles. I had no problems with nationality, there at all.

15:30 **Who were your commanding officers at Duntroon?**

Well,

Not necessarily names but what sort of people were they?

Oh well one fellow you probably wouldn't know, would have heard of General Sir Thomas Daly, he became Chief of General Staff, he was our Commanding Officer at Duntroon. Company commanders I had he's now General Jim Norry,

16:00 he was also my commanding officer in Pacific's Island Regiment and also my company commander in Korea, there's the adjutant, Stewy Gordon. Armoured fellow, very good soldier, great sense of humour, just unflappable. The there was

16:30 our instructor in military history, Major McQueen, Moose McQueen we use to call him. And judging by the looks of the just ex-coach of the Wallabies, I think they're related. And who else, oh yes there was General Major O.D. Jackson, Odis we use to call him, he was responsible for my demotion.

17:00 When we went to Duntroon everyone had to play rugby and I was, there were five teams and I was in the fifth, fifteen training list. And it was a game I couldn't really get my hands on and I was walking back to our barracks one afternoon with a West Australian friend of mine Bruce Boyes.

17:30 And I said Bruce I wouldn't mind this damn game so much if I didn't have to spend half the time on the field with my head stuck up someone's backside, because I was lock or something. Little did I realise that just behind me was Major Jackson who was the coach. And I got called into his office the following day and he said you know young Yacopetti you might make a good hockey player and he was right I did. I was transferred from the

18:00 rugby training to hockey and I was quite a good hockey player.

Were there many sports as part of your training at Duntroon?

There's tennis, athletics, swimming, cricket, football and the last two years Aussie rules was allowed to be introduced. So yes and boxing.

18:30 **What sport did you prefer or excel at the most?**

Hockey I suppose, I became captain of the second eleven and on a couple occasion played for the college in the first. Athletics I could run a fairly fast 100 and run a mile too. In fact I use to run a mile for the school back at

19:00 Perth Mod and boxing I did a bit of boxing. I wasn't a star in any of them but yeah I got by.

What was the atmosphere of the Military College of those early days of the Regular Army? Was it new or exciting?

It was certainly new, at times it's exciting, at times it's a bit of a drudge too. A routine like that can get boring and if the Officers in Charge

- 19:30 aren't aware of it, you know it can lead to trouble. But by in large they organised it in such a way that there were outlets for us and we were encouraged to mix socially. Every year there was the 4th Class Tennis Party when a lot of the young girls, lasses from Canberra were invited to come and partner us, how to make contact. And a lot of life long relationships and marriages resulted
- 20:00 from things like that. We were allowed to go hiking on weekends, and they'd provide, the college would provide a vehicle usually big GMC trucks 6 x 6 because we always us to go out bush a long way away that's how we could take some grog, where nobody could see us and had the odd fag without getting into trouble. And go fishing. There was a,
- 20:30 we played the annual rugby match against the GPS, the Greater Public School of Sydney that was always a highlight. During leave we were allowed to go home. Those of us that live in Perth and the Government couldn't afford to pay us an airfare we use to go to places like the personnel transit depot Melbourne or in Sydney; I use to go to Sydney
- 21:00 mainly. Yeah at times it could get a bit boring but there was plenty of variety to keep a normal young man in those days quite happy. Not enough to keep youngster today occupied and happy, but enough for us.

You mentioned the tennis parties, could you tell us a bit more about those? What sort of occasion were they?

- 21:30 As tennis was one of the approved sports, there were 4 or 5 courts and our mentors were responsible for making sure that their girlfriends got their girlfriends to come along and be part of the function. And we were introduced; blind dates if you like to call it. But we were introduced to some very nice young lasses, lovely
- 22:00 lasses too. And we played tennis and that usually resulted in, there was afternoon tea and we chatted and it usually resulted in invitations to go out and visit families and that's how it went, it developed from there.

What did you see of Canberra?

Plenty of Canberra, very small in those days. Great open paddocks and spaces between the suburbs, not like today.

- 22:30 The Defence Complex wasn't there at all, neither the Academy nor the Russell Hill complex. It was all training paddocks. We use to ride Bren Gun carriers or drive Bren Gun carriers across those places. That's armoured personnel vehicles, it would be the equivalent today.

You mentioned your mentor, your lord and master, who was your first mentor

- 23:00 **at Duntroon?**

David Johns, New Zealander, Kiwi.

What sort of things did he teach you?

He made sure that I knew the routine. For the first week, right strip your bed and if there was a sheet touching the mattress you were in trouble you know. Right you go to the shower and you wait until the senior class has showered and shaved and then you. That type of thing, made sure that I studied, that I was in my room when I should be and all that sort

- 23:30 of jazz. And as I say made sure there was a lass for me to meet at the tennis party and at my introduction to the social life in Canberra at least on it's way.

Was that a friendly relationship or was it a bit of a, a kind of intimidating one?

No, I don't think it was either. But it was a relationship that is necessary and I think both parties responded accordingly.

- 24:00 I wouldn't say I was a great friend of David Johns. It's just a little bit too, not standoffish, a little bit too serious for me, as you know I like to quip quite a bit. But yes he did his job well.

What trouble did you get into?

Do we have to cover that? Oh

- 24:30 well I can remember one of these occasions when, I think it was in fourth class, the first class and we were doing signal training and part of the signal training was to take off in a vehicle drive 60 miles out bush and then set up a radio and then see if we could establish contact with Base. Because that's what you've got to do as a signal. And we went out this day to

- 25:00 Goulburn from Canberra, and the day was like yesterday. It was howling, it was wet and reception was lousy so we eventually got the word that we were to close up and return home and we'd had such a bad day that on the way home, we each had about 10 shillings in our pockets and we thought why don't we call in at the pub
- 25:30 and have a drink, because it was one of these occasion when perhaps there weren't any of the officers around we could indulge a little bit on the sly. A friend of mine who now lives down the road here and I, between us, what was left of our pocket money we afforded a bottle of sweet sherry, which we bought, and we got back into the truck and another couple of
- 26:00 colleagues of ours had bought a bottle of Old Kedge rum, I don't know whether you've heard of O.K. Rum, anyway. When we started the long trip back, in those days in the G.M.C. About 4 hours drive from where we were, way down the side of Goulburn, dirt tracks and all. Anyway to warm ourselves up we drank a little bit of this, it was our intention to throw the bottles out before
- 26:30 we got to the college, but somehow or another it turned out that our two other colleagues didn't like the rum it was too raw, and my friend and I were too scotched to see such good grog wasted. And the story goes that about half an hour outside of the barracks, my friend Peter was
- 27:00 passed out asleep and I was almost in the same state and went out singing out La Paloma, which was a very favourite aria of ours and the story goes that we were rolled off the truck when we got to the sig. hut. Somehow or another we acquitted our sig. stores and we went home and I had enough sense to set the clock for
- 27:30 4 o'clock in the morning. And when we woke and Peter was very sick eventually we got him to the sick parade and I went on parade and oh how close I was to vomiting, you've no idea. Had I vomited, I would have been out. But that's the sort of trouble, the worst bit of trouble I got into. There's also the, all the other scrapes
- 28:00 that make you remember things. You do things that you shouldn't do on parade and somebody makes a story out of that.

Could you tell us about your time at Perth Modern School, some of the characters

28:30 **you knew there?**

I think I've mentioned the most notable one except Gary Gagnia was someone, have you ever heard of Gary Gagnia?

No.

Well he was well on the way to becoming an Australian Champion Swimmer when he left Perth Modern School, had he pursued that, that's what he would have been. He was fantastic in the water, but wisely I think he chose the task of acquiring

29:00 wealth, which he did, he was a millionaire in the next 4 or 5 years.

Rolf Harris you sat next to I believe, is that right?

Yeah I did on two occasions, only because he was in the arts class, I was in the science class but on one occasion when either it was his master or our master was sick and we had to joined an on a couple occasions I sat next to Rolf Harris. I didn't sit next to him week after week. But we all knew Rolf, as is his want now

29:30 if he was, when we were in the playground he usually had a mob of us around him, especially down in front of the tuckshop which you know an ice cream or delicatessen just down the road, entertaining us with stories or jokes or whatever, that was Rolf. Quite a gifted fellow.

Did you find that you stayed with kids who were from migrant families at school?

30:00 I suspect I was the only migrant there I don't know. No I didn't mix, the people I did mix with I think I've mentioned already people like Peter Crow and Hedley Firth, then there was Shemburg, Harold Shemburg I was very friendly with. Graeme Glick.

During World War II did you find you had any direct prejudice

30:30 **directed to because of your Italian background?**

Yes

Can you describe any of those particular incidents?

I think that well I've described some of those when first the war started. I was telling you about how we got ribbed and...

What did they call you?

Oh dago or

- 31:00 some name like that. Iti [Italian], Musso's [Mussolini's] friend or something like that. The odd barb was thrown at us regularly in the bus or in the playground. Once at school, I think at Perth Modern School one fellow only started to push me around because of
- 31:30 and he called me a dago and harking back to say I learnt the lesson that I had to stand up for myself, a fight ensued and I won thank goodness, but after that there was very little ostracization occurred.
- 32:00 **During that period when you went onto Duntroon, did you consider yourself, Italian, Australian or British?**
- That's a good question, Oh there was no question that I was very aware of my Italian heritage but I tried very hard to be an Australian. I didn't have to try very hard; bit-by-bit it became natural. I liked living in Australia; it's
- 32:30 not very difficult to listen to Mum and Dad as to what their youth was like or what my youth would have been like had we'd been back in Italy compared with what we had here and what we were doing here. I think this was at this stage where I stopped thinking Italian and converting to English, and started thinking in English and converting to Italian, that's about the time I went to Perth Modern School.
- How British did you feel? Australia was a very white British, Anglo Saxon, orientated society.**
- Oh you know the
- 33:00 Australia side hadn't developed that stage, it was all British. Our school, our school curriculum was straight out of British educational hierarchy. Sure we learnt all about [Admiral] Nelson and [The Duke of] Wellington and it was yeah British to the tee really.
- How close were you interested in the Anzac tradition?**
- 33:30 I hadn't really heard about it until I went to Duntroon. Then it was a result of military history and the Anzac tradition came to light, the birth of Legacy and what that stood for. This new military culture started to open up and I absorbed it.
- 34:00 **What was your political upbringing?**
- Well you see, there was no political upbringing, no politics as such. No party politics in Italy. There's the powerful and the rich and they call the tune.
- I'm thinking more of your home, your background of your parents and what they introduced you to?**
- Having come out to Australia. I think by in large
- 34:30 Dad was would have voted Labor, I don't think I've ever asked him, what he voted. But I've often heard him voice his view against what some of the unions were doing. This is going back early days but even then Dad could see some problems with what the unions were doing.
- Did you ever have to take a citizenship ceremony?**
- 35:00 It's funny you should ask that, the answer is no. Because having come out when I was eight, almost nine I came out on my fathers passport and therefore I was a citizen by virtue of being on my fathers passport and I was still a citizen when I went to Duntroon. It wasn't until 1991
- 35:30 when my first wife then Barbara before she died, had to go to London for my sons wedding. Matthew's married an English lass. That I applied for a passport and was told that I can't have a passport because I'm not an Australian citizen which I thought was funny seeing that I've been an army officer for 26 years held
- 36:00 this nations highest clearances but I'm not an Australian citizen. And apparently it transpired that I didn't know that once I turned 21 my citizenship by virtue of being on my fathers passport no longer holds and I had to become naturalised, so there and then I became naturalised so I could get a passport to go to, so that's the only citizenship ceremony I under
- 36:30 went. And it was quite funny that, I believe that the same thing happened to my brother Larry because he was in the unit in New Guinea when he turned 21 and his commanding officer called him up and said well, you lucky fellow you have two options, you can stay with us or you can go to the other side, you're not an Australian citizen. Larry said well I'll stay with you, so he signed and he's an Australian citizen.
- 37:00 **Did you speak to, what did Larry tell you of the Second World War when he came back?**
- Oh I don't think he told me that much, especially since very shortly after he came home, I went to Duntroon but yes he explained some of his interesting experiences. They had to go from Perth over here to the East to do training and because of the shortage of
- 37:30 transportation vehicles, they came in a cattle truck on a train.
- Did he express any opinion, or what opinion did he express about you going on to join the**

regular army as an officer?

Oh, I don't think that Larry expressed an opinion. Dad was the guiding light in this move and

38:00 but by and large, my elder brother has been my real mentor in life and he was supportive and well lets face it. As we did back in Italy when he used to be in charge of our forages he took me under his wing, cause I used to work

38:30 most weekends and also during the school holidays. And he would look after me when we went to work in the Voya Quarries or when we went to cut timber for these pumps that use to pump water from the Mundaring Weir to the Goldfields. And whatever I did he was there supporting. I don't know that I can answer your question

39:00 other than to say, he never said yes it's a good move or no you shouldn't, war is hell. Perhaps he should have but he didn't.

Can you tell us about your graduation ceremony?

Oh well, it was a memorable occasion.

39:30 For two reasons. I had a lass that I was very keen on, in fact we got engaged that night, we were hoping to marry, but I think her father was not for the marriage, he was an ex-soldier from the Second World War in the Middle East and I maybe misrepresenting here

40:00 or maligning him but I think he saw what the brutal and loss and essential soldiering could get up to. And I think he was a bit worried that he was a widower, that his only child, only daughter was getting married to an army type. That caused problems but yep that was memorable from that occasion because I had asked her to marry me and she said if she can talk Dad around to it she'd love to marry me.

40:30 But you know that's of these areas that perhaps shouldn't be, go beyond the archives

That's all right.

because she's probably still alive. The other notable aspect about the graduation was I had an interest in photography and every ball we used to,

41:00 I used to sort of be the leading light in the camera club and we used to set up the little tent inside the hall, we had special lights and all the cadets with their young ladies would come and we'd take their photos and charge them a few shillings for each copy. And the other memorable incident was that

41:30 by this stage of the finally I'd risen to the lofty heights of a section commander which was one up above the cadets and my section had looked after me very well throughout the year, always covering for me when I was late back from leave, they put a dummy in the bed and make it look as tho I was asleep so the duty officer wont check again. And I told them that I would

Tape 3

00:51 **About your experiences in Italy and the boys brigade?**

Oh yes, it was part of education actually in Italy,

01:00 not that we received my schooling there as I recall a teacher used to come to our village from our regional centre once, twice per week, days per week. And we the very young who was learning to read and write went to school of a morning and I think the more mature students went of an afternoon. And part of that

01:30 education experience involved an idea that Mussolini had in order to induct us into his fascist line of thinking and it consisted of us being given a black shirt and a Balilla tie, in fact the Boys Brigade as you mentioned or as you called it was called the Balilla.

02:00 And we wore this cap and yes we were taken to our street, outside our school and marched up and down a couple of times. I think they were trying to teach us some patriotic fascist song, which I don't recall. It wasn't, it didn't involve any military training as such, it just involved a little bit of hype to keep

02:30 in front of us the fact that there was a fascist goal to be achieved and we were in due course going to be part of the process of achieving that goal. Does that answer your question?

Yes indeed, but it's a fascinating experience for having gone through that?

Looking back, yes it was interesting but at that stage you know you're like anyone else in the school, you're told to don this and do that and that's what you did. I

03:00 didn't read anything sinister or all that wonderful into it at that stage. But looking back on it as you say it must have done something to mould youngster's thoughts in a particular line.

Do you remember getting any indoctrination into the ideologies of Mussolini at the time?

No. I may have but not that I can remember all I can remember is

03:30 being taught a little bit how to read and write.

Moving into Military life. You've graduated from Duntroon and you've gone onto a command. How did you find your first experience of commanding troops?

Interesting, I was posted to a unit called 6 Recruit

04:00 Training Company which was commanded by a very solid, good soldier we used to call him Major McKenzie, Buggar McKenzie we used to call him, who called a spade a spade. Very down to earth, he knew what soldiering was all about and knew how to handle diggers too. He was a good soldier. And he taught me a lot but one of the first things that struck

04:30 me was how much trouble my diggers could get into. And to be perfectly frank, looking back a little while later on I realised that quite a number of them came into the army to escape from trouble. Whether it was from the police or from a domestic circumstance, which they didn't want to be part of or for some other reason, yes.

05:00 Looking after diggers is a real problem. And one that you have to accept if you're going to make good soldiers out of them. It's probably the most important role that a Junior Leader has. It's to get to know the soldier, what makes him tick, what his problems are, what his strengths are, that's the art of being a good junior leader and getting the soldier

05:30 to become successful soldiers.

Can you describe a time you first had to employ that philosophy?

Yes I called for the chaplain, because that's what was needed. Yes this chaplain went and investigated this situation and said his view

06:00 was that it didn't matter what the soldier did, the situation at home was beyond repair. And so I went along and spoke to the company commander who agreed, in fact the lass concerned had rung the company commander first, the company commander gave me the job, I got onto the chaplain, the chaplain gave it to me and I got back to the company commander. Does that answer your question?

Well actually no can you tell us the details

06:30 **of this?**

Family break up, he'd married the wrong lass, and he'd got her pregnant. He was married to her and the child was born and he didn't want any part of it. Don't ask me why, but he didn't.

How does that affect you as his commanding officer?

Well, she rings the company commander, comes round and says hey one

07:00 of your blokes, sort that out. And if affects him because he's unhappy, he's not paying attention when your trying to teach him do this, you want him to go out on the training exercise for three or four days, he's going to camp out and he says "Look skip I've got problems the police are looking for me" or "I have to front up to court or got to front up to some other domestic situation."

07:30 he can't avoid, it affects you. You're training him though and that's what happens.

How were you finding this? This is somewhat outside military training I would have assumed.

Well that's what people think and maybe that's how it is today but in our day it was an essential part of your soldiering. Today perhaps I understand, when I left the army we were moving in this direction we had

08:00 officers with special training. To undertake this welfare kind of work. But you don't have those officers in Korea or Vietnam, the problems are still there and you've got to solve them.

Who were the troops that you were commanding?

Just Australian recruits, coming in to the army for the first time and bringing in their problems, mind you it wasn't

08:30 just the troops that had problems, a couple of the officers were in trouble as well.

Australia had just learnt from World War II. Were there people involved who had gone through World War II?

Yes, Major McKenzie was ex company commander during the Second World War he was thoroughly

- experienced, as I say he knew all about the problems soldiers got into, he knew how to handle them
- 09:00 and I guess basically I noticed what he was on about and how he approached things and probably modelled myself a little upon him.
- The training you'd received had it trained you to fight a World War II war or had it trained you to fight Korea?**
- Oh definitely World War II, it certainly wasn't a Vietnam War nor an Iraqi War, it's completely different.
- 09:30 **How well equipped were you to go and fight in a force that you eventually did go and fight in, the United Nations Force, in Korea?**
- Oh reasonably well I suppose. We'd received 4 years of training, we in fact had achieved a certain level of skill in all the principle techniques of war.
- 10:00 Knowledge about weapons, what supporting arms can do for you and when you use them. Knowledge about men.
- What is that knowledge about men that you describe?**
- Just then?
- Well generally what is that knowledge about men?**
- Well eventually it comes out, you have a particular patrol to do, who will you select? You've got, you're in a situation somebodies go out on
- 10:30 and who will you select to be in charge of that group going out. Now to do it, perhaps I could quote an incident, which occurred, in my platoon in Korea that demonstrates that my platoon sergeant was a fellow called Sergeant Ray Simpson, have you heard of him? He won the Victoria Cross in Vietnam, he had a Japanese wife
- 11:00 and you recall there was quite a bit of publicity about how well, we as a Nation treated her, or otherwise being the wife of an Australian V.C. [Victoria Cross] winner. But he was my platoon sergeant, and in my platoon I had this used to call them K Force enlistee, he was a member of the United Kingdom who joined the Australian Army because there was a war on in Korea and that was the best way of getting there and seeing the world in the process.
- 11:30 He got there and all of a sudden realised this wasn't what he joined for, it wasn't what he thought. And I got wind through the men that he's a bit morose on his own and wasn't really pulling as a member of the team. And anyway at the time it came his turn to be on patrol, and I rostered him for patrol and his section commander came to me and said "Look Skipper
- 12:00 I've got to tell that private so and so says he's not coming on patrol." And I said "What do you mean he's not coming on patrol, of course if you're roster on patrol, you go on patrol." "Sorry sir." he says "He's not coming." I said "Look give him half an hour and if then in half an hour he hasn't come for a patrol rehearsal with his equipment, he's to be placed under arrest and sent back to Company Headquarters." And Ray Simpson said "No, no, no, skipper don't do that." and I said "Why not."
- 12:30 and he said "That gives the platoon a bad name, you let me handle him." "Oh." I said "Oh all right." Anyway to cut a long story short, apparently he went to him and said "Look the way that you're behaving you're giving the platoon a bad name and we don't like that and this is our platoon." And he said, "Too bad and I don't want to go and I'm not going." and Ray said, "Well I'll get a couple of men
- 13:00 and one will grab you by, each will grab you by one arm and you're coming." And he said, "All right you can drag me there but I'm not bringing my weapon." He said, "That's all right you can't bring your weapon but we're taking ours." He knew how to handle the men, knowledge of soldiers. I would have done the copybook thing, disobeying an order on active service, very serious.
- 13:30 **Did he go on patrol, this man?**
- Yes he went on patrol and took his weapon. Not that he stayed with us long, we found reason to transfer him back to a non-combatant role in due course. But you see that's I don't know whether that answers you questions.
- 14:00 There's a technique in handling men, which by that stage Ray Simpson had mastered better than I had. He had a lot more experience in it too I might add but he's ex Second World War. I suspect Bugger McKenzie would have handled the situation probably somewhat similar fashion.
- You were a pretty raw recruit and you're quite young, how much are you learning from these old hands when you**
- 14:30 **first went out to your first command?**
- A lot. I learnt quite a bit in the 6th Recruit Training Company where I was telling you that I first went on actual service my first posting. Not only about that I had, that I was responsible for solving my men's problems as well as training them, you couldn't separate the two.

15:00 It's probably different today but in those days they were one and the same job. I also learnt that there's a limit to which you can be aloof and the officer if you're going to be a junior leader. You've got to go and take quite a few

15:30 steps towards gathering or developing, engendering a friendly easily to approach if you expect you men to respond in a way that you'd want them to. It's

16:00 giving me concern earlier on, the Americans sometimes are quite different and the officer rules by the book and it doesn't necessarily work.

When you leave the military college, I'm just curious are you able to lead what I call a secular life. I mean can you separate your personal life from your professional life. Or are you more like in the priesthood or somewhere where the Military is everything, there's no division between?

16:30 That's what it was like when I graduated. But you see a few years later, I think quite a few years later when I was in the Pacific Islands Regiment. I expected my platoon commanders to behave or to adopt the attitude that I had as a young platoon commander. And one said, "Fair go Sir you expect me to be." what'd he say, "Like a missionary". I said, "Yes that's exactly what I'm expecting you to do. You've got to be with them

17:00 24 hours a day learn what they're thinking, what they're doing and if they're not doing anything, find them something to do". I said, "It's like have children." this is the term I used to him, it's just like having children. You're responsible for their welfare, it's like being a parent. Again I gather it's a little different today as a ...?

This is before you had kids?

Yes,

When you were over there?

No, I had kids by this stage;

17:30 this was the Pacific Islands Regiment.

No but when you first went?

Oh no I hadn't had any kids then.

Did you really feel that or were you just sort of somehow learning it yourself to actually embody the military life?

Oh no, you see the theory of it had been taught to us in junior leadership discussion at the Royal Military College but as you know the theory is quite a different to practice. But

18:00 being aware of what was required I had no problems in accepting that as part of my role. I didn't find a problem involving myself in their personal problems if that became necessary. I didn't say, "Oh you've got to be wary of the notion that he's more trouble than he's worth, wipe him". That gets to be a dangerous attitude.

What attitude do you have towards somebody who's not pulling their weight?

18:30 You just do what you can to make him a member of the team and if that proves to be unfruitful then find something else for him to do, put him somewhere else. Everybody has a lot that they can give; your job is to find which spot he's best used in or her.

19:00 **How were you finding life in the military in those early days?**

Oh, I quite liked it I think.

How happy were you?

Oh very happy. Lovely young wife seemed to be a somewhat successful career, getting paid regularly. You know it's...

Can you tell us when

19:30 **you got married and tell us about how that came about?**

I think I mentioned that before briefly, it was towards the end of my posting in the 6th in Western Australia, in April. My company commander had noticed that I was, hadn't quite entered the social

20:00 life of the unit and of Perth generally. That I wasn't going out weekends, I was quite happy to stay at home, or go to the races and then come home. And somehow or another it turns out that he was talking to one of the personnel officers at headquarters of Western Command. Oh I believe you had a Duntroon graduate posted to your unit

- 20:30 how's the young fellow getting on? So this was mentioned and low and behold the next thing I know I received an invitation, almost like a tennis party again, received an invitation to go to this family gathering to which this personnel officer at command headquarters was going to with his wife and there I met her sister. I think we knew each other one week and we were engaged. And then it
- 21:00 turned out that, oh I'd already told my company commander that I had become engaged in Canberra but that things weren't working out to well, Dad wasn't, because she was, Mary was oh only just turned 18 I'd just turned 21 and we couldn't get married without Dad's permission. So that wasn't working out too well. And obviously
- 21:30 Dad suggested that I should, or had worked out that I should be persuaded to take more what shall I say, start going out into the community and living life as a young
- 22:00 man, should instead of staying home at weekends and just training up the troops. And so I met this lass and we were engaged and oh then the call came that I had to come to the eastern states to go to 4 Battalion to train as a reinforcement for Korea because the casualties seem to be escalating a bit. So I came over and then I was expecting to go in any
- 22:30 minute, this was in June. And by the middle of July, I hadn't been called forward so I went to the commanding officer and said, "You know when am I likely to be called forward." and he said, "I don't know" and he said "Why?" and I said "Well if I'm not going go forward to Korea for a couple of months, I'd like to go back to Perth and get married." and he said "What?!". Anyway after a long
- 23:00 discussion he said "All right. Why don't you get married anyway." he said, "If we do get a call for reinforcements there's 4 or 5 others we can send in the battalion, go and get married". So I went back and we were married in Mid August and I don't know, she came back with me and I think the end of September, October I went off to Korea.

Can you describe first meeting your wife, it was a very whirlwind romance, it sounds like?

- 23:30 Yes I went to this party and this personnel officer said I'd like you to meet my charming sister in law. I looked at her and she looked at me, then it clicked like that. And for 41 and a half years later, ovarian cancer took her. Just as the good times were coming. Don't tell me life's

24:00 fair.

No. You come from a fairly traditional Italian family, was there any pressure from your mum and dad to marry an Italian?

No. By that stage Mum and Dad realised they'd lost all influence, once I went to college, unlikely to.

Did they come across to your graduation, do you remember?

No. Mum wouldn't have travelled. She would have had to fly or go on an aeroplane. It was all we could do apparently was

- 24:30 to get her on a ship to bring her out to Australia.

How aware were you of what was going on in Korea?

Oh pretty well aware. The, as I say we all had radios and televisions in those days, no we didn't have television then, but the media was full of the stuff. If you cared to read it. And to be perfectly frank I don't think

- 25:00 all that many people were very conscious of the fact that there was a war. But here the army certainly was and there was a lot of information coming back on what was needed in the way of training and what was happening, so the army kept us informed.

How keen were you to go to war?

Oh very keen. Don't ask me why?

I was going to?

- 25:30 I don't know, I guess all youngsters my age, all my colleagues and that were keen to get up there and show their metal and perhaps substantiate their purpose in life, this is what they enlisted for and they'd done the job, maybe even come back a hero, I don't know.

But was that the reason you enlisted?

- 26:00 I don't think it was the reason that I enlisted but that's what you developed. I mean you just were one of the team. You know we all thought the same we all trained the same, we all had the same thing in mind. That if we wanted to be Army Officers, successful Army Officers we had to have experience, this was an excellent way to get experience and we were there to fight wars

- 26:30 and this was a war. And those who didn't go and didn't have experience would be disadvantaged later on. And it was a way of proving ourselves to our peers and the community that we were going to be

men. If that means anything to you. That's true, that's what men are like,

27:00 well they use to be in my day I don't know now.

Can you tell us how much you knew of what you were fighting for in Korea?

I suppose like the rest of my colleagues could see the real threat of the looming communist movement throughout the world.

27:30 And this was probably as good a way as any of halting the spread of communism which was, well lets face it they had set it out quite clearly in the Comintern [Communist organisation for the spreading of socialism worldwide] which we got copies to read, that the aim was to over throw the capitalist system right throughout the world and substitute

28:00 it with a socialist system. And I don't think I was that slow in picking up the message I was quite easily convinced by the shall I say, the play of the day that said communism is nowhere near as

28:30 successful as a system of government or as a way of life as the system we had and it should be resisted. I'm not sure that everybody in Australia agreed with that. But to be perfectly frank, I don't think all that many Australians were really concerned about the communist threat or

29:00 about the Korean War. For a start they'd just been through a war where the menfolk were away 4,5,6 years at a time, some of them never got home during that period. And there were a lot of casualties and I don't think all that many Australians wanted to repeat the process so shortly after the Second World War. I think the other things to that

29:30 they didn't see it as an immediate threat, the danger of Chinese or communist landing in Australia and imposing their will upon us, that was years away yet. And also I think that a lot of people didn't see it as a national responsibility, that

30:00 was United Nations, America was responsible for that, the United Nations not us, we have to contribute that's fine, we'll send troops but you know it was of no immediate pressing concern to them. That's my reading of the public attitude, which was quite different to the military attitude, those of us who studied it were concerned about the prospect of the spreading communist threat.

What was the feeling in Australia at the time that you went, because the war had entered a static

30:30 **phase and it had been going on for a couple of years before you arrived and they'd been advances and retreats up and down the peninsula and fought to a stale mate. What was the feeling in Australia about Australia's commitment to the war at this time?**

I think I've described it, it's a war hopefully the cease fire would come soon but if had to kept going for a while I don't think it would have really

31:00 cause either any of the political parties any major concern. There was we'd bought a commitment and we were happy with it right, well not happy with it, we were prepared to follow it through. Unlike the Vietnam where there was 50% of the population wanted out now, that was the difference. It wasn't apathy on the part of the people, they were aware there was a war there and they were aware there were casualties

31:30 and that really affected some Australians but it wasn't a war that affected everybody personally like the second one. In the Second World War see people were rationed so it affected them. They had to go to factories to make arms, ammunition and uniforms, everybody was affected, this wasn't the same subject.

Do you remember having conversations with your civilian friends or colleagues at

32:00 **the time?**

Oh yeah.

What did they tell you about their...?

I guess what they told me that I rephrased when I said to you. "Let's hope it's over soon, go over there and do a good job."

Did you have much contact with civilians in this time?

Yeah sure.

Did you have your school friends from Perth when you went back there?

Yes.

Did you socialise with them at the time?

Yes I did.

- 32:30 The same colleagues as I mentioned before, they were there. My wife's family had a wide circle of friends, civilians, contact with them. My family, six brothers and sisters, and some of their friends too. We spoke about it, just generally there was
- 33:00 **an acceptance of the fact there was a war and that we were part of it and we had a commitment to it, but certainly wasn't that sense of urgency and desire to succeed and bring the enemy to their knees like there was in the Second World War. But then it wasn't a divided nation like we were over the Vietnam deal.**
- Do you recall having any particular conversations**
- 33:30 **with people especially when you knew you were going to Korea?**
- Yeah.
- What was their response when you told them you were off to Korea?**
- Oh, basically they said "Oh are you happy with that, lets hope you come back safely". There's, if it answers your question nobody said to me "Oh gee I don't know what you're going over there to fight this war for, it's not our war." that element wasn't there. Does that answer your question?
- 34:00 **Well, I was really interested if there was any because either way it's sort of interesting to know the national mood at the time, which you left Australia in?**
- Well the national mood, that was part of it but also we were really getting into stride. We'd just overcome most of the repair work that had to be undertaken to convert the
- 34:30 nation from a war footing back to a peacetime footing and expand. We were beginning to see the deficiencies in the labour market if we were going to have an economy that was. You know we had great plans, the Snowy Mountains scheme was going, a big decision had been made at the end of the Second World War that we were going to develop our own car, the Holden. Do you know by way of reparations
- 35:00 from the Germans, Australia was offered the whole of the Volkswagen automotive outfit, not only their motor manufacturing, their design, their research, their transmission, their hydraulics, the lot and we said no thanks we're developing our own. We could have had it for nothing. But that was the national mood; things were going right, things were happening, objectives were appearing.
- 35:30 The Korean War was just part of it.
- You're no longer going off to fight for the British Commonwealth?**
- No.
- You're going off to fight for the United Nations, can you tell us what you knew at the time of this nations body, the United Nations?**
- Oh, well I guess some of us wondered whether it was any better than the League of Nations and looking at it now, we might have been justified.
- 36:00 Although that's probably a harsh criticism of the United Nations at the moment. I think most of us saw it as a good idea, or a good bubble against communism. I do think that the Korean War did slow the communist
- 36:30 movement down quite a bit. I think it shock them, not necessarily shock them, surprised them to see how readily quite a large number of nations came together to offer resistance to the North Korean and the Chinese military ambitions of the day. I think it quite shocked China to see the firepower that could be brought to be, especially from
- 37:00 American armaments, especially the airforce. The United Nations complete master of the air in Korea really rocked Mao Tse Tung [Mao Zedong, Communist revolutionary and chairman of the Peoples' Republic of China 1949-58] to his toes. Anyway perhaps more about that later. Because already the
- 37:30 notion that America was going to be the back bone of the resistance to Communist expansion had taken hold and ANZUS [Australian New Zealand United States mutual defence treaty, 1951] was being developed. And heard of the SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] Pact?
- 38:00 And ANZUS and SEATO are both allowable or legitimate permissible developments within the United Nations, out that nations could get together for their mutual protection and development etc. So yeah the United Nations was a good thing but it was becoming clear that because of the Russian
- 38:30 influence in the United Nations we would have to move outside of it a bit to achieve our security and other developmental goals. I mean the only reason why we got to Korea was because for some reason or another and I've forgotten what it is [Andrei] Gromyko [Soviet Union diplomat, foreign minister 1957-85] the Russian foreign minister had abstained from attending the United Nations Security Council meeting and the Americans said, "Right this is when
- 39:00 we can get the United Nations Security Council to authorise a United Nations resistance against the

North Korean advance". Otherwise it wouldn't have happened that way it would have had to happen some other way. And so the United Nations was a good move and I think by in large it has often proved to be a good move but just as often it's probably been an impediment to progress in the world. But a realisation had already

39:30 come that we would have to form other forms of cooperation and on the periphery of the United Nations charter.

We might just stop there.

Tape 4

00:36 **Lets move back onto your personal experiences as a young commander, can you tell us about your embarkation and leaving for Korea?**

Oh yes, well a great friend of mine, in fact he's dead now Colonel Bruce Boyes and I were two sub-lieutenants who were drafted to

01:00 go to Korea together, we were call forward in a bit of a hurry. All of a sudden there'd been quite a bit of activity and a few casualties and we had to go. We took up a draft of I forget it was 8,9,10, 11 soldiers with us as reinforcements. We turned up at Mascot airport and some of us were on our own there because our families were on the west, most of the soldiers had

01:30 you know mums and dads and girls there to say their farewells and who should turn up but a fellow called Wilfred Burchett [Australian left-wing journalist]. Have you heard of him? Well he was one of the few people who were very anti the Korean War but only as so far as it was resisting communist expansions, he was a communist and sure in those days

02:00 whilst I don't think too many Australians were terribly concerned about the fact that communism would take hold in Asia well I wasn't because I knew the grounds in which communism develops and flourishes were not here. We all had jobs, we were doing reasonably well so. So I wasn't concerned but a lot of people were but and Wilfred Burchett

02:30 was part of the group that was pushing the communist socialist line for Australia. And he and the three or four of his lackeys had turned up because he was going to China on a mission which would assure the Chinese that the Australian trade union movement, that's one of the things that I don't want repeated, I've got a brother in

03:00 law who's very senior in the Trade Union Centre, Peter Cook who's a terrific guy, don't get me wrong but you know. Our information was that he was going to China to assure them that the trade union movement was solidly behind the Chinese freedom-loving people. And a couple of his retinue had been drinking

03:30 and had chosen to poke some jibes at well my men they were in the draft who were in uniform going to Korea and I think a couple of diggers, especially those who were there without their families and their girls were about to take to them. Anyway we got that sorted out, and we didn't have to call the police. Fortunately I think

04:00 the good thing about it was the aircraft's about to take off, it was a big help. Anyway we landed at Manila and he fortunately had to catch another flight from Manila to wherever it was, Beijing or as it was called then Peking.

He was on your plane?

Yes,

How did that happen? Was this not an Army plane?

Oh no, we went by civil air.

Civil air?

Much cheaper if you've only got 9

04:30 men to move. You can't fly a Herc for 9 men from Richmond to Kure [Japan] or wherever it was where we landed, it's very expensive.

There were 9 men?

There were 9, 10 or eleven of us. I think there was Bruce, myself and 9 others. 11 I think it would have been.

Who were these men?

Just reinforcements going up to replace casualties or people who had finished their time in Korea. Just

like myself a reinforcement.

05:00 **Very small contingent, or was that quite...?**

Quite common.

Quite common to send...?

Perhaps later on we should talk about the pro's and cons of changing units, changing holus-bolus or keeping one unit there all the time and just feed in the reinforcements as people become casualties or ill or finish their time and come back and be replaced.

There was tension between those two groups, the groups that were already there and those that arrived?

Not true, no.

No?

05:30 Those that were in my battalion the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment we were inclined to say "We've been here all the time" and we knew what its all about but the others you. And sure the battalion that goes up to relieve another battalion in total does have a little bit of acclimatisation and also needs to get

06:00 used to the type of warfare that's being fought whereas the units that's been there all the time is ophey with it, you know it rolls on. But there're disadvantages in that too. I remember as a platoon commander I had my men replaced on about 7 or 8 different occasions, 2 or 3 at a time. And you've got a whole new ball

06:30 game fitting these people in, learning who they are, what they, see you haven't trained with them you don't know their strengths and weaknesses, you haven't had time to weed out those that don't make good line front line soldiers and transfer them somewhere else. You've got to do that whilst you're in action. Which is not a great advantage tactically but it's, advantage in other ways that in, it's much cheaper nationally, for example

07:00 we move 9,10,11 by civil air instead of having to fly a whole Hercules [plane]. We get to the stage where there's always the old experienced hand to pass on the knowledge to the new, so if you're in static warfare like we were, the rotational system as we call it, it doesn't really matter that much, it's quite o.k. But if you're in

07:30 sort of rapid moving, more aggressive attacking operations then the extent to which you train together before as a team especially in co-operating with supporting arms like tanks and artillery is quite important and it's best that you do it that way. Horses for courses I think is what they say. But anyway to get back to...

Those problems getting to know your reinforcements must be double when you're a commanding officer

08:00 **and you're reinforcements? How difficult was that?**

Oh, yes when I arrived there, well perhaps I can go back a little further?

Why not?

See in my training for Korea, was fairly general back here in Australia.

08:30 There was nothing specifically Korean orientated in my training except we knew that the emphasis had to be on patrolling. The specific Korean emphasis was to be given to us at a 2 or 3 weeks course at the school called the Battle School at Haramura in Japan, which was commanded by another West

09:00 Australian Officer Jack Gerke, whom I met later on. Anyway when we got there we moved in such a hurry that we missed the Battle School at Haramura because you know officers were needed up front and I can remember, I've forgotten where we landed, I think we landed on the flight from Manila at a place called Kure and there we got a boat and went to Iwakuni [air base, Japan] where

09:30 the people responsible for moving us to Korea looked at Bruce Boyes' and my documents and said, "Oh you two haven't had this needle, that needle or the other needle". And we said, "Oh." and he said "We'll soon fix that sirs". This medical sergeant put about 6 shots in one needle and hit us with

10:00 all of them. You would never do that today but in those days you know, nobody really fussed about that, got it. I passed out, Bruce Boyes vomited as I recall. And the following morning somebody shook us and woke us and we were put on an aeroplane to get to Kimpo [airport, South Korea] which was where the nearest military landing strip to the commonwealth division, where we were going

10:30 was located. And we stood there wondering if somebody would meet us, looking lost, couldn't see anybody until an Officer who was you know another West Australian, Major Bill Finlayson was coming back from his R & R [rest and recreation] in Japan. And he looked at us in Australian uniform and said, "What are you two doing here?" "We're just sent here". "Oh." he said, "Anybody here to meet you?" We

said, "Not that we can see." he said "Well I'm not going to leave you here, you're obviously coming to the, to our Brigade, get in the Jeep and come with me". Anyway on our way to, up to the 28th Commonwealth Brigade where the two Australian Battalions were, he was 1 RAR he said "Which Battalions are you two going to?" and we said, "We don't know" and he said "Oh, in that case," he said, "I'll make the command decision and you boys you come with me and you Yacopetti you can go to 3 RAR".

11:30 I can't help but feeling that he selected Bruce because he looked a lot less sick than I did. But that's how we finished up in the 3 Battalion and presumably somewhere along the line the paperwork caught up with us and eventually we were posted to the appropriate units.

How did you feel about that apparent disorganisation at the time?

It didn't appear

12:00 to be really disorganised until we landed at Kimpo and nobody there to meet us. Up til then we things had happened, we got on a plane, we were told to get off, you go to Haramura, no you can't you haven't got time to go to Haramura your going straight ahead, we were shot we were put on a plane, it wasn't disorganised it was all happening then we wondered what the hells happening here. So we didn't really, and then of course after that we were too busy settling in to worry about being disorganised. It didn't appear to

12:30 be all that disorganised in fact when you look back it probably wasn't but somewhere along the line somebody slipped out and some bit of paper hadn't got somewhere for us to be met. Which is not all that traumatic really. Anyway...

What were your first impressions once that had been sorted out?

Oh well, got there and I was welcomed into the battalion and allotted to D Company and I was made commander of 10 Platoon and my company Commander

13:00 Bill Morrow said to me, "Well you better get yourself you know briefed, find out what's going on" he said and he appointed a colleague of mine he was at Duntroon. I can't remember whether he appointed John Burns to take me around or whether it was Neil Paramor to take me around but whichever way it was I spent the day with this fellow and he took me to all the four platoons, explaining this that and the other and I can't remember

13:30 whether it was John Burns who took me to Neil Paramor's platoon or whether Neil Paramor took me to John Burns's platoon whichever it was we were standing just on the reverse slopes where the enemy couldn't see us talking about this that and the other and all of a sudden there's a "Shhhh, shhh" and all of a sudden I find myself standing on my own and the other two are flat on the ground. And that was the first and last time an incoming mortar

14:00 beat me to the ground. Fortunately it was, it landed over the other side of the ridge line and was quite harmless, but you know that was the first day. And after that I settled into my platoon, I was give the platoon commanders notebook and for the first 2 or 3 days all I did was go around and meet all my

14:30 men, find out what they were doing in their weapon pits or in their hoochies, check the platoon commanders book, which is a very important item.

Can you explain a bit more about the platoon commanders notebook?

Yes its something, which is fairly crucial to the platoon commanders art or

15:00 role of leading his platoon. It had all sorts of information in it not only personal information, like you know, date of birth, and next of kin, and wife's name, number of children etc, if one gets hurt or killed and either you or the company commander got to write. It's pretty important

15:30 something in which you register everytime he goes on patrol or out on a listening post or what happens if he's wounded or suffers illness and has to go to hospital, all this sort of thing is terribly important.

Was there other information in there?

Oh yes what his civilian skills were so it gives you an additional

16:00 option to employing him in a most useful role. I said before you've got to find out what spot you could best employ him. It has information about what his hobbies are, any pre existing conditions, medical conditions, whether he's been wounded before,

16:30 or if he comes to you as a medic or a signal or something then perhaps he can come to you with a pre-existing conditions but you may not necessarily take him out on patrol.

How was this book physically organised, was it a folder, what did it look like?

No, notebook about that big or as big as you want it. I can show you the

- 17:00 size of a little pad over there. Alphabetical order is usually the best way and most importantly you had to put down what his nickname was, whether he was married, whether he had a girl you know if he'd been found guilty of drunkenness or misconduct you know it's a very useful book.
- 17:30 **What were your first thoughts on flicking through your platoon, you know through the notebook?**
- Christ, fortunate in that two of my three section commanders had previous experience in the Second World War and that's both comforting and frightening because you've got to prove yourself to men with this sort of record, it's daunting
- 18:00 but at least you've got somebody that knows the score. Yeah just hope that I'd be able to do the right thing.
- Who were you replacing?**
- I can't recall his name, but the platoon that I took over had been without a platoon commander for some time and the sergeant was acting command.
- Did that pose.....**
- He was a non-
- 18:30 Duntrooner and that's why I've forgotten his name, which I shouldn't have forgotten but I have.
- Did the fact that there hadn't been a platoon commander for some time bring it's own difficulty to the position when you arrived?**
- No, no I think probably the men didn't notice much difference either. The men were pretty quick to spot
- 19:00 my weakness, that was the fact that my wife used to write to me everyday. Because mail only came once or twice a week. But they realised that after I got mail I was in a good humour so low and behold I'm getting a letter per day. The runner picks them up from company headquarters and fed because
- 19:30 Barbara use to put the number of the letter on it. And the beggars, this happened about 2 or 3 weeks before I woke up.
- Was that to indicate that you weren't always in good humour? What sort of Commander were you?**
- I don't believe that that's a fair statement; I think, I was in better humour when I got a letter, would have been a more accurate way of describing the situation.
- Can you**
- 20:00 **explain a bit more about the situation that you arrived into? Physically where were you dug in, what was going on, what did you have to do?**
- Yeah well my platoon had the honour of guarding the highest point on Hill 355, called Little Gibraltar. And that had its privileges or its status rather than privileges as well as disadvantages. One of the disadvantages was
- 20:30 that it was a very good position from which all company commanders could have their patrols at night. They'd come every day because it was the best observations post and therefore to plan their patrols and quite often it was the best place for which radio communications could be received. And they would come up there; some of them came up there to control their patrol from there. It just stood out on top of the... Which was unfortunate in some ways,
- 21:00 the second time before we came out in reserve it was freezing winter, just after Christmas or just before Christmas and my signaller with my knowledge had decided that the heater in the command cost which was running on diesel fuel wasn't working well
- 21:30 and the whole command post sometimes used to stink of fuel which was a good point because that means that some of the company commanders didn't want to control their patrols there but he was a little bit sick of the smell and he used to take the refuelling can outside the hoochie, pour a bit of petrol into the diesel and then bring it back and
- 22:00 the heater use to work tremendously well. And one night it was so cold you know we had degrees of minus fourteen fahrenheit, not celsius, minus fourteen fahrenheit was registered on top of 355. It was so cold that he decided to mix the petrol with diesel inside the hoochie and he accidentally knock the petrol gerry can over onto the hot choofer and my command post went up in flames.
- 22:30 For which I earned the brigadiers arr and because standing orders strictly forbade the mixing of petrol with diesel for the heaters and I spent the early part of that night on my knees praying that the enemy would see this and send a few shells or mortars over so I could claim it on enemy actions and the beggars must have been sitting
- 23:00 on the other side laughing having worked out what and they never sent one mortar or one shell over.

But anyway that's where I was up there.

What was the accommodation like; if you like the hoochie can you explain that?

Oh yes, well mine was the biggest and I obviously the best equipped hoochie because in it was the platoon sergeant, myself and the signaller.

23:30 And it had radio communications and also the telephone back to company and also forward to my listening post at the end of the mine field gap. So it was about the size of this rug, it was riveted inside with timber, timber that was cut from the local timber

24:00 it wasn't. Although towards the, after peace was signed I believe they were bringing in prefabricated timber and metal and they were digging the holes out with a backhoe, putting the prefabricated structure in and filling it but we hadn't quite got to that stage and yeah just a hole in the ground with timber and tin on top and timber sides to stop the earth falling in whenever the shells

24:30 or mortars came.

About 10 foot by 6 foot, just for the camera they can't see the rug?

Oh 6 by 10 is probably a little big, oh yeah about that size.

How were you connected to the other parts of your platoon?

Well, I wasn't except that by voice. The listening post or

25:00 I had a standing patrol, which was at the head of the minefield gap ahead of us that was connected to me by phone but the rest was just voice. I'd yell out for the section commanders, the section commanders would answer and we'd communicate which was all right provided there weren't any enemy walking along the front otherwise they'd hear you.

Where were the rest of the troops housed then? Where were the rest of the troops then,

25:30 **this Hoochie was on top of Little Gibraltar?**

Well if you can imagine there was weapon pits you know along the front and hoochies for the men, sometimes on the reverse slopes but sometimes came straight out of the weapon pit, depending on where the weapon pit was. There's a lot of rock in the area and sometime it was all you could do is get a weapon pit let alone put sufficient

26:00 soil to dig a hoochie as well and so quite. Sometimes the men's living quarters in the hoochie were very close to the weapon pit, they had to man in case there was an attack but they would have to get out of their hoochie and get into the weapon pit and that was one of their not problems, but one of their most important tasks, cause if there was an alert to make sure that everybody had been woken

26:30 and was manning their weapon pits.

How close was the enemy? Can you explain their situation?

Oh yes, where I was at the top of 355, the enemy were a long way away but later on the second time in the line I was with A Company I was right under their nose. The nearest enemy feature was about 300 or 400 metres over there and we were down here, they were looking down on us.

27:00 **What was the terrain in between?**

Oh it was a bit of a gully, there's a valley in front of us, a big gully. It wasn't a valley in so much as there was a river running through it, non-perennial creek I think. But that way the nearest strongly held enemy feature was one

27:30 called Kowang San point 317 which was more than a kilometre, a kilometre and a half up that way but over here we were what we use to call point 227 which had four noticeable features on it and they were called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John after the four apostles. They were only 2 or 300 metres away [Hill 317 was a major feature in the Battle of Maryang San near the Imjin River, October 1951].

How did that numbering work, the map points and the features?

28:00 The height of the, 355 is 355 metres above sea level, 317 is...

Can you explain a bit about what you did then when you first arrived after you'd checked out the platoon notebook?

Oh yes, 2 or 3 nights after I think I did my first patrol. Which was not sure if it was a great success or a big disaster.

28:30 We were told to, myself as a reconnaissance patrol, myself and one other and perhaps later on we should talk about patrols and the patrol policy.

It's something that we need to talk about.

But this was a reccie [reconnaissance] patrol, our aim was to go out along a particular ridge, it was the Simgok feature and find out how far down that feature the enemy had dug their forward defended

29:00 localities. And so and I thought should go at least that far, I was told to go. And to be perfectly frank when I got there I wasn't quite sure whether I'd got there yet, but anyway I kept going, or we kept going, Corporal Detty was with me, he'd been out before. We kept going until somebody fired at us.

29:30 Fortunately we were climbing up hill and they fired, there's a natural tendency when you're firing down hill is to shoot high, just like there's a natural tendency when you're firing uphill to shoot low and the burst of machine gun fire went over our heads, we ducked, rolled down the side of the slope and then got out. Because in a reccie patrol you're not meant to stand there and fight

30:00 although on occasion if you can get in and observe you may of course direct artillery fire, without the enemy knowing that it's being directed and they think it's just harassing fire anyway. And yeah that caused some comment in that obviously I exceeded the distance where I was supposed to go, it was quite unintentional, we went until we made contact.

30:30 And that was my first patrol.

Was that a difficult experience for you, you can't have been too prepared for it?

Well I think you've hit your nail on the head, you worry about it quite a lot. The things that you ought to do to be prepared and how you will react you know. And when the time comes all your worrying

31:00 or concern and preoccupations probably weren't nothing because the decision or the action demanded of you would be quite different and you really won't know how or what you're going to do or how you're going to do it until it happens. Preparations fine as far as making sure that you're fully equipped, everything works, that you're going that way, you got out a certain time, back a certain. That

31:30 having been done it's a, it's a little bit unrealistic as we use to do, say try and work out the flank hit, the enemy hits you from that flank you'd do this, from the front you'd do something else. But when it hits you don't know whether it's to the flank or point front, you know what I mean.

How were you organised on patrol? Can you explain

32:00 **what you did, how you went out, who was in charge, how you moved?**

I think the best describe or hear, discuss here the patrol policy of the time or the different types of patrols because depending upon the type of patrol, how you'd go about it, who you'd take, what you take with you, would vary.

Lets start with a reccie patrol, what was that all about?

32:30 I'd prefer to start the other way around.

O.k., well take us through the entire structure?

I think that's yeah. In static defence patrolling is the key to defence. It is how you block or learn of enemy major attacks before they get to place and bring down artillery fire on them. It is how

33:00 you ensure that the enemy don't have the chance to come along and mess around with your minefields, cut the wire or cut a path through them. It is how you impress upon the men that they have a very important and dangerous task in front of them and if they don't master that task then the enemy will get the upper hand, that's good for morale. So in static defence that's

33:30 the focus of your operations, usually patrols and our policy was that we had fighting patrols which is normally about an officer and 14 or 15. Which in my view is much too big. Fine by day, you can have them bigger by day but at night, try and see what 7 or men on one side and 7 men on the other especially when the last two or

34:00 three are 20 metres away. It's firepower you want not men at night. Anyway it's a fighting patrol and sometime we use to call them ambush patrols because instead of going out and sweeping no mans land, looking for if there's enemy there to make contact and making sure they got a bloody nose if they did come out in no mans land. You went on where you suspected enemy movement

34:30 would occur and you got out there very early, as early as possible and set an ambush. But you're still a fighting patrol. Other than that we had a reconnaissance patrol which was usually pretty small, an officer and one or an officer and two, the idea was to go out and get information, the idea was to be completely silent so the enemy doesn't know you're getting, there or moving or getting information and you come back and the information

35:00 you bring back of course can be useful for other patrols or for an attack which is being planned and so on. Sometimes a reccie patrol is called a layout patrol and a layout patrol in our case, usually we use to go out just before first light, find a concealed spot from which we could look in behind the enemy lines, usually with binoculars

35:30 not necessarily and with the radio, just one or two. And find out what sort of activity was going on

- behind the enemy lines by day. Quite dangerous, but very tiring you've no idea. If you've got to lie still on hard ground for 12 or 13 hours, or 14 hours. Then we use to have what sometimes we used to call a
- 36:00 snatch patrol. The idea being to get a prisoner and this can vary which in my view is the ideal snatch patrol from 4 and 5 your best trained men, your most aggressive and alert
- 36:30 blokes that you can possibly find. Took almost the company in size where you overrun a small enemy location hoping to grab some prisoners. I don't know why around about my time there, so much emphasis was placed on capturing a prisoner but basically a prisoner if he's a rifleman, a
- 37:00 soldier which is what you'll probably get, isn't going to tell you much. He can tell you what his number, rank, name and his unit is, his number, rank and name really aren't of much value to you and which his unit is you can get from other sources. But this for public and political reasons back home I think the Americans wanted prisoners
- 37:30 caught. And in our corps, out went the call that we had to if possible capture prisoners. So the snatch patrol idea came out, there were and this again is a criticism of the Americans one of the reason why I didn't want to, lost a lot of good men trying to get prisoner which we didn't get.
- 38:00 But had we got them I don't think they would have been much use to us but you know I can remember on one occasion our battalion did one we had two fighting patrols out one night, one got into trouble, got into trouble made contact, the enemy tried to out flank them so the other patrol came along, the other patrol didn't know whether they were firing on the enemy or the other.
- 38:30 Yeah not the way I would have organised it anyway. If you want to do a snatch patrol you just select 4 of your best, you get out there at just before first light and as the men, whoever it is the enemy are coming to men their forward listening posts what have you, there'd be only 2 or 3 of them.
- 39:00 You shoot them, hopefully wounding one of them and make your choice as to which one you grab and get out as quickly as possible. It's more likely to achieve success then to try to move 20, 30 men in separate groups at night. But so they're the type of patrols and the sort of jobs we did, the tasks we allotted to them. I remember on one
- 39:30 occasion when again I disappointed the Brigadier, it was one of these layout patrols, we went and we laid up, this was a night layout patrol, we got there just after last light and came back just before first light. Which meant we were there about 7 or 8 hours not as bad asYes we did hear movement, they were obviously digging, so we came back and reported that and apparently the Brigadier when he read the report a couple of days later was
- 40:00 a little bit annoyed that we didn't radio the information back so he could have brought artillery down there and then and I had say to my company commander, "Well I wasn't told." I was just told "To listen and report movement". We certainly heard the movement, the digging and whether we could have brought artillery down on them sufficiently accurately to do any damage is another question because they were the
- 40:30 movement and digging we heard was at least 200 metres away, I could have been told to get closer that's for sure. So it's shows how important it is for the patrol task to be very clearly defined.

Tape 5

- 00:28 **Can you explain**
- 00:30 **who planned these patrols and how you got these orders?**
- Well normally it was the battalion concerned with a particular front decided what the overall patrol policy should be and they were also responsible for liaising with the neighbouring units,
- 01:00 so if a patrol of ours was moving along there the neighbouring units knew and didn't fire on them. Or if a patrol of theirs got in trouble close to the boundary and wanted to come in through us you knew that. That's the Battalions responsibility. And from that the numbers and types of patrols that ought to go out each night was decided and these patrol tasks were given to companies.
- 01:30 And the companies, the company commander would say which, say my platoon would do a reccie patrol tonight, go out down there up there and come back that way and the next platoon even whilst I'm out there might send a fighting patrol out there but keep away. And the company commander would actually control the patrol from his command post or one of the forward platoon.
- 02:00 And the platoon commander would attend the company commanders orders group every day, receive the patrol tasks and they'd go back and they'd select the men from the platoon commanders notebook, you know whose turn is it to go on patrol and brief the men on the task and how they were

- 02:30 going to go about it and then rehearse any particular phase of the that might need rehearsing for example if there was a deep donger that had to be crossed you know you might and this is where it sometimes in theory you'd rehearse back at the behind your forward defended locality so the men know what to do when they get there
- 03:00 but when you get there it's not quite...but anyway you did the rehearsal, you test fired your weapons, sent the patrol back, sort of back to behind battalion headquarters somewhere where the enemy couldn't see and you test fired every weapon that you were going to take out with you. That wasn't always done but sometimes it... And at
- 03:30 the appointed time you took the patrol out, or went out on patrol. But basically the platoons, the platoon commanders were responsible for the detail preparation, the briefing of the men, the selection of the men. The company commander would assume control once the platoon left the forward defended localities generally through a minefield gap in front of one of the platoons.
- 04:00 And he would be in radio contact with the patrol commander, especially if a contact was made and artillery fire was required.

You mentioned different weapons you test fired. What were the weapons that you were using?

Oh generally there was rifle and an Owen gun. They were the principle weapons. As a patrol commander you might decide to take a revolver

- 04:30 instead of your Owen gun especially if you didn't take a signaller and you had your radio equipment to handle as well, which is sometimes handy to have because if a contact occurs and you and the sig [signaller] get separated you know it's quite difficult but on the other hand if contact occurs and you get put out of action, your company can't help you, but you know
- 05:00 so. But by in large I chose to carry an Owen gun all the time. Best have a signaller because if something happened to me, as happened, did happen on one night. The signaller was still in contact with company Headquarters.

What about other weapons?

The other weapons were infrared equipment was just starting to come in then. And there was, we uses to call a snoopy sniper

- 05:30 scope or a snooperscope which was infrared and telescopic sight which you could detect any movement at the same time aim the rifle. If as on one occasion that I described you were going out and you knew you were going to buy a fight because you were going to overrun a position you might take mortars with you, 2 inch, the small mortars. The big mortars 3 inch or 4.2 inch mortars naturally of course they stayed behind
- 06:00 unless you've got a full company size operation some distance away from the battalion you wouldn't move the mortars from their normal base plate positions. You'd have two inch mortars, you might take a Very [flare] pistol to fire different coloured flares for signals indicating certain things, but grenades, hand grenades other than that it was just spare ammunition and spare magazines all full ready to go.

How much would you

- 06:30 **have to carry out?**

Well lets take a normal rifleman he would of course have his rifle with his bayonet and he have ten rounds in the magazine with one up the spout ready to go, he'd have a bandolier, a couple of bandoliers each with 50 rounds, he'd carry 2,3, or 4 grenades in

- 07:00 his belt and invariably because the Bren gunner used a lot of ammunition they'd also carry some ammunition for the Bren gun as well because beyond the Bren gunner it was a quite heavy weapon and his offsider to carry all the ammunition that might be required. It's quite a load when you consider that you also be taking

- 07:30 dressings, and field dressings and spare batteries maybe for the signalman, but the signaller would usually carry those but everybody would go out carry about 50 pounds at least.

Can you describe firstly the Owen guns that you were using and how they worked with their magazines?

Well they're the Owen guns were

- 08:00 an automatic weapon, it was about that long and the beauty of them was that they were so simple, very few working parts went wrong with them therefore they were reliable, they had a good rate of fire and one of the big things was they loaded from the top. Out there in no mans land pitch black its', and you've got to pull out a magazine then try and fit it in from underneath and your trigger finger gets in the way and you can't find the slot,
- 08:30 here it's much easier and I think as I recall each magazine carried about 28 rounds and you usually had you know 3 or 4 spare mags in that pouch and 3 or 4 spare mags in this pouch.

What about the radio equipment can you describe that for us?

Oh yes, in terms of today's communication equipment they were, left a lot to be desired.

09:00 You couldn't always guarantee on getting back when you wanted to. Batteries were a problem, whether that was because we were using reserve stocks as a result of the Second World War or whether their shelf life had expired but you know it was a

09:30 saying amongst the diggers, have you got fresh batteries today because they didn't last long and you virtually had to have batteries every day. Radio communications in those days were not in my view what should have been available. We hadn't developed the art or we hadn't spent sufficient research on getting reliable radio communication for combat

10:00 operations. We had later on a few years later in the Pacific Islands Regiment we had better equipment I remember 510 and with a little bit of training and a little bit of luck we could establish contact with battalion headquarters with the patrol way up the top of some you know Ramu Valley or Lakekumu River Valley hundreds of

10:30 kilometres away. But it required, even then it required special skills, special training, you had to select the time of day when you would, this is high frequency, not very high frequency, special time of day when it was reception was likely to be most successful. You had to know which direction you were pointing so you could set the aerial at right angles, how to set the aerial but

11:00 yeah generally each day on schedule even if you couldn't hear what they were saying you could hear that they were trying to get through to you so you knew it was all right. Hundreds of kilometres away. So that was comforting but again hopefully now we've got much more reliable equipment.

You would leave this to a signaller most times?

Yes

How long would it take them to set up the radio to make a

11:30 **communication?**

You set it up and you checked before you left the, you spoke to your company headquarters, you know. We're about to go now you're in control. And you tested that before you left. And if something happened out there as happened on the night with our first patrol when we hit the dirt and rolled out of danger's way, Corporal Detty in rolling the battery came out of the radio

12:00 then we had to stop for about 10 minutes hoping the enemy wouldn't following up while he found the battery or put a new battery in the radio, these are things that happen in action.

In that first patrol was that particularly difficult for you in that these men had more patrolling experience than you did as there...?

It did up to the point when we left the gap, after that you're watching you know. Am I going in the right direction

12:30 have I gone far enough, you forget about that, your focus is on the job, it doesn't matter then. Yeah but up until then you're a bit of a nervous wreck.

What rules for communication among the men were there once you were out in no mans land?

Oh, normally it is that each man must be able to see the man either side of him. If you

13:00 need to contact with them, you went over to them and touched them or you went "Pssst" no more than a hiss because they could be just over there. Once contact was established and all hell broke loose, well o.k. you yell orders and directions or whatever it is that you've got to do. Different techniques are developed for example

13:30 if you set an ambush patrol and all of a sudden you see the enemy coming you have to let Company headquarters know, you're not going to get up and say "HEY I CAN SEE THEM COMING." you do three or two whatever the signal is taps on the transmitter switch, lets' company know that they'd better get the artillery ready. You develop your own techniques. Each unit has it's own techniques that they employ to cover

14:00 situations like that, but normally patrols at night, silence is the key. Silent in movement as well as noise. You become aware of the enemy by the noise he makes not that you can hear him talking.

Would there be other signals that you used? What other hands signals?

Yeah by day you can use signals. On a bright moonlight night, there's a standard set of you know hand signals.

14:30 Lie down, come to me you know. If you can see you use it.

Were there any others you want to remember for us?

Yeah

Did you use that very often?

Not very.

That's a well renowned sort of hand signal. So on a moonlit night you could see things, what could you see on a dark night?

Nothing, you saw and this

15:00 is the problem on a dark night, you've got 15 men and that's too much, I always found that's too much, Much better to have no more than 3 or 4 men, maybe five that side and five that, that's more than enough. If you can't see at night, if you can't see the furthest man then you don't have complete control. You don't know whether he's there, whether you've got to wait, whether he's been wounded and you've got to get him out or do you do that now or do you wait until the action is finished then

15:30 sweep to pick, it's control is so vital at night in a patrols especially in contact. And that's how I disappeared I lost control, so I was wounded the night that I disappeared. And 15 men on dark nights, too many.

How do you know where you are on a dark night?

You know because you've been there, like you know you start off in your patrol

16:00 preparation studying the map, you might even have a map model, get a picture of the shape of the ground in your mind, you compare the map with what you can see in day and it's surprising how good that picture in your mind is and you will recognise the features at night, especially if you lie down and look up so you can see that the outline against the moon or against the moonlit sky or whatever it is.

16:30 And after a while I think I did over 30 patrols during my time there, you know the area; you know all the area really.

What features are we talking about here, you've mentioned that there were features that you recognised...what sort of things?

Oh yeah, well I think I mentioned some of them, there was the 220 feature which was Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Lozenge feature, then there's Simgok feature and there was Kowang San

17:00 oh there was a couple of others, there was 169, that's in this area. In other areas of the battalion was involved in the Hook and the Samichon Valley and there's another 169 which is involved in a very significant operation that 1 Battalion was involved in,

17:30 I don't know I suppose if I took a few minutes off and looked at the map I could mentioned quite a few other features but they're the features that come to mind.

You must have gone through that particular area either on a model or in your mind many times?

Oh yes.

Can you still picture where things were?

Yeah. It's up here, you never forget that.

18:00 **I'll just stop there for a second. At night time...?**

No it's not, I think I've probably given you all the detail you need on the first patrol I did when we went and made contact and I think I also gave you details of another patrol that when we had a layout patrol and we came to the point where we sat, we laid there for several hours and heard the enemy moving about or digging and we didn't bring down artillery

18:30 fire which perhaps the Brigadier would have appreciated if we had of.

Why didn't you bring down artillery fire at that time?

Because our in our reccie patrol was there to be very silent and information to come back and report it, unless you were given otherwise a specific instructions that's what you did. And in hindsight I can only ask myself the same question as you have perhaps it would have been better if we had have come up on there told them that we could hear something

19:00 and then maybe would have been directed to get closer and direct the artillery. If that had have been what was required then that should have been included in the patrol task. By in large if you did on a reccie patrol you did not come up on air unless it was necessary and your tried to keep as quiet as possible as to conceal the fact that you were there observing.

19:30 and that's the standard reccie patrol and nobody indicated that this, that there was a you know a slightly different or a special requirement to this area. I subsequently learned it was the Brigadiers direction that the Battalions sent to patrol in that area to investigate, I didn't know that.

What did you fear most on patrols?

Losing control, losing men or have your

- 20:00 at night, perhaps this story encapsulates your question, answers your question better than most other. The first time I was in the line, this is about the 3rd or 4th or 5th patrol I had done, it was a fighting patrol.
- 20:30 And we went out from my platoon Headquarters sometimes you might go out through another platoon headquarters but weand we were coming back through my own platoon. And so you know things were pretty right you know. You know the area immediately in front of you and you know you're coming back through you own platoon area and
- 21:00 during the pervious 2 or 3 weeks one or two of my colleagues, platoon commanders had received some slight criticism by virtue of the fact that they had left one of their men behind. Which is not unusual because it was very foggy and one of the men, tail end
- 21:30 Charlie, cause he's looking back to see to make sure that the enemies not following you in, which they sometimes do. And all of a sudden he looks around and he doesn't know where the patrol is, he's disorientated. Even I would be disorientated on a night like that if I can't see the features right, to point, to know where you are. And it's quite easily done, the fellow at the ...gets left behind.
- 22:00 And on this occasion it was a foggy night and I was going to make sure that I wasn't to be the subject of talk in the mess having lost, left one of my men behind on patrol. So when we got close to the, I would say within one hundred or two hundred metres of the platoon listening post that my platoon manned at the head of our gap, I stood aside and counted all the men you know as they came by
- 22:30 and I said to the forward scout you take the patrol back to the gap, we were only what 150 metres, yards away and he'd been out with me a couple of times before so I was pretty sure he knew the way in. And fortunately 15 men came through and I became tail end Charlie going in and then all of a sudden there's a boom and the forward scout,
- 23:00 unfortunately no fault of his, cause if was foggy, he followed what he thought was the track and he was just unfortunate enough to pick a spot where the minefield wire, you know where the boundary had been cut. We didn't notice it going out but apparently it had been cut for a day or two or more and he walked into the minefield. And one of the men tripped one
- 23:30 and we lost him and two or three others injured, I didn't know he tripped the minefield and I said "Hey! What the hells going on?" and I rushed from the tail up to the place where the explosion been heard, I thought a grenade had accidentally gone off or something and I thought oh my god I can hear the investigation and all of a sudden somebody said Skipper don't move
- 24:00 you're in a minefield. Somebody realised because they'd seen the wire down cut down on the track, yeah so that's how you lose control.

That must have been quite a terrifying situation, what did you do?

Well we stood still fortunately by this time I got fairly close to the thing and I said tell company headquarters that

- 24:30 we're in a minefield, we've suffered casualties and we'll try and get him out. My decision was we could see because in the snow, because this is really cold time of the year, there was snow there. We could all including me rushing forward we could see the footprints, I said we can get him out that way in the meantime
- 25:00 the platoon sergeant, he was new just come. I think I told you when I arrived there, there was somebody as a platoon sergeant, in fact he was a platoon sergeant of another platoon, he was acting in command. I got a new platoon sergeant a couple of weeks after that and he was, this was his first week as platoon sergeant and he
- 25:30 thought he'd show his metal on this occasion and out he came and along the gap, along the wire and he met two or three of my soldiers who missed the cut, were up there and with their bayonets and he brought his bayonet with him, they prodded in and got most of them, and in the meantime we'd already got the wounded fellow, the fellow who died actually Jacky
- 26:00 Page out by getting him back along the track that we'd made in the snow.

How did you do that?

Just like that, stupidly. We walked back, back pedalled along our footprints that we'd made in the snow.

How were you carrying him?

Yeah, dragging him.

What were his injuries?

All his stomach had been blow out.

26:30 Trodden on the mine and..... . It was inside his combat clothing.

Was he still conscious?

No.

You also had casualties there, how did you get the other people who were wounded out?

Oh they were walking wounded. They got out

27:00 sideways and the sergeant came through prodding. The medic, one other fellow and myself just grabbed this fellow and put him out the back along the way we come.

Was he killed instantly?

Oh yes, I didn't know that, but you don't know that at that stage when you, I didn't really realised what had happened in here until afterwards. All you can see is blood everywhere. He's probably still

27:30 alive for all you know, your best to get him out as soon as possible.

What happened, proceed on? What happened then with the recovery of ...?

Well by this stage it had become first light and pretty sure the enemy could see what was happening, they heard the bang, and they'd see us moving, I reckon they'd mortar my platoon area so

28:00 with the other 2 men that were with me, that had got him out I said to them well you take the patrol back through the gap and you've got to save this fellows, I didn't realise that he was dead at this stage. I said "I'll take him down through the next platoon area where the enemy won't probably won't see us". Until we got some distance from the end, it was obvious we were in full view of the enemy so

28:30 I got one of the soldiers I think to put a white hanky on top of his bayonet and hold it up and we carried him out on the stretcher, the two of us carried him out on a stretcher. They didn't shell us or mortar us.

What was the purpose of the white hanky?

It's you know, if they could see us carrying a stretcher hopefully they wouldn't mortar us. I don't know that's the decision

29:00 that I made then.

Was it one of your own mines that you'd hit?

Yeah it was one of our mines. It's our minefield we walked in.

So that pretty much answers my question about what you feared the most. I think mines must have been something?

Oh not really. It

29:30 well it supports your point of view there's a ...I think I told you a great friend of mine General Digger James lost both legs in a minefield. They were yeah sure a point of concern, but basically we knew where the minefields were, our own minefields and the problem at this stage, the problem was that

30:00 in the last couple of days since we'd been out there, enemy action whether deliberately cut or water had cut the wire. Digger James case was different I think it was an enemy minefield that wasn't marked and that's bad enough. In fact I can recall another patrol when we walked into what possibly was a minefield. See the enemy didn't mark their minefields with wire and little triangles on the wire.

30:30 They marked the minefields for the sake of their own troops I mean it would be behind the minefield but they 'd do it with broken reccie branches or rows of rocks and things like that you see. And we were on this patrol, and another reccie patrol, I forget just how far up we were, behind the Simgok feature and the sig said "Hey skipper

31:00 What do you think all these branches are doing?" There was branches of trees in a straight line and we were this side of it and maybe the mines on that side, we didn't set any mines off. And maybe it wasn't a minefield mark at all but it probably was because at the end of the branches there was a row of rocks you could see it was set in a straight line about every metre or so. And that gave us the indication that we

31:30 probably were in the minefield but we didn't set any off.

There were various types of mines, which mines did you fear the most?

Oh, I don't know, there's a Jumping Jack mine, which was probably the one that you worried about most because it went up into the air before it exploded and got the lot of you. This mine that Jacky Page trod on was a ground trip mine

32:00 and it took all his insides out. So there's three, four or five casualties during my tour of duty which occurred as a result of my warfare, not that many.

Looking back, how do you feel about losing your men?

About?

How do you feel about losing men under your command?

It's very disquieting; the most disquieting is that you've got to

32:30 get home and sit down and write to their parents or their wives or what have you, about it. This fellow really did disturb me to the point where I really couldn't sit down and write to his parents. He's a young man about 22, as far as I was aware, what should I say judging from what I knew

33:00 of him, he was probably still a virgin, he'd never known the love of a woman, he'd never known the joy of being a parent and it disappears. How would you feel about it? You're responsible.

What do you recall what you said to him before you sent him back?

Jacky Page, he's dead?

33:30 **But you sent him along the line. Did you recall that situation when you sent him back when you thought you were back in safety?**

I'm not with you Rob [interviewer].

You sent him on ahead, is that correct?

No. I sent the forward scout ahead. It wasn't the forward scout, who tripped the mine, it was Jacky Page two or three back. If it had been the forward scout I probably would have gone that far we may have tripped another one. The forward scout was unfortunate

34:00 that he led the patrol back, you know looking back perhaps I should have led the patrol back because I knew the area better than anybody else did but you know that was the decision I made was to count the men.

Oh yeah that's very hard.

That's just the way it happens. But I knew enough I could see, as I say light was just breaking, daylight, first light and I could see that there was so much

34:30 blood and gore over him, that you didn't need to talk to Jack he wouldn't have heard you, he wouldn't have understood you.

You're in snow too. You're in very unusual conditions, can you describe...?

Snow yeah, sometimes we dressed in white garb, there was so much snow on the ground we dressed in thin cotton white over the combat thing, so that you wouldn't be seen, especially if you were on reccie patrol. And you wanted to be

35:00 absolutely quite.

Can you describe how cold it was?

Yes, just a couple of examples, I have known instances where the ground was frozen for at least 12 inches and to try and dig or improve the size of a weapon pit, you would take about a dozen swings just for the pick head to go in this far

35:30 and then you'd lever and if you've got a really strong man, and we did have one or two big strong men they would bend the pick or break the handle but the earth wouldn't move. On another occasion I can remember in the hoochie, shaved of a morning and tried to see what you were doing, we used to have shiny stainless steel mirrors, you didn't carry glass you'd break the thing. And the light was so bad

36:00 you couldn't see, but you shaved by Braille and when you comb your hair you couldn't see anything so I went you know with the hot water from the shaving, washed my face, put a bit of water on my hair, went outside in the light, combed my hair and you can't comb in because the moistures frozen literally you know, you're dragging the hair, the comb through the hair and there are icicles, in front of the teeth

36:30 on the comb. Minus 14 Fahrenheit is what we registered on several occasions, that's minus 46 below freezing. That's how cold it was.

That's not something that you could train for in Canberra?

Well its' a problem going to the toilet. When the ambient temperatures so low and the Arctic clothing we had, you'd pull your pants down but the other

37:00 couple of layers you had inside had a big slit from here up to here for obvious reasons. That's how cold it was.

Was it adequate? How adequate was that clothing?

Well when I got there it was quite good. But in the early days it wasn't so good, and the diggers froze. Basically if you saw an unoccupied hoochie that's you know your local hut

37:30 or anything, it was used for firewood, it's the only way you could keep warm. In fact there's an interesting story it goes that the first Christmas that our soldiers were in the line and in Korea it was very very cold and Bob Menzies had called in, I think the Minister for the Army his name was

38:00 [Josh] Francis. And he said Minister you're going up to visit our troops in Korea for Christmas, makes good publicity, show the ministers out there inspecting the troops, seen with the troops, how they're getting on. And the story goes up there, the Minister arrived, the battalion commander took him to one of the companies that was in reserve

38:30 and at that stage it was mobile operation at that stage. And he came to this platoon, which was commanded by an Aboriginal, our first Aboriginal officer called Reg Saunders, heard of him. Lieutenant Reg Saunders and his platoon was huddled around this fire which they'd got out by pulling this shack to pieces and the Minister went and said "How goes it men?"

39:00 and one of the diggers said "Oh sir, this is no place for a white fellow" and Reg Saunders said "Just between you and me sir it's not a place for a black fellow either." true story. Yeah bitterly cold, Korea, those winds blow off the Siberian ice expanses and the chill factor that you wouldn't believe.

39:30 **Frostbite was a real issue up there too wasn't it?**

Yes, big frosts yeah. It's not only on the toes, the Bren gunner. We would allow the soldiers to wear gloves, not gloves, woollen mittens that the trigger finger could still operate effectively accept the Bren gunner, he wasn't allowed to wear the gloves. And we often, this is no lie we got back from patrol and we would pour warm water

40:00 to get his finger off the trigger of the Bren gun without leaving the flesh behind.

Tape 6

00:29 ... most dangerous

00:30 **time or periods of the patrol?**

I think going out of the gap or coming back in the gap, if the enemy knew you were out there and invariably the gaps got.

How did you cross back to your own lines without being you know, coming into conflict with your own troops?

That's a good question. And believe you me it sometimes happen that our

01:00 own troops fired upon friendly troops, especially if radio contact had been lost and you weren't in communication with them. The sad fact of the matter is that several fatal casualties occurred, even on patrol as a result of

01:30 people leaving the patrol to do, as a firm base, to do a reccie then coming back and didn't coming back exactly the way they said they would or when they would. You don't have much leeway out there, if somebody fronts up in front of you a few yards away and if you're not expecting it and if he's looking around fervently and doesn't give the right password or what have you,

02:00 you're likely to get shot.

Can you describe an incident specifically that happened to you?

Not to me, I never had that problem but a number of patrols did.

Can you give us examples of passwords that you used?

Oh yeah, one red reindeer. Red, reindeer is the response, that's just one example. You can name any, it can be a single word, people liked

02:30 two words, because it seems to be more secure, not that I think it is.

Was there any specific way that you would or details of how you would deploy your weapons say grenades or where your machine gunners were?

No, if you're out on patrol and you took 2 Bren guns out then you normally had one on each flank, that way you can cover,

03:00 better cover all the ground that might be to your front or to your flank. Other than that I used to like to take out as many Owen guns as possible, and as few rifles as possible because at short range and at night and then the number of rounds you put out is important.

03:30 If it's broad daylight I'm inclined to go the other way. Because rightly or wrongly are people who fire automatic weapons are less inclined to aim and make sure and hit their target. At night it's difficult to see your target so that's not important but yeah I also

04:00 very happy to have grenades on patrol, providing everybody is properly rehearsed in them and remembers to yell out "Grenade!" when they decided to throw one. You'd be surprised at night, in the dark you don't know if any of your troops have moved around you, you've got to whilst you're lying down throwing it and the grenade will often finish up where it's not suppose to be.

04:30 Well I shouldn't say often, sometimes it does. But yeah if you've got somebody who knows just where to pitch them, they can be a very useful little device.

Is there any occasion where you had to pitch a grenade?

No. You know you're not in the business of pitching a grenades, if you're a patrol commander somebody else does that. As I said before one of the essential thing is to keep control at all times, and your trying to look and see

05:00 what's happening and who's doing what. The pitching, I've had one pitched at me unfortunately. Got the remains of it in my legs, but no I have never pitched one.

What happened in that particular incident?

That's the night I disappeared.

Just before we come to that, I just like to stay a little bit on the details of patrol and

05:30 **how was this continuous stress of patrolling affecting you?**

Oh I don't know, it's a personal thing, some people react to stress differently to others. By nature I'm a slightly nervous type but I'm also very you know as soon as I become aware of it I deliberately make light of things, quip around, you know joke most of the time.

06:00 Some people don't do that they just store it up and it's can get pretty unpleasant at times. Stress makes people do some funny things. I think that I've given you one example how one

06:30 fellow in our platoon, the second company I was with, he was a U.K. [United Kingdom] enlistee eventually just couldn't cope, something was different to what he thought it was going to be and he took the step of saying that he wasn't going to soldier on anymore which is a very serious thing you know in the face of the enemy as it were. And we had to move

07:00 him. And when these stress factors start to appear and you can tell from platoon commanders notebook there the number of times a soldier report sick, on sick parade. They've got headaches or stomachaches or diarrhoea. If it goes, you know does that a few times you know something's wrong. Not physical, it's mental.

07:30 I don't know, does that cover your question; yeah stress is always there. Especially in this type, much more so than in the more aggressive, more mobile operations. Where you're moving forward at such a rate, things are happening at such a pace, you don't have time to get stressed but when it's over then you know you're out of it, you're somewhere

08:00 away from the front line, it's a few weeks perhaps before your unit gets given another job and you can relax and forget things but in this sort of situation, you're there all the time, the mortars and shells keep carrying all the time, the patrols are on all the time, your listening posts say "Hey skipper, I can hear someone moving". Then you look around and it's perhaps a deer that's come in or a patrol from a neighbouring

08:30 platoon or companies come to far but there's a, it's there all the time in this sort of situation.

Why were you there?

Where?

Why at that time, in the static phase of the war did you consider strategically the objectives of what you were doing?

It's a very prominent feature, and a very and it....

09:00 **That's tactically, strategically why were you there?**

Oh strategically that's where people started to question what was the value of this war, not only the United Nations side but the other side too. You know the way they were pressing their attacks, wave after wave and being mown down like hay, started to count with them too. That's where a propitious

09:30 moment was to stop and whilst people sorted to a few things out. There was no strategic aim to what we call the Kansas Line [the fall-back position behind the front line of battle, which was called the Jamieson Line], no strategic value to it. It may well have been another 10 miles further on or another 10 miles further, oh no it wouldn't have been, it shouldn't have been 10 miles further south cause then even the medium range guns wouldn't be with range of Seoul, we didn't want that.

10:00 **How does that affect you, knowing that leading men into harms way?**

Well that's you know part of the nature of war. Of which I think people seem to now not understand the nature of war. It's you get two nations or several nations with opposing wills and one tries to oppose one on the other

10:30 results in any number of sets of circumstances like this one. And that's it, you've got to make the best of what there is.

You were fighting with Korean troops?

We had about two members per section where what we were called KATCOMs [Korean Augmentation Troops Commonwealth scheme].

How did you get on with the Koreans?

O.k. they were all right. They were a bit slow to learn I thought, but they did learn and they fitted in. The diggers were pretty good in mothering

11:00 them shall I say. Bringing them along. But there were no problems.

Yet it was their war that you were fighting and you were also opposing people who spoke the same language?

The language was a problem but you could get by because they could learn a little and you knew the odd word too. You could get by. Provided most of the conversation could take place in English. You could

11:30 get by. It wasn't just their war, as I indicated before those of us who thought we could see what was on the horizon realised it was just as much our war as theirs. Yeah there were lots of other people, not that there were lots, certain a number of people in Australia who thought this is the Korean's show let them sort it out. Just like people in Vietnam said it's a Vietnam problem let's sort it out. But neither is true, it wasn't just a Korean

12:00 or Vietnam situation. If you care to put the two together you come to realise that the especially about Vietnam, we may have lost the battle in Vietnam but we didn't lose the war. The war didn't start in Vietnam, the war started in Berlin straight after the end of the Second World War with Russia leading the communist push.

Just back on the patrol,

12:30 **as an officer you what contingency did you have for the possibility of captures of yourself and your men?**

No I don't think we got much training in that. By and large, well we got no training in that, had we known what happened to the Americans we might have but we had no, we had no

13:00 specific reason to concentrate on that. Sure we were told that if you get captured then your role is to make it as difficult as possible for the enemy to maintain you, in other words cost him some effort and still you were expected to do whatever you could to damage the enemies cause and capacity to wage war, not that that's always

13:30 possible. I don't think anybody gave it much thought beyond that I didn't.

But you had the patrol notebook, which is obviously something that you wouldn't want to fall into enemy hands, or maps and things like that?

Oh no that never came out with me, that stayed back in the command post and I never carried any maps with me, you never carried any badges of rank

14:00 cause if you got captured you'd be in trouble and in fact they found out I was an officer and then there was trouble. You behaved and tried to look just like one of the men as much possible. You certainly did not set out to make yourself look like an officer. And that's one of the things why it's important not to carry a weapon which makes you different,

14:30 carry a map board or the signal or the telephone you, that gives you away.

Was that something you specifically trained for? That must have been a heck of a decision that you made?

I don't mean specifically trained for, that's you know it's obvious that they're the things you don't do. You don't have to train for it, you're just told you know, it's passed on. Had I stayed there, had I not decided to visit the other side and stayed there, I probably would have given that over

15:00 in my briefing to my successor as platoon commander.

What was your feeling to your opposition?

Oh I think probably my feeling was typical of most other soldier's view that they were the enemy, we didn't necessarily hate them but they were pushing a line,

15:30 which our country didn't agree. They'd think nothing about overrunning us given the opportunity and we weren't going to let them have that opportunity. I didn't remember hating the Chinese, from what I heard I think I could have easily developed a hate for the North Koreans but no I don't think my feeling every developed to the point of hatred.

16:00 Not that I can remember.

Did you have any particular names that you called them?

Charlie.

What did you call them sorry?

Charlie. Are you going over to see Charlie tonight that's what you would say if you were going on patrol, you're going over to visiting Charlie, the fact that my names Charlie is coincidental. Other than that we use to call them Noggies.

16:30 What other name? There was another name but I can't recall it, but they're the two common names, the Noggies or Charlie.

What about the UN forces of all the different nationalities, what did you call the other nationalities that were there?

Kiwis for New Zealanders, Pommies they were our sister battalion in the Brigade,

17:00 the GIs [government issue - slang name for American infantrymen] were the Americans, the Koreans that were part of our force were called the KATCOMM and the South Koreans got called the Koreans or the Noggies too.

Can you describe for us the relations you had with the Americans personally?

17:30 Oh yes, the only close personal relations I had with the Americans was in the POW camp. In combat...

Prior to capture you didn't have anything to do with them?

No I didn't have anything to do with them. They were there on the division's right flank and I've a great friend of mine who was also was in battalion, his name was Alex Weaver, I don't know whether you ever heard of him, Lieutenant Alex Weaver

18:00 and when we were in reserve, in divisional reserve our commanding officer had just arrived to take command of the battalion, he was a new fellow Colonel Arthur McDonald, he received an invitation to visit a ceremonial parade which was taking place in the Second Infantry Division, American division, 'Second to None', that's their motto,

18:30 And he told us a story that the Commanding Officer invited Allan to go along with him just to have somebody to you know and to show Alex a little bit of the American set up. And this particular division had a couple of National Guard Units; you know the American National Guards, reservists

19:00 recently called out for service in Korea. And he told the story of the march past the general officer commanding the division which is part of the ceremonial parade and it appeared that in this National Guard Battalion there was one company commander who wasn't well versed in the strict regularities of ceremonial drill and as

19:30 he approached the saluting diode in front of his company to everybody's amazement he turned round and yell to them, now hot it up there Company B, then turned round and saluted the general and said "Morning General." that's about the closest I got to knowing, that's a story that my friend tells, told the mess when he got back.

20:00 That's about as close as I got to not the Americans. We used to get some fire support from them; they use to have the big medium to heavy field guns not far away from behind the divisional, our divisional headquarters. We use to called them the Hok Chong Persuaders.

When you're, you lost that man on patrol was there a service held for him when he?

A service was probably held back where he was buried.

20:30 **Where was he buried?**

I think he was buried in I've forgotten the name of the cemetery; there's a cemetery there. In fact I was I think appointed head of the Australian army contingent that went back a few years later to move a lot of the remains from that into a more central larger

21:00 cemetery, this is going back about 1966, 67 I think, but I don't recall the name of the place but you know.

You went back there at that time?

Yes.

How was that?

Oh it was all right by that stage, in fact there's a photo of when we went back, it's back there which I'll show you later. We just went and did the job, there was

21:30 the other two services were also represented, the British were represented. There's a, the Americans were represented, there were a few Americans buried in that cemetery too. And we had an Australian civilian who was here either president or secretary of the Australian Koreans Association which

22:00 joined us.

Were you able to find his particular grave?

No.

We could go onto talk about your last patrol. Can you take us through and describe to us the events leading up to that patrol, the reason for it, then lead us on?

I'd prefer not to go into too much details, I'll describe it pretty generally. Basically we went out to set an ambush

22:30 for the enemy coming down a ridge and we got to what I thought was the ambush site, in fact it was the ambush site, we set the ambush. What I didn't know, well none of us knew was that the enemy had beat us out there and they set an ambush for us, just a little further up the same ridge. And the next thing I know, I'm assuming that because

23:00 he was there first, he saw us come in and heard us come him, cause we didn't hear him and he therefore had to move in order to attack us. That's when somebody said, "Skipper I think I hear some movement over there." in a pretty hushed voice but yeah I heard it. And just then a grenade was thrown and landed just behind me, I heard it land and I got up

23:30 to get out of the way and it went off. And that's when the problem started because I was pretty you know. You know when an explosion like that occurred, it's happen before the breath gets suck out of your lungs, I was a little bit put out

24:00 by the incident. And the next thing you know they're up and they're advancing, firing.

What does it feel like, did you feel the pain or did you hear the explosion?

I heard the explosion, didn't feel the pain straight away, you just feel like burning, like something burning into your buttock and then you can just feel the blood flowing on your legs. Then you start to feel

24:30 a bit sick and queasy and you realise. You know as a realisation dawns that you've copped it. Anyway I not good waiting there and with me I had this other fellow Alec Weaver. Actually he had only, whilst he had come to us and joined us when we were in divisional reserve, when we went back

25:00 into the line he had to get some experience for his first patrol and he came with me on this patrol to get some experience. And when somebody said, 'the Skippers hit,' apparently he took control and he said, "OK, we're going to get out." and my Bren gunner, I got up and started to follow them and that's when I got a couple of bursts of machine gun fire, one hit me on this ankle and another one hit me across here.

25:30 And I went down and my Bren gunner by the name of Bert White picked me up.

What's it feel like to be hit by a machine gun bullet?

Well this one that me here is a bit like, here I didn't have an armoured vest, it just tore the muscles and the flesh and opened it up and you could feel the blood flowing down your arm. This one felt as though you

26:00 got kicked in the chest by a mule, cause it hit the armoured vest just on the inside where the zip goes up on the armoured vest. You've seen an armoured vest, combat jacket, yeah you probably know it. And the one down there it just felt as though, a bullet does a funny thing especially if it's not a high velocity bullet. It entered the boot, the combat boot right and hit the ankle and both these caps were blown out,

26:30 you know furrowed out as though you'd ploughed them out. And but that sort of gave bullet a high level of resistance to then go to the boot on the side so it goes out to the junction between the foot and the gate or the boot and they just followed their way up the back. But you know, you knew

27:00 you weren't going to run once you got hit there.

Are you in pain?

Yes by this time it's getting a bit painful. But when I went down my Bren gunner Bert White, picked me up and said, "C'mon I'll carry you out Skipper". You know things were going hazy and I could see that as far as I was concerned I'd had it, this was it, Charles Yacopetti this is your day so I said to Bert White, "Drop me, you need to fight the patrol out." he was the Bren gunner,

27:30 he's got bulk of the firepower the patrol had. So he obeyed, he dropped me. And if you read the official history I was left in a weapon pit there with my bayonet fixed on my Owen gun facing them, which is bullshit, I passed out.

Can you tell, I'd like to know what does it feel like to think that your times up?

It's not as bad as your think, it's happened, the terror is in thinking

28:00 it's going to happen, once it's happened, oh it's happened. There's nothing you can do about it. And when that realisation hits you it's not as bad as you know.

But you thought you were going to die?

Yeah, I thought I'd had it.

Who were you thinking of?

Oh, I guess my wife and the wonderful life I wasn't going to have with her.

Is there a sense of

28:30 **disappointment or guilt or...?**

No you're just conscious of it, just guilt, not disappointit's a funny situation. Oh God, you know I didn't even think hell this is worse for her than for me. I didn't think that at all, all these things I planned is not going to happen.

What can you hear going on around you at this time?

Oh, there's lots of firing, shouting, yelling, grenades going off.

29:00 Just these didn't hit me; this time they didn't hit me.

And is time playing tricks, are you thinking, you know in a much more clear way?

This is less than one minute from when I've been first hit. And you know things are blacking out. That's probably another reason why I didn't think much about, didn't have time to think about what's it like going out.

29:30 You know things go black. Spin and blank, the minds the blank and you're feeling really woozy and you just collapse.

You had a vest on; did the bullet go through the vest or how did the..?

It just went between, you know how there's one plate on top of the other, well that's how our vest. I don't know what the modern vests are like, it went between the vest

30:00 and through there.

Were you carrying any medical supplies or was there someone who could administer some field dressing or something to you?

Yeah I think I had two field dressings in the bottom underneath the pouch.

Are you carrying morphine?

No, yes, always carried morphine, the patrol commander or the medic always carried a couple of ampoules or modules of morphine each.

30:30 **Do you recall if you gave yourself any morphine or not?**

No I didn't give myself anything, I think I thought about it, but that's when I came to and I was being dragged across the earth by this wounded arm, it was really painful, that's when I thought about it. But I gathered by that stage that I'd been searched, binoculars had gone, which I shouldn't have worn because that gives you away as abut sometimes it's

31:00 night vision, if you want to see, especially if you're in ambush and you're sitting and you've got time to watch if people are coming, binoculars can be handy. They'd disappeared; weapon had disappeared, what else had disappeared? Compass had gone, wristwatch had gone, that's when I came too.

What do you remember

31:30 **saying to Owen who's next to you or....what do you remember saying to the last Australian?**

That was Bert White, I said drop me you'll need to fight the patrol out. That's the last thing that I can remember saying.

What do you remember next?

I woke up face down with a China man sitting on my back. How long after I

32:00 don't know.

Did he realise that you were alive?

Yes, by that stage I realised I hadn't died yet.

What did you think when you woke up?

I wondered what the hells going on and then you know, there's this weight on your back and then there's a few grunts he's obviously saying "Hey he's coming to." or I presume I don't know. Do we have to go into all this detail?

32:30 **While there are official records of what happened your personal experience is of great value to people, no one can tell us this, not even war movies.**

The official history is only half bloody true. It's a load of, quite a load of codswallop in it. They've written up and exaggerated quite a bit.

I think it is value that we hear you personal story at this level of detail and as much detail as you can recall,

33:00 **the minute detail are ...?**

Well don't forget it happened, what's it now? 50 years ago. As I said before things which are real important in which you experience with intensity you remember, you'll not forget. But it might be a little bit difficult to remember the exact words used or what text. I can remember you know

33:30 I can remember oh I'm not dead, not yet, you know. After that there were a few grunts and somebody came over and talked to him and something happened and I got grabbed by the wounded arm and made, and got dragged on my side up the valley. Oh it hurt like mad, I screamed like mad and obviously that didn't please them because you could still hear the battle going on up there, there

34:00 was shelling and mortaring falling, not near us but falling around. I don't know whether they thought that my scream might alert them to where I was and they might get mortared but I got a swift boot in the back, I think it was probably a rifle butt. I got hit with as I was laying on the ground, "Shut up". Oh that shut me up all right. I don't think it could have been a boot because they wore soft canvas shoes and this was something solid. Well then some of them

34:30 use to raid the American dead because they loved the Americans boots and they use to wear them even tho they didn't fit. And I certainly don't have my boots from that night, some Chinaman got them. So they may have had a boot, probably not probably a rifle butt, collected me as I was lying on my face, bonk in the middle of the back.

35:00 **Can you take us through this a little bit more as you're taken to an aid post or what?**

Yes dragged another couple of hundred yards and hurt like hell and then my medic, Eddie Perks I didn't realise that he'd also been hit in the legs and he got carried past me in a stretcher would you believe. I was being dragged by this wounded arm, really sick and faint from loss of blood and he was being carried. And he said

35:30 to me "Are you all right Skipper?" and I said, "Yeah I am so far but don't call me Skipper." I remember that much of the training. But I think that was a bit futile obviously there was somebody amongst them who understood a little bit of English and that turned out to be unfortunate in the interrogation because eventually, I tried to kid that I wasn't an officer

36:00 but somebody must have had a pretty shrewd suspicion that that was the effect of the conversation between Eddie and me because about 3 or 4 days after I was taken to this hoochie in the front lines and they went to Eddie and they said to him, "Look your buddy who was captured with you the other night, he passed away would you mind confirming his details so we can let the Red Cross know". And of course

36:30 Eddie obliged. Ah then it got a bit woolly. Anyway I was dragged along for, I would say the best part of half a kilometre or more from then on. It I don't know why I was dragged, they could have

37:00 easily picked me up, but anyway that's the way it happened and I finished up in a hoochie which I gathered as far as I can imagine, and I'm imagining this purely from the sound of the harassing fire that came over our way and having being an officer, having some knowledge of where the harassing fire usually use to fall, in our sector

- 37:30 where I probably was and I was probably within certainly less than a kilometre, maybe half a kilometre from the front line. Half a kilometre from their front line. Probably no more than a kilometre from ours. And yeah there they came in, undressed me, took my boots, maybe they thought I was going to run
- 38:00 away with my legs the way they were. Washed my wounds with hot salty water I think, I think it was salty water. Then I was put on this sort of palliasse type of arrangement on the floor of the hoochie and actually it wasn't on the floor of the hoochie it was up raised a bit. What it was up raised on I can't remember.
- 38:30 But I can remember it wasn't on the floor because when they bent down a couple of times to threaten me or get rough they didn't have to knell down, all they'd do is bend down. I can't remember, I think it was some sort of stretcher on ammunition box or a couple of ammunition boxes or packages of some sort at either end. And
- 39:00 there I was, left there until the following midday maybe later, somebody came in with some rice and soup, that's all I got that day. And the following morning in came some military officer not very high level I would say, certainly not very intelligent, by the questions he was asking with an interpreter. And then the interrogation started.
- 39:30 **Was that the first person you spoke to in English?**
- Yeah.

Tape 7

- 00:30 **Can you describe the first English conversation you had with your interrogator?**
- Wasn't so much the conversation I had with him as rather listening to the tirade that was addressed against me. Well it turned out to be a tirade, it started off saying, "ou are fortunate in that you are
- 01:00 now in the hands of the freedom loving peoples of China etc..." you know. And that, "he North Korean Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army will look after you provided you cooperated..." and so on. This was the sort of thing, the build up. It was a sophisticated to a point; there was a build up. And then
- 01:30 I can't recall exactly what my reactions were except well this I expected anyway. And the next thing you know they hit me with this thing, "We believe you're an officer" and I said "No, I don't know who you got that off". And they said "You give us your name, your number, rank and name" and I said Yes. I gave them my correct number
- 02:00 my correct name and I was a private soldier. "Ah, we find that strange," they said or words to that effect. But they let that go and then they started on the tactical, "What's your unit? Where is it located? Where are the minefields? Where are the gaps? How many men in your
- 02:30 battalion? Your company? What's your platoon?" I could answer all those and I didn't really get fussed about that, because they already knew who we were because sometimes they used to broadcast to us from, you know with power amplifiers from their, they gave us a broadcast for Christmas the previous year. And they knew we were Aussies, Australians.
- What did they say on the broadcast to you?**
- I forget now, something like,
- 03:00 "You will not enjoy your Christmas as much here as though you were at home," or words to that effect and "We'll send a few Christmas present over to you just to make you remember it you know," or words to that effect. So that wasn't a problem, I told them "Yes I am an Australian, I belong to an Australian unit" and I told them it was 3 Battalion and
- 03:30 then they wanted details of the things, where the gaps were, where the minefields were, where the machine guns were which of course I falsified because that was valuable information to them. And they were a little bit more cunning and sophisticated then I thought because a few days later after things had, they'd found out that they
- 04:00 let me know that they knew I was an officer and that they'd confirmed it. They brought out a little model of our position, very accurately depicted especially the minefields and the gaps and where machine guns were, so I needn't have told lies, I did but you know they were testing you. They knew pretty
- 04:30 well it's not surprising after the line had been static there for almost 12 months. But anyway when after the third day or fourth day it was, they went to Eddie with the story and they came back and said "Ah so now we know, your buddy has confirmed it, you're his platoon commander

- 05:00 and you have not been honest with us. And this will not go well down with you, you will be punished". And they got a bit rough, twisted the wounded arm. And the important thing was that after a more senior officer came in, he was obviously more senior because the sentry stood to and when he came he saluted him. He asked more intelligent questions.
- 05:30 **What was your relationship with your translator?**
- He was an interpreter, he was a poor English speaker but he was more antagonistic or more aggressive, probably he was told to be than the actual fellow who was asking the question. It was through him that the anger or the disappointment or the hatred or whatever it was
- 06:00 antagonism was expressed so it wasn't a good relationship with him, he was the mouthpiece.
- Was it at any time did he show some sympathy or kindness towards you?**
- None. It wasn't his job to I guess.
- Can tell us about the higher-ranking officer who interrogated you?**
- Yes, well this went on for part of a morning. I suppose an hour maybe a little bit less
- 06:30 it wasn't so much repetition the questions he asked he was, I think this fellow was more concerned what plans had we to attack his position. Had we rehearsed any? Where did the, where was the artillery planned to fall if they. You know he was obviously thinking at a battalion level or more.
- 07:00 The following day, somebody I assume was the divisional commander came along, he must have been at least a regimental commander, probably a division commander because everybody really stood to and kowtowed to him and the same interpreter and he asked you know some fairly high level questions. Who were the neighbouring formations, he knew we were the commonwealth division
- 07:30 and he said he also knew that we had, I forget I Corps, 1st Corps, American Corps on our flank and he wanted to know what the strategic plan is and I know that you're an officer so you must know what the strategic plans for the United Nation force. What plans they have. I guess looking back he was trying to establish are these people
- 08:00 going to sit here for much longer or are they actually going to do something to try and get us to agree to some agreement at the peace negotiations, which were going on at this stage.
- And what did you know of that, what could you tell him, or what did you know?**
- All I knew was that the peace negotiations were going on, and I didn't know. He wanted to know the organizations of the was it him or was it back in the hospital I was quizzed on. A few days later I got
- 08:30 to a hospital. He wanted to know what was the organisation of the Australian army back at home and I couldn't see that being of a direct interest to a divisional commander in the field, so it may not have been him. You know where, I knew that there was only one other fellow in there captivity who could prove that I was wrong in what I told them, his name was Captain Phil Greville and
- 09:00 he was back on the Yalu River, he'd been captured a year or so before. So yeah, in each situation you've got two options you either shut up and you say nothing and you suffer the consequences or you bullshit your way through. You can't tell them the truth. So yeah I decided to tell them we had the Australian army on an area command basis or rather
- 09:30 a geographical command basis, which we were. We have 14 divisions, four of them were regular the rest were reserves, four armoured divisions and I was right, that was never questioned, they never came back and said you told us a pack of lies, there was nobody there to tell them any different. So we got away with that but....
- As this was going on what was your medical condition?**
- Getting worse, you know, it was around the sixth day
- 10:00 all the wounds were starting to smell, getting a bit gangrenous.
- What does that smell like?**
- Smells like something that maggots would love to get into, if that helps you at all. Sickening.
- This is your own body decaying around you, how are you coping mentally at this time?**
- Well I was losing weight obviously and I
- 10:30 wasn't getting much to eat, I was getting sort of a bit of rice and soup once a day. And I couldn't have looked too good, because after six days, the previous day they'd left me for quite a few hours outside the hoochie where the our forces firing harassing fire, would, might fall and get me, this was
- 11:00 part of my punishment for having told them a pack of lies about not being an officer and told them all the lies about the location about the defended, our part of the defended line on 355. I couldn't have

looked too good because they took me to a hospital, an underground hospital. I was carried there in a stretcher this time, I wasn't dragged. And the best part of an hour

11:30 almost to get there so it must have been, that's assuming that I went directly backwards and not sideways. Well it must have been at least three or four kilometres behind the front lines. And yeah I started to get some good treatment and got some good food. The some of the Chinese doctors could understand a smattering of English; although there was an interpreter you know not far away. The same interpreter

12:00 and that was a bit. Didn't quite know what to make of that, I don't think they allotted an interpreter to me, although they could have once they found out I was an officer. I would have thought that he would have stayed back in the front lines, but he turned up at the hospital. And they gave me, the Chinese doctors told me, one or two could speak a smattering of English and they said "We have blood plasma we can give you

12:30 blood plasma." anyway they were very well advanced, not quite matching our medical service but yeah I got some injections I don't know what for, what the injections were. We couldn't communicate sufficiently for me to understand that, but they told me I'm having blood plasma so I know that much.

Were you kept isolated or did you have contact with other troops, prisoners?

No I was just by myself in this ward.

13:00 **What's going through your mind, did you have cause to reflect on your situation at all at this time?**

By this stage, I'd come to the firm conclusion that I had no life threatening injuries it was just loss of blood that beat me and that I was going to make it one way or another. And that's a good feeling.

But you were also; you know you're a prisoner of war, had this dawned on you?

Yes.

13:30 **How did that make you feel?**

Oh I just had to wait and hope that everything would be all right when I got out.

Was there a sense of guilt or failure?

Yes, definitely.

Can you talk about that?

Prefer not to.

Maybe you could give us a bit of an insight into what it is...?

I was worried how I would be received when I got out. Why hadn't I fought to the death, you know that sort of thing. But I must admit that was not weighing as heavily on my mind as

14:00 how to survive. I prayed a lot. It's terribly important to have some religious linchpin to hang onto in these circumstances. And then the task of surviving from day to day takes over. Well the challenge, or you know the activity and the thinking required to

14:30 and you think less and less of the adverse side of it all, of the situation. And think more about how you're going to cope with the things the following day and so on.

Can you tell us about the next stage of the interrogation?

Oh yes, the next stage of interrogation, didn't in fact take place until we got back to

15:00 this place which was in fact a staging camp. Getting back there was quite interesting, it took us almost 3 days, for a few hours on the first day I was carried by 4 stretcher bearers to. I'm now assuming that I was going to go to some place where a vehicle was going to pick me up and take, transport me to

15:30 this staging post which turned out to be our camp, our POW camp.

What did you see of the organisation towards the front line of the Chinese?

Nothing it was all underground. The only time I really saw anything outside the ground is when they left me for the daylight hours on the forward slopes of the next ridge behind. Where the sentry could still

16:00 you know. The shelter was almost a hundred metres away, or a hundred yards away in the hoochie where I was and he could say shelter there, but he wasn't frightened about my taking off, there was no way in the world I was going to walk or run.

What was that like waiting out there thinking you might be hit by your own shelling?

Oh a bit hot in the sun, and you're on a stretcher. And

16:30 nothing to do, just waiting, not one shell or mortar come.

What was your impression of the forces of the Chinese, having seen them from this side at that time?

I saw very little of them. I was dragged past their defences in the dark. I only saw a half of dozen or so people which whom I was intimately concerned. And I was

17:00 not taken back as part of what ever raiding or ambush party got us. I saw the sentry at the door, the interpreter, three officers, separate officers who interrogated me and the doctors, the stretcher-bearers who took me to the hospital, late evening. I saw nothing in the way of defences. And back into an underground hospital.

Did anyone ever

17:30 **treated you with a sort of small act of a particular kindness at this stage?**

But I wasn't maltreated in the way that you read in books or you see on television. Sure they got rough with me when they you know found out that I'd told them a pack of lies about my status.

18:00 And they did this solitary confinement bit out there on the forward slopes, but that's the worst that happened. I think to be fair, I might have to say that they could see that the end war in sight and there probably wasn't much value in pushing the matter too far, otherwise it might have been different. I think that was the reason why the staging camp

18:30 that we got to eventually became our POW Camp. Normally I have understood from my debriefing after I got out that that staging camp was something a lot of POWs and Chinese casualties had been through on their way back to Yalu River POW camps or to the major Chinese hospitals, military hospitals back further. Because the end of the war was in sight there wasn't

19:00 much sense in going any further. So I think our good treatment was probably partly due to that. Any special kindness was the four stretcher bearers who took us from the hospital, no the doctors in the hospital were you know very professional, smiled, you know there was no bitchiness on their part.

19:30 And I think I would be fair to say that I probably got as good a medical treatment as they gave their own. I mean if you give an enemy casualty some blood plasma, which was in pretty short supply for them, they must be doing their bit. But the four stretcher-bearers who carried me for two or three hours the first day

20:00 mind you most of the time we were hiding, under a tree or on the paddy bund or in one of these bunkers on the roadside from the American Air Force. But they were very attentive, very caring in so far as when we stopped they were pretty careful to put me down gently and if they

20:30 were going to sit there for half an hour whilst the aeroplane did their bit and took off they made sure the bandages were okay when we got going again.

Can you describe seeing those aeroplanes in the sky?

Oh yeah. I think that the United Nations air superiority had a lot to do with the war coming to an end or the peace treaty being signed.

What could you see from

21:00 **your stretcher of those aircraft?**

Oh just American fighters, staffing and rocketing and bombing anything moved in the war zone it got hit. The enemy, that is the Chinese soldiers, bare just about every bush, tree, hut flattened. Any vehicle moved on a road, if the dust was seen

21:30 somebody would call in a fighter and in it would come.

Did your particular stretcher bearer party get particularly strafed?

No but we could hear it; we could see it and hear it going on close by. Whenever we stopped, we always travelled on a paddy bund and if we stopped we'd just prop there never on the open paddy because you stood out, if you stopped on the paddy bund where the

22:00 grass or foliage was, herbage was it was easier to camouflage. All the four stretcher-bearers had four big hats they carried on their heads and they just squatted with this sort of big straw hat or rice straw hat if anything was coming. They often put one on me if the sun got a bit hot too. Just sit there. Every hill had a

22:30 sentry with a rifle on it. When the, if and when the sentry saw or heard an aeroplane he'd fire the rifle because that way he could make any vehicle along the road at the bottom of the hill or wherever it was aware that enemy aircraft were on sight and then the vehicles would scatter for cover under camouflage, under trees, if there were any trees left, not that there were many left. But most

- 23:00 hillsides where a road went close by had some fairly large bays dug out of them into which these vehicles could duck into. And most of the vehicular traffic took place at night, didn't dare go by day, not if you were a big truck or a convoy. Vehicles dashed by.
- 23:30 And yeah most of the vehicles that I saw going by excepting one could see by the moonlight or half light, at first light or last light were loaded with pine logs, that's what they use to take forward to the defended localities to revet and support all the bunkers that they'd dug.
- 24:00 All the hospital and other administrative areas. They were all revetted with pine logs.
- Were you able to keep any personal effects with you? What personal effects did you still have you?**
- Nil
- Pictures of your wife or anything like that? Were they taken from you?**
- Yep, I didn't have any pictures of my wife they're back in the command post. You didn't take anything out with
- 24:30 you that's not necessary. Some diggers use to take a, you know, a little necklace with a cross on it, I didn't even have that.
- Had you left a letter to send back to your wife in case you didn't come back from patrol?**
- No, that's asking for trouble.
- I agree.**
- But I think it's worth mentioning the amount of digging these people did,
- 25:00 they should be called the diggers not us. You have no idea, they use to dig out whole garages, you know hospital complexes out of the ground. Tunnels as wide as from here to the wall, a vehicle can travel past, six foot high or more. This is the effect.
- 25:30 **Can you describe for us the staging post cum prisoner of war camp that you were eventually brought back to?**
- Yes we got there sort of early on the third day. The first night we stopped with these four stretcher bearers and the second day was bad from the air, this when I saw most of the action, the air force action because we only travelled four or five hours the whole day
- 26:00 and I gather that night I should have been picked up by this vehicle and transported because there was some argument between the fellow who was in charge of this little military complex underground where we stop and the leader of our stretcher bearer party and they were pointing to a vehicle, as if to say "What about that vehicle?" "No, too bad." or words to that affect I gathered
- 26:30 I couldn't understand. And the following morning some vehicle turned up, a big truck just before first light. And looked at it, it was full of Chinese casualties. There was a lot of head shaking, looking up at the sky and eventually the leader of the stretcher-bearer party said "Okay, you're going on there". One
- 27:00 of them came to escort me and the other three went back. And I gathered, from what I could gather most of the these soldiers, there must have been about 20 almost on this truck, all Chinese soldiers suffering from cholera, there was a lot of vomiting going on. We were in this vehicle for about two hours, fairly slow and believe it or not we weren't attacked from the air. And we were dropped off at this place called the,
- 27:30 well one of my American colleagues and friends called it Kaesong Freedom City, this was after one of the members of camp had said believe it or not, words that almost sounded like welcome, but rightly or wrongly I don't know how much he meant it, said that we would be safe here, we would be well treated provided we did as we were told, otherwise it would go down
- 28:00 it would go very badly for us. But it was a camp situated on a river. It's a fairly fast flowing river, it was very murky white, murky in colour we didn't know why but we bathed in it and it was only after we were repatriated we discovered that a few miles upstream there was a gold mine and they were using the cyanide process for refining and here we were bathing in it.
- 28:30 How many of us got cancer I don't know but nobody as far as I know. It consisted of several rough huts, very rough huts that we occupied and when I got there, there would be what less than 30 people there all told. A little bit further up stream from us was the camp commandant's office and headquarters, then there were
- 29:00 three or four large, fairly large log, well relatively speaking compared to our huts, larger and I had course to look into those later on as I'll explain and this is where the staging post for the Chinese casualties came in, because they were set up double bunks all the way through and I guess and this is just an assumption on my part that each hut if full

29:30 would of held about almost a hundred casualties. And I gather that the ancillary huts on the side, is where the medication and where the doctors and nurse or whatever would have operated and kept their gear. And that's about the extent of the camp from you know by this, this was shortly after I'd got into the camp I was able to

30:00 walk on crutches and on one occasion the camp commandant had cause to inquire whether I was able to walk or not to accompany him to look at one of these huts because the American aeroplanes had attacked us, dropped a bomb which hit the middle of one of these huts with a lot of casualties in it. The carnage was really awe inspiring, you know. This is what your air force does to us.

30:30 And he said the camp is well marked, I had no cause to believe otherwise because I know that the after the first time we got attacked or staffed by air force the camp commandant took a couple of our diggers up with them and I said yeah there were special marks, they didn't quite recognise them, special marks and they could see up on three or four hills around

31:00 the river valley and around the camp, they had signs on them. And I gather the signs were cloth pegged to the ground from what they said. But by this time it was May/June warmish, lots of rain, lots of mist, lots of fog and I've no doubt that often

31:30 the aeroplane, we were now I don't know 40, 50 miles perhaps more from the front lines and quite often aircraft, if they hadn't expended all their ordnance as they say would in the first 20 or 30 miles of the front lines look for targets and we looked like a pretty good target.

Were those markings signifying a medical staging post or a prisoner of war camp?

32:00 I don't know and my soldiers couldn't really, they said there certainly there were signs, I asked was it a red cross and they said it didn't look like a red cross.

What was your reaction on seeing that, the result of that bombing?

A bit of revulsion, that's war.

Did you immediately bring yourself to understand it through

32:30 **explaining it? That it may have been a mistake or dropping extra ordnance?**

Oh I think, let me put it this way the camp commandant just said he wanted us to see what the American, he called them the American Air Force, there were a few Australian fighters there too, Gloucester Meteors I think we were using and a few British

33:00 aircraft there too. But anyway the Americans got the blame for the lot for this one. And I suspect, I don't know but the camp commandant didn't take me stepping through all, and to see all the damage because I wasn't really in the condition to walk too well. He never invited discussion; he just wanted me to see it. And my reactions were awesome, or awe inspiring or whatever you like, revulsion but that's war.

Were you singled out immediately when you arrived with the other prisoners at this camp?

No it was sorted out between those of us who sort of got together that somebody should

34:00 be the senior United Nations officer and it happened to be me. Senior only by virtue of the length of time I'd been an officer, not in years, the oldest fellow and by far the most mature fellow became my very good friend, he was an American artillery officer called Bob Crawl. He was a great help; very mature, I never took a decision

34:30 without consulting Bob. And there were two other American officers, one was Ernie Kruse, also an American artillery officer wounded, Bob Crawl had one leg completely shattered. And the other one was an infantry officer called Pat Milantoni, we had a Canadian by the name of Gordon and I can't remember what his other name was. Usually after a while if I focus my mind on

35:00 things that happened around that fellow and a number of things did happen around that fellow, especially his capacity for playing bridge, I can remember what it is that eludes me, but do you think I can remember, no I can't. The British, we also had British POWs there, and I had somebody else, I've forgotten his name too, John who's a very nice chap, a very capable fellow, intellectually very bright

35:30 I admired quite a bit, John. He I believed wrote me up or partly responsible for writing me up for a Mention In Dispatches in POWs only because I got up with my crutches and helped him rescue or not rescue, retrieve one of the wounded fellows that had been wounded by you know the second or third time

36:00 the American Air Force attacked us and we took refuge in some hoochies that were dug in just behind the barracks and one of the rockets hit the hoochie and injured a couple of fellows and we went and dragged them out as best we could.

Were you allowed from the beginning to mix with all these men, how did that work?

Well this is a bit surprising because by and large

- 36:30 the officers and men are kept completely separated if at possibly can otherwise the officers it is assumed will encourage the men and raise their morale and all sorts of things, which they should to, but in this particular occasion whilst we were quartered separately there was no embargo upon us freely mixing with them and talking to them.
- 37:00 **What were the quarters, where were you accommodated?**
- Sort of rough huts, they had thatched roofs or sort of thatched, rice stalks I gathered with mud. Some sort of wooden frame, not, you know, manufactured timber, but roundish timber, but it didn't appear to be pine, I don't know what it was.
- 37:30 Again sort of mud, not masonite or cement rendering, just some material made out of the rice stalks and mud, floor with palliasse type, floors levelled out with some palliasse type mattresses thrown in there. Bob and I shared one sort of partition,
- 38:00 not a cubicle in so far as there wasn't a proper wall, but a partition about that high and Ernie Kruse, Pat Milantoni and Gordon shared the other one.
- How closely were you guarded?**
- There was a sentry at every on every hut with a rifle, quite often the rifle wasn't cocked, I don't think they feared any insurrection
- 38:30 I don't know why but. There is a guard on every hut, every day, 24 hours a day. And they were relieved, they did oh at least six, eight hour shifts maybe more, I can't recall now. We could you know recall that we saw them change guard and one would brief the other, if there was someone to be watch, because we couldn't understand a word.
- 39:00 And yeah guarding was consistent but not, there weren't dozens of people looking down on us. There would be no more than five or six guards on at anyone time.

Tape 8

- 00:30 ...as they gave their own and probably we were fed as well their own were fed, in the camp.
- Can you explain how much you received and how that was doled out?**
- Yeah we got two feeds per day, one was just before lunch. Normally around lunch but usually a bit of soup and rice. And the main meal was of an evening and we had more rice than we had at lunchtime and the soup
- 01:00 is usually thickened up with some veggies and sometimes a bit of meat actually floated. And usually if we didn't have rice at lunchtime we got some roasted peanuts and we got even more rice of an evening. That was it.
- Was that more than sufficient, did you suffer for the lack of food?**
- No but then we didn't have much activity going on either.
- 01:30 And this was one of the problems or would have developed had we stayed there more than the two and half months that we did stay there. There were two problems at the start, a) the requirement to find things to do and if you were to watch television about the experience of other POWs during the Second World War especially in Germany,
- 02:00 there was no problem of what to do. You know basketballs; football grounds, people could go and do a bit of carpentry whatever, right? Nothing here, not a thing. The big deal came when they felt they ought to show that they were completely devoid
- 02:30 of materialistic pleasures and about half of our time in the camp, the camp commandant announced that we would be issued with toothbrushes, it was a big deal everybody got a toothbrush, no toothpaste but we got a toothbrush. And in due course when we had a little bridge competition against them and we can talk about that later, some cigarettes and candy
- 03:00 even surfaced. So yes how to keep the men occupied especially if we stayed there during the winter. It was something that was exercising Bob Crawl and my mind. Always we were surely the armistice will be declared any day and this will not be necessary. And fortunately that was. Another problem that we could sense coming up was a couple of the Americans and a couple of the British soldiers wanted to organise an escape
- 03:30 committee. I suspect they thought that because that's what they read in the books, that's what they saw on telly or heard on the radio. And it's quite a feasible proposition if you're going to escape from a camp in France or Germany. Cause you're mixing with people with whom you look exactly the same, not too much trouble scrounging a bit of food even if you've got to wait for somebody to buzz off so you can go

into their house and steal it. And

04:00 maybe you could even, lots of people can speak a bit of English or a bit of French or a bit of German. And I tried to tell them that that's not our situation, you wouldn't last five minutes away from the camp. Cause there's no way you're going to adopt or disguise yourself into mongoloid features all of a sudden. And I couldn't see anybody given us half the very scant rationing of food we got

04:30 to create reserve for anybody to be given enough food for four or five days and hope they make it to the front lines. There's even no where to hide, the countryside is so bare, but anyway I don't think, Bob Crawl agreed with me but ...

Was that escape committee just maybe partly a way to kind of keep morale up?

Yes, yes it I guess undoubtedly it was but our argument was

05:00 morale is fine, you can keep it up, morale as long as you can make it clear that you're going to do something and it will be successful but there's a limit to how far you can fool people and this was leading it up the garden path I thought, there's no sense in it, in my humble youth.

How did you and Bob take charge of the situation or do what you could do for the men?

It wasn't a great problem. a) I think at the most we had about 60 people there towards the end. b) We

05:30 were only there for about two and a half months altogether and c) we were fortunate in that everybody spoke the same language and we got on pretty well.

What was the mixture of people in the camp?

That's it. Australians, Americans, British, I think one Kiwi.

Had they been there longer than....?

About 20 of them had been there longer than me.

What was the longest

06:00 **that anyone had been at this camp for?**

Oh I don't really know. I guess, I'd have known, I've no doubt we'd discuss it, but I don't recall it. Didn't think it was very important.

To begin with tho the interrogations continued?

Oh yes.

Can you tell us a bit more about the next stage of interrogations?

The interrogation here focused on two things, 1) is they were

06:30 I think interested on confirming a lot of the things I'd heard from the Americans about how good life was in the country of the capitalist pigs. Which we were of course. I was 'a lackey of the capitalist pigs', that was made clear to me in the front line. And the other one was I think they were really interested in

07:00 establishing for themselves, just how good, what type of life workers in Australia or England or America had. I don't think they believed what the Americans told them. Especially when most Americans, some of them had two cars in a family. Every family had at least one radio, probably two or three

07:30 and some of them even boasted of a holiday home on you know in the mountains, on the lake or on the beaches. But this is workers you're talking about, not the hoi polloi. Oh they didn't believe that's how come that the workers can do that, you know. If that's you see what's in their mind, if that is true then the story that is being put over by the hierarchy that the proletariat

08:00 is being exploited by the rich, influential capitalist pigs, can't be true. So a bit of a dark area there for them. I think that's what they were after. And it is clear that we had two interpreters and two interrogators originally, not very well

08:30 learned in the English language and had some difficulties in communications but later on some very good English speakers came on the scene and what I worked out for myself was that in fact some of this they told me, told us themselves. In China, there are quite a number of wealthy businessmen

09:00 and what have you, who had sent their sons to be educated in England and America. One of them, I've forgotten claimed that he'd been educated by either Harvard or Oxford, I can't remember, one was in America, one was in England but I can't remember. But by the way he spoke I'm quite happy to believe that. And it was easier being interrogated by these people because on one occasion I said to one,

09:30 "Look maybe you can't understand that somebody like me can in fact have a home with seven rooms in it, three bedrooms, two radios in the home." He said "You shouldn't assume that I can't understand, I've seen it, I've been there." I gather he's the bloke thatso,

Were you able to find out much, about these people who were, the people interrogating you?

No, they were pretty,

10:00 they played that part pretty close to the chest. What was clear, that they were obviously educated in an English speaking country. They spoke English as well as I did, if not better. I don't recall, the cat started to come out of the bag when we were playing bridge one day. Bob Crawl, Ernie Kruse, Gordon the Canadian and myself, we were the bridge experts or fiends or fanatics and

10:30 these fellows heard about it and came along and this fellow was standing beside me and he didn't know that we were playing to a special convention that Gordon had brought out from Canadian, called the one club convention. Anyway the first round of bidding, I responded to my partner's call and I can remember him saying, "That's interesting, with your hand I wouldn't have answered what you did to a one no-trump bid."

11:00 And then took it from there, "Oh yes, we play bridge." Anyway we organised a competition, two of them against the four of us, although they played our two pairs twice. They played on both occasions and there was a big bag of lollies, of candy, was the prize and using this one club convention we really outfoxed them because they didn't know,

11:30 understand what it is that we were calling and we won nice bag of lollies. Yeah it's part of the, entirely what the interrogation was on about. And also they asked some political questions, were people absolutely free to vote how they wanted. It was more, I think that's how they put it, but I got the impression what they really wanted

12:00 to know is could as many political parties as wanted to stand up and asked to be voted for. The detailed questioning indicated that's what they were really after. And as I say early on in the piece, those who had no knowledge of western customs and cultures wouldn't believe that. They couldn't understand a system where anybody could stand for

12:30 parliament and so on.

What physical intimidation was there, during these interrogations?

None.

Was that a little bit surreal to be you know being asked these questions about lifestyle?

No. If you put yourself in their position you've been bombarded by this propaganda from the hierarchy and then when you are faced with the people who have been subjected to the

13:00 horrible things that the propaganda. You hear something quite different, what's your reaction, you want to know, you start asking questions and you don't necessarily get intimidatory, you want to know. Eventually this brought Russia down didn't it?

Was there a sense that this wasn't vetted by the top brass? That these questions were more ...?

I suspect that it was very

13:30 much the top brass who wanted to know as well as the curiosity of the people actually doing the interrogation. I suspect, you know I just get a feeling that the task given to ...what do you do with these people who have been educated in a foreign country and then Mao Tse Tung [Chinese leader] pulls the cord and they can't go back? So they get,

14:00 find their way to the army for interrogation purposes. Somebody said "Okay, your task is to confirm this." or "Find out what, get see if the Australians can counter or negate what the Americans say." You can imagine yourself giving those sorts of instructions if you were in their position.

What luxuries if you like, were you offered? Obviously you were allowed to keep playing cards?

Yes

14:30 **What other things were there were for recreational?**

That's it, cards and a toothbrush the rest was your eating utensils you had.

The sweets you won in the bridge competition were completely one off?

Yes.

There was never anything else like that offered to you in celebrations or...?

We were offered a cigarette that night too. In an American packet would you believe?

15:00 **Was there any attempt to inform the outside world you were there or to get information to you from the outside world?**

The information I got after we were repatriated was that the Red Cross had made a number of attempts to get first of all parcels and letters to prisoners, especially those who had been in captivity for several

15:30 years on the Yalu River, not so much us, I doubt whether we would have featured very highly on the Red Cross list. And also that they had tried very hard to get access to the prisoners to interrogate them, let them know what was going on in the outside world and also to take back to the families information about the prisoners conditions and welfare etc. But the Chinese wouldn't have a bar of it.

How did that affect you knowing that as far as your friends and family were concerned

16:00 **you were missing in action, possibly killed?**

Oh I knew my wife would be terribly worried but I also knew that if I made it she would be terribly pleased eventually, but that's war.

What were the hardest things you had to deal with?

Just keep well. It is clear, as I said before it wasn't

16:30 very long after, I mean as soon as I got to the hospital I realised there were no life threatening wounds or injuries. It was just a question of escaping infection or disease and keeping healthy.

Was there disease in the camp?

Oh yes.

What was the common ailments?

Rashes, oh lots of dysentery. We all suffered from dysentery. Lice.

17:00 Lice reminds me of an amusing antidote. In that when two or three of the soldiers said "Look Sir there's you know, I'm pretty sure this is lice, so we best..." Yeah there was lice, in the diggers, in their hair. Which is surprising because having in cyanide water, surely that would have killed all the lice but anyway.

17:30 So I requested a meeting with the camp commandant and I pointed out there was lice in the camp and this could get quite serious and I would like some assistance in the way of whatever medication they had to treat the lice. Anyway he said he would give it his greatest consideration. The following day I was summoned in my crutches again up to the commandant's office where a staff member, one of his staff, someone in

18:00 the office met me and told me, I think it was one of the interpreters told me that he'd given it his serious consideration and he agreed we should not have lice in the camp and therefore I was to put a sign outside of each hut out of bounds to lice. You can see what he's getting at. I don't want lice in the camp either it's your responsibility to make sure that there isn't any lice and you adopt appropriate hygienic

18:30 conditions. What hygienic conditions are there against lice other than treatment? Didn't have a comb, none of us had a comb, you just washed our hair, we bathed it no soap.

What hygiene was there in terms of toilet waste and stuff you mentioned, dysentery?

Deep trench latrine. Such newspaper or

19:00 things like that that you could use as toilet paper. Pretty rudimentary and no wonder there's dysentery never disappeared. Flies, gee things used to grow. Behind one of these deep trenched latrines there was a squash plant, behind our particular barrack. The squashes, you could almost see them grow. We actually put

19:30 a stick in early one morning and by the following morning, the damn thing had grown four inches in one day.

What did you do with that squash?

We didn't do anything with it, I'm sure that the cooks. Cause we didn't cook for ourselves, they cooked. I think they were too clever to give us food to play around with. So they use to collect

20:00 whatever was grown down there and I'm sure it finished up in the soup.

Were there men in the camp who suffered mentally, who couldn't take it?

No, none that I can think of, not one.

What was morale like then?

Good.

And what kept morale up do you think?

I think the knowledge that the negotiations might any day succeed. Wanting to get home. I think I indicated before

20:30 there were three or four people started to get a bit itchy and wanted to think in terms of escape. But it and I think I indicated before had that gone on for a few more months that could have been a problem but certainly it had not surfaced as a problem at this stage.

How much were you able to glean about whether the war was about to end, from the behaviour of your captives?

We were relying entirely on what the camp commandant told us. We had such complete air supremacy

21:00 wouldn't you think instead of strafing us they would have dropped a few leaflets along the Yalu River saying "Hi fellow we haven't forgotten you, this is what's going on". The worst that our captors could have said is you're not to read them, you are immediately to burn them or use them as toilet paper, no we never got a thought. That's a little bit disappointing. Sure on one occasion,

21:30 this is important because of the Wilfred Burchett [Australian journalist] saga, on one occasion we were shown two films, now that's really getting materialistic and showing us that they were up with it. This cinema crew came along and they had two films to show us, which they showed us, open air of an evening on a sheet, between two bamboo poles. And

22:00 one of the films in fact feature Wilfred Burchett and we saw him land, for all I know it was his landing from the aircraft that he took off from Manila. I don't know if it was but it could easily have been. And the

22:30 Chinese commentator speaking in Chinese said, according to the camp commandant's interpreter, 'Our comrades say that Wilfred Burchett is pleased to be welcomed into the freedom loving Chinese people and assures them that the trade union movement in Australia is fully behind them in this war.' And that was

23:00 unfortunate because later on when consideration was given to charging this fellow for treason, we couldn't say that the bastards, pardon my French, said this. All we could say was we heard our interpreter say that the Chinese commentator said so. The only evidence I could give was he was present when two of his lackeys tried to cause trouble at Mascot Airport. That's hardly good evidence

23:30 to find something guilty of the charge of treason.

What was the other film?

That film was about the work that the Chinese were doing, supporting the Korean people, building roads and making aid availability aid as well as economic aid as well as military aid. Well according to them. We were never shown an English speaking film

24:00 which is something else that the Americans or the air force could have dropped.

Can you tell us about one of the bombing raids that occurred while you were there? Were there a number of them?

About three in all. As I recall. Planes coming over. They strafed on two occasions and then strafed and bombed on the third occasion, or on the other occasion.

24:30 I think there was only three. And when they bombed, the hospital got hit.

Was there a mixed reaction to that, seeing as these were your own bombs but they were inconveniencing you?

Oh there were a few, well appointed, well chosen words went in the direction of these ace fighter

25:00 pilots from the diggers in the camp and us too. But you know, I think that on each occasion it must have obvious to all of us it wasn't deliberate, it was foggy and they couldn't see. All they could see were some huts appearing in and out of the fog. Had it been, had visibility been any better I suspect we might have suffered a good deal more

25:30 or we wouldn't have been touched at all because they would have seen the signs.

What were the worst injuries that allied UN prisoners received?

What we suffered from that? Oh just splinters, rock and earth and wooden splinters flying about. I don't even recall that there were any metal splinters from the actual ordinance themselves it was just stuff flying about. Nothing serious,

26:00 except when that bomb hit the hospital. It must have at least 500 pound, probably a 1000 pound bomb to make this huge hole.

From what you saw could you estimate how many people had been killed in that?

No, the lot.

When was the first

26:30 **inkling that the peace process was coming to bear fruit and you might be released?**

It was announced, we were called onto parade and it was announced that the peace, that an agreement had been reached

27:00 and that we would soon be informed the details for our departure, that much we knew. And just before we were informed, or we were going to be told, the date we were going to leave and how we would get there and where we would go. The commandant summoned me up to his officer and told us that in the next two or three days the vehicles would turn up and to mark the occasion he had acquired some

27:30 sujuie which is, its like the equivalent of the Japanese saki whiskey, rice whiskey. But he called it peace wine and that he would like to celebrate the occasion by giving all the soldiers a little sip in a glass of peace wine and he expected me to say wonderful treatment

28:00 they had given us etc. You know that sort of thing; well at least I understood that's what he wanted. By this stage the experts in the English language had disappeared to some other camp, they didn't stay there all the time so we were back to the poor speaking interpreters again, by yeah it wasn't too difficult to understand what he wanted

28:30 to say. Once I discussed it with Bob Crawl and the question was, was this a real gesture or was it something that perhaps they could use as propaganda in due course? And I said well I guess we'll know if

29:00 there are reporters or cameras or something present in which case it was obviously propaganda otherwise it's...

What happened with the peace wine?

They paraded the whole 50 of us or whatever it was. And the guards had a little table with all the soldiers were taken from the parade and filed passed and they picked up their glass of wine, or peace wine

29:30 and went back into line and I stood up and I proposed a toast to her majesty.

Was that understood, do you think by...?

I don't know, I suspect that the, the English I used couldn't have escaped the interpreters but whether they understood enough as to what that might have meant and that in fact it was almost an affront

30:00 to them, for in fact what I said was "Well we can't deny that we have been reasonably treated but we look forward to the next war when in fact as a result from our experience we make sure that the roles are reversed and they will be the captives and we will be the captors." that I think escaped them.

Was it to his majesty or her majesty?

30:30 Her majesty.

But the coronation had only happened recently?

That year, I'll have you know young man that when I was first posted to 6 RTC, Recruit Training Company, remember I was telling you that you know I spent most weekends in camp and I wasn't going out. In January when His Majesty died and Princess Elizabeth was in, what I think is now Zimbabwe,

31:00 the OPD [other Protestant denominations] chaplain also slept in the mess that night because he had service early in the morning before he went and did his parish you see, for the troops that were left in camp. And early on Sunday morning he came along and woke me and said, "Have you heard the news?" and I said "No" and I said, "You're joking." "No" he said, "The Kings dead, I think you should, you know what's to be done". And I said "What should be done?" he said

31:30 "You should parade all the troops or those that are in camp and say the King is dead, long live the Queen." which I did. So I had a specific reason for toasting her health I had proclaimed her as queen in our camp about 8, 9 months earlier.

What eventually happened, did the trucks come as the Commandant said it...?

Yes about 3 days later.

Can you explain

32:00 **the atmosphere amongst the prisoners at that time?**

Yeah waiting, when the bloody hell are they going to come. Once it was there, we were very impatient, we waited reasonably patiently until then and then we couldn't, well the men could hardly wait.

And what was that trip like?

Great, we couldn't see much because it was all covered in but I think we were so elated that we didn't think to say

32:30 is this the way we came in, I wondered. Oh I wondered what was going to happen when we got to the other end. Of course I think as I don't know, I've never mentioned before I met my brother in law with a letter, a letter from my wife and we were first of all detoxed, put through a tent, fumigated, what have you, showered, soaped and off

33:00 to a good meal, steak and beer.

How did your brother in law come to be there?

We married sisters and we were both soldiers.

Was it a coincidence or....?

Yes he just happened to be in the battalion the same time as I was.

Did anyone else get letters from home or is that particularly, you were particularly lucky?

Well I don't know, on the release...

On the release?

I don't know. To be perfectly frank I stumbled out on those

33:30 crutches, I was on my own, I was the last of the Australians to be released. The men, a couple of Australians, one of whom was Eddie Perks my medic, and they had left the day before on a different draft. So I was on my own really, I had nobody to worry about but myself.

You weren't able to speak to anyone until you were

34:00 **debriefed but were you aware that the message had gotten out that you were alive and well?**

Oh yes. My brother in law had been informed three or four days beforehand but he had written to my wife before and he was pretty sure that I was missing in action but from

34:30 you know he read the investigation of the incident and he was pretty sure that I'd made it, I'd be alive. And obviously as soon as the peace agreement was signed, I think it was mid August, wasn't it? Or something like that.

A bit before.

A bit before that was it? Whenever it was I gathered that he wrote to Barbara and said I'm pretty sure he'll be released what about greeting him with a letter, or it may have been Barbara's

35:00 idea. I didn't bother to ask but the letter was there.

Was that one of the most...?

Yes

Can you explain the emotion at that point; it's something that most people don't get to feel in their lives?

No, it's great, everything was great there you know, the trip south was great, we even didn't object to being detoxed or fumigated, it was great hot showers, with soapy water, icy cold beer and a steak was great and a letter from your wife, yeah it was all great.

35:30 **How did you get back to Australia?**

Well I was flown to Kure where Jack Gerke took me into custody, so that nobody could talk to me. I don't think I told you he was the officer commanding the Haramura Battle School before the war, then he got this as officer in charge of the Australian contingent in Tokyo or Kure where we landed.

36:00 And yeah he was very good to me. He made sure that I got money to shop with, he took me shopping and took me to a club and good dinner and all that sort of thing. All that sort of jazz put me on an aeroplane. At that stage I had a brother in law, that's my wife's brother is a pharmacist in Papua New Guinea and he wielded some influence because he was providing a lot of the pharmaceutical services

36:30 for all the government agencies in New Guinea. And he managed to get me, how I don't know, routed through Guam instead of through Manila because the airplane from, going through Guam landed at Port Moresby where he was instead of going Manila, Sydney see. And I met; it wasn't very nice of him in some ways because it took me an extra day, that's an extra day I was you know

37:00 away from my wife and family but yeah it was great to see them and they'd just had their first child and it was good to see them, only an afternoon that's all that I spoke there with them, or a best part of an afternoon. And then I landed in Sydney where a Red Cross lady met me and gave me a box of chocolates and some flowers, there's a photo of her over there. And then I got on a plane and flew to Perth.

Can you talk us through

37:30 **the arrival in Perth?**

Yes, any fears I had of not being received with great welcome soon disappeared. Everybody seemed to be delighted to see me. That night we had a, I was allowed to stay at home with my family and not, the following day I had to go back to hospital but I could stay with my family overnight and my sister in law

- 38:00 who was the wife of this officer, in the personnel branch that I mentioned to you before. Lenore Folks and Ron Folks invited us to their place for dinner and I went in the door and she had a bowl this big of hot steaming rice as a welcoming joke. It, so we had that first night together and the following day I went into hospital
- 38:30 and I stayed there for a few days while I was medically checked out and everything was documented. And an interesting point there, which I should record because purely because I should be grateful to the person concerned. I was put in a ward with a sort of mature middle aged air force officer and the day after I went in, the following morning somebody from,
- 39:00 I presume it's repat perhaps hospital staff came in with a bunch thick of forms that I was required to fill in and which I was invited to report this that and the other, describe my experience and so on. All I could see was more reason why I need to stay in hospital longer than necessary and away from my wife. And I said "I don't want fill those forms in, take them away". And the air force officer who was there said "I don't think you should do that
- 39:30 just let me talk to you for a bit." so he pointed out, he had quite a bit of experience through the Second World War and he was obviously going through some problems and he was aware of the evidence that the department of, as it was then repatriation wanted to accept his disabilities as war service so he explained all this and he made sure that I filled those forms out. And it took
- 40:00 me all afternoon. As just as well he did because, twenty years later when the problems started to surface it was all there.

Tape 9

00:37 **How did you feel towards your Chinese captors after they released you?**

Oh not very friendly in the early days for obvious reasons.

Maybe they're not so obvious, perhaps can you just explain?

Well they were the enemy,

- 01:00 they shot me up, they dragged me under very painful circumstances about a kilometre, yeah they weren't any at all pleasant, especially during the first week. And I guess my feelings towards them remained fairly antagonistic until
- 01:30 we got back to the staging camp and then it started to sort of ease off quite a bit. I think it sums, I think in my interview with the woman, where I may have even have said it on this interview how very considerate the stretcher bearers who carried me for the best part of two days from the hospital back toward the staging point were to me. But
- 02:00 I've always felt, that with some regret that I was a little bit more grateful for their care they displayed and how kind they were to me. But at that stage they were still the enemy you know. And if you can understand that, yeah it's good today, what's going to come
- 02:30 up tomorrow, that's part of the deal of being a captive. So yes it became clear to me that we were not going to be harshly treated shortly after we got to the staging camp. Within a couple of weeks there was no reason to believe there was going to be any treatment meted out to us that even
- 03:00 resembled some of the treatment that some of the captives in the Yalu camps got. And I think that started to quieten me down.

After the experience was over, how did being a prisoner of the Chinese change your opinion of them?

Oh I think,

- 03:30 shall I say, gradually became reconciled to them as a people. I love Chinese food; I have some good Chinese friends what. When we first had seven children in Canberra, our family doctor was a Chinaman, Doctor Wong Si, he became an ophthalmologist, I don't know you may have heard of him in Canberra. He eventually became an ophthalmologist,
- 04:00 he was our family doctor. And there was a time when we had a lot of illness in the family, you know if you've got a family like that all close together, one gets chickenpox they all get chickenpox and there was a time when he use to call round every day and if there was seven children to be treated, he treated

the seven children and charged me one.

How did he remind you of your captives?

And

04:30 if there were no children to be treated he had a cup of tea with Barb who badly needed it. Yes, that's the sort of it's you know.

How did he remind you of your captors back in Korea?

He's Chinese; obviously Chinese there amongst the Chinese are very nice people. Is there not?

Can you tell us of your debriefing, official debriefing after that, after you were released?

It mainly

05:00 occurred in Perth, with the intelligence officer for the command, for western command as we were called then. A chap who I got to know reasonably well, in fact his wife and I, his wife is still alive, he died about twenty years ago. And we're quite friendly and his Merton Bath. It was mainly a tactical debriefing. They were mainly concerned with what

05:30 sort of treatment we got, what did they want to know, what did we notice, were there, did we see enemy tanks, did they have many tanks. Yeah we saw one or two broken down holts on the American Air Force had shot up on the way there. They never in my humble view they never went into any depth to find out what the Chinese really wanted to

06:00 find out from us in the deeper sociological sense. But they started me thinking on that and I sort of come to my own conclusions about that. I think the debriefing was a little more detailed than I think was necessary, they wanted to know, as I recall just about every thought I had and I think

06:30 you have to assess the type of debriefing I got or interrogation because it was like interrogation rather than debrief. Was strongly coloured by what the Americans were experiencing when so many of theirs seem to turn against their own system.

Did you tell them everything?

Tell who?

Your intelligence officer in Perth?

07:00 I answered his questions right. I don't recall that I offered you know enlarged like I have today. It wasn't that sort of encouraging interrogation. Clearly they wanted to know everything that we thought and did, whether any Australians had behaved or misbehaved

07:30 and it was all related to the tactical aspects and just that brainwashing aspect.

Is it possible to really relate your experience, do you find there's a sort of part, that can not really communicate the experience?

I think it would have been impossible then, it's quite possible now. Time has you know made a

08:00it has allowed me to place a lot of things in context. You know which I wouldn't then. You asked me a question a little while ago, "What was my attitude towards the Chinese?" I still is antagonistic and certainly regarded those 4 people who were so good to me, carrying me and were so good to me you know. That's different now; if you ask me today I'd say I regret I wasn't more humane in my response. But that's the difference.

08:30 **Just have to stop you there.**

Lot of the things we've discussed today I've never discussed with Merton Bath, but then I wasn't asked. I was never asked what were your feelings, how you know. Direct questions, they got direct answers.

Were you able to piece together or when did you find out the full story of what happened to your platoon

09:00 **after they'd pulled back?**

Oh a) there's the official history. b) my brother in law Alex Clark, I was telling you about, he did the investigation, so I got a pretty detailed and of course my friend Alex Weaver I was telling you about in Victoria, he got all the experience he needed, he got shot up in the elbows that night.

I mean we have the official history but I would imagine the major dilemma for your men would have been to leave behind their commanding officer? It would have been very difficult I assume?

Oh you know it's

09:30 my men's attitude was typified by Bert White, the Bren gunner he said "I'm going to carry you out skipper." he picked me up under one arm, he's a big strong fellow with his Bren gun in the right hand and he picked me up under the other arm and I had to tell him to drop me. It must have been a dilemma for them.

You went on to become decorated, not only for your actions there but your action in the POW camp, tell us about that?

10:00 **Oh I don't know, I guess some, I must have been lucky enough to be in the right queue at the right time somewhere along the line.**

It was not a small decoration, it was a Military Cross ... how did you feel when you....?

Oh I just wondered why I got it. I can assure you that there was quite a number of other people equally deserving. But you know

10:30 how I got one mention in dispatch. Although I believe at again my brother in law Alex Clark found out that I was already had been written up for a mention in dispatches as a result of the Ernie Cox incident. But when this write up came from the U.K. from this young British lad whom I helped rescue

11:00 some wounded fellows, and lets face it two of the three people hurt were British and the other one was American and we dragged them out of this little hoochie where they'd been staffed and bombed. When that commendation came through they decided to write that one up, instead of the other one.

That was when you were a POW?

Yeah.

11:30 **Can you tell us how much, how does that affect you getting such a high award for gallantry in the...?**

Oh I don't know. I don't think it's affected me really. It's you know a recognition for something I've done. I don't know I would have been much happier to receive an award for being the father of

12:00 seven children, all of them healthy, normal, working and contribute, that's my claim to fame not the decoration. It's I don't know somewhere along the line you did something that people commend you for that's fine. A bit of luck involved I must say.

Where does that luck come from?

It's I think I said before sometimes you just have to stand

12:30 in the right place in the right queue at the right time. It's I guess that if you look at my history, I've probably done more patrols than any other officer in the battalion at that time and involved in several contacts and someone's going to be written up for a Military Cross I guess I'm stand in line.

As someone involved in those patrols, did you have to fire you weapon very often?

No, not often, about three times.

Do you know if you hit anybody?

13:00 Yes.

I can imagine that must be quite a difficult thing to think about, does it every cross your mind?

Yeah it's not good to think about or talk about. That's war.

Never the less that's the brunt of war and despite...

That right and it's one of the things I'd like to talk about later on....

Despite us saying that that is war, I think it does need to be talked about if you care to, that incident?

13:30 **Do you need to consciously suppress memories like that?**

No. I've rationalised that, that's I'm not the only one in that bracket, there's millions of soldiers out there all. Why should I be required to make a special....and many of them have rationalised their situations, coping with life, put it out of their minds and get on with it. I guess that's it you're a fellow that

14:00 moves on or your a fellow that stands still and worries about things.

Are there times when you look back on some of those harder moments?

Yes.

When they still affect you? How do they affect you now?

I don't know you affected me a while ago talking about Jacky Page. And Ernie Cox also bothers me, but they happen and they go away.

When you got back did you suffer any sort of difficulty

14:30 **in sleeping or difficulty with dreams?**

Yes a little bit, just a little bit, just wondering what sort of reception I would get and how it would affect my career and how I would look at myself, and all that sort of jazz. By in large the reception I got, everybody was so wonderful everybody was so nice to me. It just, that's faded into the background.

Who was the person that most helped you back into

My wife.

How was it, was the relationship o.k. when

15:00 **or did it change when you got back?**

Was it ever? She made sure it was.

That must be a wonderful to look back on?

It is. As I said they don't make them like that anymore.

Of course your career didn't stop there you went on to use your experience in the army to assist in jungle warfare training, can you tell us briefly about training in Canungra, the training that you offered to train for Vietnam?

Yes, actually it was quite funny. My friend

15:30 I've been talking about before Bruce Boyes, Colonel Bruce Boyes he was in fact was the I think the chief instructor of the jungle warfare that actually taught the jungle warfare techniques. I was instructing the tactics wing in instructing officers on tactic of Jungle Warfare. And the two are quite separate. They still

16:00 both deal with jungle warfare but the physical heroic bits are done by the other, the wing.

Vietnam was a patrolling war too?

Oh yes.

When you were training people to go to Vietnam as you were. Is that correct?

No.

Was that before?

That was planning at army headquarters our injection, our putting the Australian troops into Vietnam.

16:30 **Can you tell us a little bit more about your role there and exactly what the**

Oh it was just a question ofwhat we had to do of course was to get the appropriate troops ready without letting the population know that we were about to go in because it was such a controversial war. We use to go to extraordinary measure, which I went go into about hiding the fact that we might need to

17:00 send officers up to Vietnam to conduct reconnaissances. Because if the newspapers have got word of it, you know. So we planned on training troops, without giving any hint there was something special. We might say

17:30 our defence policy calls for us being able to deploy a battalion into New Guinea on the West Irian [Indonesian] border at 24 hours notice in case something happens with a follow up battalion to follow. You can imagine where in fact they were deployed. You know that's the sort of thing that we were going on and on with. And had to be pretty careful

18:00 about ordering special equipment for troops that might give an indicative, it was so political sensitive that it's unbelievable.

Can you tell us which years this is for?

Oh you're going back 64, 65, 66.

What specifically was your role at that time?

Just making sure that

18:30 the troops which were nominated in the contingency plan were in fact were available because they might actually have to go to Vietnam, you know.

This was prior to our commitment of troops?

Of the battalion.

Of the battalions, but the the Australian training teams were there?

They were already there. When I went to operational plans they were already there.

And you were part of making the plans for the RAR to go in?

The battalion to go in and then the taskforce.

19:00 **How long was that planning process and when did it begin?**

Oh it began when I went there, I think it was 1964 and it finished when I left in about 1966. The taskforce had just gone in, that's when I visited Vietnam a few months before I left.

And were you under particular security clearance to undertake this work?

Yes.

Are you able to freely discuss this work

19:30 **at this time?**

Not really, there's very little of it that I wouldn't be able to say but... the official secrets acts say that I say nothing about what happened, it's as simple as that. I don't know whether the 30 years freedom of information legislation exonerates me from

20:00 that but you know. I don't think there's really much that I could tell you now that you probably don't know already or that you couldn't deduce.

Having prior experience...

I think the worst thing to be said about that is the way we went about planning and doing things, to hide it from the public. Because if the media got at it, all hell would break lose you know. The Labor Party would say "Ah

20:30 we knew that you know."

Having prior experience with Korea how many, at the time did you see parallels with the war that was fought?

Very few. There's virtually a huge chasm between the two that people still don't understand.

21:00 Korea was fought in an environment in where the civilians were back there, the combatants were in the middle, those that fought the battle were in uniform, if there was somebody whose features were different to yours they were either workers under somebody's escort and guard, there was never a problem you knew who the enemy was, where he was, what's happening. Vietnam you didn't know.

21:30 I repeat the story I heard when I visited Vietnam, an American advisor to one of the South Vietnamese units and it was something that he saw, he was coming back from battalion headquarters to one of the forward companies in battle. And there was this

22:00 lady with a baby, I think he said feeding, baby at breast, whether she was cuddling or feeding I don't know. And this South Vietnamese platoon had just gone through their search of the village and there was this soldier, as I understand it, a soldier that was hanging

22:30 around this hut where she was, for what reason for hanging around I don't know but he had his back turned and from under her, whatever it was, what's the name of a sarong, whatever it was, pulled out a pistol and shot the South Vietnamese soldier from a distance of a few yards.

23:00 And he was, he noticed this and he was armed, what do you do? Would you shoot?

If it was self-defence I guess I would probably have to consider it, yeah.

It's too late to consider she might turn round and go bang you haven't got much time, that's the difference in the two wars. And a lot of especially Second World War veterans can't

23:30 hang, latch on to the impact that that has on people.

You were involved in the planning of sending of troops there. When you finally went to Vietnam...?

Yes

How did the impressions you had prior to going there meet the reality on the ground?

More accurately than I thought possible. But then you see, I'd received such excellent briefings

24:00 **Can you describe for us your personal impressions and perhaps you can describe for us the experience of personally of stepping off the plane and first going to Vietnam and seeing the**

situation on the ground?

The first day I got off, I got there was indeed very interesting. I landed and it so happens that

- 24:30 the commander of the Australian forces which was Lieutenant General Mackay, he was my boss when we were doing all the planning back at Army headquarters and he was at the airport, he came there to meet me and Marshal Ky, who was then the President of South Vietnam also landed and he heard that General Mackay was there and he made sure that he came over to greet General Mackay, and nice to see him, and he introduced me to him and we shook hands.
- 25:00 And going back to General Mackay's headquarters I said to him, "Well there you are Sir there's the hand that's shaken the hand of the President of South Vietnam" and he said "As soon as you get home son, wash it". You know that was one of the things. That night he and his wife took me to dinner in a very nice restaurant, which was French cuisine. And
- 25:30 the following day we went on a helicopter to the G.2 Major Bird. They took me in a helicopter and we went to Bien Hoa, because I wanted to see the airforce base cause that's where 1 RAR was and they'd just left and I'd heard so, I'd briefed so many people, so many politicians, including our ministers about what 1 RAR was doing with 173 Airborne Brigade in Bien Hoa
- 26:00 so I just wanted to see whether how much of the spiel I gave is accurate, was really accurate. And yes it was amazingly accurate, what I saw. Not that I stayed there for long, 173 Airborne Brigade was out on operations. We came back and spent a bit of time around Saigon [now Ho Chi Minh City], which is oh brother. We were quartered for the first two nights, 5 or 6 floors up and ...

26:30 Which hotel?

I knew you'd ask me that question but I can't remember.

The Continental?

It's where the Australians were.

Right that was the Americans; the Americans were at the Continental.

No, it wasn't the Continental but I can't remember the name of it. But if I think about it long enough. Anyway we were 5 or 6 floor up, there was no water pressure. We use to do down to a donga, where some dirty water flowed there, fill up the buckets in order to flush the toilets; we could get water, the Americans

- 27:00 use to deliver, there was a big water tanker use to come around and deliver it water for domestic use, for drinking purposes. That's ...

What year was this?

It would have been 65 or 66. Then the following day we went to Phuc Tuy province, and I was to stay that night until I ended up staying with Colin Townsend whom I knew, he was CO [Commanding Officer] of 6 RAR

- 27:30 and my friend John Hooper he was 2IC [Second In Command], I was to stay with them had a very pleasant afternoon, got briefed on what was happening and then they both got called to task force headquarters on operations the following morning. So I didn't get round to inspect what was happening with the Battalions at all.

What was your understanding of the strategic objectives of the war for Australia at that time that you saw on the ground?

On the ground? It's mainly trying to

- 28:00 get the South Vietnamese to a situation where they could control their own villages.

In your mind was that achievable at that time?

Then I thought it was. It wasn't long before I realised it's going to be a lot more difficult than we thought. In fact I can remember Malcolm Fraser [Minister for the Army; later Prime Minister, 1975-83] ringing me up one day he said,

- 28:30 he wanted me to go over to his office and brief him, I said "Yes. Why sir?." he said "Well you've been telling me what we Australian are going to do and how we are going to achieve it". He said, "I've just got information". In effect what had happened was we'd done the search and destroy and the clearance of Bien Hoa village and the Australian model was to stay, leave the troops there for some time, make sure that the new South Vietnamese infrastructure
- 29:00 was in place and that they were sufficiently well backed up and supported to resist any counter action by the V.C. [Viet Cong] coming in. Which we did for about a week or so and then as soon as we left the press got wind of the fact that the South Vietnamese people that we put in were worse than the V.C. with regards to how they were

29:30 running the village and extortion, raping.

That was the battle of Bien Hoa?

Bien Hoa, the first battle of Bien Hoa.

Because you were still fighting over that three years later I think is that right?

That's right.

Sitting back in Australia following these events how did you feel when 68, 69 the battle, there was quite a controversial battle in Bien Hoa.

It's a, you know as I said to the Minister I'm not sure why you're surprised if this sort of thing doesn't happen then we wouldn't be

30:00 there in the first place, would we. That's the Vietnamese. The Americans decided to back South Vietnam and on the basis of the anti-communist line and perhaps they really weren't backable. You know I didn't want to say a few things

30:30 where I wanted to have that bit added on, we backed the wrong horse. Sure as I say we lost the battle of Vietnam we didn't lose the war. It played its part in telling the Vietnamese that you know this wasn't worth pursuing and at the end

31:00 of it lets face it the North Vietnamese eventually did win but they still haven't got their country fully rehabilitated and there aren't too many countries that are going to undertake that kind of resistance again.

How did you feel, you must have been caught between a rock and a hard place, you've got to put, you're serving the politicians but your also fighting

31:30 **for a nation?**

I think ... nation that's fighting for our future security, o.k. This is what it's going to cost you if you want the ANZUS shield to protect you, which I don't think it will. That's another reason why I don't want to go into things.

How did it feel as someone whose commanded soldiers on the ground having to place soldiers into a war that perhaps many people were losing faith in

32:00 **perhaps even yourself had lost faith in...**

Oh no it's, the soldier is place in a position, he acquits himself as well as he can, to the best of his ability, you can't ask him to do anymore than that. The rest of it is really up to the politicians and the military leaders, that's the bit that I wanted to tackle which I thinks the important conclusion I've come, that resulted or that I've drawn from the wars.

32:30 To me that's not a problem.

Perhaps you can tell us what lessons have we learnt from Korea and Vietnam?

Oh well I don't know if its just from there. Basically I think that neither in Korea or Vietnam did we ever really understand the nature of war as we were taught or as I have studied it to be.

33:00 In war, you go to war because you wish to impose your national will upon another nation, that doesn't stop when you've belted up their military forces. Before you can say that you've imposed your will on another nation you got to make sure that there's a new set of institutions acceptable to you are in place. There's a new cultural mindset

33:30 in the minds of the people you've just defeated. It mean that you have to be on the ground in sufficient strength and for sufficient time to make sure that just about the whole of that country feels the pressure of your wrath and your will to make sure that things will change.

Can you impose a change

34:00 **into peoples I guess hearts and minds to use the terms in Vietnam?**

That a good question. We did in the First World War, Peace Treaty, League of Nations, 10, 15 years later we're faced with a resurge in Germany. Korea, did we finish the job? No. What have we got now? Vietnam, did

34:30 we finish the job? No we didn't but fortunately the country was so run down it couldn't afford to do anything else. First Gulf War, did we finish the job? No, what have we got now. Second World War, did we finish the job? Did we do it right? We sure did. In Germany in particular

35:00 probably because the Russians were there, but we stayed there until not only was there more acceptable set of institutions working but there was also a very significant economic recovery had been achieved thanks to the Marshall Aid plan. Which was a brilliant move really. We're talking about a

soldier who understood the nature of war and it's winning the peace, that's the important bit, not the former.

Have we won the peace?

- 35:30 And in Japan again, we did it properly, we were there for quite some years and we were there to make sure that not on a new set of institutions were set up, you know with courts and what have you but a very substantial degree of economic recovery had been achieved and the people who had been defeated could see the benefits that came. That's the nature
- 36:00 of war, if you're prepared to do that, then you will win. I fear and that in Iraq we may be close to making the same mistake. I don't think there are enough troops there and nor do I think we plan to stay there long enough to achieve that which has to be achieved.
- 36:30 We have now got to the stage where our political and military leaders are thinking that it's firepower that counts you know. Masses of firepower, you don't need men anymore. Man is not the ultimate weapon anymore the dollar is. So but you see firepower didn't win Vietnam and it doesn't look like winning Iraq and I question
- 37:00 whether its really won Afghanistan. It has become too political sensitive to go on imposing or applying this tremendous firepower we have when there are so many innocent women and children in there. Well if you don't have the will to do that,
- 37:30 I wont say courage, that would be a terrible misuse of the word, have will to do that, well don't go to war, achieve your means by some other means. And that I think is what's concerning me. The nature of war is, what peoples understanding of it has changed. They seem to think that oh if you go to war you've got to make sure that you defeat
- 38:00 the arms that those countries have developed and you must do it in a very elegant sophisticated way so that innocent women and children aren't affected and that's not possible. I regret to say, but people don't understand it. Not so long ago I was in members of my first wife's family, I was having an evening with them and naturally
- 38:30 the way that the Howard Government has handled the illegal immigrant question cropped up and I said I support the Howard Government's policy on illegal immigrants unequivocally even if it means as a result some women or children have to be detained, well you should have heard the uproar, I mean my own family, I'm a child abuser, I'm
- 39:00 insensitive you know what I mean. It's a sign of the times to a large degree that I think I would say to our political and military leaders you know please understand what it is that you are undertaking when you declare war and if you're not prepared to put up with the consequences then try and achieve objectives by other means. There are economics, social,
- 39:30 cultural, diplomatic means.

Surely war is the last resort?

Exactly, but you see these runners don't have any problems in that regard do they. Many many distinguished careers, you could read in the other interviews and get the same, it's nothing. I think that if ever I was to contribute anything it's been in the last 10 minutes.

40:00 **Is there anything that I skipped?**

No, or [Chief of Defence Forces] Peter Cosgrove. I mean what's General Cosgrove; he's a military politico. Is he off at Defence Headquarters running the armed services? No he's out with John Howard making sure that his political backside is covered.

There are many questions surrounding war, it's very complex.

- 40:30 Yeah that's very true, now don't get me wrong I'm neither agin the Labor Party nor the Liberal Party, I don't belong to either. I vote for whichever party I think has the best policies for the countries and that's the way my kids will get the best deal. That's my view, so and I have friend in both camps and relations in both camps.

Charles thanks very much for talking to us this afternoon.

- 41:00 **We'll stop it there.**

INTERVIEW ENDS