Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Barnby (Barney) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:45 **Before we start, just give you thanks from the Archive. To begin with we just need a summary as I said, so if you could tell us a little bit about where you grew up and where you were born and maybe your family and start from there.**

Okay. I was

01:00 born on the eighth of April 1950 at a place called Brewarrina near Bourke in western New South Wales. Dad was in the New South Wales Police Force and he was stationed there obviously. We travelled all around western New South Wales, places, went from Bourke to, Brewarrina to Bourke, Bourke to Murwillumbah. Murwillumbah then we went to Cobar. I went to school at Cobar and Wellington

01:30 and I left school in Wellington, did high school, fifth year high school. I went to school in Wellington, joined the army on the seventeenth of May 1967 at the age of seventeen, did my basic training at Kapooka. Was then posted to ordnance because I was too young to go overseas, basically, had to be nineteen I think and I was only eighteen or seventeen.

02:00 So I was then, I did my basic training in ordnance at Bandiana and then was posted to 2 BOD [Base Ordnance Depot] at Moorebank, in Sydney. Stayed there for a while and that wasn't my sort of idea of the army, driving forklifts and folding blankets basically. And a friend that I joined the army with, a Burmese guy, was posted also to RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] at 2 workshops there, at Moorebank.

02:30 He said that SAS [Special Air Service] was recruiting but I was still too young, he was about two years older than me. They were recruiting, he did the selection thing and went to, was posted to SAS, did the cadre course and all that. And he wrote back to me while he was over there and then when he went to Vietnam subsequently. And he said, "You've gotta do it, I mean it's fantastic." I knew about SAS because I'd read a bit about it when I was a school kid. And he said, "If you get over here

03:00 I'll present you with your first beret." or something. So that was good incentive and anyway I wanted to get out of ordnance so. I struggled on there til I was eighteen or eighteen and a half. Went to selection, did the SAS cadre course at Swanbourne, Western Australia. Passed. Out of seventy-five I think on our intake four of us passed. One was a Royal Marine Commando major on exchange,

03:30 and the other two were infantry, and I was ordnance. And the incentive that got me through the cadre, which was quite difficult for a young eighteen or nineteen year old soldier that wasn't used to all this sort of stuff, was the words from my fellow colleagues at 2 BOD said, "Oh, we'll see you back here in a week, you won't make it." So the challenge was down and I took it up, and there was no way I was going back to Moorebank. So, I passed that. Served in SAS from

04:00 late '69, early '70 to '73. I resigned or was discharged on seventeenth of May, 1973 after six years in the army. While I was in SAS I served in Vietnam in 2 Squadron. Retired from the army, got married, hitchhiked around Australia. Got married to my childhood sweetheart in 1973 and joined the police,

04:30 the ACT Police in 1973 in July.

How did you end up in the ACT?

Well dad was in New South Wales Police and I couldn't see myself settling down to becoming a bank clerk or a... you know, like, in those days it was not what you wanted to do, what you wanted to do or would you get a job, it was just basically, you know, what job did you want, everybody had jobs. There was no problem about getting jobs and I just wanted

05:00 a bit of an adventurous job, and dad being in the police force, I mean obviously I knew a little bit about the lifestyle. And he said, well I know some friends down in Canberra and Canberra Police would be the way to go because you don't get transferred all over the place. Because I went to about three different schools and mum and dad had about twenty different postings so that didn't excite me much. So Canberra Police seemed to be the way to go. So I applied while I was still in the army did the interview

in Sydney, was

05:30 accepted. So literally as I said, two month gap between getting out of the army and in the police force. Came down as a newly married couple, we got married on the Saturday and I started work in the police on Monday, sworn in. I served initially, after training, in general duties, then I was, applied to go on the bikes. I did thirteen odd years in traffic on the bikes and pursuit cars.

06:00 Got out of bikes. During that time I did three years in Cyprus in the UN[United Nations].

Is that because Canberra Police is the AFP [Australian Federal Police] or is there a difference between the two or…?

No, no. The ACT Police and the Commonwealth Police amalgamated in 1979, to form the Federal Police. Prior to that it was, they're two distinct police forces. And they amalgamated to join the Federal Police, to form the Federal Police.

06:30 So yeah I went to, I was actually on the first AFP contingent to Cyprus in 1980 because we amalgamated in '99 and we replaced a Commonwealth Police contingent in Cyprus. So I did eighteen months there and eighteen months tour. Came back, got divorced, shadow of the job, and went immediately back to Cyprus and did another eighteen months, so basically three years in all. I came back, stayed in traffic for another twelve or eighteen months.

07:00 Transferred to Witness Security in the police force, Federal Police. Did five years in Witness Security, was promoted sergeant in 1990. Transferred to VIP [Very Important Person] duties, close personal protection of VIPs. Was put in charge of the Turkish Ambassador then during the Gulf War I was put on the PM's [Prime Minister's] team, Bob Hawke's team. And then back to the Turk and then I was appointed saergeant in charge of

07:30 the CPP [Certified Protection Professional] Team on the Governor General , Bill Hayden. I did five years with Bill Hayden right up until his last minute in office. I was actually with him when the clock ticked around to midday or whatever it was. And came back, got out of CPP, about four months after that and went to Interpol. And basically, Interpol didn't sort of, didn't really sort of suit me because I mean, I was

08:00 operational police up until '96 and suddenly I was behind a computer and that sort of really didn't… So I did two years in Interpol, I supposed to do two years and I did two years in Interpol. I escaped to the jungles of Bougainville for three or four months during that time. Resigned after twenty-five years in the police, early discharge. Travelled Europe, came back, found a job at Parliament House, doing security up there.

08:30 Was called back in to do East Timor, the election. I was in charge of the training, the training side to do East Timor. We went up there and did the East Timor election. Came back fairly shattered, I was, had typhoid and dengue [fever] and a few other bits and pieces. Went back to Parliament House.

Did you know what you were in for on that job?

Well we sort of did, I mean you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out it was going to be fairly hairy but

09:00 it just turned out to be a bit hairier than we thought it was going to be. Got out of the police force again, went back to Parliament House. I was just recently been called back in to do CPP for a three, four-month contract. Resigned from that just a couple of weeks ago. And that's it, I live in Canberra. love it.

That's great. One bit that we just want maybe just a little bit more detailed summary of is your service in Vietnam.

09:30 **How long was your tour over there?**

Eight and a half months I think, yeah we did eight and a half months. We went up in February 1971 and we were the last squadron there, we got pulled out in October I think, October '71.

And what was the role of the SAS in…?

Deep reconnaissance, missions, reconnaissance missions and ambushes and surveillance of enemy positions and strengths, whatever. We used to

10:00 feed that information through intel [Intelligence] back to the battalion commanders and they used to, or the Task Force Commander and they used to act on that intelligence.

So deep reconnaissance is in, an SAS platoon is how big and…?

Five man, five men in a patrol, occasionally two patrols'd join up to make a ten man patrol, and that would be for the purpose of having what we used to call ambush fighting patrols. And they'd go out literally to ambush a track and

10:30 get into a fire fight basically, to either ambush them or assault a known enemy bunker system or whatever. But most patrols were reconnaissance and five man patrols.

Was finally getting over there what you had expected it to be?

Yeah it was, I mean everything when you do it is, turns out to be a bit of an anti climax. Because once you're actually doing something, you've gotta keep pinching yourself.

11:00 This is my experience in life, you have expectations of what something's going to be like and then when you're actually doing it, you have to keep pinching yourself to say, well I'm actually doing this. I mean this is like, I'm not gonna do this again, this is like, this is a one off. So it was what I anticipated it to be because our briefings and the training for SAS was absolutely brilliant. Done by ex-Borneo and ex-Vietnam veterans already. So

11:30 they taught us well. So short of actually experiencing what they were telling us, it was probably the best training that you could ever have.

Where do you think your desire to serve actively in the army came from, obviously you were very keen as a seventeen year old when you joined up?

I think most of my passion for wanting to join the army came from my uncle, dad's brother, who served in the 9th Division during the Second World War.

12:00 And I remember as a kid he used to tell me some stories but they lived in Lane Cove in Sydney and when we came down to Sydney on the odd holiday from the bush, I'd stay with Uncle Tony and he'd, we'd go down the garage and he had all these boxes of German stuff that he'd brought back from the desert. And it, be, with every little piece of stuff that he used to give me, it used to be like a little Christmas every time I used to go there. And I'd wonder what, what was he

12:30 going to give me, and there'd be a little story attached to everything. And I remember the first thing he ever gave me was a German helmet and I was only about eight. And I, mum often laughs about this, I was laying in bed looking at it as an eight year old, having, holding it above my head. And I obviously fell asleep and the helmet came down, nearly broke my nose. I just couldn't take my eyes off it, I was just looking at it and imagining, you know, a German soldier wearing it and all this sort of stuff and I fell asleep and it nearly brained me. But I think the passion, cause dad wanted to leave the

13:00 police force and he tried on many occasions. He wanted to be a Spitfire pilot as a couple of his friends from Grammar School in Sydney did, and they were both killed in the Middle East. And that's who I'm named after actually. But dad was frustrated at every attempt, because I mean police couldn't get out, it was a protected occupation so, they wouldn't let him, they recognised him every time. Where Uncle Tony ended up, he was in the police too, but he ended up somehow evading the process. And he got in and I think

13:30 most of my interest came from him. Although, and I used to beg mum to buy me books every birthday or Christmas, on you know, just war books, war history books, I love history. And I think the passion just grew and developed. And SAS, I remember the first book I bought on SAS was The Phantom Major and I just got an insight into that. And I thought well this is really, this'd be a neat way, if you have to be involved in a war, to be involved in such a unit that has got

14:00 sort of a fairly democratic way of doing things. That you're not ordered to take positions and do this by some officer that really shouldn't be there, that's a fairly democratic way of doing it. And in fact we used to call that in the regiment a Chinese Parliament. Before we did anything on patrol we used to all sit around and discuss it, as equals. Unless it was something that had to be done and which was going to be unpalatable, which was an object of the mission. But I mean

14:30 we discussed how we would do it, if we had to do something, like ambush a certain track that was quite dangerous, we would actually sit down and discuss how we would do it. And all points of view were taken aboard so it was quite good, it was quite good.

We'll definitely come back to the structure of the SAS and the Chinese Parliament in a while. Do you think, obviously your uncle served and your father wanted to serve, did the area you grew up in have a strong sort of military tradition from the Second World War?

No, not really,

15:00 I mean the, a lot of country towns had, you always see the War Memorial, and I was always sort of drawn to that and I used to read the names and that, but, no not particularly. I wasn't bought up in a military family and the only influence in our family, my grand father served in the Boer War in the 2nd New South Wales Mounted Rifles, so there was a little bit there. But no I wasn't bought up in a militaristic family, I mean not at all. My sister became a teacher and I joined the army. I left school a year early,

15:30 I was the last, I was the first year of the high school certificate, but that would've meant I would've had to do another year to do six years to do, get the high school certificate. So I left after five years, I left school early basically. And I was seventeen and one month when I joined the army, so I just couldn't wait to get out of school and join the army. I don't know what, where the drive for that came, but I mean it was there. I just, I begged and begged I said, just let me go, I just want to go, I don't want to stay at school

16:00 for another year, just let me go, so.

It wasn't the most popular kind of point of view amongst…?

No it wasn't, not in those days. If you remember the, towards, well in 1967 the war was, in Vietnam was quite, was at it's peak basically, it peaked in '68, I think, fairly good consensus agrees that it peaked in '68. Then '67, '66 was Long Tan I think, and I remember reading about that. So no it wasn't the most popular

16:30 occupation to go to. I think out of my class only two of us went to the army, one went to the navy and that was it. So, no it wasn't the, you know, it wasn't sort of the most popular area to sort of serve in or [UNCLEAR].

Did you cop any flak at the time from your mates?

No, not really no, I just, I told everybody I'm just off to join the army. I mean I just, no, it's, they all wished me well and yeah. They were all quite surprised when I first came back on leave in my uniform. You know, little seventeen year old with no

17:00 hair from Kapooka, I mean it was, but they'd all, they were all still at school then, I was yeah.

What was it like growing up in Cobar and Wellington?

In those days it was fantastic. I mean Cobar was, before the mines open, reopened in Cobar, it was just, it's a small country town and it was just a kid's delight. I mean we used to, Hal and I and all the mates, we used to just get on our push bikes and ride out into the bush somewhere and play Cowboys and

17:30 Indians and wars and hike and discover stuff and then Wellington was the same. I mean on the river system there, the Bell and Macquarie Rivers. And it was just really interesting place to live, I mean a small country town, it was just great, schools were great, people were great.

What sort of things did you do in this child wonderland?

Oh we just used to explore, I mean even now when I go down the coast I love exploring, just the rocks, even though I've gone over them a hundred times, I mean I love going back and exploring. And we used to, I mean

18:00 the bush is just so interesting, we'd sit and watch kangaroos And dad used to do a lot of kangaroo shooting out at Cobar. So, and I hated shooting kangaroos, I used to deliberately miss them and he used to give me a clip over the ear cause he knew I was a good shot. I had a slug gun and he knew I could kill a sparrow at fifty yards or something, so he knew I was missing deliberately but I couldn't stand seeing animals killed. Even at that age and but we used to sit and watch kangaroos and all the animals and just throw rocks in the river and just kids. You know, like,

18:30 like, Ginge, not Ginger Meggs, what's that Australian, that series about that little kid, I don't know, anyway. Like Ginger Meggs, you know just going off and doing stuff, just kids stuff. I mean, we used to just explore and just have a great time, I mean we had an amazing childhood. The only down side to dad being in the police force I remember was after school socials, everybody'd pair off and go down the river. And,

19:00 you know, do whatever and I was always ostracised from that group, because they'd say, "Oh no you can't come, you'll tell your dad, you know, you'll tell your father." So I was just sort of left after the, everybody'd pair off and go and have a lot of fun. And I didn't have a girlfriend until I was out of, well out into the army and out of training because I was just ostracised out of that group, because everybody'd be scared that I'd tell dad, and they'd lock him up or something you know, so.

What was your father's kind of

19:30 **reputation?**

Dad was a disciplinarian; he was a very good police officer, well respected throughout all the stations that he served in, in New South Wales. But he was very much a disciplinarian. And very strict, and the way he regarded people should behave, and I wasn't allowed to wear jeans cause only hoodlums wore jeans and I used to have to get a very short haircut every fortnight I think. And in those days my pocket money was a shilling a

20:00 week. And dad used to make me, to get that shilling I used to have to mow the lawns, do the gardens, chop the wood, wash the car, light the fire every morning in the thing, wash up at night. And he would come home at lunchtime and inspect the lawn literally. And if one of the edges wasn't done or there was a weed in the garden, he would just say, do it again. I mean it was just, well kid, my mates were out playing I'd be mowing lawns and chopping tonnes of wood and all this sort of stuff. And he was like, you know, he taught me how to replace an axe handle once, and

20:30 he said, "If you break an axe handle, you buy it out of a shilling a week, you buy it and you fix it." he was that sort of guy. You know I had a pet sheep and when the sheep was about nine months old I think, he said, "Come on." and he grabbed this knife and he started walking up the back yard with this thing. And he said, "I'm gonna show you how to slaughter a sheep." And I just, can you imagine, just died, just died. So I never ate, didn't eat meat for ages, and mum'd sort of feed me secretly. Cause dad said, "If you don't

21:00 eat what's on your place, you don't eat at all." so. He was very much a disciplinarian but a very good

police officer.

You were obviously quite a sensitive young man, how did you react to that discipline?

Yes I was. Oh well I didn't, I lost a lot of confidence and I was, I was just never thought I'd be good enough. I grew up never thinking I'd be good enough. And I think in a way that was partly the reason why I wanted to go in the army to

21:30 prove myself, to myself as well as to him. But he never acknowledged, he didn't acknowledge that I'd made it until actually was in SAS going to Vietnam and that's another story but. I wanted to prove to him that I was good enough, worthy of his respect or something. And, but I never seemed to be good enough, didn't matter what I did, whether it was good marks at school or getting on the cricket team. I was sergeant in charge of the Rifle Team in the cadets and all that, and that was still never good enough.

22:00 Cause dad was a good shot, he did the Queen Shoot, he won the Queen Shoot in Australia in 1957, you know he was very much the perfectionist. And mum was very sensitive and she developed my love of books and you know all that sort of stuff. I was never the typical male, I played football at school but didn't like it, I prefer cricket and tennis and all that sort of stuff, so.

When you say you were ostracised a bit because of your father, how did that affect you, what ...?

Well again, that

22:30 used to make me feel inadequate, I mean, as a little, as a kid, you know, sixteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and I mean they're the worst ages aren't they. Well I was only at school til I was sixteen though, but they're the worst ages. And you'd go to these school socials and you knew what everybody was doing and in those days, you know, girls, I mean we, I think we, all males of that era grew up fearing rejection or just used to rejection. Because you'd go over and ask a group of girls you know, would you like to dance, and they'd say, "Oh, you know, get..."

23:00 And we all used to just sort of, all of us, I remember all of us. But that doesn't happen now, I mean girls ask you to dance or do whatever, take you out. But in those days it was like, it was the male thing to do and they used to love to reject, you know, like saying no. And I, you just used to get so embarrassed and walk away with your head down, and you know, and everybody'd be laughing, "Ah ha, you got knocked back." and all that sort of stuff. But when they used to go off and do stuff after the socials and I was sort of left just standing, literally outside the school, what do I do now?

23:30 And I remember I took one girl to a dance and I took her home one night and I walked up and down outside mum and dad's bedroom so they could hear me talking to her and they, and mum was just so, she was just so chuffed. But, you know, dad sort of went, "Bloody late, you should be inside." you know, all this sort of stuff. He was very much a disciplinarian but, very hard man but I mean I think he, I think he thought he was doing, setting me up for the hard life, because you know, life's not easy.

24:00 And in that sense he did a good job that he certainly took away all confidence and I grew up with a feeling of inadequacy and just not good enough, I didn't measure up basically, not to his standards anyway so.

There was a time that you said you finally kind of won his respect when you joined the SAS?

Yeah well I was in the SAS and as I told you before I was in ordnance in Sydney. And I went over and I just said "I've applied to have,

24:30 for a transfer to Perth." And they said, "What is it?" And I said, "Oh it's something to do with the air force." you know we, I didn't tell them anything about what the SAS did, I just said, "It's Special Air Service." and they didn't know what it is cause dad'd never heard of it, and we're based in Perth. So I went over there and did all the training and on my Pre-Em [Pre-Embarkation] Leave, prior to Vietnam I came back. And just before that, dad had, dad was in charge of Hornsby Police Station and one of his sergeants was an ex-

25:00 veteran from Vietnam I think. And he said, oh dad, "Young fella's come home on leave, he's off to Vietnam." And this bloke obviously said you know, "What's he doing?" "He's in the army." "What's he, what unit's he in, what corps's he in?" And he said, "Oh something, SAS, Special Air Services, I mean he's in Perth." And this bloke's jaw apparently dropped, dad telling the story, this bloke's jaw apparently dropped. He said, "What, is he a bloody idiot or what?" And dad said, "Why, what does the Special Air Service do?" And he told him, he said, "Fuck!"

25:30 So dad came home and I remember that night, the first night ever, dad came home and he said, "I think we'll go out the pub for a beer." Amazing. And dad said he, from that period he realised that he might lose me, you know, I could be killed. And I think that was the only thing that, yeah.

Was that a watershed moment in your relationship with your father?

Oh yeah, definitely, definitely. Yeah, cause from then on he,

26:00 his attitude towards me changed, and yeah it was, that was quite a sea change in attitude definitely.

Going back to Cobar and Wellington, was that small town notion where everyone knows what you're doing, was that something that you didn't like or liked?

No it didn't worry me, as a kid it didn't worry me. I mean we all knew what everybody did but as I kid, I mean what secrets I had. I mean it was

26:30 fun, at my level in those days it didn't concern me at all, didn't affect me at all, no, no.

What ambitions did you have as a younger child and a teenager?

Well I actually wanted to be a vet [veterinarian]. When I, they did that school, when they, school careers thing, somebody comes around and you know. They said I'd be either good as a town council, a town council planner or a veterinary, you know doing veterinary

27:00 science. But to do vet science you had to get really good marks to go to uni. And I think I would have been too soft with animals, I'm just hopeless with animals. And I, and they said nothing about the army, I mean the army wasn't even mentioned. The police wasn't mentioned, none of those occupations was mentioned, it was all, you know, airy fairy sort of stuff. But I always sort of wanted to be a vet, I had ideas to be a vet,

27:30 yeah.

Who ...

They wouldn't eventuate.

Who were your best mates when you were growing up?

What by name or...

Oh no, well tell me a little bit about them if you want.

Oh there was a guy, a young guy out at Cobar used to, he and his brother used to live on a station called Maryantha Station out of Cobar on the Louth Road. And every school holidays I'd go out there and their father, old Any Matthews was a wonderful old guy And he taught me how to drive tractors, taught me how to shoot, taught

28:00 me how to do everything. And he used to, I remember after a hard day out in the paddocks you know, crutching sheep or bloody dragging cows out of the bloody dams or just rounding them up and doing all the stuff that you do on properties. At night old Andy'd come back and they'd have the fire going in the big lounge room on the property, and we'd all be dressed in pyjamas you know, be laying around. And Andy used to read us stories from history books, you know, Robert Louis Stevenson and all the

28:30 Australian classics and all sort of stuff, Henry Lawson, and he used to recite poetry. And we'd all be sitting around there just listening to these stories. And I, if you remember the movie Gallipoli, when the old guy that was the trainer of the runner was reading stories to the kids and they were all sitting around with their little faces turned up. And that was just; I just remember that, it was just classic. We'd get up in the morning and have bacon and eggs for breakfast and really thick gruelly porridge and it was a classic time you know. I

29:00 used to hate going back to Co… back to the town you know, and then going back to school basically. But it was just, you know, it was just, that was a boy's own adventure on its own. You know shooting snakes and trapping rabbits and all that sort of stuff, it was classic.

How much was the bush a world away from the city and even the town in that day or those days?

Well we didn't get down to the city very much, I mean. I remember the first time we went down to the city from Cobar I think it was. It was, dad went down to replace one of the police trucks. And on the way down we hit a

29:30 kangaroo near Nyngan and it smashed the front windscreen and ended up in the front seat and we all bailed out and it shredded the front seat. It got away, hopped away so it was obviously alright but we got down to the city and I was just absolutely in awe. We went to Manly and you know saw the beach, although I'd seen the beach at Murwillumbah. I mean it was just a different beach you know, lots of people. You know, trams around the place and it was, you know it was just a different life, a different world from what we grew up in.

Was it something you wanted to,

30:00 **to be part of?**

No I never had a hanker, an ambition to live in the city that I now have. I mean I could not live in a country town now. I mean, not a small one, I just think they're too stifling. I mean they're lovely people; they're wonderful people in the bush. But I just think I've been probably too spoiled by living in cities. You know Perth and Canberra I've lived here for thirty odd years. Short times in Sydney and other cities around Australia.

30:30 And I just like the access to facilities and infrastructure in cities. You know I think I'd be, I don't get

bored at all but I think I'd become quite tediously distracted in small country towns.

We'll just stop there for a second. Okay. Can you tell us about TV and the introduction of TV, that was around, that must have, you must have bumped into that when you were growing up?

Yeah I did, I

31:00 dad, again being the disciplinarian refused to allow us to have TV in the house because it was a distraction. We used to sit around at night listening to serials on the radio. You know, The Phantom and Famous Five and Hop Harrigan and all that sort of stuff. But dad, a lot of kids, a lot of families in those days had TV back in, I think we first got TV in '65. And when it finally came out I mean it was, had, dad was very strict about how much we could watch, which was probably about an hour at night,

31:30 you know, and that was it. But it was quite a big impact, I mean just to be able to go, we used to have outdoor theatres in Wellington and Cobar and that was our sort of experience of movies, and I used to love going to the old movies. But to actually be able to see, to watch stuff on TV in your lounge room, quite, you know, this is quite exciting stuff. And black and white, it was brilliant.

Did you, what, you said,

32:00 **did you have a TV in your house or…?**

Yeah, yeah dad eventually weakened and I think we got one in about '65.

And what sort of programs were you watching?

I remember, well I remember distinctly shows like Rawhide, the, what's that, Ponderosa, what's that one…

Bonanza.

Bonanza,

Bonanza.

Bonanza. And Vic Morrow in Combat, I remember Combat was a great series and I remember I used to watch that. If I was allowed an hour, that was my hour,

32:30 that would be my hour, that I was going to watch. Oh I used to like, even in those days I used to like the news, watching the news. Cartoons and kids shows were not a big part of TV in those days. I remember watching Graham Kennedy and Bert Newton back in the old, you know the funny days you know, the older. I think, well not long after that was the Naked Vicar Show and all those, Number 96, yeah all that sort of.…

Were

33:00 **you picking up you know, the Vietnam War's the first, so called TV war.**

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Were you, can you remember sort of early imagery from that?

Yeah I seem to remember watching the news and it did have quite a bit of footage coming from that. And I was, I used to get excited, you know as a kid, as a sixteen year old, get excited when the news came on and had a bit of Vietnam stuff on it. And we used to talk at school about Vietnam and you know, cause I remember as I said Long

33:30 Tan was I think in '66 and the Australians had about twenty odd killed in Long Tan, so it was a fairly traumatic thing to happen in those days. And yeah, we used to talk about it at school a fair bit. But, you know, I used to, I remember seeing images of Vietnam and reporters, you know reports from Vietnam coming back over the television.

Was that part of the current affairs and school curriculum or was this outside?

No, no that was outside. I think in those days we were into British history and,

34:00 you know the industrial revolution and all that sort of stuff, it was. I used to love ancient history, I chose for the last two years of high school to do ancient history, Ancient Greek and Roman history, I loved it, fantastic.

They actually had, that was in the curriculum?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you could, I think in third, from Intermediate on, you could elect to continue with modern history, what they called modern history in those days or do ancient history, and I chose ancient history. Just found it more fascinating.

34:30 **Had you out at Cobar, I know there's quite a few Aboriginal sites out there, had you had much contact with the Aboriginal population?**

Dad was always very attuned to Aboriginal history and what they were all about, cause we had black

trackers. I remember at Byrock, a family, a black tracker and his family used to live at the police station, where we used to live. And they used to come in and have dinner with us and all that sort of stuff. And,

35:00 and dad used to tell us, dad was very into Australian history, riding, because he was a stockman before he joined the police force. He was well into all the bush stuff. He used to tell amazing stories you know, about how Aboriginals could track over you know, vast distances and all this sort of. So yeah I, we learned a, we grew up with Aboriginals and we learned a lot about Aboriginals from dad, because dad was heavily into sort of Aboriginal history.

I guess he as a police man he would have had, you know, also policing the Aboriginal communities

35:30 **there, was that any particular incidents in that...?**

Well there was one instance that was with dad til he died. He, I think he locked up two or three Aboriginals, one drunk and one of them hit him on the head with a full wine bottle and it wrecked his hearing. Knocked him out, I mean obviously, and he had, but he actually arrested em, he took them back, I remember he took them back. As a kid we were hiding in the lounge room and cause, we used to live at the police station and the lock up was next door. And dad came back and mum was, you know,

36:00 "What happened, what happened?" Blood was streaming down his face and Hal and I were peering out, you know, through the blinds. And dad was, had these three guys and he charged em and threw em in the cell and then he went to the doctors. And I remember, heard, it affected his hearing cause his hearing was absolutely stuffed after that, I remember that incident.

Do you remember much sort of feelings of racial prejudice towards aboriginal people?

No, no, none in those days.

What about the kids at school, did you go to school with Aboriginals?

No, no, nothing. I think it's a, I think it's a,

36:30 it's a generated thing of the modern era. I mean, no, we grew up with abos [Aboriginals], we used to call them Boongs and coons and I mean, but there was no, I don't think there was any derogatory meaning behind the words in those days. It was all sort of, that's just what you called them. I mean Uncle Tony used to talk, tell us about the Fuzzy Wuzzies in New Guinea, that wasn't meant as being a derogatory term. Whereas these days if you talk you know, boongs and coons, God. Yeah so,

37:00 there was no racial feelings at all, they were as equal as we were at school. I mean they were bloody good at football I remember and...

Do you have any mates who are Aboriginal?

No, not at, at Wellington there was more Aboriginals than Cobar, believe it or not. Not actual friends, but I mean kids I used to play, you know, sport with, you know, cricket team and particularly on the football field. I used to hate it when they used to have a, you'd be playing a team and there'd be a couple of abos in it. Cause they were bloody

37:30 hard players you know,

Oh yes...

play with bare feet, weird.

Do you recall, sort of, I mean I'm interested in that period where the space race also got going, do you recall that being a sort of an influence or part of your imagination as you grew up, the Sputnik and the escalating...

Oh yeah the, the Cold War, I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was in '63, '64, '63 [actually 1962]. I remember we were at

38:00 Cobar then and we were all sitting out on the lawn and we had a pic, I remember we had tea on the lawn that night. And we were listening to the radio, listening to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] radio. And stupidly, I mean this is how naive we all were, we all sort of sitting out having cups of tea on the lawn or something, and looking up at the sky waiting to see the rockets coming over. But that was quite a, I mean I remember doing that. And as I said, we used to listen to stuff on the radio, Hop Harrigan used to be a

38:30 radio serial, that was a bit of a space thing, and Flash Gordon was another, Flash. But I remember in 196-, when did they first walk on the moon, '68...

'69.

'69? I was in ordnance and I remember the whole workshop where I was working, stopped, and we were listening to that you know, one small step for man, and you know, static-cy radio and it was just like wow, you know this is like this is pretty important, this is pretty important gear.

39:00 I mean it yeah, it was all novelty in those days. One thing about growing up in that era was that we all,

we were easily impressed. With an Australian slant to that, I mean we're not as impressionable as Americans. And I say that because I've worked with Americans. But we were easily impressed because everything was new, everything was sort of fresh. I just remember it as a good

39:30 time to be growing up, people had good attitudes, they had you know, different slant on everything, it was, it wasn't as political as it is now, it was just different, different times.

We'll just have to pull you up...

Tape 2

00:28 **Okay.**

00:30 **Did you have dreams of escaping Cobar?**

No, not of, not at Cobar because I was only very young at Cobar. I went to Wellington at age twelve or thirteen so Cobar, no, I wasn't, I didn't have dreams of doing anything, basically. But from Wellington I had dreams of joining the army but I didn't have dreams of leaving Wellington. Wellington to me in those, at that age was still a neat place to live. Cause I had

01:00 snippets of time in Sydney at, visiting you know, Uncle Tony and other people down there. But no Canberra was great but no, sorry, Wellington was great, but what I didn't want to develop, I didn't want to be one of those kids that left school, married somebody you went to school with, bought an HE, HD ute or something and drove up and down the street with big fat wheels on it or something and just, that was your life. I mean, you know, or screamed down to Dubbo and you know, got on the piss and then screamed back, and then that was your whole life.

01:30 I thought my life was worth more than that, I knew I could do something better than that. And it was quite interesting, in 1960, 1988 we had a twentieth reunion, I was in South Africa at the time, I didn't make it. But they put out a brochure of all the kids I went to school with and what they've done since they left school. And out of a class of about forty or thirty-five people, probably about,

02:00 probably eight to ten actually, not, I wouldn't, I don't say this derogatory, did something with their life but they left Wellington, they got out, they made the break and did stuff. All the other ones, you know, joined the town council, one opened up a laundry, another worked in the theatre and most of them worked on the council or public servant within the Wellington district. And they all married the girl that was in the class below or above them or something and three or four kids and that was their life. And I mean, it's just that theme

02:30 runs through everybody's life. And I thought well, not that I can do better that this, because I mean, whatever floats your boat basically, I mean, whatever you want, you do. But I could just, I just, there was a big world out there that I just, I loved geography and I loved learning about other places and other people and just reading. And. I used to have those adventure books and world, Boys Own Annuals and all those sort of things. And in it were stories of derring do

03:00 in places in Africa and you'd read about all these places.

Do you think, I mean, I'm interested in the geography especially out there, I mean we're talking pretty flat places out there. Do you think growing up in a very flat, essentially on the Western Plains, I mean you've got a few hills but it's pretty flat, does that affect how you imagine the rest of the world. Do you really, sort of see, you have to sort of use your imagination and think outside the place?

Well I think in those days, because there wasn't things like the internet, there

03:30 wasn't things like all the publications, there wasn't a TV, there wasn't a doc, the national, the natural documentaries that they have on TV these days, that I think imagination did play a big part. You read about things in the books that you could find, but then you had to fill in the gaps and to do that you had to have an imagination. Whereas today, if you want to find out what a certain part of the Amazon rain forest looks like, you just punch it in to the internet and up you, you're there. Whereas

04:00 we didn't have that facility in those days and everything was an adventure. I mean everything was, you dreamed about, well I did as a kid, I had dreams about seeing these places you know. Being, going to London, walking, seeing the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower and going to Africa and you know, experiencing it all, and I did.

Can you, did you get involved in car culture out there?

No, not, dad again, wouldn't let me own a car, I mean that was just a no-no. I

04:30 used to, he, I learned to drive on a property as I said in Cobar, but dad used to let me wash his, let me wash his car every weekend, it was a big Chevy. And I'd drive it, I was allowed to turn the key drive, back it out of the garage, wash it, and drive it into the garage. And then he'd, if it was a special favour, he used to let me drive it in and out, in and out about ten times, that was it. Never was allowed to drive.

I actually got my license I think, when

05:00 I was in the army, I came home on leave and yeah got my first car and got my license then in Wellington. And dad said to the senior connie [Constable] that was doing the, the police used to do licensing tests in those days. And he said, “Make sure he bloody well passes, you know don’t, just cause he’s my son, fail him if he doesn’t know what to do.” So, it was a pretty strict test. Yeah, didn’t have any driving instruction, just, you know, how to drive and read the book.

Were you aware of the new Holden models as they came out?

Oh yeah but

05:30 yeah, but didn’t sort of, I wasn’t into cars in those days. No, not really. Dad had cars, ranging from Zephyrs to an Austin 1800 I remember. Holdens, and the last one I remember was a big Chevy, big green Chev. No, I wasn’t a car...

About this, you mentioned your childhood sweetheart, was there any girls that you were particularly were fond of or the, your first love out at Wellington.

Yeah there was two, one Leanne Bell.

06:00 She was the one I took to the social and actually walked home with her, that was a big event in my life and another one called Margaret Bailey. She was just a girl that I adored, you know, she was, she wasn’t in my class, I think she was one lower than me but she was just beautiful, I mean she was just gorgeous. And when I told her I was going into the army, you know, in those days, it sounds all so corny now but I said, “I’m going off to the army and I’ll possibly be going in to war and all this stuff. And, can I have a photo?” And

06:30 I remember she gave me a photo of her in a bloody basketball uniform or something and I took it with me to Kapooka, and yeah, I’ve still got it somewhere. Yeah, she was gorgeous. But we didn’t have a relationship as such, I mean nothing, I might have had a peck on the cheek, that’s about it.

Have to get a photo of that at the end. You mentioned that there was sort of you know, you were paying attention to current affairs and the Cold War, development of the Cold War. How

07:00 **did that, do you think that influenced, or what influence did that have on you wanting to go off and perhaps serve in the army?**

We heard, you know, I was very aware, well aware of the popular line that if we don’t stop communism in Vietnam it’ll, you know, the domino theory, it’ll come down and invade Australia. I remember the old things, there’s a red under every bed and the Korean War, I was born in the Korean War. And I remember the anti communist feelings

07:30 that pervaded in those days. But having said all that, I mean, kids these days are much more politically aware and much more political than we were. I mean I wouldn’t have even dreamed of demonstrating in a student body about anything, I mean you just didn’t do those sort of things. I wasn’t politically active in any sense, mum and dad always voted Liberal, and I just assumed I would. I didn’t really care who was in charge of the country as long as

08:00 it was being run, as long as you know, as long as the country functioned. I wasn’t politically aware, I wasn’t politically intelligent, but having said that again, I was aware of what was going on in the world, you know, with the Berlin Wall and the wars that were going on overseas at the time. You know, the Vietnam War and then other little brushfire wars all over the place, the Congo, you know the Mau Mau uprising in the Congo [actually Kenya] and all

08:30 those bits and pieces. I remember reading about that in the paper. I used to love reading the first two or three pages of the newspaper you know, all the big newsy stuff. Yeah, I think I was just a fairly normal kid for the sixties, fifties and sixties. I mean we were a different breed, I mean when you look back on what we were like in those days, we were so naive and so unaware of really what was going on in the world. We might have thought we were politically aware but

09:00 given what everybody knows these days, I mean everybody knows what’s going on in the world, or they think they do.

I’m not so sure actually but...

Yeah, well. We were sort of more willing to accept, we were a more accepting generation than the young generation. We accepted, if somebody said do something you’d just say oh okay, you know, we just did stuff.

Did you grow up in a fairly well off family, compared to say perhaps the gener..., your parents ...

We always had food on the table...

who grew up in the Depression?

09:30 but not well off, I remember eating bread and dripping. And dad in those days couldn't have a second job so, and the police force didn't pay very well. He used to shoot kangaroos, we used to have kangaroo tail soup, emu egg omelettes, I remember we used to collect emu eggs and have the omelettes. We weren't poor, there was always food on the table but it was, mum used to do amazing things with little. You know, she used to do, we used to have rice, boiled rice and milk and brown sugar I remember as sweets. Big

10:00 favour, big sort of occasion was where we had fruit salad but it was always tinned, I mean it was all stuff like that. I mean I just remember our food was quite, our fare was quite basic, obviously didn't affect me that much, I mean we grew up fairly well.

Your parents' generation certainly looked towards the Britons, but things changed after the Second World War. Where do you think Australia's outlook was at the time you were growing up or where it was [UNCLEAR] it was families?

I think more,

10:30 more during the sixties particularly America came to the fore. I remember when, was it President Johnson or President... came to Australia, 'All the way with LBJ' yeah. I think our alliance was veering closer to America. I mean England wasn't mentioned in the way that it probably would have been when mum and dad grew up. I mean the Empire and everything, you know, the reasons they went to war, in the First and Second World War. I think the alliances

11:00 with America were becoming quite strong and the reason for an alliance with America was quite obvious in those days. Well at least it was made to be you know, it sounded like it was obvious.

Do you remember , what do you remember of that as growing up, was it something that was in your, sort of, part of what you were paying attention to?

No, not really, not per se but I just remember that Vietnam, the Americans were basically, when you talked about Vietnam you talked about the Americans and the Australians were helping

11:30 them. The American were involved in most things that happened during that period you know, the space race and, the Americans and the Russians but the space race and the Berlin Wall and the Korean War and all that sort of stuff. They were all sort of talked about with American involvement, the Americans, you know, their involvement was paramount in all those sort of major events during that period. .

Were you listening to any music or get involved

12:00 **listening to sort of hit music or rock music on the radio?**

Yeah, Elvis Presley was big. Helen, my sister, was really heavily into music. She was, you know, as girls are, they used to dance around the lounge room, older sister. But you know, all the old, like, Col Joye, Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs and you know all those. I went to the concert just recently, all the, Long Way to the Top series out at Canberra at the stadium here. And absolutely fab, probably the best concert I've ever been to.

12:30 I mean just that era of singers, and the sixties and then back into the seventies, but that era was fantastic. But going back to the fifties, things like, yeah, Elvis Presley and some of the older Australian singers. Dad used to love Burl Ives and The Platters and all that sort of stuff so we used to listen to that a lot. But again we weren't a particularly musical family. But

13:00 I remember dad, mum and dad wanted me to learn the piano. And I thought no, guys don't learn the piano, this is really girlie stuff, so my sister learned the piano. And I've regretted it every since because I mean, I've since grown up to realise that if you play any musical instrument, I mean it's just comes in very handy, it's just a good social ice breaker. But no, I, as a little twelve, thirteen year old you don't

13:30 learn to play the piano, it's was just not on.

What sports did you get involved with?

Played football, played rugby league, cricket, played tennis a lot, loved tennis. Dad taught me how to play golf. Athletics, I could never run very far, my legs used to be seemingly too long and used to [UNCLEAR] and I used to trip over at sprints, but I used to run, distance running. Little bit of athletics but no, mainly cricket and tennis,

14:00 and football and rugby league. And basketball, that's right, I played basketball at school too. Yeah.

Did you follow the Test cricket?

No, not in those days, no. I think our exposure to media things were, was quite, we had stuff to do outside. I mean we used to listen to the radio when we were inside but as a kid we were more often outside than inside I remember. All our life centred on outside, I remember all activities were outside you know, kicking the football, doing

14:30 my chores, it was all outside. When you came inside you, it was to do homework or clean up after a meal or have dinner, have meals. And our actual exposure to media, ie. the radio, was quite limited. I mean, not because of any ulterior motive it was just because no, I didn't want to stay inside, I mean you

only did that at night, you only did those sort of things at night. During the day we were just doing stuff outside, I mean active

15:00 lifestyle for a kid, brilliant. It's a pity more kids these days don't, I mean you know.

You ever been back out that way and...?

Yeah I actually went through Wellington and Cobar when I got discharged from the army in 1973, I drove my MGB back through there and caught up with a few old mates. And they, a lot of, a lot of my old school friends from both towns paid me I think the ultimate compliment. They said, "Jesus Barny, you haven't changed, you haven't changed a bit, after all you've been through you haven't changed."

15:30 And I've thought about that since and I think that's a bloody good compliment. Because a lot of people did change, you know, they grew up and they come affected by different things and...

Had you changed?

No, I don't think I had changed, in those days I hadn't, no. I've changed a lot since because of the police force. I think had more bearing on me than the military, but I don't think I did. I mean and if I did I suppressed it, it was in those days you didn't show emotion. And if I had, and I did have nightmares

16:00 after Vietnam, I remember waking up screaming on quite a few occasions, or sweating or just suddenly waking up. But I didn't tell people about it, I never told my parents about it, never told my sister about it, never talked about Vietnam with my wife and certainly never told friends about it. Didn't talk about it, I just suppressed it all. And I think that's what most of us did in those days because we're all of the same generation. And then I think now that's why a lot of it's coming out,

16:30 because we're now talking about it. And you know, whereas the guys now that go, gone off to Iraq and the Gulf and Afghanistan and all this sort of stuff, I think the culture is more that you do talk to people. I mean if somebody had of said "I think you need to see a counsellor." we would've gone, "Oh, wha, what are you talking about, what's a counsellor?" You didn't, that just wasn't in the lifestyle you just didn't do things like that.

Get that from your parents do you think, that sort of stiff upper lip, you know?

Yeah I think it was, I think it was definitely brought down,

17:00 mum was very tender and gentle and very emotional, but I think it was partly because of my parents, obviously the influence of my parents and how they lived their lives.

Did they express emotions or...

No.

or they were affectionate with you or...?

They were, yeah they were very affectionate. Or mum was at least, dad wasn't, dad was always at a distance. But mum was always very affectionate but it just wasn't the done thing. I wouldn't have felt comfortable

17:30 you know saying I've got you know really big concerns about this or I'm a bit worried about this. I didn't know who to talk to about it and there was nobody available to talk to so therefore you didn't talk about it. You just didn't, you didn't open up to people in those days, you know, you just suppressed it, you just move on, just live with it you know and do stuff you know.

Was there something that particularly concerned you, as you were growing up?

Well I remember dad shooting kangaroos in, mum used to, I used to

18:00 hate it and he wasn't, he was never brutal with animals, he was always very kind to animals. But he used to shoot them, and that was partly to make kangaroo skin rugs, which he used to make and supplement his income, that was one job he did do, but wasn't a job. He used to send them to Sydney to get tanned and all this sort of stuff and we used to have meat, we used to eat the meat off kangaroos. That used to affect me all the time, I used to hate it. And dad used to get me to hit kangaroos that were wounded, on the head with a stick.

18:30 I used to run around and hop around, you know, the wounded kangaroo would follow me around, I'd grab his ears and bang him on the head, knock him out and kill him. And that used to give me night, I used to hate that. And I remember when I came back from Vietnam, I went out to this guys property that I used to, said I was good mates with, the Matthews. And we went goat shooting, he had a lot of goats on his property and they herded them into the corner of a big paddock with a few dogs, because they were eating everything, there was a dry; it was during the drought period. And had to kill all these goats and

19:00 I remember we killed about two or three hundred goats. I was walking around just shooting them in the head and there was a photo taken of me covered in blood, with the gun. And I had nightmares about that and I've never ever, ever killed an animal since. I just, that was that, and that was after Vietnam. I just, it just absolutely disgusted me, shocked me. And I'm stupid now, even when I go running I try and miss ants when I'm on, running on, I'm just hopeless. You know if I hit a bird in the

19:30 road, I stop immediately, you know safe, stop and go back, and if it's still alive kill it and all that.

Was that feeling exacerbated after, by, especially...

I think it was, after Vietnam yeah, after Vietnam yeah.

was it sort of somehow some resonance with what happened there?

I think it did, I think Vietnam had, basically, it drew it to a head and I just felt more gentle towards animals than I'd ever felt, I just couldn't see the sense in killing them you know.

20:00 **When you were growing up, did you have any religious upbringing in your house, did you or...?**

Mum was Catholic and dad was Church of England so we were brought up as Church of England. And I remember serving on the altar as a altar boy. And in those days again you know, child abuse and paedophilia was obviously around but I certainly never suffered any of that, or experienced any of that. And the brother, Brother Peter in Cobar, I remember all we used to do after the service

20:30 we'd be in there taking off our cassocks or something and getting ready to go home and start playing or whatever. I was only about eight and nine and ten you know and I remember we used to do really evil things like eat the bread and drink some of the wine and then you know, put water in it so that he would never know that it was drunk, I mean that was our big adventure. But he was a really nice guy and I remember one Christmas Eve I was carrying the candles, it was a midnight service, carrying the candles and I fell asleep. I was only about

21:00 ten or eleven. I fell asleep and my hair got singed with the candle, I fell onto the candle. And mum was sitting in the church you know, "Oh God, you know, gonna burn his head off." But you know, no, not a real, went to Sunday School every Sunday, it was just done. You know you went to Sunday School and did that and then I used to serve in the, do the service in the morning, or the midday service or something. But not a religious background no, not at all.

You mentioned movies before, I was gonna ask you which, any particular movies that stand out in your mind at this open air

21:30 **cinemas that you were going to?**

There's a war movie Dunkirk. I remember Dunkirk was a, with John Mills, was a big influence again for the army, from the army side of it. But, no, cowboy, there was a lot of cowboy movies and names escape me now but all those really cheap American westerns that used to come out. You know I remember the Lone Ranger and Kit Carson and all the, the American legends, the

22:00 cowboy legends, I mean they had movies about those in those days, I mean a lot of the actors I don't think were around. But we didn't go to the moves that much, it was a big treat if we went to the movies, mum and dad took us to the movies and it was an open air theatre. But no we, again we didn't go to the movies very often. But I remember you know, I remember the old CineSound News, then you used to get a first movie then interval then a second movie, it was all sort of like a big deal.

22:30 You'd get ice cream and it was like a really big treat, I mean it was a big outing to go to the pictures, so. But I can't remember any movies per se that you know that imprinted themselves on my mind. Lot of, lots of cowboy stuff.

Aeroplanes, air service out there, did you do ever do any flying or travel by air?

No, not while I was a Cobar, at Wellington, no not really, I think

23:00 no, not at all. Some of the friends that dad knew on properties had their own light aircraft. But no I never went up in an aircraft until I literally joined the army I think. Never flew, I don't think I, I can't remember ever flying as a kid, as a child. No.

You said you really busting to go on and join the army as you were growing up as a sort of adolescent. Can you tell us about the time you told your mum and dad that you

23:30 **were leaving, or did they, did you discuss that with them and they assisted you with your application to join the army?**

Yeah, oh no I discussed it, I discussed it, I remember I left school when I was sixteen years and nine months and I couldn't apply for the army til I was seventeen. And in fact I did and went to Sydney for the app, for the tests. And came back and, but in the interim between sixteen and nine months, I'd left school and, to go in to the army, dad said, well you can't live at home for nothing so you have to get a job, so

24:00 have to pay rent. So I went down, I worked at a hardware store, Thomas's Hardware Store in Wellington I remember. And initially I was put in the clothes area selling clothes and I was busted out of that area literally. 'Cause I remember they had a sale one Saturday morning. And I went around and dutifully arranged all the shirts and pants and women's stuff and all this sort of gear. And

24:30 it took me ages on a Friday night to do all this, for the Saturday morning sale. And then they opened the

doors and all these women, I just remember women coming in and just ripping everything that I'd so lovingly put, set up, ripped it apart. And some woman came up to me I remember and said,"I want a bra, I want a bra." or something. And, "What size, what size are these?" and I just grabbed her on the tits. And I said, "I don't know, I don't know lady, or something, but you're big." And I just got,

25:00 you know, I was really angry because they'd just bloody ripped apart all my bloody work. So I was duty, I didn't lose my job, but you would have these days probably, I didn't lose my job but I was banished then to the grocery section. And I was in the cellar, I used to go down to the cellar and cutting up big packages of dates and getting the grocery, groceries ready to go out in a little, they used to deliver them around town, and I used to go out in the little truck and deliver the groceries. So I was banished from

25:30 the clothing area. I disgraced myself. This woman really pissed me off. She just wrecked it and I just didn't realise that women could be so ruthless, just walked in and just ripped the whole bloody place apart. I couldn't believe it that was a good insight to life.

So you, did the army have recruitment campaigns out there…

Not really no.

or did, how did you just get in touch with the…?

I think I had to write, there was an ad in the paper or something and I wrote

26:00 to the Recruiting Office and I think it was in York Street in Sydney in those days. Sent in my application or letter for application and they sent me back all the forms, I filled em out, talked it over with mum and dad. Because their concern was I was gonna have to leave school, I wanted to leave school early a year before I was due. I obviously convinced them that that's what I wanted to do. My sister became a teacher; she went to Teachers' College at Wollongong. So I sent off the forms and got the notification that I was accepted.

26:30 And I remember when I went down, big trip to Sydney, went down, I think mum came down with me and I went in to do the day's induction in York Street. Took the oath and we went and had lunch, and I remember this Burmese guy I was telling you about. I'd only signed for three year's initially and he signed for six, and he said, "No, no, you've gotta sign for six, you gotta go for six, don't sign for three. You know you probably wont get to Vietnam you won't have done your training and anyway six, oh, it's great,

27:00 we'll see the world, we'll do everything, you know, we're just kids." And so I went back and after lunch I crossed out three and put in six. And yeah and then I went to ECPD at Watson's Bay and I remember...

What's ECPD?

Eastern Command Personnel Depot at Watson's Bay where the army used to have their personnel depot. So we went out there and for a couple of nights of inductional stuff, final medicals and all that sort of stuff. And I remember mum was, they took us, we drove, they took us by bus from there to Wagga, to

27:30 Kapooka and we left in the afternoon I remember. And mum was there waving goodbye to me and I was looking out the back window and this Burmese, Burma's parents were there too, and big adventure, we're off on a big adventure. It's a little bit like the Gallipoli stuff and it was just, everything was so, it was just such a wonderful attitude to have, everything was a big adventure, everything was, you know we didn't sort of, there was none of this, I'm bored, you know, what's next, it was all sort of exciting. And

28:00 we stopped at Marulan I think for a hamburger, on this trip, this epic trip in a crappy old bus. And we got to Kapooka at eleven o'clock at night or something, it was terrible, freezing cold, bloody May, terrible, you know.

How did you get from Wellington to Sydney at that time?

I think mum and dad drove me down, we drove down, or I went, mum and I took the train, I can't remember. But we probably went by train or car, but maybe train, probably train.

Tell us a bit about taking the oath and what that involved at

28:30 **that time?**

Oh it was, well it was quite special, is that alright? It was quite special; I mean I think you, after we'd done all the selection tests, the interviews and all the rest of the stuff, to take the Oath. And it was sort of a feeling of importance, we were actually, 'cause it was, you know, God, ah, Queen and Country and all the rest of the stuff. And I mean I'd never done anything like that as, in my life so it was all sort of quite,

29:00 quite special I remember and yeah we felt quite important after we'd taken the Oath and done all that.

Did you feel a sense of national duty at that …?

Of duty yeah, of duty, definitely of duty. I mean I was joining it as an adventure thing, and the fact that I wanted to, and I know it sounds terrible and very naive these days, but I wanted to go to war, I wanted to go to the war and I wanted to do my part. I thought I was actually doing something for Australia.

Which war?

Vietnam.

29:30 And I think it was quite, I felt quite important doing that and I was really quite proud. And I know again that sounds really sort of probably naive and bit altruistic these days but yeah I felt quite proud of what I was doing.

You were taking an oath to the Queen obviously?

The Queen and Australia.

Did you, had you thought about the fact that we were still a part of British Empire?

No. No.

How did you feel, you felt…?

I

30:00 accepted it.

It was, where, you obviously felt very Australian in a sense?

Oh very Australian, I mean I was never British, I was always Australian but the fact that the Queen was the Queen of Australia, we just accepted it. We used to sing the National Anthem God Save the Queen every morning at school and salute the flag.

And did you end up with this Burmese chap? Can you explain how a Burmese person came to be joining with you at the…?

Well he just happened to be in the same induction

30:30 as I was, and his number, his regimental number was Two-One-Seven-Five-Eight-Three and mine was Two-One-Seven-Five-Eight-Five so that's how close we were. And we literally, we just palled up on the day that we went to York Street, I just, we just got on, hit it off.

What was his name?

Ah Lawrence Meelan[?]. And I'll tell you a story about him later; he was tragically killed in a training accident in the SAS in 1976 I think, in Swanbourne. But

31:00 he and I just hit it off and when we went to Kapooka we sat on the bus together and luckily we, I can't remember whether we actually got allocated rooms, you know like you four in there, you four in there or we actually had a choice but I'd, I would suggest it would be, you four in there so we made sure we were together. And it was four to a room in those days at Kapooka and we all got in the same room and the other two guys we didn't know, I didn't know them, I hadn't had anything to do with them. But Burma and I

31:30 shared a bed, you know, like shared two beds in the same little cubicle, not very spacious accommodation but, you know, we were there. And we did all our training together and he wanted to go to infantry and I wanted to go to artillery and armoured. And after we'd done our, they'd done the selection at the end of our course, ah, recruit training, I said, "What'd you get?" And he said, "Bloody RAEME." And he said, "Oh yeah, don't tell em you used to work in a shop." you know. But they knew that because I'd to put that on my application form.

32:00 That's why I was sent to ordnance, cause I worked in a shop. Three months I worked in a shop so I must be a really good storeman. Pul-ease. Talk about a square peg in a round hole, I had visions of winning Victoria Crosses and you know, jumping out of planes and whatever.

What was the selection process, was there some sort of, anybody could join up or was there some sort of, were they critical that you have some tests and things like that?

Oh they had, you had aptitude tests yeah. Did aptitude tests and education tests and writing tests,

32:30 and then they asked you a series of questions, I can't remember what but political awareness questions, knowledge questions, general knowledge, why did you want to be in the army, all the sort of obvious sort of type of questions. And then...

How did you answer that, why did you want to be in the army question?

I just, I think it was, I said, members of my family have been in the army, you know my uncle and all that. And I've always wanted to be a soldier, and I was in

33:00 the school cadets, I rose to the rank of sergeant and I've always been, had this burning desire to be in the army, I just want to be a soldier. I think I, obviously won them.

You'd been in school cadets, but how was your first sort of encounter with military discipline at Kapooka?

Oh, a bit of a shock, but having said that, and, I get back to what dad, the way dad brought me up. You know, short hair, don't ask

33:30 why you have to do something, just, you know, how many times. And he prepared me, in his own way he was, I think he was preparing me for a life, he didn't realise I was probably going into the army, but he prepared me for a hard life. So I found the discipline to be quite easy to me. We were never allowed to sleep in, in the morning, even on Sunday.

What time do you have to get up?

Oh six, six thirty, I had to get up at six thirty. Light the fire, the big range stove in the

34:00 kitchen, help mum prepare the breakfast, so I was up early as a kid. Even Sunday mornings, no sleeping in. You'd be out, there's stuff to do, get out of bed. You'd, I mean you couldn't relax, I mean it wasn't a relaxed you know, you'd lay around and sort of read a book and, I'd read a book by torch light or something at night. You know I just loved reading at night but it wasn't relaxing. But he prepared me for the discipline side of life and then having to get up at six o'clock in the morning in the

34:30 army and stand in line and do this and do that, didn't worry me, it just sort of water off a duck's back.

Didn't have any of the sort of stereotypical sergeant major yelling at you?

Yeah we did in those days but yeah it was a little bit like yeah, what you'd expect, it was what I expected. You know they were all shouting at us, in those days instructors could shout at you, now they can't apparently. They shouted at us and swore at us and gave us the odd biff and clip over the ear and all this sort of stuff.

35:00 But that sort of didn't worry me, I mean I might have, I think I was quite a sensitive and soft sort of kid but I accepted what they were doing because I think even with my limited knowledge of what they were preparing us for, I knew they were doing it for a reason so I just, I didn't question it, I just did it and it didn't worry me.

What particular things did you like about basic training?

Oh the rifle shooting, the bush craft, the field craft,

35:30 I hated the drill, but loved all the bush stuff, you know, doing stuff in the bush. All the equipment side, learning all about different equipment that we had to use. But particularly the weapons training and all this sort of stuff, it fascinated me, I loved it. 'Cause I'd been around weapons all my life living out west, I mean I had my own twenty-two rifle and dad had three-o-three's and I'd fired rifles, I knew I was a good shot so, and being in the cadets.

What was the rifle that the army trained you on?

SLR [Self Loading Rifle]

36:00 SLR.

Can you tell us a bit about the SLR in training and that?

Oh well it was just, that was the basic infantry rifle in those days, the basic army rifle, SLR, seven point six two, twenty round magazine, semi automatic, muzzle velocity of twenty-seven hundred feet per second, I remember that. And we used to, we learned how to, all about the weapon its capabilities and how to strip it and assemble it and everything.

Can you tell us about stripping down an M-16?

An M-16, we actually...

36:30 **Can you describe it for us? Sorry an M-16, I beg your pardon, the, it was, was it...?**

No, SLR.

SLR, beg your pardon.

We actually didn't train, do any training, recruit training on the M16, it was just coming in.

No, sorry , I got that mixed up. Can you tell us, stripping down the SLR?

Well put it this way I can't remember the sequence on an SLR but I could do it now, if you gave me one I could strip one down. But as, in the cadets I remember we used to, I used to be a Bren gunner too. And I just remember the sequence and I've never forgotten it, to strip a Bren gen.

37:00 Piston, barrel, butt, body, bi-pod. Bi-pod, body, butt, barrel, piston, and that was the way you used to do it. I don't know why I remember that, I just, I just did and that's the way, piston, barrel, butt, body, bi-pod. Yeah, incredible, so, it was pretty similar to an SLR, you take things out, you know take the magazine off and take the slide out and breach...

How do you un-jam or a misfire in the SLR, what do you do?

Oh first you take, on any misfire you take the

37:30 magazine off. Take the magazine off and clear the weapon, make sure it's clear, there's no round in the breach. And if there is a round in the breach you, you know, use, work the action, to try and eject it and then you put on a full magazine and let rip.

Are you inducted sort of into the importance of your relationship of your weapon?

Oh God yeah, yeah.

Can you describe that?

Your weapon is your life. Well you know, your weapon, you lived and, everything,

38:00 you looked after your weapon before you looked after yourself. Your weapon had to be spotlessly clean all the time even out in the bush and for that you were given you know, cleaning equipment to do it. And you were taught how to do it and how to look after it and how to prevent rust, how to clean the barrel and make sure everything was in working order. And I know our training was so much better than the American training cause I've got a pamphlet upstairs somewhere of the American training pamphlet for the M-16, used in Vietnam. And it was

38:30 done in, for American training purpose, it was done in, pardon me, a cartoon type format of M-16… Annie I remember it was. And it's some girl in a leopard stripe bikini and in a bush hat with an M-16. I mean and that was the way they taught the American soldiers how to look after their weapons. But ours was really matter of fact, it was, you know, and we used to have races at stripping assembling, and then blind folded, stripping assembling at night.

39:00 Our range practices were very authentic, you know you'd be, you don't just lay down and just pot away at a target, you'd be rolling around and running and diving and jumping. And, you know, shooting after you were exhausted and all this sort of stuff, so it was really quite authentic and realistic training, good training

We might have to stop there and…

Tape 3

00:40 **The training you were just describing to Rob was the basic training you received when you first entered the army?**

Recruit training.

When you finished that and you were assigned to ordnance, what was that like?

Well initially I was a very disappointed little chappie, I wasn't a happy trooper. I didn't have visions as I said of folding

01:00 blankets. I had visions of, I wanted to go in armoured and they said no, cause I was too young. Basically the reason, their reasoning behind it was you had to be nineteen to go to Vietnam and I was only seventeen when I finished recruit training. So therefore I would have had to have been posted, if I was posted to a combat unit or a combat corps, I wouldn't be able to, and if that corps, if that unit that I was posted to was sent overseas to Vietnam, I would have had to have been taken out of the unit and gone somewhere else. So all the training that I would do in that unit would be wasted because I wouldn't

01:30 be able to go to war with them, or wouldn't be able to go to Vietnam with them. So their reasoning was to put me in like a sedentary occupation or a base unit, until basically I was old enough to go. But having said I did do training in Canungra for, to go to Vietnam in ordnance, but I didn't want to do that, so I did the training but I didn't go to Vietnam in ordnance, so.

What did you end up doing in ordnance, where did you go?

Well 2 BOD at Moorebank, big warehouse

02:00 built by the Yanks during the war I understand. And Burma went to the workshops next door, and I went to 2 BOD and it was a big, initially I was a storeman, and packing and repacking and unpacking and unloading boxes and crates of stores. Then I did a ware, a forklift driver's license and I became a forklift driver which was, you know, I thought quite neat. I had a hotted up forklift and we used to have races around the warehouse. And

02:30 that all went swimmingly until one day I was racing this guy in my forklift, cause you drove them backwards, and I missed the turn, I went straight through the wall of the warehouse and ended up out in the parade ground, out there with pieces of tiles and fibro and dust all over me and well I was banned from driving my fork, my beloved forklift after that. But we used to get sea containers in from the Jeparit back from Vietnam. And they were full of all stuff that the Australian Army brought back from Vietnam.

03:00 And we used to have to Board of Survey it, we used to have to sort of look at it, helmets, clothes, boots, webbing, everything, everything you name, vehicles, everything. And we used to have to Board of Survey it and basically look at it and say, well you could, this could be salvaged and sent to a disposal store or just rip it up. So you'd be either ripping up shirts and trousers or throwing webbing into big bins to be burned or sold at auction to a disposal store. And I remember painting helmets, was another thing,

03:30 and there's a photo, classic photo somewhere of me sitting amongst this mountain of helmets. And they'd all been sandblasted and I was just painting them. That was, I was given that job for two months after my, as penance for driving through the wall of the warehouse. And I was, with a paintbrush painting these tin helmets. And I was bringing them from that side, painting them and putting them on that side, putting, painting, putting them on that side. And somebody took a photo of me sitting in this little box with helmets that side and helmets that side and me in a pair of over

04:00 alls. And I said this is not the army. I used to go home on leave, we used to live at Dundas in those days, I'd go home on weekend leave or something and I'd just almost cry myself to sleep, thinking this is not. I was getting to the stage of even thinking of going AWOL [Absent Without Leave] from the army, you know, just, this is not my vision of being a soldier. Because most of my bosses were civilians, you know old civilians that had never been in the army and they used to boss us around and I wasn't even wearing what I considered to be a

04:30 uniform, it was just a pair of overalls you know. And it just, it wasn't my vision of the army, so.

Where were you living at the time, you in barracks?

I was on camp, living at camp in Moorebank. But mum and dad lived at Dundas so every weekend I'd go home to Dundas cause we never worked weekends.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the kind of gear you were seeing coming back from Vietnam, what…?

Well as I said a lot of, most of it was clothing and webbing. But we would also get sea containers

05:00 of trucks, Land Rovers and I remember we got one APC, Armoured Personnel Carrier back that a lot of Australians were killed in, it was a mine accident. And we had to go in and hose it out to see what was salvageable. And it was still dirty and muddy and all that and there was blood still on the walls, you know dry, very dry blood. But I remember a finger or a part of a hand was under some junk in the corner when we hosed it out and it was all rotten. And I think

05:30 think that brought, the damage to that, the blood on the walls and just seeing body parts. I mean just absolutely freaked us out, you know, I mean this is what war's about, it was a bit of an eye opener.

What affect did that shocking experience have on your desire to get over there and be part of it?

Well again I was young, I mean I was very you know, your very, your mind's very supple in those days. Shocked me for a day, then never thought about it, you know, never. It didn't make me not want to go to Vietnam.

06:00 **What did, what were your parent's views on your desire to go to Vietnam?**

Well I think again, they were proud that I was in the army and, well, at least mum said she was proud. But I, they didn't, mum was obviously worried about me going to Vietnam but dad sort of was, didn't make a comment, he didn't sort of actually talk about it. He said, "Oh yeah, you might go, you know. You might go, you might not

06:30 go, you know, it's in the hands of the Gods or some." but he was very non committal about, you know, any discussion about it. But I remember mum was, you know, worried but she knew that I had a mind of my own and I was just gonna go, I'd shown that when I joined the army so. She just resigned herself to the fact that, hoping that I would never go but knowing that I probably would, so.

While you were in Moorebank you must have well, been in Sydney and seen a lot of what was going on in the city. What was the

07:00 **reaction and protest against the Vietnam War, like what did you see?**

Oh there was a lot, yeah there was a lot of protests about Vietnam in those days, considering this is 1968. And I remember that battalion coming back and that bird throwing red paint over the battalion commander when they were marching down the street. And I remember getting into a big fight one night near Martin Place in a place called Angel Place at Martin Place, anti Vietnam protesters. And we went in there,

07:30 and cause we'd all been drinking in the pub and you know we were in uniform. And we remembered there was a demonstration in Martin Place and we all decided you know bit a group therapy and mob mentality, we went down and bashed the shit out of these demonstrators. And you know went back quite happy with ourselves on the train, back to Liverpool.

Just talk about that in a sec, we just have to stop for ten seconds.

08:00 **Can you tell us a little bit more about that incident, what actually happened, what were the protesters doing?**

They were just protesting about Vietnam, there was a group of women, Save our Sons, or something and most of them were uni students and long hairs. And because I'd never been able to, I didn't have a childhood basically; I left a very disciplined childhood at home and then joined the army. So basically I was, I lived in a,

08:30 a very disciplined world and I think, or environment. And I think I was, I just didn't like long hairs, I didn't like you know, and I didn't like, I thought they were being unpatriotic and treacherous to the country and all this sort of stuff. And I think most of the guys felt the same, it was all, I think a lot of it was buoyed up with a bit, fair bit of beer. But I mean we basically thought that these you know, these bastards that were demonstrating against Vietnam were doing the wrong thing.

09:00 That we should be there, in those days it was a popular belief that we should be there, amongst most people. And we just couldn't understand why they were demonstrating. And so we just took out our, lot of our frustration and anger on them I think. I think we won the day that day, we won the battle but lost the war, literally.

Were there occasions where you didn't win the battle, where you got some hard flak from being in uniform?

Well, I

09:30 I just remember, no most of the kids that lived around the area that, I didn't really associate with a lot of people. Because we'd moved around a lot, I didn't go back to my home town. And mum and dad as I said were living at Dundas when I was in 2 BOD and I didn't know many people. I knew some neighbours over the back and they had a daughter and a son or something. And they had no real feelings, they didn't say anything about me being in the army or anything. But I think it would have been a lot different if I had of still lived in Wellington or Cobar

10:00 and had gone back on leave to areas that I grew up in as a kid. Cause I think people would have been, would have talked to me more about, you know, what do you think you're doing or we're proud that you're doing it or, you know there would have been a range of views. But because I was unknown basically, I'd come home on leave, I had a car in those days, little A-55 Austin ute. I used to drive home to mum and dad's at Dundas and you know spend the weekend there and then go back to camp on Sunday night. So I didn't really associate with many people, I used to see Caroline my

10:30 fiancé in those days, and we used to go down to the beach, down to Manly or Long Reef or something and go swimming. So I didn't associate with a lot of kids, a lot of piers, lot of kids of my age that I knew. It was mainly just seeing Caroline and she certainly was quite proud that I was in the army in those days and her parents were and all the people that associated through her, knowing her, they didn't have any anti views so I was sort of quite cocooned I think.

11:00 You know I wasn't sort of in an environment that was anti war or anti army.

Were you in contact with national service men in camp at Moorebank?

Yeah we were. We were a full, fully regular battalion or fully regular company sorry. But in the training unit at that stage, there was companies and platoons of national service men doing their training too, cause they were well, that was well up and running in those days.

What was…

We didn't associate with them

11:30 much because we were in a, as I said, a platoon or a Company of all regular soldiers. We'd see them and probably get into a few fights with them at the bar or at the canteen or something but basically didn't have a lot to do with them. They were older than us, they were twenty and I was only seventeen. So I used to, I remember I was not allowed to drink at the canteen, and I used to go up and have a big slab of Cadbury's chocolate and a big, one of those big bottles, glass bottles, in those days, of Coca Cola, and that was

12:00 my treat at the canteen, cause they wouldn't serve me alcohol, I was too young. So I was a baby.

What would you say was the relationship between the regular army and the national servicemen in those days?

Oh I think there was obviously a little bit of resentment, because we volunteered and you guys had to be dragged in. But having said that the average national service man was probably a little bit more aware and not intelligent but just a more street smart than we were. Because

12:30 the average age of my unit was, my platoon was, I was seventeen, I was probably the youngest, but probably similar ages, you know eighteen, nineteen. But these guys were twenty, they were all twenty, had to be twenty. I remember in our platoon there was a guy called Dick Schwer, he was about twenty-eight and he was an old man as far as I was concerned. And he used to sort of look after me, he used to look after me and make sure I didn't get into trouble and you know, wasn't picked on as a, I was a young

kid, I was as skinny as a rake

13:00 I'll show you some photos, I was skinny as a rake, you know just all skin and bone, I was only about nine stone.

Were there other mentors that you found when your early days in the army?

No, not in recruit training. I remember Bombardier Pearson was the 2IC [Second in Command] of the platoon, he'd just come back from Vietnam so I looked up to him. And he used to tell us occasional things about what Vietnam was like, what we were in for. And Second Lieutenant

13:30 McCaffrey was the platoon commander and he was nice officer, you know, he was quite a nice guy actually. I saw some of the other instructors or platoon staff the training staff and they didn't, they weren't as nice as... Pearson used to shout a lot, typical bloody bombardier in the artillery. But he certainly was a good instructor, he had a sort of a compassionate side and he was a good instructor.

14:00 But I remember the only, one of the guys I did sort of look at as some sort of a hero was when I did ordnance training down at Bandiana. This guy was in, Captain Hartung, Erik Hartung, he was in the German Army during the Second World War and he was in Russia in the Panzer Division. And he used to tell us stories about, get a few beers and tell us stories about the Russian Front and I used to sort of... he was a brilliant

14:30 bloke, absolutely brilliant. Taught me how to drive Studebaker trucks, you know without using the clutch and all that sort of stuff. But I used to look up to him as a bit of a, sort of idolised him.

Was there a difference again between the blokes who'd been over in Vietnam and those who hadn't?

Oh we looked on them with awe; I mean you know if they had the ribbons up, I mean we just looked on them with a certain, certainly a lot of respect regardless of what they did. I mean in those

15:00 days you didn't form opinions about, you know, people in combat units and non combat units. But as long as they had the ribbons of, Vietnam ribbons up, you used to sort of look at them as some sort of you know, hero, not hero worship, but, we weren't that naive. But I mean we used to say, oh wow, you know, these guys have actually done the business, you know, and in what capacity. But I remember there was one guy at Kapooka that had SAS wings on, and he was one of the instructors, and SAS ribbons and,

15:30 and wings on and yeah. Used to go, wow, you know, bit of a God. You know he used to walk around looking fit.

What was their morale like, the blokes who had seen action and ...?

Oh, good, I mean basically they didn't used to talk about it a lot. There was not a lot of discussion. We used to have lectures on Vietnam and what the war was, how the war was being conducted

16:00 and what the Australians were doing. And you know we used to have sort of up to date sort of history sort of captures you know, like this is what's happening now in Vietnam and after Long Tan and all this sort of stuff. And where the Australians were and what was happening and what the Americans were doing and how the war was going and all this sort of stuff. But because basically, most of us ended up in Vietnam, most of the people that I did recruit training with, ended up in some way, shape or form in having gone to Vietnam.

16:30 So it was just a lot of awareness training and a lot of awareness lectures and all this sort of stuff. And just basically getting us ready, for what the inevitable was going to be.

How were we going, in Vietnam, as far as you were told?

Oh in those days, well again, 1967, everything was, the whole mood of Australia and particularly America changed after Tet '68, if you remember, Vietnam. The public,

17:00 the public mood even then was still more behind the troops and more behind the reasons for the war than it was in later years. And by that I mean end of '68 '69, '70, '71 that's when the mood about Vietnam really changed. But up until then it was all fairly patriotic and you know, everybody thought we were doing the right thing because I mean my feelings about Vietnam now are still

17:30 fifty, fifty. But I still think that, I think as a general rule the public of Australia were fairly well brain washed, you know, politically, as the reasons why we were there. I mean, and again, a lot of Australians or I think the majority of Australians in those days were not as politically aware or as politically interested as probably we are now. I think more people now are more interested in what,

18:00 what the government's doing, you know, whether nationally or internationally.

Just do that again, sorry. What did you know about the SAS, you mentioned you saw someone with wings on that gave you a bit of a...?

Yeah, well as I said, I'd read about the SAS from books that mum had bought me years before. And I actually didn't realise prior to joining the army that

18:30 Australia had a SAS because all the SAS stuff that I read was about British SAS. But obviously when we were taught about or told about all the different parts of the army, the different corps. and SAS was a part of infantry corps. And all I remember, when I first joined the army I didn't have any thoughts that I'd ever get to SAS because I thought it was unachievable. I mean these guys could run on water and swim Bass Strait and run across the

19:00 Nullarbor, and I mean, how do you do that? So I just, I didn't have any hopes or, I might have had hopes but I didn't have any ideas that I would ever get there. But then I used to talk about that to other people, and some of the other guys I remember put in for SAS. I don't know if they succeeded but I know Burma did and I remember I talked with it about him a lot, before I, before he went away to

19:30 back over to Swanbourne to do the cadre. Because he told me what he was doing and what the selection procedure was for SAS and all the rest of the stuff. So I was more aware of it then.

One more quick technical thing. That was, feels alright, okay, sorry. So can you tell us a bit about how that occurred, how you found out about the fact that they were recruiting and what happened?

20:00 Well Burma again, I used to call him Chopper, everybody called him Burma cause he was Burmese but I called him Chopper for some reason, I don't know why but. Chopper, they used to have travelling recruiting drives for SAS, applicants for SAS. And he applied for one because he was, as I said, a couple of years older than me, so he applied for one. And after his selection and he'd been selected to go at least and do the training. That was the first step. He told me a lot about you know, what they asked and what

20:30 they told him about SAS and what it was likely to be like. And then I grabbed any, there was no books written in those about SAS unless they were British SAS books. So there was, the amount of material that you could read about SAS was limited. Even within the army there was a not of stuff you could, you didn't have web sites, you didn't have computers, so there was nothing you could actually glean. So I was actually quite naive about the roles and the way SAS worked

21:00 prior to applying to join it. Quite amazing but yeah I just know that Chopper went over there and he loved it and he said get over here, so yeah, that was enough for me and I wanted to get out of ordnance.

Was it still very important to you that this was a means of getting yourself to Vietnam?

Well it was and I took a bit of a gamble actually to, because I was told that when you, if you were selected for SAS you did at lease twelve months training

21:30 in the regiment prior to going to Vietnam. And nobody knew how long the war was going; nobody envisaged that it was going to finish in 1971, as far as we were concerned. But as I said I was selected, when I was nineteen I was sent on jungle training to Canungra with a view to sending me to Vietnam in ordnance, which I didn't really want to do. But I knew I was dead certain to go to Vietnam in ordnance, but I took a bit of a gamble at age nineteen

22:00 to apply to SAS, not knowing that I would get in. And then doing the twelve months because it all, you know the time frame, and I knew my term of enlistment was up in 1973. So I thought that if Vietnam was still on and I might have to re-engage or re-enlist to go to Vietnam in SAS, if I passed SAS. But I knew I was certain to go to Vietnam in ordnance, so I just took a bit of a, threw a coin in the air and it came down SAS, so I went, I did.

What

22:30 **were your ambitions to do with the army beyond the war?**

Well I actually, while I was in ordnance, I was again selected, they did aptitude tests and psych [psychological] tests and all the rest of the stuff, and I was selected to do officer training at Portsea. And I went, I did all the tests, all the exams, all the psych tests, passed and again, sounds all so stupid these days, but I went out and got pissed with,

23:00 with the blokes that night. Because in those days there was nothing, nothing to do in Liverpool other than go in to the Railway Hotel and get pissed, get into a fight and get home. You know, I mean that was all you did just about every night or whenever you had leave. So I went out and they said, "Oh you're not gonna be an officer, you're not gonna do this, ah, bullshit, bullshit you know, get in with it, you know stay one of the boys." and all this sort of stuff. So I remember after a night such as that I went back and just withdrew my, even though I'd passed, I was literally waiting for a date to

23:30 go down to Portsea to do officer training. And I said, "No I don't want to do it, I've changed my mind." Stupid. But having said that if I had of gone to Portsea I wouldn't have gone to SAS and I wouldn't have led the life that I've lived. So I mean you make your choices, I'm very much a fatalist. And Vietnam turned me into being a fatalist and I think choices are made for certain reasons. And I may well have been an officer, I may well have gone to Vietnam as an officer. But I would certainly not have gone to Vietnam as an officer in SAS. So

24:00 we'd be having this discussion and I'd have been an officer in some other regiment or some other corps. So.

Maybe got killed in the war?

Maybe got killed, lot of officers did.

Can you tell us about how, the training at Canungra, what were you doing there?

Yeah jungle training, it's a three week course, jungle training, preparing all Australian troops to a service in Vietnam. All the instructors were either all ex Vietnam or ex Borneo or ex Malaya. Very high level of

24:30 instruction, very good course. Three weeks of absolutely hard bloody balls up training, it was just really, I just remember my last thought of Canungra is, isn't there a flat piece of ground in this place, it was all up and down and jungle. I remember spending one of the coldest nights on exercises in the hills around Beaudesert somewhere. It was absolutely freezing in the jungle, it was wet and we were

25:00 wet and it was freezing. But a lot of fitness training, weapons training, obstacle course training, patrolling. It was basically the excellent grounding for any troops going to serve in a Pacific theatre of war, which at that stage was Vietnam. The training was good, excellent.

What did you know about jungle warfare and about guerrilla war fare and what were you taught in Canungra?

Oh well at Canungra we were taught all about the Viet Cong booby

25:30 traps and the way they operated and their style of fighting, which guerrilla war fare. And the way we as an organised unit or an organised force, conventional military unit were fighting to combat their style of fighting. As opposed to I think the Americans, the Americans approached Vietnam in a totally different way. Whereas ours was you know more

26:00 patrolling, silent patrolling, even as an infantry soldier they were taught a different, we were taught fairly precise methods about how to function in the jungle environment and how to fight an enemy like the Viet Cong, fairly disciplined approach to it.

We'll talk about those methods in detail when we get on to your patrolling with the SAS. But as you were

26:30 **introduced to them at Canungra, what were those methods you just mentioned though? What sort of things would they teach you about how conventional army took on this enemy?**

Well the Australians I think the concept of Australians involved, the Australians' involvement in Vietnam was by virtue of, they used to do a lot of patrolling. It wasn't right down to a section and platoon type operations. As opposed to rather large

27:00 divisional or regimental type formations the Americans used to sort of seemingly do. But we were taught all the fine tech, the fine art of jungle patrolling. Silent movement, camouflage, how to use hand signals and never speak, watching your arcs, watching your front, sighting of different organisations within the patrol.

27:30 You know the gun and the scout and what the scout did and the roles and each that each soldier had to fulfil. How to survive in the jungle, how to look after yourself medically, how to live in the jungle. How to you know, put up your poncho, put up your bloody hoochie or whatever. How to survive in a wet, cold, miserable, damp, humid environment and still be able to carry out your functions. So the training was excellent,

28:00 I mean I just remember that I came away feeling, Jeez these guys really know what they're doing. And I mean you know, I felt a lot more confident. Again I was still in ordnance so I thought well I'm not gonna do, I'm not gonna utilise a lot of this stuff overseas in ordnance but having said that, I'm pretty well prepared. And then I had visions of transferring to a battalion or, you know, at least going and using this stuff in practice. Because I knew if I went over in ordnance, I mean, again, most of my time would be spent driving trucks or fork

28:30 lifts and doing stores. So it motivated me to sort of basically want to use it, want to use the training, utilise it.

What about those other trucks and equipment, APCs, helicopters, were you introduced to that kind of thing as well?

Oh yeah we were, we were introduced to the weapons that we were using in Vietnam. We were given an air power demonstration, we saw tanks you know, saw the Centurion tank and APCs, they had a lot of APCs around then.

29:00 The one, one oh five millimetre Howitzer that they had, we saw a firepower demonstration of that. I mean fairly all basic stuff, I mean not like the modern army of today. But all the weapons we used to, we would be using if we went there, the M16, the SLR, the M60, the little M79 bloody thump gun, I think in those days they still had the F1 sub machine gun.

29:30 Grenades, we did a lot of grenade practice, saw napalm, white phosphorous, all that sort of stuff, all the weapons at our disposal.

Were there accidents in Canungra while you were there?

The only accident I remember is not in our sort of little training section. But one of the guys had a ring on his finger and when they were doing truck debuses, you know like contact on a truck, troops sitting on a truck and

30:00 suddenly come under ambush and they had to jump off. And this guy had a ring on his finger which was not allowed but there was no rule against it and he ran off and had, jumped. When he was jumping down off the truck it grabbed the side of the truck and just pulled his whole finger off, just sheered his whole finger off. So I think an instruction came out after that, no rings you know, no rings to be worn, no jewellery of any type, except watch, except a watch. But that was the only accident, there was no military, we had live firing practice. You know we used to

30:30 crawl under, I remember a Vickers machine gun, on a fixed line, used to fire over us you did night, night training, tracers and you know firing under it, explosions going off and all that sort of stuff.

How real was the concept of the war in Vietnam after you'd done that?

Well it was a lot more real because they had a mock-up of a Viet Cong village and Viet Cong camp, and they used to have so called enemy running around dressed in black pyjamas and you know shooting over our heads and all this sort of stuff. Yeah, it

31:00 was a lot more real I mean the actual concept of the war, was, became a more real prospect. Cause up until then my army experience was yeah, quite disillusioning. But then I started to think, well wow, you know, this is looking a bit more like the army that I had dreamed about. So I was getting more interested.

Can you tell us about your application for the SAS, what did you have to do?

Well again it, got the

31:30 form out of the orderly room, applied to do selection training and then I think, I think from memory they had a travelling panel of SAS guys that used to come around and interview you know, different units. And I remember I went over to one of the battalions, probably 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] at Holsworthy, did an interview. And again I don't know what I told them but obviously I was considered suitable. And I, again I was only nineteen at that

32:00 stage and just told I'd be notified as to results. I went back thinking, and again everybody said, "Oh you wont get there." When the notification came through that I'd been selected to undergo training or an applic, a selection course for SAS, the comments from everybody I worked with, "Oh you wont make it, you're a bloody forklift driver, what the hell would you be going to SAS for, you know, super troopers." and all this sort of stuff. So I said, "Right, that's it,

32:30 I'll pass. There's no way I'm gonna give you guys the satisfaction of coming back, bloody jumping back into me forklift." But I remember after crashing the fork lift I was doing a guard at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. I did about seven guards; we used to do the Martin Place Cenotaph and that on a Thursday afternoon. And while I was on the front gate of Victoria Barracks, I collapsed and I had hepatitis and glandular fever. They raced me to Ingleburn hospital and I

33:00 was there for about four weeks, five weeks. And I didn't want to go back to ordnance, this is how much I hated being in ordnance, I didn't want to go back. And I asked around, lobbied and some, one of the supply sergeants or service corps sergeants said, "Well there's actually a vacancy as an ambulance driver here, because our guy, one of our guys has been posted to Vietnam." So he said, "Do you want me to pull a few strings, I'll see if I can get you attached to the hospital as an ambulance driver?" and he did. So I was attached to Ingleburn hospital as an ambulance driver for six months

33:30 and loved it. Crashed three ambulance and had a ball, had a ball, loved it, loved it. You know so yeah, and that's when I first, saw my first dead person. There was a, I was on night shift one night sitting in the casualty area of the military hospital, talking to two nurses and drinking coffee. And there was an amazing, an enormous explosion outside, seemed outside but it was down the road, and on the road from Ingleburn to Liverpool. And what had happened, this, one of these soldiers from I think the C Regiment just

34:00 down the road, got pissed at the Cross Roads Hotel, careered down the road in an old Rover and hit a paper truck head on. And he was killed, the steering wheel went through his chest and he smashed his head on the bloody windscreen, smashed his brains. But the guy in the paper truck, the truck was on fire and he was stuck in the cab, couldn't get out, it was all squashed on his legs. And I raced out and the truck was still on fire and I jumped up on

34:30 the running board and tried to grab this guy out of the truck, bearing in mind I was only eighteen or nineteen. And grabbed his arm to pull him out, cause he was screaming obviously. And pulled his whole, all the flesh of his arm off, and it came off in my hand and I just collapsed back and then the flames took over and he died, you know, he burned alive basically, poor bastard. I was just hopeless and I remember there was traffic going passed the scene of the accident then they cordoned

35:00 it off and the truck was still smouldering. And this woman bought her little son back to look at the

wreck. And I remember her saying, “Look Jimmy, look at the dead man.” And I just went absolutely fucking ballistic. I went over and shouted at this woman, cause I was crying, I was screaming. You know, cause this guy’s arm, I still had his flesh on my shirt and everything. Oh bloody terrible, so it was my experience of death, my first experience of death. Yeah.

35:30 **Did you reflect on your role in the army at that moment and what you’re likely to do?**

Again your mortality, or feelings of mortality as a teenager, which I was, everybody’s ten foot tall and bullet proof and it can’t happen to me. I mean I wasn’t dumb by any means, I was quite an intelligent person I think but I also had these feelings of immortality, you know, wouldn’t happen to me. It happens to

36:00 everybody else, but not me. But it certainly, that gave me a few nightmares, I mean, that was a horrible introduction to the tragedy of death and, ooh, yuk, disgusting.

Is that a smell you’ve ever kind of …?

Burning flesh, yeah. I’ve always had this fear of ever dying by fire because this guy burn to death, I mean he was still conscious and well he looked conscious, he was still screaming.

36:30 And the smell of burning, human flesh just yeah, that’s one way I don’t want to die.

Is there anything you’ve smelled like that since?

A bloke, Viet Cong in Vietnam was white phosphorous, he was burning, that was quite horrendous but it was a different type of smell. Since then in, when I was in the police force I went to a

37:00 couple of accidents that people were incinerated in cars and it’s quite horrible.

Must be difficult for you when you remember these events, to sort of have all the connections that there must be between them. Are they, that first burning man, is that a, was that a stronger, more traumatic image for you than a lot of the subsequent events?

Well it was a shock to me because I didn’t realise. I mean, again as a young teenager, unblooded, I mean to

37:30 see death in that form, I mean to see somebody dead laying in a bed or something is one thing, but to see somebody actually dying and then burning, on top of that, it’s quite horrific. I think that’s why I abused this woman. I just couldn’t believe that she would be, her son probably was traumatised for the rest of his life. I mean this guy was just a burned body, it was terrible. I just couldn’t understand the stupidity of some mother that would do that.

Were you a bit

38:00 **of a loose cannon as a nineteen year old?**

I was, yeah, I was sort of, I had my moments. Because I’d lived such a disciplined life in such a closeted environment and I wasn’t allowed to enjoy myself. I mean enjoyment, I enjoyed myself as a child but it was always under the constraints of I would never let myself go and do things too dangerous cause I was always very scared that dad would find out and

38:30 you know, punish me. He used to whip us with an old, the end of a stock whip you know, and for anything. You know he used to, he wasn’t being abusive but he was just a disciplinarian. So I was always constrained in anything I did as a child, I knew what, I had a very, a clear sense of what was right and wrong. Because of dad’s, you know, police, you know, he used to come home and tell stories about you know, this person did that and that person

39:00 did this. And you know, you make sure you never do that sort of stuff and don’t behave in that manner and all that. So I was very aware of how you were expected to behave in certain circumstances. So I think when I joined the army and I was actually free of all this, even though I was in a disciplined environment, I became yeah, a little bit of a tearaway. I used to go up to Kings Cross, go to the prostitutes at King’s Cross all the time. My first understanding of women

39:30 was from a prostitute. I didn’t even realise that women had hair on their pussies you know cause in those days there was no pornography you know, you couldn’t get hold of pornography. I think the only thing you could look at was Women’s Weekly bra ads or something; I mean that was about the most you could get in those days. And I, so I was a bit of a tearaway, I used to do those things on the weekends, before I met Caroline, who later became

40:00 my wife. I used to go up, catch the train into Sydney, in uniform, wander round Kings Cross, get drunk, you know, just, I was a bit rebellious because I just lashing out. I mean I thought God, I can do these things, nobody’s gonna tell me you gotta be home by a certain time, well you had to be home by a certain time but it was usually weekend leave so you could sort of, you know. I dossed down in some of the worst hotels in Sydney, I mean down at Woolloomooloo. We used to have a place called; the navy had a hotel down there called the Bunch of Cunts. And it was, you’d go down

40:30 there and I’d deliberately go down there to get into a fight, you know, and weird. And they had raffles

and these women with Band Aids, you know pro's, women with Band Aids all over them, terrible looking bloody specimens of females and they used to have these raffles. And you know, if you won it, she'd drag you upstairs and bang the back out of you for a you know, for a dollar or two dollars or something. It's just weird. Sydney

41:00 in those days, Chapel Street and Kings Cross, it was a fairly safe environment, that was before the drug scene took over, even though the Americans were coming out and the drug scene was starting to show its head. It was still quite safe and you could walk around streets of Kings Cross at one or two o'clock in the morning. And it was just quite, you know you'd go to discos, I remember Long John's Disco in the pub, the beer house or the pub on the top of Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross and Oxford Street. And

41:30 oh I'd just walk around and I'd be talk, I used to talk to the, I used to love talking to these prostitutes and I'd walk around Kings Cross. And I was actually became quite a favourite of them. Cause Chapel Street was like an 'H', it was like a series of little lanes and I'd walk around and they all, "Oh hello Don how are you?"" And they'd actually talk to me and then they'd be you know, plying customers and then I'd just stand to the side then I'd go in and I'd just talk to them about, I just loved talking to girls, because I was deprived of that when I was a kid. So I'd

42:00 just talk to them and then I'd, I think...

Tape 4

00:31 **Briefly can you describe the atmosphere in Kings Cross at the time, especially with the influx of the Americans and your experience of that?**

Was just a, I'm trying to think of the right words, it was just an outgoing, effervescent, everybody was there to have a good time. It was just a very fun place to be. There was lots of discos, lots of pubs, clubs, taverns.

01:00 People, everybody, it was just a really fun place to be, it was a happy place to be. There was none of the seedier side of King's Cross that I know, the history of Kings Cross, you know, or part of the history of Kings Cross. Prior to the R&R [Rest and Recreation] times and that and after the R&R times, and I mean the Kings Cross of today is different than it was in those days. It was quite a safe place to be. I mean I don't think I ever saw a fight, or if I did I can't remember it. Crime,

01:30 I mean there was obviously the pickpockets, or the touts that used to hang around outside the strip clubs and Whisky a Go Go. And I remember going to Whisky a Go Go all the time and getting drunk and watching the girls you know with their tassels on their tits. And disco girls dancing in the cages and all that. It was just a really, I know it's a bad adjective, but it was a happy, happy, fun place to be, everybody was there having a good time. Yeah. It was just,

02:00 it was great.

Did you have any contact with American service men in...

No.

Kings Cross at that time?

No, never. We'd probably see them in the street and if we were in uniform we'd go, "G'day mate." just, you know, hello.

Were you aware of the, how aware were you of the increasing numbers of American soldiers?

Oh, very aware, I mean there were buses, there'd be busloads you know, you'd see them all over the place. They'd, sometimes they'd go on tours around the city and you know they'd be all down the harbour, around the quay and you know, Circular Quay, catching ferries and.

02:30 They, from memory they never wore uniform, never allowed to wear uniform, it was always, except, unless they were navy. I think maybe the navy guys wore uniform. But the, all the soldiers were just you know, jeans and shirts and crew cuts and you know, yeah.

What was the relationship like between American service men and Australian service men?

I don't think there was any dramas. I mean there was obviously some fights. It was nothing like the Brisbane fight, riots of the Second World War. There was probably some fights but again, I,

03:00 nothing that comes to mind, nothing significant in my mind anyway. None of these, us and them-type confrontations.

The Whisky a Go Go I think is no longer there now.

No it burned down.

Can you just describe that for us from a service man's point of view, don't have to go into the,

just…?

Oh it was excitingly sleazy. You'd walk, I remember it was next to a night club called the Bamboo Room. And you'd go in there and there was obviously the touts on the doors, you know, the bloody guards and all this sort

03:30 of stuff. And you'd walk in there and there was these big cages with girls with very little on, dancing. And they'd always have these tassels on their tits swinging around in different directions. And you'd just get plied with booze and you'd crawl into a little booth or grab a chair somewhere and just generally soak up the ambience of the place. I mean for a young soldier, not used to any of this sort of stuff, there's, I might be wrong, but there's no Whisky a Go Go's in

04:00 Wellington or Cobar. I was just absolutely blown away. I mean all these Yanks'd be around, plying drinks and drinking and falling over dead drunk and chatting up birds. And it was just, again there was no, it wasn't an aggressive atmosphere; it was just a really fun time. And I've got photos somewhere of me taken with one of my mates and we're in uniform, both just absolutely blind drunk, you know, signed on the back, Whisky a Go Go. You know Whisky a Go Go fold out thing, classic

04:30 place to be.

Just the wider atmosphere there, there was still some protests against the war, you just mentioned you were on Cenotaph duty. Did you cop any abuse or flak when you were on guard duty?

I just remember comments being made as we marched into Martin Place to do the Cenotaph. And from memory, most people maintained a respectful silence when we were actually doing Rest on Arms Reverse, you know, the part of the

05:00 service that we actually rest on our arms and reversed around the Cenotaph. But then there was comments made during the services, if there was services. I can't remember even what format it took, I think they read the Ode and they played the Last Post and maybe somebody said something I think. But it was every Thursday afternoon I think about lunch time. And I just remember comments, particularly marching in. You know, soldiers, ah, "Soldiers get out." you know, "Vietnam get out." all this sort of stuff. But

05:30 during the actual formation of the ceremony I can't remember anything being, but nothing was directed at me personally I don't think. But I have heard of stories, you know people being spat at and pushed and you know and one guy got his rifle, tried to get, somebody tried to grab his rifle or something. But you know I just remember that there was a little bit of animosity about Vietnam in those days. Again this was '68, '69.

What were the Anzac Day ceremonies like

06:00 **at that time?**

I don't know I never went to one, never went to one. I remember the first Anzac Day I went to was with my Uncle Tony. He took me to the dawn service at Martin Place when I was about twelve. And I think that was the first and last Anzac Day I ever went to before the first one I went to in Canberra when I came here. I never went to them. I mean it was just, I was usually working. I was either at school, we had a holiday at school, I remember

06:30 probably at Wellington they had Anzac Days, I remember, you know the services and all that sort of stuff but I can't remember doing anything. I remember as a member of the cadets, we did something at the Cenotaph at Wellington I think. I've got some memories of that but I can't remember attending an Anzac Day ceremony as a teenager or as a young soldier, cause I was usually working.

It wasn't required as a…?

No. No, it wasn't required,

07:00 part of a, unless you were actually you know ordered to do guard duty or something, ceremony or something. No, it wasn't sort of required, requirement.

We might move on to your training in the SAS. Can you tell us about receiving, just recap receiving word that you were off to go on this?

I was overjoyed cause it was just classic, I mean the army was a big adventure, this was like the biggest adventure.

07:30 I went home and told my parents that I was being transferred to Perth. And I had to give them the address that they could write to me, so it was, care of the SAS Regiment, Swanbourne, Perth or something. And the postcode was six zero one zero, I remember. And again they asked obvious questions like "What would you be doing?" And I said, "Oh I think we're doing a lot of stuff for the air force cause that's where the 'Air' came into it." I knew what I was going to join at that stage, but I didn't sort of let on to them, I didn't tell mum and dad anything

08:00 about that. And they didn't push it so I just, "I'll keep in touch, I'll let you know." And I remember I went over by train.

By yourself?

By myself. And in those days it was a four to five day trip. We caught a train from Sydney to Melbourne, Melbourne to Adelaide, Adelaide to Port Pirie. Then you actually change trains because it's a different gauge then you went across on the Inter Continental I think it was, to Perth. And I remember going into Perth and it was just absolutely like wow, you know, I hadn't been

08:30 anywhere in Australia except for New South Wales. And that was pretty exciting. And then there was nobody there to meet me so I had to ring up the camp orderly Room and they said just get a train out. Bloody hell, how do you catch a train, you know, where do you go; anyhow I found out, had a kit bag and another bag with me. So I ended up catching a train to Swanbourne and then I rang up from Swanbourne Station I remember and they sent a Land Rover down to pick me up. And I went in to the orderly room,

09:00 reported to the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] I think it was. And I said "I'm here to do the SAS course, SAS Course, that's right, I'm here to do SAS Training." Well that was mistake number one, I nearly failed before I even started, "You don't call it SAS, you call it Special Air Service or SAS." He said, okay, blah, blah, blah. Gave me this, that and a meal pass or something and then got, detailed some guy off to take me up to the barracks.

09:30 Went up and found me room and I was there quite early so I was put to work in the mess, mess orderly, waiting for the course to, people to turn up and the complement to be filled out. So I was probably there for about three weeks before the course started. So I don't know why they sent me that early, anyway I was there for about three weeks. And you know got to know Perth pretty well and what a fun place that was. I mean it's a beautiful, beautiful city, and right on the beach so I went swimming all the time. And

10:00 under advice from some of the people around the place cause you talked to people in the mess and the bar and all, got, started to get fit, started to do a lot of running, lot of sand hill work, you know sand work and all that sort of stuff. And then finally the training started, the course was there. And as I said, I think there were about seventy-four or seventy-six people on the course. And literally from day one people just didn't turn up for day two, and day two didn't turn up for day three. And the numbers in the room, in the barracks, empty beds appear, started to appear

10:30 all the time. And we never knew why people weren't there the next day, what they did wrong or what they didn't do, they just didn't, they weren't there. They weren't given a chance to come, they were called in usually of an evening, to say pack your bags and you'll be RTU [Returned to Unit]. I presume they were told the reasons why, or that they were told that you're totally unsuitable or to try again later on or something. A lot of it was because of injuries but a lot of it was because of other reasons. But

11:00 they never had a chance to talk to us, you know the people that were still on the course. So you couldn't say, oh you know, I got kicked off, well nobody every knew why they weren't there. And gradually we did a lot of training in Perth for about two weeks. And then we went over to Rottnest Island I remember. And that's where we'd do all our navigation training, weapons training, a lot more fitness training, cause there's a lot of sand on Rottnest Island. And I remember being, running along the beach in squad

11:30 size numbers, and we'd all, by this one Sergeant called Dutchy Pavlenko, who was ex training team, Vietnam, ex regiment, hard little bastard. And we used to always start heading towards the wet sand, you know, cause we were running in boots and greens. And there'd be people, some, cause it was still a holiday resort in those days but a very, you know, not as popular as it is these days. But there'd be civilians on the beach, you know, sun-baking and swimming and we were running along this bloody beach. And we used to head towards the

12:00 wet sand and he'd steer us towards the soft sand and like you do a three or four mile run in soft sand in boots and you're just absolutely fucking knackered. Then you go back and we're doing mainly navigation training. Night navigation, day navigation, weapons training, medical training.

And that's orientation, [UNCLEAR] at night?

Yeah orientation, orientation stuff. Sig [signals] training, basic sig work.

What's that involve?

Oh, you know, sending, receiving messages. Doing codes and

12:30 setting up a radio and all the basics of signal work, and I say basics of signal work. As I said, weapons training, fair bit of weapons training.

What sort of weapons training?

All the weapons we'd be, come in contact with during the course, and during our service in the regiment.

Is that different to basic training?

Ah yeah well we were then introduced to the M16, the Armalite, the thump gun, the 79 bloody grenade launcher, the M66 rocket launcher.

13:00 Captured weapons, AK47s [Avtomaticheski Kalashnikov – Russian automatic rifle] and SKSs [Samozaryadnyi Karabin Sisyemi Simonova – Russian automatic rifle], pistol training, did a bit of pistol training, did unarmed combat, basic unarmed combat with knives and pistols.

What did they train you to do in unarmed combat?

Oh just basically get out of the situation, it was all dirty stuff, I mean stuff that you don't talk about in normal environments, but you were taught how to hurt people, basically. It wasn't the, it certainly wasn't

13:30 Queensbury Rules. And if you were in a situation where he had a knife and you had nothing or you had a knife and he had a gun well you just, basically survival, basic raw survival. And I remember one of the instructors doing the unarmed combat side of it, he said, "The human body is like a supermarket." he said, "You can just go in, you can find any, you can find a thousand ways in which to hurt somebody. And your body is a supermarket, just shop, anywhere you want to go, I can tell you how to hurt somebody." And we did,

14:00 we did all this, it was well trained, I mean it wasn't sort of macho, you know, marines hitting the beach at Iwo Jima type of stuff, it was all sort of common sense, good training. And again, I hadn't been exposed to any of that.

Did they teach you that in the army?

Well not really, not unarmed combat type stuff. I mean we do basic bayonet work, you know butt striking with weapons and all this sort of stuff. But no, not unarmed combat, I can't remember doing unarmed combat

14:30 in basic training. I used to do a lot of boxing when I was a kid at school, that's another sport I did, I forgot. Got a couple of pennants for boxing at school in the Boys' Club. So, you know I sort of quite like that sort of rough stuff. But yeah the training on Rottnest was all the basics of everything you know, sig work, med [medical] work, weapons work, fitness, navigation.

What's a thump gun, by the way?

Oh it's an M79 grenade launcher,

15:00 it's a forty millimetre bomb and I think the Yanks called it a thump gun. It's a very small weapon about yay big. And just a big barrel, forty millimetre barrel and you feed rounds in.

Was it a competitive environment, you realised you were competing against your

15:30 **class mates essentially for that [UNCLEAR] places?**

Yeah we were. It was competitive but having said that, it was also, they concentrate a lot on team work. You know, the old saying, a team's only as strong as its weakest link. And things like the runs; I mean I, compared to a lot of people wasn't as fit as they were, even though I was young. But I hadn't been in a unit that did any, a lot of, we didn't do any PT [Physical Training] in ordnance. And basically I was from a very sedentary

16:00 background and a lot of these guys were from battalions or combat units, combat corps. And things like the runs, the ethos in SAS was not how, they didn't particularly look at people that wanted to excel. They looked at people that just kept trying, kept try, you know, kept at a task until it was actually achieved. They didn't look at the people that came in first on runs, or you know,

16:30 they actually put more value in people that actually stopped and went back to help people, to help them along you know. And now looking back on it, I didn't realise in those days, but looking back on it, that's what they were looking at. People that could work in a team, in a team environment and make sure that the team achieved any given task. And they weren't interested in, because you can always make, their thinking was you can make an unfit person fit, you can make a

17:00 person that's not a really good shot, a good shot, you can train people to do those skills, but they need something else from within. And what they were looking for was just a will to achieve whatever task was given to them. Which was yeah, a good ethos.

This wasn't SAS training, this was a course…

This was selection.

this was a selection procedure and then you went on to training afterwards of course. So, what we talk about…

But they were training, they were selecting in the,

17:30 in the mentality of the, of what you'd be doing later so.

Amongst your recruits, when you did get some down time did you discuss the war in Vietnam?

Well very rarely I think because most of the time we were that knackered. I mean really, we were up

early, very, going to bed late if we were in bed, sometimes we'd be up doing night exercises. So when we actually talked we were probably more conversation centred on you know, why so and so got booted out. Or, you know, I wonder what they got

18:00 in store for us tomorrow, and Jesus Christ, is this bloody hard or what. I mean, you know, it was really sort of, it was more centred around the activities of what we were doing at the time rather than what we may be doing in Vietnam.

How was the course structured, were you informed of what might happen tomorrow or was it just living day to day?

Well we were given a basic, you know, like the two weeks at Rottnest was laid out in a sort of a pro forma, you know like a program. And then the week or so at Bindoon where we did a lot of weapons training was, and explosives training,

18:30 that was laid out basically, weapons training from eight a.m. to five p.m. But, what, the content of what, changed daily. You had a loose idea of what you were doing, but they didn't tell you, you know, it's not like going to school, this period we'll... You know we had a program, a schedule, but as to what bastardisation they could throw into that program,

19:00 we were obviously unaware of you know.

Were there moments where you thought, oh stuff this?

No, never, never. I just remember finishing one twenty mile run or something and literally had burst blisters on, in my feet, blood in my socks, and I was just, I persevered and I threw up on this one run a couple of times. And this Pavlenko, Dutchy Pavlenko came up and booted me along, he said "Come on you can make it." And I was probably one of the

19:30 last people to finish and that's what they were looking for, the grit and determination to actually do what they asked you to do. Whether or not you came in first or last, they were actually after people that did it. But even after all that, those trials and tribulations I never ever thought, because in the back of my mind was the derision that I would get when I got back to Moorebank, told you, you couldn't make it. And there's no way I could live with that so, I was just gonna persevere, and I was probably one of the youngest on the course.

20:00 Most of the other guys had you know been in battalions or artillery or armour or something and they were about twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-five, twenty-six, you know and I was nineteen, so I was fairly young.

How was Chopper going at this stage?

Oh he was already in the unit and he'd already, he was already in Vietnam when I was doing my cadre. So I used to get letters from him in Swanbourne from Vietnam and telling me what he was doing on patrol, what it was like and you know. And that then refocussed my thinking back to Vietnam. Because I'd get

20:30 first hand knowledge of what we would be doing in Vietnam from him, he was already over there so.

Was he enjoying his time in Vietnam?

Yeah, loved it, loved it. He was a bloody good soldier actually Burma, Chopper, he was just fantastic.

You mentioned, just curious, you mentioned there's a few people who aren't of, aren't Australian, Australian nationals or...?

Oh he was, he was, well he was obviously naturalised Australian or his parents were, but they were Burmese. Yeah they were lovely people.

You mentioned a German guy who was...?

Oh that was when I was doing ordnance.

21:00 He was an instructor in ordnance; he was a German, ex German Army.

How did a German, I mean...?

Oh probably naturalised Australian after the war. Oh he was just in the Panzer Unit, one of the tank units. They, you know, obviously was deemed fit enough to be naturalised so he was naturalised Australian. And he was in the Australian Army; every now and then he'd show us his Iron Cross.

Just one of the things that happened in the fifties was the, the nuclear explosions in the, did you hear any of those,

21:30 **sort of that, Australia's involvement in the nuclear weapons program at the time?**

Oh Maralinga and all that, no. Oh yeah we, yeah I knew about it but again, I wasn't very newsy in those days, I wasn't, I said I used to read the first two or three pages of the paper. But having said that I can't, obviously I, my attention was focused or attracted to certain things and I can't remember actually

having any interest any way whatsoever about the nuclear tests.

Getting back to the training,

22:00 **towards the end of the course, can you tell us sort of the, that paring down procedure and when you realised, you'd or you'd been told that you'd graduated and succeeded or...?**

Yeah well there was a lot to go through and strangely enough you know, people were disappearing at a rapid rate of knots. And we were doing everything from you know, exercises down in the Pemberton area and Collie. And we were down to about, I think in the last week, we were down to ten or

22:30 eight people out of seventy-five or seventy-four or something. And the last week was made up on nicety things, like they, we did a bit of helicopter work, chopper work, did some basic diving, basic boat work on the Swan River. Some of the more interesting aspects of SAS work they exposed us to. And even though there was eight on the last week, four people got the shot, got the bullet in the last week for

23:00 whatever I don't know. And then when on the last day at selection we were called in one by one to the chief instructor old, a guy called Joe Flannery, wonderful old guy. He called me in and with all the instructors were there in the room so it was a bit of a confrontational situation with the instructors that had been watching my progress over the last five or six weeks. And they said, "Well we'll just let you know at the outset you've passed,

23:30 but it's a provisional pass because you lack the degree of maturity that we're looking for but you have qualities that we think we may be able to foster. So yes you have passed." and I just went phhhh, couldn't believe it. And walked out and I was just beaming, I didn't even talk to anybody else, I just went off in my own little world, I was, you know, just rapt. You still don't get the beret or anything. And then I was

24:00 sent back to, I think I was put back on mess duties at the end of the course and four of us passed, and we all congratulated each other and went into Perth and got pissed or something. And then and then we did a parachute course at Williamtown and at the end of that I think, oh then we had to do a patrol course down at Collie, which was three weeks of intense patrol, SAS patrolling techniques down in Collie, and then you got your beret. And in those days it was no,

24:30 there was no formal presentation, the four of us were called into the CO's [Commanding Officer] office, Colonel Clarke's office. And he just said "You've passed, you're now a member of the SAS Regiment or something and you'll be posted to a Sabre Squadron, and here's your beret. Go across and get the appropriate badges at the Q [Quartermaster] Store and your wings, cause you've passed your para [parachute] course and you know, talk to your appropriate SSMs [Squadron Sergent Majors] and which squadron you'll be going to." I think we all went to 2 Squadron.

Sorry, what's the,

25:00 **what's the parachute course involve?**

Three weeks of basic parachuting, static line parachuting at Williamstown, pretty hard course actually.

Any free fall?

No, no, not at that stage. It's only just to get your parachute wings, we had to do nine jumps, I think it was nine jumps. One night jump and I think a water jump and seven normal jumps, with and without baggage, you know, with and without equipment.

25:30 But pretty intense training, I mean we were as fit as mallee, I was that fit I couldn't even walk properly, I mean, I'd sort of bounce along when I was walking. Cause we used to do all our runs in equipment so you'd be so fit and your leg muscles'd be so strong, that you'd, you found it hard just to stay on the earth. You know you had, you'd be bouncing along and you could just run and do anything you wanted to do. So, but having said that, my first exposure to really wearing a helmet for prolonged periods,

26:00 and doing all this twisting and looking up your rigging lines and all that, your neck muscles, oh just, your bloody head nearly fell off. But I remember I nearly didn't complete the course because a guy called Lindsay Hanch[?], we're in what they called the Polish Tower which was a very tall tower operated by a hydraulic system. And you'd jump off at about two hundred feet high or something. And you'd all rig up and you'd drop off and by a system of hydraulic brakes, your descent would be slowed and you'd

26:30 practice landings from a great height. And he was just before me and he fell down and something went wrong with the brakes and he hit the ground too hard, and he had a compound fracture of his leg. His bone, I remember his bone was pointing up, and there's blood everywhere and he's screaming. And I was all rigged up on the other side ready to go. And they stopped it for a while, while they pushed him into an ambulance, put sawdust on the blood and they wheeled him away. And I was on the other side and I said "That's it, fuck I'm not gonna do this." And I knew I'd give away

27:00 everything and that's the one time that I thought I wouldn't do it because, I don't know, don't quote me on the height but it was a long, it was a very high tower, Polish Tower. So they fiddled around with the brakes and literally I was the next dummy, I was the next test case. And so they threw me off and thank Christ they got the switches right and I landed, fairly heavily, but rolled over and over. But the only way

I passed is one of the instructors called Jock Thorburn put his boot in me back, he said, “You’ll be right son.” and he just booted me off, kicked me out.

27:30 So I was gone. Otherwise I was just about ready to unhook the parachute and get out, I thought fuck that’s bloody horrific, you know. But Lindsay Hanch was in the regiment and in fact he had to come back and do another para course and he joined us in Vietnam as a reinforcement, later on, he was a second lieutenant. Yeah, so that was pretty...

Were you all ranks in this training course?

Yeah a lot of guys came in as corporals and lance corporals, very few if any sergeants.

28:00 The one, the officer that did pass Captain Ron Billet, he was an ex Royal Marine Commando major or a Royal Marine Commando captain on exchange to the Australian Army. So when he passed, he passed on his merit but he was on exchange, he was on exchange program from the British Army, ah, British Navy. The other two guys were, one was a lance corporal ex commando, ex 2 Commando or something and another one was a battalion guy,

28:30 private. But I think there, probably the highest rank would have been a corporal in the course.

What was your rank at the time?

I was, I was just a private, a [UNCLEAR], private, nineteen year old bloody no hoper, going nowhere.

Did they have any nicknames for the people who were on the training course or recruits like yourself?

Yeah, shit bags or hoodlums or you know, they used to refer to us quite derogatively. You really knew where you were in the pecking order very quickly, you were nothing, you know, you were just...

29:00 And having said that, they were there, you got a feeling that they wanted you to pass but you had to do it on your merit. But it wasn’t a case of you know, they just didn’t want to pass; they’d fail you at anything. There was always, I’m sure always good reasons for why you did fail, if you failed. And I’m sure they handled it in a way that if, to leave you with enough confidence to try again if you, if in fact you did pass, you did fail the course. So they weren’t sort of

29:30 just ruthlessly culling people left, right and centre, and if they were culling, they were culling for a good reason. Because from my experience very few people, there’s always exceptions but very few people that actually passed selection got into the regiment. Proved to be duds later on in training or later on in operational situations. They sussed people out pretty well. There was a series of psych, looking at you psychologically, and you know, mentally and how you, not how

30:00 physically healthy you were because you could always be made to be, you know, physically fit. But how you handled things mentally you know. And one of the main things in training was maintain a sense of humour. I think that’s one thing that, you know, when they kick you out of your little hole in the middle of a rainy night you know, at two o'clock in the morning to say we’ve just been ambushed, what are you gonna do about it, a lot of guys just said, “Oh fuck, this is ridiculous.” you know. Well they just wouldn’t have appeared the next day. And things like when you finished runs,

30:30 there’d be a truck, particularly the twenty mile runs up West Coast Highway, you’d run away from Swanbourne, start at four o'clock in the morning or something, run away from Swanbourne, twenty miles is a long way with a pack and a rifle. And there would be a truck at the end of the run, and right on the dot of, as the second hand ticked around literally, at four hours, you were given four hours for the run. You could, and if you weren’t at the truck you’d see the brake lights come on, the engine start up, and it’d turn around it’d pass you, you’d still be running, you’d have to finish the

31:00 run. But then you had to make your way back to Swanbourne, twenty miles back, and then do a day of training so you had to hitch hike back or something. And people’d be going to work and you’re still slogging along you know, sweat, bloody people collapsing all over the place. But you know, things like that or you’d be brought back in the truck, you’d make the truck, the truck’d be heading back to camp and it’d suddenly stop and the instructor’d yell out, “Truck’s broken down, you have to push.” So we’d have to all get out and push the truck, and then he’d be have a foot on the brake and you know ten people pushing

31:30 the truck, bloody hard. Or you’d be caught in an ambush on the way back to camp, you know, somebody’d let off a smoke grenade in the back of the truck and then you’d all have to de-bus and they’d watch how you handled that. You know because you’d just been through a nightmare run and the idea was you just didn’t relax you know, you just didn’t think well I’ve done that, I can just, you know, look forward to breakfast. Well they just wanted to see how people would react in a stressful situation after they’ve been physically absolutely gutted, you know. So blokes’d say, “Oh

32:00 fuck this is stupid.” well they just didn’t turn up. So you’d get in, you’d run out and drop to the ground and go through all your contact drills and, you know play the game basically. But maintain a focus as to what you were supposed to be doing.

You said this was a turning point for your dad when you graduated, can you describe telling him about your graduation and the...?

Well wasn't so much when I graduated because I think I went home on leave and I just told them a little bit about SAS

32:30 and what I was doing but he still didn't do anything. But it was when I was home on Pre-Em Leave to go to Vietnam. Which was at the end of twelve months, I was posted to 2 Squadron at the end of the cadre course they call it. And while I was in that twelve months, I did a lot of training, I did medical training, sig training, unarmed combat, weapons training, and more intensive patrol training. And one, at least once during that year

33:00 I went home on leave so I told mum and dad a bit about SAS, but still not giving it away a lot. But it was when I came home from my seven days Pre-Em Leave that I told dad, you know, that dad asked this guy at the police station you know, what's your son in? He said, SAS. What is he, mad, you know. And that's when dad's attitude changed; it didn't change while I was doing the training or even when I graduated because I didn't really... I remember I went home on the weekends, from Williamtown when I was

33:30 doing the parachute course. And all they knew was that I was just so tired I just staggered in and had a bit of tea and went to bed. And I just slept, you know, just slept and slept. And for once dad didn't get me out of bed because I just wouldn't have got up.

Is there anything they didn't train you for, once you got to Vietnam you, how relevant was all that training?

It was all fairly relevant as I said, all the instructors in the regiment, I don't know if it's like that now, but in the regiment in those days, to even become a corporal you had to have

34:00 at least either been in the regiment a very long time or have had some operational experience. So most of the instructors had been, were ex Borneo Malaya and Vietnam. Some had already done a tour in Vietnam. And all my instructors had been in Vietnam, either in the regiment or in the training team. So they, all the training was very well focused and as realistic as you possibly could make it. Right down to the fact that we used to use live rounds in contacts,

34:30 contact drills, you know like you'd be walking along, ambush drill. An old joke, Flannery used to shoot at us with the shot gun and saltpetre in the jungle so not dangerous really but I mean, you could get one in the eye, but just for a state of realism or they'd shoot over our heads with live ammunition. And we had SAS shoot and scoot drills, that when you're involved in a contact, the scout'd drop down and empty the magazine at

35:00 where the enemy was supposed to be. And then we used to, he'd come back, run back, and as he got to a certain position, the bloke behind him next in line, cause you patrolled in a single file, he would fire over his head the thing, and then he'd let go and he'd turn around when his magazine's empty and then the next bloke... so we'd do, and that was all with live ammunition so.

What was that called, shoot and scoot?

Oh shoot, well SAS shoot and scoot, means you shoot and then scoot, you know.

35:30 Cause our, the aim of SAS work was mainly if you got involved in, was not to get into contact, was to remain undetected. But if you were detected, to get out as quick, to re, disengage contact as quick as you can because basically there was only five of us usually and you never knew what strength the enemy was. I mean you could bump anything so you might bump two or three guys but your aim was not to get in to a stand up fight, your aim was to get information. So

36:00 basically, shoot and scoot, keep their heads down and get out of there. And we had this series of drills that we used to do to get out and distance ourselves from the contact scene.

What's, just pick up on some of these, the language used, bump, what do you mean?

Oh bump the enemy, you know, bump into them, meet them head on you know, contact them we used to call it contact.

Battle noise training, was that similar to what you found was like in real battle?

36:30 Yeah, yeah. And the weird thing about it and I don't know if other people have talked to you about this but if you're in a contact or, and it's all happening and there's firing going on, you don't actually hear it. It's all, you sort of float away from it, you, it's all sort of peripheral; your vision is very focused. But your senses or your hearing, sense of hearing is somehow deadened. And all you hear, and when

37:00 people are shouting and yelling in a contact situation, you actually seem to be speaking in slow motion, everything seems to be happening incredibly slowly. You know, it's really hard to explain and but I don't know whether you've heard this in other interviews, but...

No we haven't, I haven't heard.

things slow down considerably. And I remember after one contact, I said I didn't hear anything. I can't remember hearing

37:30 weapons going off, firing. I can't remember hearing explosions, I can't remember hearing anything. And

it was like all I remember is seeing things happen and when people were shouting, their voices were sort of drawn out and very slow, you know, slow motion sort of thing. Really weird.

Extraordinary, must have something to do with your hyper-sensitised.

Yeah, you're hyper-sensitive, your adrenaline is just pumping or something.

So you're just moving so fast that you're sort of processing it, something very quick,

38:00 **very, you know you're actually able to take on board a lot of things I guess. I don't know I haven't heard of it before, Second World War blokes haven't talked to us about it either.**

It's weird, it's a weird sort of sensation and I have spoken to other people about it and it's like, yeah everything's slowed down, in slow motion. And you sort of hear things but you don't hear things, you're not focused on the noise. Yeah, but in training I mean you hear a lot of noise. Because, probably because you know it's not for real,

38:30 I think there must be something in the human mind or the body changes when you know it's for real and you sort of, everything happens. And in fact I heard, I found that in Timor too. And yeah.

I've actually been near battles and what I've found was, extraordinary was, it's really, really noisy compared with what you see on the movies, you see a gun shot on television, a real live gunshot can shake you to your boots.

I know, it is incredibly noisy. But

39:00 yeah, you hear noises but it's like it's a deadened noise. It's like muffled, it's like muffled explosions you know, weapons going off and all this sort of thing. It's quite, quite unreal.

We might have to stop there.

Tape 5

00:24 **Is there a code of silence about what you're allowed to talk about to do with your SAS training, while you're part of the unit?**

00:30 Well in those days there wasn't the secrecy surrounding SAS as there is these days. No, we weren't, we weren't, may well have been, I can't remember but I don't think we got any direction that we don't talk about the training that we were going through, but in fact we didn't anyway. I mean it was, it's quite unusual, it's even to the point, on Anzac Day if you

01:00 came along to drinks with us on Anzac Day all of us, the SAS guys go to one of the pubs in Canberra in Ainslie. And we have drinks but never any war-ies are spoken out. We actually don't speak about war-ies, we don't speak about war, we speak about current stuff and what guys have been doing and it's never war-ies, nobody ever spoke about those sort of things. So, I can't remember actually talking to anybody outside the regiment about what we were doing in training.

01:30 It was just, and I don't know whether that was partly because of the direction that you didn't or, partly because of, you just didn't, you just didn't do it.

Didn't talk to your wife or to your family?

I wasn't married in those, I didn't get married til I left the army in '73 but no, I didn't talk to her about anything. She saw me when I was doing parachute training cause she was in Sydney, lived at Granville. And no, all she remembers I think was just I was knackered all the

02:00 time, I was just absolutely buggered you know, and I was skinny as anything cause I was just fit, but I was certainly carrying no fat. But no, I didn't tell her about anything, and in fact I didn't tell her anything about Vietnam when I came home, which is probably one of the reasons why we split up, I mean I just didn't talk about it. Didn't talk, you know, didn't discuss anything about with anybody really, unless it was your peers. And then we used to discuss better methods of doing something or something, it was more on a professional,

02:30 or, you know, basis.

Has that changed for you as time passed since then?

Yeah I guess, it has, only because SAS is like the flavour of the month. I mean you can go to any book shop and there's always books everywhere now on SAS. Well in those days I think, as I said, the only books on SAS was British SAS, the Australian SAS was a non event. And in fact I remember being in Sydney in my SAS uniform when I was going for my police interview in 1973. This old, I was at a pedestrian

03:00 crossing, this old guy obviously about Second World War vintage came up to me and he saw on my battle dress, Special Air Service Regiment, didn't say Australia, just Special Air Service Regiment on my

wings. And he said, “Oh you from England son?” cause he was obviously, probably served in the army during the war in the Australian forces. And he said, “You British?” cause they had SAS as you know in the desert. And I said, “No I’m Australian.” He said, “Oh.” he said, “I didn’t think we had an SAS.” It was unknown, not many people knew about it, it was quite sort of yeah,

03:30 it was weird. We operated in like a, in a knowledge vacuum, nobody knew about it, sort of quite special. Not like now, everybody knows, all kids aspire to be in the SAS if they want to join the army I think. It’s like the bees knees, it’s a different attitude.

There wasn’t the need for secrecy because no one knew.

No there wasn’t the need; we didn’t walk round with bags on our heads and all that sort of stuff.

I think we head to Vietnam, cause we want to get into that. Can you tell us about arriving and about

04:00 **your journey over to Vietnam, when you got deployed?**

I remember I went home on seven days Pre-Em Leave. Nearly didn’t go to Vietnam, because while I was, after New Guinea I’d got dysentery and malaria in New Guinea, and I was quite sick when I got home. And I also developed an abscessed wisdom tooth. And so I had to go to a Macquarie Street dentist and he ripped out two wisdom teeth

04:30 and I was horribly swollen up and gummed up and all that see. So he assured me that he would notify the army authorities cause I was on Pre-Em Leave to go to Vietnam so, if I didn’t turn up it was desertion not AWOL. And he obviously didn’t make the phone call because about two days after the operation when I was supposed to be back in Perth, two policemen came to the door ironically enough, two military policemen, and dad was just getting ready to go to work up at Hornsby. And he was in his uniform and they said, “Does

05:00 Don Barnby live here?” “Yeah I’m his father, why, what’s the problem?” “He’s a deserter, he’s supposed to be back in Perth.” And dad said, what, what the, cause he was with me at the dentist and he heard me ask the dentist to notify Vic Barracks to notify the regiment, that I think I’ll be a bit late you know. And that was in December so, I nearly didn’t, I was nearly taken off the draft to go to Vietnam, all because of a bloody abscessed tooth, I can’t believe it, and some dentist not making a phone call.

05:30 **What happened, how’d you get…?**

Oh well they smoothed it all out and the dentist, they obviously contacted the appropriate people I told em, and he said, “Oh yeah, sorry, my mistake.” blah, blah, blah. Anyway I finished that and went back to Perth and I remember saying goodbye to mum and dad at Sydney airport and flying, and Caroline, and my fiancé, flying back to Perth. Then we did a fairly, some fairly intensive training for about a month

06:00 in January prior to going to Vietnam. Work up training and equipment and all this sort of stuff. And then we all got bussed out to Perth airport I remember in a series of buses from Swanbourne. And we left in night I remember and we were all wandering around Perth airport in our polyesters and berets. And there was a lot of people in Perth so, their parents were in Perth so they were out there. And I remember

06:30 a couple of the guys got horribly drunk there. Anyway we got on the plane, not a lot of fanfare, not a lot of you know big farewells. And we just jumped on the plane, first stop Singapore and we all put on our, we had to have a civilian shirt with us, cause we weren’t allowed out of the terminal or in the terminal with army uniform on, because by some bloody international agreement. So we got off and had breakfast in Singapore airport I remember. And

07:00 jumped on the plane and I think it was only about a two hour trip from Singapore to Vietnam. And I remember as we flew in from Ton San Nhut, Saigon airport, there was a couple of fighter planes off the wing of the 707, we went over in a 707, Qantas 707. Landed at Ton San Nhut, and I remember the first thing that I remember about Vietnam was the smell and it’s a smell that you’ll never forget, it’s, it’s an unusually

07:30 tropical mix of smells, herbs and spices, I think it was just amazing. And we got bussed to a, taken to a terminal or a hangar and I think we were given a meal or something and then thrown on a little C-123 aircraft, small Hercules, a Fat Rat we used to call it. Flew up to Nui Dat, we were in Saigon for about two

08:00 hours, and landed at Nui Dat, trucked up to the hill where SAS was and then it all started.

Can you describe Nui Dat for us, when you arrived?

A series of rubber plantations and a big expanse of red dirt. And there was a little pimple of a hill called ‘The Hill’, and that was SAS Hill and that’s where we were, we were in the middle of the Task Force area. And it was just, yeah, it was a weird

08:30 sensation driving in and then seeing, actually flying into a war zone, I mean you know, there was 105 Battery, there was APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers], a squadron of APCs driving around the place. There was a 155 Yank, 155 millimetre battery behind the hill, everybody carried guns, yeah it was quite

an unusual... we'd sort of been gee'd up to look at you know, it's always, you have some expectation

09:00 of what it's going to be like but it was, I think a little bit different than what I thought it was going to be like and I don't know in what way it was different, probably just the sheer fact that I was there, I mean God, I'm here. Anyway we then had about a week or two weeks of in-country training. Lots of very intense lectures on mines, booby traps, patrolling, the enemy. We were given a, prior to leaving Vietnam actually, we were given a little book, a little

09:30 hand booklet on Vietnamese and Vietnam and all that sort of stuff. We actually went out on a patrol, on an APC patrol, while they dropped off another SAS patrol. And New Zealand SAS was there when we got there and they left about probably a month after we got there. And we went out and just, we sat on the APC not in camouflage gear but just normal greens, while they actually dropped off an SAS patrol on a patrol in, out the back of

10:00 APCs. So we saw how that was done. We did a night lager in, with APCs out in Indian country as we used to call them. That was out near the Long, Nui Two Five's I think it was, a mountain range, called the Nui Two Five's. Then we came back in and then the patrols started, out patrols actually started. So all the patrols were duly given what they call warning orders, from Task Force. The brigadier, the commander of the Task Force would

10:30 get the squadron commander, Major Chipman, he would obviously brief him as to where it is that he needed SAS to look at and recce [reconnoitre/reconnaissance] and you know, get information from. And then he would then subsequently detail different patrols to go out and do the assigned tasks and yeah, we started our patrolling. And I remember our, my first patrol, we went out by chopper and it was in the dry season. And we had been

11:00 told that walking in the jungle in the dry season in Vietnam was like walking on a bowl of cornflakes. Because everything's dry and tinder dry and very noisy. So we went out there and I remember a feeling of, oh, we did a lot of work up training prior to the patrol. You know testing weapons and I was the sig [signaller]. I was the morse operator in the patrol so I had to test all the sig gear and get all the codes and all that sort of stuff. And I remember a feeling of excitement, apprehension

11:30 a feeling of numbness, particularly sitting in the chopper going out, and watching all the gun ships around us, you know the other helicopters that carried rockets and mini guns, they used to sort of fly cover with us. Looking out and actually thinking, Jesus Christ, I'm actually, this is actually happening. We were all cam'd [camouflaged] up and you know all this sort of stuff and we'd had our briefing just prior to jumping on the chopper from the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] guys. Then the intel [Intelligence] guys from Task Force saying that it was gonna be a cold insert, meaning

12:00 there was no known enemy near the LZ [Landing Zone]. So, you know it should be a fairly easy sort of start at least. But then the chopper came, you know, comes down and hovers off, just off the ground and you jump off. And we'd already rehearsed what we were gonna do, what the LZ, cause one of our, our patrol commander and 2IC [second in command], he'd gone out the day previously in another little chopper and done an air recce of the AO [Area of Operations] that we used to operate in, we were to

12:30 operate in. So we knew where to go, so as soon as we jumped off the chopper we'd head to the bush and just drop down, just drop. And the chopper'd take off and it used to go away and circle about three or four kliks [kilometres] away and just do circling patterns waiting til we actually called in on our little hand held radio. And saying that we're on the ground, everything's safe, no signs of enemy, and then it'd take off back to Nui Dat. Because I don't know how far out we were out in that patrol but it would be from anywhere between

13:00 five to thirty kilometres away from the Task Force, so there's a fair way, and we're out in their playground basically.

Can you describe the scene in that chopper in a bit more detail? You're sitting there a bit numb, what can you see around you, what's in the chopper, where is everybody, what can you see out?

Well we're all, chopper's in those, chopper's that we used in Vietnam didn't have seats and didn't have doors. So there was no seats, no doors. And there was five of us and we all just piled on to the, and we used to carry extraordinarily heavy packs, particularly in the dry season,

13:30 cause my pack used to weigh anything over a hundred pounds, probably a hundred and ten pounds. Forty pounds on your belt, belt order with all your ammunition. And I had, you can see in the photo up there I used to have, I carried an Armalite with a M79 forty millimetre bomb launcher underneath it, an under and over we used to call it, underneath it. So I had a lot of ammunition, we had Claymore mines in our packs, water, our rations. We never

14:00 used to carry sleeping gear only, other than a small sheet of Vietnamese plastic we used to wrap ourselves in at night. No tents, no hoochies, no stretchers, nothing. So very heavy pack but sitting around and we're all hunched on the floor, sort of humped in and getting down, we're all sitting down on the floor. There's, in the helicopter there's the pilot and co-pilot, and there's a gunny each side, a RAAF guy, a crew man on a machine gun, M60, I think it was usually twin barrel

14:30 M60 machine gun each side. And he'd be sort of strapped in and tied down, he'd be sitting out, looking

out the side and we'd juste, cause there was no doors you'd just look out. And it was so cool; it was pleasantly cool up in the chopper. And we're just going, flying over jungle and you could see bomb damage from B-52 bomb raids, earlier bomb raids. And we're all just wondering, and I mean there was no talking cause you couldn't hear a bloody thing. We all had headphones on, try and preserve a little bit of hearing.

15:00 We'd hear the chopper pilots talking but it was just a feeling of apprehension. And I remember thinking, and this day goes back to my childhood, you know, I didn't want to do something wrong, so I always worried about, did I have the sig codes, the morse codes with me, I'd check and double check that. Morse keys, radio was alright, have I got everything, got the weapon all, you know, everything, just worried that you have everything right. Because I mean obviously later on it became second

15:30 nature, but first off you just wanted everything to be perfect. And the chopper flared and came in and didn't land, they never used to land they used to hover just off the ground because of mines, and we jump off. And we all headed for the bush and I remember the chopper took off suddenly going from quite a cool environment with wind, everything was just dead still, and hot, and you'd be sweating from the run, from the, where the chopper dropped you to the edge of the LZ, probably only about thirty metres.

16:00 And the sweat was just pouring out of us and all these flies and mosquitoes bloody biting you and all that and you're just waiting, you're heart's thumping. And you just, fuck, you know what, what's gonna go on here, we're just laying in the bush just waiting and watching. And we'd do that for about ten or fifteen minutes. And then we'd call the chopper up to say we were all clear, we're heading off on this bearing, and then they'd go back to Nui Dat and then we'd start patrolling. But for ten or fifteen minutes, and don't quote me on the times but I think it was about ten or fifteen minutes we'd just stay there. So if

16:30 there's any enemy that's seen us, saw us get dropped off or saw our approach, that you would assume that within ten or fifteen minutes they would do something about it. So you just, motionless, you just lay there in a big pool of sweat, half of that was fear, cause it, anybody that says they weren't sort of a little bit fearful, bloody liar. And you just lay there and just wait for it all to happen. Then patrol commander, all by hand signals, be just, go off and the forward

17:00 scout'd take off, and then you'd just adopt your patrol order. And the patrol order was always forward scout, patrol commander was second in patrol, the sig. that is me, was third in patrol, the medic was the fourth in patrol and the tail end charlie who in our case a corporal called Ian Rasmussen was tail end charlie, he was the back. And we all knew exactly what cause we'd rehearsed it and double rehearsed it and rehearsed it and triple rehearsed it in Australia and in Vietnam. So we knew exactly what to do and we just all

17:30 adopted patrol technique. And the patrol commander'd give the scout a bearing to go on, he'd be looking at his map, we all had maps, we all had to plot our own course just in case we got separated. So we knew exactly which way we were going and off he took. A speed of patrolling, depending on the terrain, used to vary from, I think the slowest day we ever did was about three hundred and fifty metres in a day, up to about two kilometres, but it was very, very slow. So you'd take one step, you'd

18:00 look around, do all, watch all your arcs up in the trees, down the ground, looking for possible booby traps and whatever in the trees. And you'd turn around to the guy behind you and you'd wait til he looked at you and you'd just go like that, and then you'd do your arc on the other side and then take another step, and then you do it all again, and that's how slow it was. Every step was like, and the tension was just, I can't describe, it was,

18:30 there was a lot of adrenaline pumping but, you never knew what you were, and I think as the tour went on it got worse. Because, and depending on the patrol, but the first patrol we did was an easy patrol, we just looked at a track and saw some signs of enemy around and reccied a bunker system I think, and we got pulled out and everything was fine. But as other patrols went on it, they got a bit more hectic, or there was more enemy activity. And having said

19:00 that, patrols or squadrons that served in Vietnam prior to ours, they saw a lot more action than we did, because we were at the last end of the war and it was winding down. So we had to actually look for the bad guys, whereas in other patrols they used to try and bloody run away, you know, get away from them because they were everywhere, they were all over the place. Phuoc Tuy Province was in the early days quite a VC [Viet Cong] strong hold. And at the time of our tour it was winding right down but they were still there. We could, you'd hear, they used to signal each

19:30 other by signal shots, they'd fire a shot then they'd be answered two or three kilometres away by a series of shots and then it'd, that's how they used to signal each other. So you could hear these shots all the time, you knew they were around. And it was really, it was like going, literally going into the unknown, you didn't know what was around the next tree or around the next branch that you opened up. You know, you just carefully pulled to the side and you had your gun, always gun, never had slings, had your gun always

20:00 ready with your hand on the pistol grip and, not on the trigger but on the guard. And you just part things and you'd be looking all around the place, every, all the time. It was just the palpable tension that you didn't know what the hell was going to happen and, yeah.

How much can you see and what can you hear and smell in that tense environment, walking, step by step?

Well you can hear quite a lot because (a) once the noise of

20:30 the helicopter's gone and it's just dead, all you hear is jungle noises and you become very attuned to what is natural in the jungle and what's not. You can see quite a bit depending on the terrain which you're in, sometimes we did patrols in quite thick jungle and other times it was quite open, it was quite open. We never did any patrols anywhere near paddy fields, because I mean, you know, the way we used to, battalions used to go across paddies, sweeps and all that sort of stuff. But, pardon me, the

21:00 whole object of our patrolling was to remain unseen so, we used to operate in varying degrees or thicknesses of jungle or growth, undergrowth. So again, yeah, how much you could see depending on where you are, but normally the speed at which we patrolled, you could pick up a lot of things. Because you were, your eyes were just, they used to teach you in SAS you know, you know yourself if you're looking at bush, you can't see

21:30 the wood for the trees, so to speak. Well we used to be able to, we used to, not able, it was just a skill that you developed, you would look through the trees to see what was behind the trees. So you looked at everything, you looked at the things that were near you, and then at a further distance and scan the area between. You actually, literally looked at everything, in the tops of the trees, at the bottom of the trees, through the trees, around the trees, everything. So you, if there was things there you actually looked. And if something

22:00 just looked out of place, you know, something didn't look natural, well you'd indicate just by flicking, or just you know, flicking and… what's that? You know, looking because if people are laying motionless in the jungle, they're very hard to see if they're pretty well camouflaged. So therefore you, you were trained to actually pick anything unusual within your environment,

22:30 and that's what we did. And we had lots of time to do it because we were travelling so slowly.

Can you take us through a few more of those signals you used to communicate?

Oh they're all the basic infantry hand signals and I'm a bit rusty on a lot of them now. But things like your, the top of your head and that means join me, whoever's going like that if he's looking at you, like you, I'd go, you, means you come and talk to me, you know, talk. Eyeball, enemy was thumbs

23:00 down, friendlies was thumbs up. Shoot, oh I can't remember what shoot was but I think it was like that or like that, you know, bear your weapons that direction, there some, something in that direction I'm not happy with, so the weapon, the signal was either that way or a pointing motion. Oh just, it was pretty basic stuff but it, but they're generic signals used

23:30 within, right throughout the army. So yeah, I can't remember, there is a pamphlet on them, I can't remember all of them. But you know, like that's the patrol commander, you know like this, patrol commander to join me. The scout'd look around, if he wasn't happy with something you just look at the patrol commander and go, you know like this, look, you know. And so he'd crawl up and, "What's your problem?" And everything was done in whispers, if you did talk, it was whispers. So when you got off patrol it was just a joy to talk.

24:00 Because you never raised your voice, you never talked like this; it was always, whispers you know, really silent whispers or hand signals. So if you try doing that for five to ten days, it's very difficult, you can't talk. Or if you do it's a very hushed whisper. Cause you didn't know where they were, you know, they could have been anywhere. We never got sort of caught out that way but you know, you never knew how close you were to an enemy position, so.

24:30 **You mentioned the noise of the jungle. What are the things that you're listening out for, what sort of things would strike you as unusual?**

Well you can hear all the birds, the birds are singing and when everything's, if the jungle's fairly normal, it's quite a noisy place, depending on the time of day. Because animals sleep and birds seem to be quiet sometimes in the day but it's,

25:00 you'd get used to the different birds that were around the area, the things that were, one thing that was very disturbing was, one of the big monitor lizards that used to run around the bush sometimes. They used to sound like people actually running, because they were quite heavy, they were quite long. They were, oh I don't know don't quote me again but I seem to remember in my imagination about six to eight feet long, these big lizards. And they'd run like this and the sound like somebody running barefoot

25:30 through the bush. Lot of monkeys, little monkeys, used to have little white faced monkeys, grey little white faced monkeys that used to hang up in the trees and shower you, and shake branches and throw things at you. Because we're moving very slowly I think we intrigued them. We had, I think they were baboons or, yeah baboons, not gorillas, baboons over there. But there's quite a lot of livestock or what do you call it, wildlife in the jungles of Vietnam.

26:00 And these monkeys used to shake branches and they used to, you could see them, you'd look up in the trees and they'd be looking at you, but because you're all camouflaged up and moving incredibly slowly,

it’s sort of, they didn’t really know what you were. You know, whereas the average person’d be walking quite quickly you know, and they’d know exact, you could imagine they’d know exactly, they’d be throwing. But they’d look at us, you could see them with inquisitive looks on their faces, hanging out of trees and they’d be looking, they’d be trying to figure out what it is down there you know, because you’d be looking up and all you’d see was the

26:30 whites of your eyes. And when you moved, you moved very slowly, so they were probably thinking, what are these things down on the jungle floor, moving around like this. We saw a tiger once and we found lots of elephant spore in the ground, you know, jobs and jobbies, poohs and big marks in the mud of elephant tracks, so there’s quite a lot of livestock around, wildlife, yeah amazing.

What were you looking for as far as,

27:00 **as signs of the enemy go?**

We’d, the patrol commander and the 2IC and the int guys back at the squadron would designate an AO in which we would operate. An AO is an area of operations that our patrol would cover within the patrol period, whether it be three days, five days, ten days or whatever. And within that period the reason we were sent there would be because there was either information or they had

27:30 heard that there was enemy in the area, there might be a bunker system in the area, there was a track that they were using to traverse the area. So basically when I say we headed off in a certain bearing the patrol commander would have it in his mind and he would brief us that we, that’s one good thing about SAS, everybody knew what we were supposed to be doing. We weren’t kept in the dark like mushrooms, everybody knew exactly what the mission of, the objective of the patrol was, what we were there to look for, so everybody was on an equal footing

28:00 as far as intel gathering. But he would, we would be going off in a direction of either the track that we were going to sit on, the bunker system that we’re looking for or just another area of interest that the int guys, the intelligence guys wanted us to look at. So, we just didn’t walk off in any direction, it was all sort of a planned move and all those moves, every time we’d stop for a five or a ten minute break, everybody had their map and you would mark in on

28:30 chinagraph on your plastic covered map, the last half hour or hour of movement, in the direction. So you’d have on your map, which you could easy rub off if you had to, the progress of the patrol right throughout the patrol, from insertion in that direction, that direction and that direction, and you’d take bearings. And in the patrol there was two guys and I was one of them to carry the pacer, which was a sheep counter on your rifle. And every time your left hand foot hit the ground, or you,

29:00 you’d practice pacing, so you knew how far you could go, but it was usually every time your left hand foot hit the ground it was a yard or a metre, so you’d just click, click, click, click. So you’d go on a bearing, you’d have a bearing, say one twenty degrees and in the last thing you’d just look at the number on the thing, it had a little counter on it, and we’ve travelled eighty-six metres. So you’d put in eighty-six metres, you’d get your little protractor out, so this is what you’d do in your break, you weren’t resting, you were

29:30 resting, but you were doing, plotting your course on the map, so you knew exactly where you were going. And then you’d have a, if there was any reason to, for the patrol to sort of huddle down and all get together and discuss what we were gonna do next. We’d all get around, make sure there’s all round protection all look out, and we’d all just sit inside, you know, sort of facing out in an all round circle. And we’d be sort of whispering and you’d be saying look at your map you know, yeah there’s a track there, we’re heading for that track, has anybody seen any evidence of that track, you know. I think we’re here, where do you thing we are, and you’d say,

30:00 there, there, there, there, there. And sort of, our map reading was incredibly accurate, given that you’re in a jungle, there was no obvious features that you could take cross sections or re sections on, it was all done by pacing, bearings and pacing. And it was actually, we were very rarely wrong. We were never lost, we were just momentarily misplaced. And I remember we, I think it was only once or twice that we had to, actually had to get a, what they call an air fix off a helicopter.

30:30 We’d, any allied choppers, American or Australian choppers flying over, we’d tell em who we are and say, or pop a smoke grenade or hit you with a signal mirror and give us an air fix, give us a bearing what, where your GPS [Global Positioning System], they had GPS or whatever in their choppers. Where do you think we are and then we can estimate where we are cause we’re, we’ll be turning to a ridge lines here, and we don’t know which one we’re behind, you know. So they’d just give us a fix and set off. But it didn’t happen very often but it

31:00 happened, I think probably a couple of times to us and a few times or other patrols, that we were actually dropped off in the wrong area. And that put you out totally because if you think you’re starting from Point A and you’re actually starting from Point B, ah, you’re fucked, I mean you dunno where you are. So that creek line that should have been a hundred metres to your left or to your west is not there, well you become a bit disoriented then. You can’t sort of just throw the pack down and walk around like you’re, you know, orienteering, you can’t

31:30 do that, you have to do everything tactically, so it makes it quite difficult if in fact your information is initially wrong as to where you are.

How long do these patrols last for?

Every SAS patrol in Vietnam was between three days and about seven to ten days. And again don't quote me, I've got my diary somewhere upstairs, but we did one of the longest patrols of SAS in Vietnam, and it was about fourteen days, or

32:00 thirteen days or something. Only because we ambushed a track which didn't prove to be fruitful and we were detailed off to go off and ambush another track. And so therefore the patrol almost doubled in length. So they had to air drop rations and a bit of water to us, but I think that was in the wet season, but they air dropped some rations to us. We pinpointed an area on the map that we thought was quite safe,

32:30 so they just dumped a whole heap of rations in a couple of sandbags and dropped them out of the chopper. And then we, you know, duly waited and looked around and then went to retrieve them and came back and dived up and then took off again, got out of the area as soon as we could. But the average patrol was about, oh between three days to seven days I think, that's the average.

What would you do to set an ambush, what sort of ambushes were you

33:00 **setting?**

We'd find an area that was obviously being used by the enemy, and you could determine that by the amount of wear on the track. And if it was muddy in the wet season you'd find the direction of travel usually, sometimes it was both ways, but usually the footmarks or the sandal marks on the track or whatever. And then we just, we'd work parallel to the track in, staying in the jungle, never going out on the track. Parallel the track in the jungle, looking for an optimum site to ambush,

33:30 either on a bend or with thick cover around so that we could be hidden from any people that were on the track, any persons using the track. And then we'd set, we'd recce the track and this'd probably, this could take sometimes up to two days. You know, you'd walk, parallel the track, waiting to find the right spot. And once the decision had been made to lay an ambush at a certain spot, usually the 2IC would set up the ambush, the 2ICs of the

34:00 patrol would be responsible for setting up the ambush. And what you would do then, he'd position, everybody carried a Claymore mine in their packs, so you'd retreat, you'd withdraw back into the jungle, everybody'd unload their pack, take out their Claymore with an attendant bloody fuse wire, re-pack their pack. We'd stash the packs in a safe location, and then have one guy just sitting with the packs, heavily camouflaged, you know, back in the jungle. Then we'd all crawl up and 2IC'd tell us,

34:30 he'd position all the Claymores on the track and usually there was about five, six Claymores used in an ambush. And our 2IC used to have an interesting twist that he'd always tape a white phosphorous grenade on the end Claymore both ends. And tape, put just adhesive tape around the pin, pull the pin and just tape the lever down with duct tape or whatever, thousand mile an hour tape or whatever we used to call it. And his reasoning for that was when the,

35:00 when the ambush was blown, when the Claymores was let off, or detonated, also the mines would go up. And if you've ever seen white phos [Phosphorous] go up, it's quite spectacular, it's a bit of a demoraliser, looks quite pretty but it's quite deadly stuff. He would position that then he'd run all the Claymore leads back into one and then he'd position, two guys'd position themselves behind the mines, in cover, not far off the track, and hook it up

35:30 to a clacker, what we used to call a clacker, what you'd set the mines off, with the electrical clacker, and then you'd just sit down and wait. And then you'd shug out, then there'd be a flank man each side, so out of the five man patrol, two'd be on the clackers in the middle of the ambush. One guy'd be each flank, watching the track that way and that way and then the other bloke'd be behind and usually that was the sig or you'd take turns at doing this. Usually the sig would be back just behind the guys with the clackers, and he would be, he'd have the

36:00 he'd almost have the set ready, I'd have the set in my pack, already ready up, ready to go. So if the ambush was blown I'd just send out the code word for ambush, ambush sprung, throw the whole top on the pack and we'd go, take off, search the bodies and go. And that's the routine of the day. And then you just, you'd shift over positions, you'd just lay motionless and it was the most, I mean, you wouldn't be bored, I mean bored is the wrong word but it'd be certainly be tedious

Maybe you could take us through one particular

36:30 **ambush, one that was successfully set off, from the time you've set up these Claymores and you're waiting on the track?**

I don't think, I don't think we ever, I don't think our patrol ever set off a successful ambush as such. But one ambush that we did set off was quite interesting. We saw three, or the flank guys and the guys in the front saw three VC go through the ambush and they were moving

37:00 quite quickly. And the reasoning, the patrol commander went no, no, no, we wont set it off, the reasoning was that they were advance for a larger party. And I was just behind with the thing and I was just about to send the midday sched in, the schedule, you'd come up on the air twice a day. Either morning, both in the morning and at night, to give them a basic sit rep [situation report] of what your

location was, what you were doing in ambush, or heading west,

37:30 and basic, any enemy seen or you know, a basic situation report. And the ambush was set up and we'd been in this ambush about three days I think and there was a little bit of traffic but nothing worthy of setting the ambush off. And just as I hit the clacker on the, on the morse set, not the clacker but as the little morse key, they figured out later on that must have set off an

38:00 electrical field around me. But I was so close to the Claymores that it somehow set off the electrical detonators in the Claymores that were a bit unstable for some reason and the mines blew up. Well I was kneeling up on my knee, sending my morse out and I was blown arse over tit with bloody scrub and shit coming through the tree. And immediately the patrol commander or somebody yelled out, "What'd ya get, what'd they...?" Cause they thought the ambush had been sprung, they thought

38:30 they'd got somebody but they didn't see them. And, what'd they hit, what'd they hit? So, nothing, nothing, I saw nothing, I saw nothing. And I was picking meself up and me rifle blew over the back and blew me arse over tit as I said. I scrambled up and I was bloody, I thought we, I was just about ready to jump on the set and send again. And they said, "Nothing, nothing, bloody went off by accident or something happened." And because it was in the dry season it started a fire, bush fire, started a brush fire. So bloody

39:00 quickly got the pack together and we're, and by this stage we'd been in quite a while and we were running short of, I remember we were running short of water. And we were sucking the juice out of tins of peaches and all that sort of stuff and we were almost down to no water at all, we couldn't eat our rations because they were dehydrated so you need the water, we couldn't eat the rations. And anyway we sprung the ambush and we retreated down this dry gully and we found a big five hundred pound bomb crater

39:30 that had a little bit of muddy water in the bottom of it with a scum, floating scum on top. Anyway we got down to this bomb crater, and all round protection and bloody you know laagered down and looked around and there was no movement. This fire was still going about four hundred metres away. There was no movement, anyway we got this water out with our sweat rags and we just used to squeeze it, we were just squeezed it into our mouth, because basically our mouths were bloody swollen, we were that short of water.

40:00 And then the patrol commander got me to send in a message that the ambush had been sprung, nil results, request exfil[exfiltration], basically get us out of there because we had no mines left and all this. And I remember the patrol commander came over in a helicopter and he said running short of water, blah, blah, blah, and request, if we stay in, request water re-supply. And the patrol, the squadron commander came over in a little Bell Sioux

40:30 chopper. I remember, and the conversation on the hand held radios was something, went something like, what happened? Claymores went off by accident, don't know what happened. Nobody pushed the clacker, blah, blah, blah. No enemy sighted. He said, no you'll stay in. Do a rifle ambush of another section of the track. But he said, we're out of water, we request water re-supply. And

41:00 the squadron commander's reply was, I think this is down in, on the patrol report, you are SAS troopers tighten your belts. That's what his reply was to our request for water re-supply. You are SAS troopers, tighten your belts.

Have to stop there cause the tape's run out...

Tape 6

00:31 **What happened, as far, you didn't have any water, what did you do?**

Well the the patrol commander and the 2ICs reaction to this and obviously all our reaction was, "Jesus, what the, I mean this is bullshit! We're out of water, we're ineffective, we've sprung the ambush, we've blown our cover basically, we need exfil." And his reply was, "You're SAS troopers, tighten your belts. Re-employ the ambush further down the track or something, use your, you know, rifle ambush,

01:00 weapon amb." So, you know, couldn't argue, so we did, we took off very disgruntled and we actually came along a, found a stream, looked at the map. And before we did anything about re-employing an ambush we found water, we went to a, found a creek, which was dried up in the main but there was pools of water. So we filled all our water bottles. We had water bladders, we used to carry water bladders, small bladders and put em down our shirts and on our packs. So we filled all those up as best we

01:30 could. And had a meal basically and then re-found the track, went back, meanwhile the fire was burning and it obviously was going in a certain direction, we were going in another direction. We found the track and we re-set the ambush, re-laid the ambush on the same track but just using weapons, weapons ambush. So that employed the whole four patrol, the four members of the patrol laying near the track with, you know, with their weapon and either the sig or somebody else back as a back man, as a reserve guy at the back.

02:00 And that went on for another three days or something, to no, to no effect, that, the track wasn't used. Obviously the explosion, the mine and the subsequent fire bloody scared anybody away from the area. So we're ineffective so then we got exfil and were pulled out. And that was one of the longest, it was certainly the longest patrol we ever did and one of the longest patrols that we, actually the squadron or maybe even as a unit ever did in Vietnam, it was too, far too long.

02:30 The premium time for a patrol is five to seven days. Because you carry rations for that period, you're self sufficient and you could reasonably, feasibly maintain your operational effectiveness within that time. Fourteen days or thirteen days or something was bloody ridiculous.

How do you deal with picking up water from the jungle?

Oh we had sterilisation tablets, but it was crap water, I mean, you know, not good. But you put it in your bottle and then sterilise it, put your tablets in.

03:00 Tasted shit but, you know, it was warm and tasted crappy but it was water.

How does the tension of being alert and awake and on patrol for so long take its toll on you in the jungle?

Well I do remember being absolutely knackered every time you'd stop. We used to have, cause the Viet Cong, and this was again, we used to operate like they

03:30 operated basically. If we were doing, we were trying to fight the same war they were, so we patrolled stealthily like most of the time they did. But the only thing that we did differently is they used tracks and we didn't. We always, never used tracks, well not to our, in our patrol we never used the track. And actually in one occasion the patrol commander wanted to walk up the track, patrol up the track to have a head on contact with most of the traffic that was obviously going in one direction, he wanted to bump it head on. And we all sat down in a Chinese Parliament

04:00 and we said nu', not a good idea, bad idea. So we decided not to and he was over ranked, you know, just by us. We refused to do it basically so we laid an ambush, oh that was another patrol. But the Viet Cong, again my, you know, details are quite hazy but they used to stop in the middle of the day to have a, basically a siesta, so we used to stop in the middle of the day. So we'd have, we'd patrol from about six thirty a.m. or seven a.m. or whatever in the morning, having ten minute breaks from time

04:30 to time or when people were exhausted or whatever. But then we'd have about two or three hour, we used to call it gonk time, gonk, sleeping, I think it was a Malaysian or a Borneo word for sleep. We used to have a gonk time, we all used to take a book with us, we'd just sort of sit around, we'd find a fairly hidden, camouflaged area. So we'd all sit around and try and have a rest and, we'd, some of us'd read a book or some of us, you know, catch forty winks and all this sort of stuff. But I remember being

05:00 knackered all the time, absolutely, absolutely stuffed. You'd be dehydrated, most of us had prickly heat, I had prickly heat that bad that I couldn't even bear my clothes on my back, let alone... you'd put the pack on and it was like a thousand hot needles in your back, it was just absolutely terrible. I actually thought I'd have to be, you know, sent home for it. It was that bad at one stage on one patrol I, almost screaming cause of the pain. But anyway, got rid of it took a few pills back in, you know, re-hydrated my system

05:30 and went to a sauna down in Vung Tau and you know, opened up the pores and all the rest of the stuff, but it was pretty bad, but. I remember we used to stop when, where we knew they stopped. And the reasoning behind that was, if they were stopped and sleeping or camped at, during the middle of the day, and if we were going on patrol or, not blundering but going through the jungle, any movement could be heard cause they weren't moving too. So when they stopped, we stopped and when we knew they stopped, you know. And that was just

06:00 what they did, like in the middle east, everybody has a siesta in the middle of the day. And that's what they did and it was quite, used to work quite well.

How much rest could you get on one of those stops?

Not much at all, I mean you'd sort of half sleep and you'd be listening and you know, you'd just sort of doze and. And usually one or two of the guys or even all of us would be awake but some'd be just dozing you know. And just forty winks basically.

What was the set up for a rest?

06:30 You'd just all sort of sit around in a circle, usually back to back in an area of heavy vegetation or something, bamboo or something. All just sit around back to back in a little circle and just all lean against our packs, put our packs together, and just lean against each other and just sleep you know. Just either sleep or just relax and just sort of, you know, have a bit of a shake out.

Was there someone posted to stay awake?

No, no sentries as such posted because we all stayed together. And the reasoning

07:00 was like at night, when we slept at night, we all slept, if you could sleep, if you call it sleep, but we all slept. We didn't have the luxury of having pickets or sentries posted because there was only five of us. So if you had, if you broke the night up into two hour or one hour watches or something, everybody'd get a fitful, you got a fitful sleep anyway but everybody'd be sort of tireder that they would be normally. So we would find a place to camp for the night and there was a technique to that. You'd be patrolling in a certain

07:30 direction, at a certain time of the afternoon it would be decided that we'd start looking for somewhere to camp. So you'd be looking for a heavily vegetated area out of the way of any normal traffic areas in the jungle, whether they be animal trails or human foot pads or whatever. And you'd find an area, identify it, usually a big clump of bamboo or something, or a very, really heavy area of vegetation. You would identify it, patrol past it, patrol, what they call the fish hook,

08:00 you'd patrol back around, back towards the direction that you went in on it, and then stopped. And then we'd stop for about ten or fifteen minutes, and if we were being followed at all, because half the time you know, you never knew, you could be, you could have been being followed through the jungle. You know people staying at a distance, just knew we were there and they were just following us through. So we'd sit and if that was the case we'd lay a very temporary ambush in that position. If we weren't being followed up then we come back around

08:30 and then we'd usually have a meal away, have the evening meal away, pack up the meal stuff and then go back into the area that we'd identified as the sleeping position. And then we'd all stay awake until darkness fell and when darkness fell was pretty quickly in the jungle, it's either light or it's dark and it just goes shht, bang, you know, it's dead dark. Then all the birds and the insects, and we used to have a little lizard called the Fuck You Lizard. It

09:00 used to sound like it was saying, "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you." And, it'd, everybody, animals get very noisy at night, because that's when they all, a lot of them wake up and they start doing stuff. But there'd be this period of an hour or so it was really noisy, so we'd all be, we'd try and stay awake until then. And then because we'd all be back to back or sleeping side by side, head to feet, head to toe, head to toe, head to toe, you know, all in this little area. We'd clear an area if we had to clear it, we'd clear an area very carefully,

09:30 just put our little sheet of plastic down, that's all we had. Leave your belt order on, take your pack off, lean back on your pack, and if it was raining you'd cover yourself in the plastic, you'd just. I think very rarely, I think we put up hoochies, you know those hoochie things, put up hoochies about three times in the whole time. And that was during the wet when it was really raining, and we just put a, because it was that bloody raining that heavy you, it actually hurt you. But you just lay, and if it was raining, it was raining and you just wrap this little piece of plastic around you, and you just lay down

10:00 as best you could and tried to sleep. And you slept all night or tried to sleep all night.

Was the darkness more or less frightening?

No it wasn't, I must say I was never frightened of being in the jungle. I found the jungle to be, probably because of all the training in New Guinea and I found the jungle quite fascinating but never frightening, never, didn't worry me. It was an environment in which I felt quite comfortable in, apart from all the things that crawled and bit and scratched and stung and

10:30 you know, bloody whatever. But no, it never, the night never frightened me at all. You got used to the noises around you, all the jungle noises, the monkeys and the lizards and the birds and it was all, you know, it was quite a, it was quite a friendly environment for want of a better word. Because no, we knew our deception or our camouflage was that good that you'd have to literally walk on us to find us. And we picked our areas

11:00 so well that you'd actually, you'd actually relax on a certain level, you'd relax. So if you slept, you slept and I mean obviously you did sleep, you gonked. And if anybody made a noise during the night, somebody'd shake em and, shhh, you always had your sweat rag around you so, you know, if you started snoring or whatever, people'd just shh, they'd be on you, you know. And if you wanted to go for a piss during the night or something you'd just wake up the whole patrol so you tried not to have a piss. You'd wake up the whole patrol so you just either, you'd

11:30 get up, crawl over out of your little area and have a piss and come back. And I remember I had really bad diarrhoea, almost dysentery and I was on the end of the five man laying head to toe, head to toe. And I woke everybody up, I said, "I gotta have a shit." cause I had gripes, I had really bad stomach pains. So I rolled over to, and had a shit and I forgot which side my rifle was on and I crapped, I just pulled, laying down, pulled my pants off and just squirted all over me, what turned out to be my rifle. 'Cause in the morning I woke up,

12:00 I thought "Oh fuck!" couldn't believe it, had to bloody wipe all, wipe it off with leaves and wait til I, we got to any water or something or wash it, and wash it a bit. But you know, like basically you had to let, notify everybody what you were doing. Cause you know, you just didn't get up and say, "Oh I'm just gonna have a piss." and stroll off into the jungle and have a piss and walk back in, you're just likely to get shot. So any time you had to do a shit, have a piss or anything, either at night or even in the day, everybody had to know you know. Even during the day when we stopped our little ten minute

12:30 breaks, say, “Gotta have a piss, gotta have a piss.” Everybody’d know, I’m going there. So you’d walk three foot and have a drop, drop and, or ten foot and have a drop, you know, drop your shit, drop your pants have a shit, bury it. Have your little knife and you’d dig a hole, bury it. Wipe your arse if you had any dry toilet paper, bury it, put the leaves all over it, and then walk straight back in the way you went out. You know, it was all done very, in a very disciplined, organised way. But if you understand the way we

13:00 did things, it was all done for a reason. It was not done, you know, to be a hard arse or anything; it was done for a bloody good reason.

Can you explain how you dealt with your rubbish; obviously you buried your shit, what did…?

Buried shit, took all our rubbish back with us. And when we got initially back in Nui Dat when we got issued rations to go on patrol, it was all American rations and there was all dehydrated but there was a lot of tins in that, the pack. And the American twenty-four hour pack it was broken down in meal lots. There was a big envelope of dehydrated rations.

13:30 And actually the food was quite nice. Had chicken and rice, beef and rice, chilli con carne, all the, I used to eat quite well out there cause I used to take a little battle, bottle of Tabasco sauce with me and you’d spice it up, a little bit of curry powder. And if you could and it was operationally sound to do so, you’d heat it up, you’d heat the water up and you could have a hot meal. And if it wasn’t operationally sound to do so you had to eat out of a tin so you had to eat cold out of a tin. But everything was, what you always

14:00 endeavoured to do if possible was to have a brew, at least have a hot brew. And you used to make either coffee, tea or chocolate out of the ration packs and squeeze oodles of condensed milk into it, you know, make it sweet, you know, energy and just… I used to dream about, not having a cold beer a lot of the time but just sitting at home with a cup of coffee, just having a hot cup of coffee, it just sounds weird doesn’t it. You know, wasn’t dreaming about women, wasn’t dreaming about,

14:30 I was just dreaming about having a hot cup of tea or coffee. But you’d endeavour as often as you could to have a brew and even get one of those cereal biscuits and dunk it in it, so you. But if it was operationally too dangerous to heat up a meal, you’d very carefully open up a tin, and you’d eat it cold, whatever it was, chicken or Spam [Spiced Ham] or something, and then very silently with your sweat rag around it, squash it, bash it down and flatten it

15:00 and put it back in the little plastic bag that your ration. We used to put, divide all our rations up into meal lots so that when you opened your pack up you knew exactly what you were pulling. You didn’t have to open up and oh I don’t want that, you’d already sorted that out back at base. So I threw away all the stuff, I was a non-smoker so I didn’t take smokes, I didn’t take all the other shit that Americans had in their rations. You only took exactly, you broke each meal down into a meal lot so that there was no superfluous stuff you didn’t have to get rid of, cause you had to carry it.

15:30 And at the end of every meal you’d carefully squeeze everything down, put it back in the plastic thing, put an elastic band around it, put it back in your pack, the other side of the pack and then you’d start at you know, you’d eat the next meal from the other, another meal lot.

Can you take through the different bits of one meal lot, what would you be eating?

Usually for breakfast you’d have, if you could, cause you always spent a fitful, sleepless night. And in the cold, in the wet season, used to get quite cold when you were wet, cause you’d be soaked

16:00 either from sweat or rain, and it’d rain during the night sometimes. So you’d always try and have a hot brew, as I said a hot coffee, tea or bloody chocolate or something with a cereal biscuit, which was like a, like those biscuits you get. Cereal, compact, really compacted hard biscuits, which were quite tasty actually, you’d dunk it in your brew and soften it up and eat it. For lunch would either be another brew and maybe a tin of something, tin of cold meat or

16:30 sausages or whatever, crappy stuff. Chew on chewing gum. Yeah, lollies, sweet lollies or something, whatever you do. Actually if they had tinned fruit you’d eat that because that was quite energy giving and a lot of sugar and it was quite tasty, you know for, so that was your midday meal, if you could have one. Lot of times you went without meals because you, it was just operation, you couldn’t do it. And at night you’d try to have a hot meal so that was when you had your, you used to

17:00 heat up your water in your little Dixie, little canteen cup, on a hexamine stove [solid fuel burner]. You heat it up and pour the water into an envelope and it had all this powdery stuff in an envelope, you’d pour it in, seal it up, roll it up and leave it for about five or ten minutes. And then open it up and then eat it, it was usually, it sounds horrible but it was actually quite tasty. Then you’d have a brew to wash it down and then that was it, that was your last meal of the day. And sometimes you’d go, had, the Yanks’ rations I think, had, they used to have lollies,

17:30 you know, type sweet lollies in it, they had boiled lollies. So you’d have one of those, you’d be sucking that during the day or something for a bit of energy. And often your meal consist of nothing but a, just sucking, eating a dry biscuit and sucking on a tube of condensed milk, that was your bloody meal, that was all you could, because you were either too close to enemy positions or too close to a track. Or in ambush, your meals were usually quite basic because you, you know, you were too near a track, and used to eat in

18:00 single, I think we used to eat singly in an ambush. Because you know, if suddenly somebody came down the track and everybody had their gear out and they were eat, scoffing a meal, it would've just looked a bit shabby, it was quite dangerous, so you'd eat singly.

From the enemy positions, can you tell us about one of the times you came in contact with the enemy, what happened?

Yeah, one was we were walking down a, walking over an incline, a slope, which...

Just take us back and what was the patrol,

18:30 **what were you were doing?**

Oh it was a recce patrol, we were trying to find, I think at that stage we were trying to find, we were near the May Tao Mountains, which was an infamous mountain range in Phuoc Tuy Province which was heavily, over the years anyway, and it was, still was heavily infested with Viet Cong, enemy. And we were trying to find a radio, a Viet Cong radio station that was jamming, used to be jamming our radios, while we were on

19:00 patrol. Cause I remember on that patrol we were looking around trying to find, we were at the base of the May Tao Mountains and we were you know, literally doing a search pattern across our grid squares of our patrol, just trying to find it, criss-crossing our grid squares. And on one of my schedules, my sig schedules, I got, the whole message was drowned out by Vietnamese music. Cause they'd literally found us, by direction finder or some

19:30 how. Got our wavelength, got our frequency, and all I got was this tinny music over the thing and I bloody called the patrol commander over and said, "Listen to this, I can't get out." I was drowning out. So I went to an alternative frequency and they drowned out that so basically we knew we were close. Anyway we're coming over the near a mount, the foot of the May Tao Mountains, we're coming over a ridge, and it was sloping down to a small creek, dry creek. And the forward scout was going down the creek

20:00 and he went across the creek and the patrol commander was in front of me going down the slight incline to the creek bed. And I was just over the lip of the hill, lip of the crest, going down and a machine gun opened up, was in a bunker system across the creek bed. It opened up and the scout had already gone, he was in the creek bed and literally the gun was above him, it was firing above him. The patrol commander hit the dirt and I think he rolled

20:30 down into the creek bed, and he was out of sight there. And I was, and I just remember seeing bullets flying, coming up, coming up, bloody, up the ground in front of me. And I ran backwards over the hill and the other two of the patrol were behind me and I ran back and fell over the bloody lip anyway. I can't remember what happened but I think we all crept to the top of the ridge, and put a bit of fire down on

21:00 what, where we thought the position was, screaming out for Joe to throw a bloody grenade up in, to see if he could get a grenade up into the bunker. The patrol commander I think was totally out of it because he couldn't move, where he was. Anyway we silenced it, I think either the grenade or our rifle fire, I think I pumped a couple of forty millimetre bombs into it. Anyway silenced the position, and it was a two-man machine gun, RPD [Ruchnoi Pulemet Degtyarev – Russian, Light/Portable Machine Gun], which was a light machine gun

21:30 position hidden in a sort of a bit of a bunker type set up, on top of this creek bed. And soon after that we found a campfire and there was, I remember there was still water flowing into the footprints around the campfire, the campfire was still warm, still smoking, so we were obviously in an area of enemy activity. And we found a couple of bunkers, old bunkers, one new bunker, an old bunker. And

22:00 we also found on that patrol, near that area a dead, a dead and buried Viet Cong, so obviously killed in a previous battle somewhere. And cause I remember we were having our lunch and Bill said, "What's that bloody, this horrible smell?" And we parted the bushes and got closer to this smell and it's a mound and we started digging with our knives and, whatever and it was a body. So

22:30 it was obviously a fairly, an area of intense enemy activity around there, or Vietnamese activity. Ah, but this yeah, this patrol, then we silenced this bunker and we got pulled out and I think we got exfil'd after that. Send in a radio, send in a message, contact, cause we had code words. For contact, it was, everything that happened, we had a three letter code word that I had to know sort of, and it changed every patrol. And I remember one was say, contact was, R-U-S

23:00 Rus, cause our patrol commander was Brian Russell so the contact word was Rus. If it was a contact, if one of our persons was wounded, was another code word. Ah, they were all in order that if we had something like, something happened immediately, I could send off a quick code word to base on a certain frequency that they would pick up anyway, even if it was out of schedule.

23:30 And if they heard code, they knew all the patrols that were out at any one time, where they were, what they were doing, and all their code words. So if our, if R-U-S came up they'd know it was our patrol, and that means our patrol is in contact, we've disengaged contact and we're heading towards an exfil thing.

And I'd, if I could tap out enough bloody information to give them the exfil LZ that we were heading towards or going to, we would. Otherwise just say, RUS and they'd send a chopper out, usually send a little,

24:00 like a Loach Chopper, a little recce chopper out with usually, maybe the squadron commander or one of the Off, you know, one of the members of the squadron back at base. And they'd find our location then the patrol commander or 2IC could talk to the chopper with a little hand held URC 10 radio. But yeah everything was done in code, I mean everything was done in One Time, we used to call it OTLP code [One Time Letter Pad] but all messages were sent in code. But we also had another code that we could send out clear but it was

24:30 a code. Like R, Rus, Scram or B-L-A or whatever. And usually they were initials of the members of the patrol that I, so I could memorise them. Cause I had to know instantly if we were in contact, send out you know, send out this code word, whether it be Rus or whatever.

In a confrontation like the one you described, you're yelling to each other. Does all the kind of methodical organisation that rules your work in the jungle break down?

25:00 No, not really, no. Everything, cause we used to rehearse contact so much, that was a bit unusual because we were separated because of, over the lip of the ridge and the creek bed, but we still all went, we adopted our training, went back to our training. So we all obviously hit the dirt and I screamed over the top of the thing. We all, you know, you scream out "Where's the fire coming from?" you put in, you put down as much fire as you

25:30 can. No all the training was put into practice and as I was saying before, everything, there's a lot happening and there's a lot of shit happening but it all seems quite quiet. When you think back on it, you can obviously hear things but when you think back on it, you can't remember any distinct noise, even grenade going off or something. You can't hear a distinct explosion, it's just all merges into a,

26:00 into a blob of noise and it's obviously very noisy, and everything seems to be slowed down, you know, go down to slow motion. But no the training worked really well. I think on one other contact, I only had about two contacts. On one other contact it was a shoot and scoot thing, and literally, it all worked. The scout bumped...

Take us back to the beginning of this one, what is was...?

Oh scout bumped a Viet Cong in the jungle, I can't remember what

26:30 he was doing, I think he was just standing up, it was the outskirts of a camp or something. And he bumped it and he dropped and he was seen, he knew it. So he emptied a magazine, ran back, just, it was all just, you know, the training took over. Everybody dropped to their knee, fired in the direction that we thought or knew the enemy was, then just pulled out, then just went back, reloaded, and waited. And the whole system just kept on going for as long as it took to disengage from the contact.

What was your

27:00 **first sign of that contact?**

Ah, hearing the scout bloody open fire. Cause I'm three down in the patrol, and I can't remember how thick the jungle was, but it was obviously, I couldn't see, I couldn't see anything what's ahead of, I could see what's ahead of me, and probably, I could always see the next man but I couldn't see the one in front of that. So the first indication I got was we're in contact was air shot, shouting and shots, shouting and firing.

And what do you do

27:30 **immediately then?**

Drop down and go into all round protection cause you don't know where the, the main threat is obviously at the front, but you don't know what else is around. So you drop down and look to a [UNCLEAR]. And again rehearsed, was I'd either look to the left and the bloke behind me'd look to the right so each side is covered. And then by a series of shouted instructions, you know, that's the only time you did speak, shouted instructions, one enemy sighted, you know bloody front, and he was shooting. And then I'd see,

28:00 then when you saw the two in front starting, running back, in fact you knew so you just poured fire down and pulled back out the other side. And just keep, as I said, keep going through that process until you disengage and then stop, wait for signs of follow up, and then pull back a bit more and stop, wait for another follow up and then go off at an angle. And again all this had to be mentally if not physically plotted on the map. So you sort of had some idea of where you ended up. Cause in all the

28:30 hullabaloo you could easily get, you know, disoriented.

When you exfil, was that, what was the term?

Exfil yeah.

What does exfil stand for?

Exfiltration. In, you, we used to get infil'd was being infil'd [Infiltrated] on a patrol, and exfil'd was you know, exfil'd on a patrol.

At what point do you feel you're out of the active situation...?

When you're laying on the floor of the chopper and it's probably risen to about fifteen

29:00 hundred feet, you feel a little bit safe.

Can you explain that feeling to us?

Absolutely amazing. I've got a series of slides of one exfil that, I think it was a ten man patrol, pardon me, but we used to radio in our position, radio in our LZ. They'd have a map of our, you know, our progress, every patrol's progress was followed very closely back at headquarters. So they'd know exactly

29:30 where we are and they had picto-maps, picture graphic maps. So they knew, if we were saying that 123456, they knew that our exfil was a certain area, because the, that, the plan, the patrol plan would be gone through prior to the patrol being conducted. So the patrol commander would then brief the intel officer usually, I guess. And he would say, we were getting infil'd at this location, we're going to move there,

30:00 there, there, this is if it all went perfectly, and we intend to get exfil'd at this location. So that's our exfil LZ, that's our infil LZ. So we'd send in a, the last day of the patrol, we'd send in a message, or the second last day of the patrol the coded message, "Request exfil, patrol conducted, no enemy sighted." or this enemy sighted, bunkers or whatever, whatever the thing was, short sit rep. "Request exfil at LZ, exfil. LZ."

30:30 which they already pre-determined what the location was. And then they'd come back, "Exfil confirmed at ten forty-five hours on the eighth of whatever." on the date. So we'd make our way very carefully to the exfil LZ. If we had time and we could do it, we would do a, quite a good recce of the LZ, make sure it wasn't being observed or wasn't under

31:00 any scrutiny by anybody that we didn't want to know that we were there. And so then we'd pull back from the LZ, spend the night away from the LZ, work our way back in to the LZ in the morning. And again do a quick recce of the LZ as best we could. And then the chopper'd be coming out and then probably have a sched. on the morse set on the morning of exfil. And then you could hear the choppers coming, I mean and that noise, I don't think anybody's that's ever

31:30 served in Vietnam will ever get over the noise of a helicopter coming in, particularly the one to take them out. Because it's just, and you only hear them when they're, cause they used to travel quite low, they'd drop down and tree hop. And you'd hear them coming well before you could see them, and just a wok, wok, wok, wok, and then suddenly probably appear and then if they, cause they obviously didn't know where exactly you were. And then you, then they'd either, the patrol commander or the 2IC would get the pilot on the URC 10, the little

32:00 hand held radio. And say, "We are at this location, northwest end of the LZ, do you request smoke?" And they'd have means of identifying our location. Because quite often our patrols would be followed or our position, not ours particularly but patrol's location would be compromised. In as much that the VC knew we were there and they didn't want to get us, they wouldn't bump contact the patrol, because they knew a helicopter'd be coming

32:30 in and the helicopter was a bigger prize than the patrol basically. So they would stand back waiting for the helicopter to turn up and we'd, there was means of identifying our location to the chopper. There was one, there was a signal mirror, there was flares, little hand held flares, there was marker panels, different colour marker panels or there was smoke grenade. And I remember stories being told of one patrol being exfil'd and went through the smoke routine. And we'd

33:00 throw, and the pilot would say, "Request smoke." and we'd throw, we'd say, "Smoke thrown." And then this'd all be going on, on the little walkie-talkie. "Smoke thrown, yellow smoke sighted." we'd throw yellow first. "Yellow smoke sighted." and the patrol commander'd come back, "Yellow smoke thrown." And that would be okay but on this one instance apparently they threw yellow smoke, the VC threw yellow smoke. Just captured, you know, they used to walk through

33:30 old Yank positions and bloody find smoke grenades. We'd throw yellow smoke, they'd throw yellow smoke. They threw pink smoke, we'd threw pink smoke, they'd throw pink smoke. And so therefore basically you can understand, the chopper'd wonder, he's seeing two lots of pink smoke, which one are you. But apparently the Viet Cong or the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] or whatever would never be able to get purple smoke. So then he, as a last resort he'd throw purple smoke, and then there'd be a big pregnant, there'd be no purple smoke.

34:00 So then he'd have pin pointed where the purple smoke was. Where the previous yellow and pink smoke were thrown so then they'd, gun ships'd come in and just bloody plaster the area. But we'd throw smoke and they'd say, 'Smoke thrown. Pink sighted, pink thrown." And then, or you'd lay on the LZ, one of us'd lay on the LZ with the little marker panel and go, bloody just flashing, opening and shutting the marker panels to pin point your location. Or in wet season a lot of times we used to fire little flares, little hand

held flares

34:30 up, so they'd sort of pin point where you are. And then we'd give a location through you know, "You're coming in, bloody twelve o'clock at our position." and all this sort of stuff. So what'd happen is the gunships'd follow the slick [light helicopter], or the slick'd come in, that was the chopper that would pick you up. And Bushrangers or the gunships would come in on both side of the slick. So that the slick'd come in very low and flare onto the LZ. The gunships'd come in either side, and if there was any enemy known

35:00 in the area or just for the hell of it, they'd shoot either mini guns or rockets, put a few rockets in and bloody shoot out that way. They'd strafe the LZ that way, the slick'd come in, in the middle and rest, you know, hover just off the ground. We'd just scream out and bloody jump on. You'd, yeah, it's amazing I mean how your legs can carry you, after doing all that work over all those days and you'd be usually dehydrated and bloody starving. But you'd jump up, jump onto the skid,

35:30 fly into the thing with a heavy pack your back and scream in, you'd just roll onto the floor and you'd grab the next bloke on, the next bloke on, the next bloke on. Then the chopper'd just, and I, just the feeling of just when they, they'd rise up like that, the back'd rise up and they'd go like, the head'd point down and they'd go vvvvv. Oh, just absolutely amazing, you'd just hold on and just go, "My God I don't believe this." And just hanging on to the straps in the back of the chopper, as it banked and took off. And you'd be looking back

36:00 where you were. I mean, you know, five seconds ago now you were down there, now you're up here with the angels basically, you'd just be flying, oh absolutely amazing.

What else can you compare that feeling to?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing, nothing. No, it's just, it was probably the most exhilarating, thankful feeling. I mean one minute you're in a, you're basically in bandit country and the next minute, even though you could still get shot down and bloody, a lot of choppers were shot down. But you didn't think of that,

36:30 your danger was on the ground, so basically when you were in the air, and as I said, once the chopper was pulled up and it used to flare and go up like that and rise up on its nose and then scream out of the way. And then once you're out there and then it'd fly low and then bank and then go. But in our mind or in my mind anyway, once you were in that chopper you were safe, I mean it was just like, you were just safe.

What's your reaction today when you hear a chopper?

Oh get goose bumps and just get all, gooey.

37:00 Absolutely do, I don't think anybody's whose been to Vietnam particularly in any combat unit or particularly infantry, that used to see choppers all the time, and particularly SAS because we used to use, 9 Squadron [RAAF], helicopters as a taxi service base, they used to drop us off and pick us up and drop us off, you know, it's just an unbelievable feeling. Even now, I mean we've got a [(UNCLEAR)] chopper out here at Fairbairn [air base], but it's a very modern, modern Huey Iroquois chopper, it's a two engine one I think. But it's still got that

37:30 familiar, double bladed, wok, wok, wok. And it makes that distinct noise because it's got two blades, not three or four or whatever.

Is it a good feeling, always?

Oh absolutely, oh yeah, amazing feeling. Just, oh it's, yeah, absolutely one of, exhilaration, release, oh just incredible, just incredible.

We'll stop there...

Sometimes yeah, oh...

Oh we've got two minutes if you wanna say one other thing?

Oh it's just sometimes the gunny'd [gunner]

38:00 let you get on the guns if there was anything happening, you know, get on the guns if you wanted and just bloody let you get rid of a few frustrations. I'd just, so you just shoot the bloody door guns and just, oh just amazing, just absolutely amazing.

Just fire off into the jungle.

Yeah just fire off into the jungle, just let some rounds off. Cause we'd, wasn't unusual at all but we'd finish a patrol with the ammunition exactly intact that what we'd taken out, we hadn't used it. So you, you're all frustrated, you went out

38:30 to hunt bear basically, we used to call hunt bear, and you'd come back empty handed. Wet arse and no fish.

Yell and scream?

Yeah we used to oh pat each other on the back, it was just amazing, and you'd just bloody hug each other and pat each other on the back and it was just incredible feeling. And you get back to Nui Dat and you'd smell that badly because you hadn't washed for as many days as you went out there. And you'd get off and everybody'd run down to greet any chopper coming in, you'd run down to greet, then they'd all back off because you'd smell like anything. And first time it happened I wondered,

39:00 "Jeez what, what are these guys doing?" But then when I greeted other patrols coming in, "Fuck, you stink!" You'd smell, you'd be rotten, your body'd be rotten, your crutch'd be rotten, your feet'd be rotten. You'd open your fly to have a piss and you just couldn't stand yourself you know. It was absolutely stunk, absolutely rotten.

We'll stop there on that note, beautiful note to stop.

Yeah.

Tape 7

00:34 **Okay. I might just stick with leading on some patrol questions and then... What wound did you fear the most when you were on patrol?**

Mine. Cause I'd seen some, while I was doing my ambulance stint out of 2 MC hospital at Ingleburn we used to go out probably once a week to Richmond Air Base and pick up all the casualties coming

01:00 back from Vietnam and transport them back to either Concord Repat. [Repatriation Hospital] or Ingleburn Hospital. And ...

Do you want to start that again? Yeah sorry, what wound do you fear the most Don?

Well the worst wound that I think you could get would be from a mine.

Is that the wound you feared the most?

Yeah, yeah. And mainly because it just mangled legs and genitals and just about everything else. And it was more probably debilitating than being,

01:30 than being gun shot wound. But, yeah, a mine was the worst. I saw evidence of that picking up casualties from Vietnam when I was an ambulance driver out at Richmond. And we brought them back in to hospital and some of the injuries, you know, no legs, abdomen damaged, and oh, bloody disgusting. So yeah that's what I feared most.

What sort of shape psychologically are they in, the mine victims?

Oh, bloody tragic, I mean you look at their bodies, they're broken and battered, I don't know what their minds

02:00 are like, absolutely terrible. But actually Bill Nisbett[?], one of the guys in the patrol and I had a little pact, if one of us was hurt in a way that was you know, debilitating, either leg blown off or balls shot off or something, just give us a grenade, you know, just let me kill, let each other kill em, you know, kill ourselves. It was a stupid arrangement, but, it would never have worked because we would have, we never left anybody behind. So we would have been taken back in whatever shape and condition you were in. But I

02:30 just didn't want to come back a maimed paraplegic basically, I just don't think I could handle that, but obviously you do, people did.

Did you ever have to evacuate someone on a patrol...?

No, not out of injuries no.

Were there other injuries or other sort of effects, people lost their nerve or...?

No, no, no, we didn't have anybody break down or fail to do the job by virtue of any disability, whether it be mental or physical.

03:00 No, everybody was, no. I'm talking my patrol and in the squadron basically. Nobody in the squadron was evacuated for any other reason other than they were injured, wounded, you know, wounded.

Did you always go out as a group with the same people?

Yep, the patrol was, I was in number 25 Patrol, F Troop, 2 SAS Squadron, and although I always stayed, always did patrol for 2 Squadron or 25 Patrol, I also

03:30 did patrols with other patrol commanders that were short a sig. If they were short a signal operator, I used to just stupidly volunteer for any patrol I could get on. So I did patrols with some of the greats of

SAS, Danny Wright, Frank Cashmore, Dave Scheele, they're all legendary SAS patrol commanders from Vietnam.

04:00 And I used to just, I don't know why, I don't know what motivated me but I used to just say, "If you want a sig give us a bell, if I'm not on patrol, I'll come and help you, I'll do it." So I did quite a few patrols with other patrols too.

How did it feel going out with people you didn't know as well as the patrol you stayed with?

Yeah, well I didn't know them as well but I did know them because we'd all trained together as a squadron in Australia and New Guinea prior to deployment to Vietnam. So I didn't know them as intimately but

04:30 because we all worked basically the same, I mean all patrols had their own unique little quirks that they used to do. Some used to do different bed spots and different ways they used to like patrolling or laying ambushes or something like that. But basically the MO or the modus operandi of patrolling was all the same, it was generic, right through the squadron or right through the regiment.

Can you describe for us the moment that most upsets you on one of those patrols that stays with you now?

05:00 We're in a contact and I think it was an ambush, and I don't know, I think my mind blanked out a lot of it. But it was an ambush and I suspected I shot; I was responsible for shooting somebody. And it was either a contact or an ambush. And a contact is just when you bump them and ambush is a pre-meditated, I think it was an ambush. But anyway it sort of, it upset me quite a bit because these guys are pretty

05:30 you know, bullets, military ammunition makes a hell of a mess with a human body. Anyway I was pretty upset, anyway after we got back to Nui Dat and after the de-brief, we went, as a patrol we all went down to Vung Tau for our night off, we used to have an afternoon and a night off. Which we used to raise whoopee and have a lot of fun. And I remember in a bar, I remember I was in a bar, the patrol had gone off to do something, either get a root or

06:00 have another beer or something. And I just said, "No I wanna be on my own." I was just sitting there drinking bourbon I remember and old Joe Flannery came into the bar, what the hell he was doing in Vung Tau I don't know. But he obviously had a few days off and he came down and he saw me in the bar and he'd actually done our de-brief after the patrol. And what he'd said, what he said to me basically was, "I know how you're feeling." cause he was ex-Korean, ex-Malaya, ex-Borneo, Training Team, Vietnam so he was a legend.

06:30 And here I was a young soldier and he said, "I know, you know, you must be feeling pretty bad and all that sort of stuff." I said, "Yeah." well I was all mixed up, I didn't know what my feelings were. And he said, "Right, we're gonna get drunk together." So, I always remember this, we, he said, "Take your belt off." that was a bit strange, weird therapy. "Take your belt off." and the bar had a rail around it. So he took it, looped, each of us looped our belt

07:00 through the bar and tied it back around ourself. He said, "Right, we're here til we drop." And we just drank and we talked, and he talked it out of me. 'Cause I remember after that patrol, much later, I, well not probably not much later, weeks later I wrote to my Uncle Tony. I told him I'd been in a contact, possibly shot somebody and how did he feel, you know, I said, "I don't know how I'm feeling, I don't know what I'm feeling." And it wasn't a sense of joy, it was just mixed up feelings.

07:30 Anyway I wrote to him and he wrote me back a really nice letter saying that what, how he felt after his first, you know, action in the Middle East, so that helped me a fair bit. But that still upsets me a fair bit, if you think about it; I try not to think about it. Another one was...

Before, I mean, I would like to hear as much as you're willing to tell us about that incident, if you, you know I think it's important that people do hear these sort of, the details

08:00 **of war at that level. Can you take us back to that time, as much as your memory allows you to and describe what happened?**

I think it was an am.. I'm sure it was an ambush, because I knew what I was shooting at when I shot, so I think it must have been an ambush. I don't know, just, just the sense of actually knowing that

08:30 when you pull your trigger, somebody's gonna lose their life. And I'm not being melodramatic or putting a modern spin on it but knowing that you had the power of life and death over one person. And there was no question I was gonna shoot, I mean there was no question I was going to chicken out or pull the shot or whatever, not like with the kangaroos. But, and then after it happened, I mean after, as soon as I pulled the trigger and everybody else,

09:00 everything happened, so basically I didn't think about it until literally that night when we got down to Vung Tau cause I think we got pulled out that afternoon.

Did you fire the first shot in that ambush?

No, no, no. I don't think so, I don't know, but I just remember there was a, noise, everything happened.

But I just remember, that was the person I was detailed to shoot or, that was my target. And I presume that was due to my space in the patrol, there we were, space, so I had,

09:30 I was number three in the patrol so I guess it was the third person or the second person or something. But I just remember feeling afterwards, nothing until that night down in Vung Tau. I didn't even think about it when we got back to Nui Dat, and then I thought about it a bit afterwards. But just sort of feelings of mixed up emotions, and did I do the right thing, I know I did the right thing, but try to just, feelings of justification to yourself and....

What sort of warning did

10:00 **the target have that they were in danger?**

Well there's a, I think it was an ambush, so basically when we sprung the ambush they had no warning at all, so they didn't know.

Were they NVA, VC?

VC. So I don't think they had any warning at all basically. No it, I'm sure it was an ambush, it wasn't a contact it was an ambush. Because I remember having feelings of pre-meditation and, you know, all this sort of stuff, you know. But yeah it's, I was twenty, twenty years of age I think,

10:30 or might have been after my twenty-first birthday, I can't remember when it was in the tour but, so I was only young, I mean I was only, fairly devastating for a young, but there's younger people than me there seen a lot more

This was, what was the purpose of these patrols?

Well as I said, the main purpose of SAS was to conduct deep, deep reconnaissance of enemy areas. To either pin point or locate areas of enemy concentration, or enemy camps, bunkers, tracks that are being used,

11:00 gather intelligence.

What's the purpose of the ambush?

Either get information off, either just kill, kill certain, you know, kill as many as you could. Sounds ridiculous but kill as many as you could. Or gather intel, cause the bodies were always searched afterwards, if in fact it was possible.

Did you search the bodies in this instance?

After that one we did.

Did you search the persons, body of the person you thought you shot?

I think I might have. Cause I think we took, because I had the

11:30 patrol camera, we used to take photos of all the bodies, not for ghoulish reasons, but just for identification, or if we could identify them. Because I remember they did have photos of known Viet Cong sympathisers or known Viet Cong in Phuoc Tuy Province. And if intel could get anything from photos at all, that was obviously the best evidence. So apart from documents or material gleaned off the victim, photo evidence you know, what they were wearing,

12:00 what state their weapons were in, all that sort of stuff.

Could you tell us what this person had on his own possession?

Just a belt, from memory, a belt and a water bottle, an old American water bottle, a belt, a web-type belt, water bottle. A pack, just a common pack that the VC used to carry around, quite an old canvassy type pack. And an SKS I think, as SKS I think he was carrying, not an AK47, which was a

12:30 Chai-com type rifle, semi automatic rifle. Yeah, I don't think we got weapons.

Any personal effects?

Not that I can remember, no, no photographs or, I don't think there was a wallet at that, I don't think there was a wallet. Again, see, you have, it happens so quickly, you just grab stuff because you're obviously in a, you've sprung an ambush, you're out of there. So, just, I don't

13:00 know, we grabbed stuff and stuffed it in packs and then just took off so I can't remember what was grabbed. Can't remember whether we got the weapon or not, whether the weapon was damaged, if it was damaged we left it, if it was still serviceable we took it I think.

Did you keep of any artefacts from people that were killed?

I've got a water bottle over there with a bullet hole in it, so, that, I think that was from that ambush. It's actually an old American canteen, in a canteen cup; you know the metal cup that they put them in.

13:30 And the bullet has gone through the cup into the water bottle and it basically welded them together, you

can’t get them apart. So I think that was out of that ambush, yeah.

How, were you, are you able to leave that behind or move on from things like that?

Well strangely, I mean again, Vietnam, my memories of Vietnam

14:00 or the bad memories have lessened quite a bit in the last ten years or, well, I don't know, after Vietnam I didn’t think about it, cause I was young, I was young and I had things to do, I had a life to lead, I, you know, I was getting married I was joining the police force, so I literally forgot about it. Didn’t march in Anzac Day til about 1978 or something. So yeah, I forgot about it and the memory being, the human brain being as it is, you sort of, you put

14:30 those things to the back of your mind. I’ve thought more about Vietnam in the last ten years than I think I’ve ever thought about Vietnam. Only because there’s more material you can read about it, you can hear about, there’s, it’s become quite a popular war to now discuss. Whether from an academic point of view, political point of view or a military point of view. So there’s more written and talked about Vietnam, that it’s become sort of a little bit like SAS.

15:00 It was not talked about for years and now suddenly everybody’s talking about it.

Before we get on to sort of more general things, which we will talk about generalities and that sort of that more reflective moments towards the end of the interview. But I’d like to stay with the specific, you said there was another incident that stuck in your mind?

That’s when we were looking for this radio station that was jamming our signal, all the signals. And I remember, I remember we were being followed or

15:30 they were looking for us with dogs. And all I remember is Vietnamese voices and dogs barking. And we hid in a swamp, hid in a really swampy, muddy, foul area and we literally buried ourselves in that, and these Vietnamese voices they were searching, all around for us. We were obviously in a very hot area and it was in the May Tao and at the base of the May Tao basically. And I remember that was fairly hairy, I remember that being the subject of

16:00 a few sleepless nights after, when I came back to Australia.

Can you take us through back to that patrol, was that a hot insertion or…?

No, no, started off as quite a normal patrol, we were looking at, as I said, trying to find this jamming station, signal station, because quite a few other patrols apparently experienced the same thing and that’s why we were sent in. And we knew the May Taos was a hot area because at one stage during the war

16:30 ‘68, or during Tet or whatever, the VC were, was, it was always known as a VC stronghold the May Tao. And there was quite a lot of bunker systems, they had hospitals, they had almost a training ground, they had a sort of a obstacle course set up and everything, it was just a really well used area by the Viet Cong. And we were searching for this jamming station

17:00 and then I was sending in a sched. and the jamming became quite pronounced, it was just really loud. And I couldn’t get out, couldn’t get any messages out, couldn’t get any signals out. And then we heard voices coming, few rifle shots, but they never found us, but they obviously knew from their direction finding gear, whatever they had that somebody was in the area trying to transmit. So they pin pointed an

17:30 area which they thought we were in and we were certainly in that area but we evaded them, and this went on for quite a few hours I remember, we just found this swampy area and hid. And I, and I don't know if the dogs were associated with the search, we didn’t get that close or they didn’t get that close. But I remember hearing dogs and dogs were quite unusual unless you were around villages and we were never around villages. And shouting in Vietnamese, you know the way they sing song talk. Every time I hear Vietnamese talk it’s

18:00 quite a, that’s an evocative memory, I don’t dislike it but it just brings back, you know, certain things, certain memories, when they’re talking, the high pitched sing songy-type way they talk. Anyway we got out and again exfil we got out of that area, basically it was too, it was too hot. I mean, and I don't know what happened after that, the Intelligence that we sent in they may well either done air strikes or sent a battalion in or sent more patrols in,

18:30 but we certainly didn’t go back to that area.

At that time, did you consider you might be captured?

Yeah, well that was always a possibility.

What did you think you’d do if you were captured?

Well again that possi… it was always a possibility but it was one that was never spoken about. You’d fight your way out, and certain patrols, had been in very hairy situations and actually fought their way out. And other, there is case, cases written about in the history of the Australian

19:00 SAS of patrols being outnumbered, surrounded and fighting until they and getting out, you know, waiting til dark and slipping away and all that sort of stuff. So there has been some quite hairy situations and the prospect of capture was always there but you never sort of allowed it to, you know resign yourself to that fact.

In that particular instance where you were hiding in the swamp when you could hear dogs, what's going through your mind?

I just hope they don't bloody find us. Just hope they don't,

19:30 don't see us, because again I don't know where we were but we would have been at least ten, fifteen or twenty Ks out from Nui Dat. Would have been quite a while for helicopter, choppers to get out, we might well have been out of the range of artillery. So the fact that we were well away from, near, close support or immediate support, was quite worrying so, I think just the main thought going through all of our minds was, I just hope they don't fucking find us.

Did you send out, at what, what

20:00 **message did you send back to your headquarters?**

Well when we could actually throw the, cause to set the morse set up you had to, I usually left it in the top right pack but you had to roll an aerial out, you had to throw it out so you'd throw it out. So we couldn't send anything out while we were there, cause obviously they were still jamming so we had to get out of that area until we could get a clear signal. In really urgent situations, we never had to deploy it, but on that URC 10, that little hand held radio, that we had two per patrol, it had

20:30 what they called a SAR beacon, a Search Rescue beacon. And they could activate it, and any allied aircraft would pick up a, it was like an SOS to any, and even airliners, apparently some of our patrol, one of our patrols activated it, and a Pan Am jet picked up the signal and radioed it back to Ton San Nhut through a variety of means. And they located the patrol that way, a civilian airline had picked up the SOS.

21:00 So that was always an option but I don't think we even employed that at that stage. Cause I don't think it was operationally possible.

How did you get out of that particular situation?

Well they moved off, they moved away. Cause they, I mean the dogs, no, if the dogs were a part of the search, as I said, I don't know but it's unusual to hear dogs in the jungle. We were in the, I mean they couldn't have smelled us, cause we were laying in this shit. And we just moved away from the area, as soon as they moved over we just went the other way. Just

21:30 slowly, tk, tk, tk, tk, you know, left, patrolled out of that area and got as far away as we could. Then obviously sent in a sched. told em what was the situation going on, and got exfil'd, got pulled out.

Helicopter?

Mmm.

Do you remember that particular helicopter?

No. I just know I was thankfully on the bloody thing.

Do all the patrols blur together for you?

Well they sort of do and they don't. I mean certain instances I can

22:00 remember certain things that happened on a patrol. But having, but then if you said which patrol was it, they could have all been, not all have been on one patrol, but certain instances I remember happened in the wet season and certain things happened in the dry season. But as for any operational incident, unless it was something to do with whether I, the memory is, is very

22:30 sharp that it was wet or it was dry, that indicates where in the tour it was.

Can you describe a wet night out on patrol when it's raining and at night time?

Bloody miserable. As I said I think we deployed ponchos, we had camouflage, little camouflage ponchos, which we used to, when it was raining; you could hear the rain coming. Particularly in, you could hear it coming across the trees, drumming on the trees for quite a few minutes before it hit. And so it'd usually give us time to sort of stop, hunker down, find somewhere to get out of the way

23:00 and just get our ponchos out of the little side pocket of the pack. And what is was, was a little, you know, like a poncho thing just goes over with a little hood thing and a zip cord. So you just, you'd be wet anyway, you'd be wet from sweat, but then you just, we'd all just sit down on our packs and just go like that because it was dangerous patrolling when it was really, really heavy rain because you couldn't see, when it rained, it rained. And so you just sit there and bloody just kneel down and let this rain bloody pummel you around and then just,

23:30 then go. But at night when it rained, I remember one time and this was near one of the other mountain

ranges The Nui Bays or the, not the Nui Tiva, one of those. One of the other mountain areas, we were up in the mountains and it was quite cool. And Joe and I deployed, it was raining and Joe and I, the decision was made to you know, get your ponchos, get your ponchos, join your ponchos together to make a little lean to, very low one, put a bit of vegetation on it, break

24:00 up the shape. We got under there and I remember sleeping under there that night it was absolutely pissing down, the rain was just running down the hillside you know in bloody rivers, little river. And stupidly I just remember waking, Joe waking up or some bloody thing and the poncho had billowed out and had got a low point full of water. And I've pulled it up and bloody pulled it all over him, he yelled out which wasn't very operationally sound, but anyway,

24:30 you gotta have a little bit of fun occasionally. And yeah, just bloody soaked him, you know, it was just... But normally it was absolutely miserable, as miserable, as miserable, terrible. Cause you had no, you know, mostly we were just laying, we had this Vietnamese plastic, which was very soft plastic and it didn't rustle, didn't make any noise. And we all had a big sheet of that and that's what, when it was raining normally, in the dry season you just sort of lay out like that on your back just looking up at the stars. But when it was wet, you just wrapped yourself in this plastic,

25:00 and that's it, you just lay on the ground. And the ground very quickly became muddy and everything would be scurrying past you There'd be rats and mice and bloody snakes and oh, it was just, you know, absolutely fucking terrible. You, I'll show you some photos later on, the way you looked after a patrol was just, like you'd been dragged through bloody ten hedges and played fifteen games of grid iron or something, it was bloody terrible. And you smelled and you were just,

25:30 you know, just a mess, just a mess, very uncomfortable. I remember my hips ached, both hips ached for years after Vietnam because of probably sleeping on the hard ground. Because I was nine stone two when I came back from Vietnam and I'm just under thirteen stone now. And I'm not very fat now but I was quite a sick puppy when I came back from Vietnam. And a lot of bones sticking out, when you lay on hard ground on bones it's just bloody uncomfortable.

Try the old World War II

26:00 **trick of digging a hip hole?**

Yeah well see we didn't have any trenching tools or anything and we couldn't, we weren't allowed to do that. Again, and I know it sounds silly but it wasn't silly it was operationally sound. The disturbed area that you slept in that night is minimal, as small amount as possible. And if in fact you had to cut down some branches or roots that were there, you cut them very low to the ground, and you placed the cut branches to the side.

26:30 You slept where you did, and in the morning you raked all the stuff back over, smeared mud on the cut stem, and got the cut stem back in, put a little hole and put the stem back in the hole. By the time it'd wilted and obviously looked dead would be two days afterwards and we'd be long out of the area. So you disturbed the undergrowth as least amount as possible. So no hip holes, even, as I said, when you go, went for a shit,

27:00 dig it with your knife, have a crap, put it in cover it up, leaves, so you wouldn't even know it was there. Just, you, we literally lived in the jungle like a local. And we smelled, even before patrol, you didn't have a shower probably a day or so before patrol and you just started to smell. You started to grow a growth, you never shaved, never cleaned teeth. I remember the highlight of my day, every morning I used to get up and had, I had a comb, so I'd comb all

27:30 the crap out of your hair, I had quite short hair most of the time. You'd comb the crap out of your hair and I'd just clean my teeth with a brush and no toothpaste cause it smelled, but just a brush and a bit of water. You just swill your mouth out and just clean all the fur off your teeth. And sometimes I'd sit there with my pocket knife I mean and just clean my fingernails, and just, it made you feel like you just had a bath. Just to comb your hair, clean your teeth and just clean your finger nails. Cause you never took your shoes, never took your boots off, never took your clothes off.

28:00 Absolutely amazing, so everything was quite dirty. I remember I had a really bad ingrown toenail. And when I got back to Nui Dat after a patrol, it was just absolutely throbbing, took my boot off. And the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] guy just laid a scalpel on the side of the swollen pussy area, just put the scalpel on it and it was that tight and inflamed that it just burst open and pus went everywhere, pus and blood went everywhere. Couldn't even take that off, I

28:30 was not hobbling because, well I was hobbling but we used to move so slowly, you know, you used to, I think if I had to break into a run I would have squealed in a bit of agony but stuff like, yeah. When I think back I think, how on earth did I, how on earth did any of us do it? It's just amazing but what we did was, we did it for a reason and our record in Vietnam attests to you know, minimal casualties, maximum body kill, or

29:00 body, you know, tallies and a wealth of intelligence taken back to the Task Force, so we did everything right I think.

Can you tell us the story of your twenty-first birthday patrol and the events surrounding that?

Well I was twenty-one on the eighth of April 1971. And we'd been deployed again early in April so it would have been in the first few days of April. Cause I

29:30 remember the eighth of April just happened to be our day, our planned day of exfil, date of exfil. I didn't realise that anybody else in the patrol knew it was my twenty-first birthday. I mean I'd, guys just don't talk about you know, birthdays, and the importance of birthdays. So, and I was sort of, I was aware of it, I mean obviously I was twenty-one, it was quite a big occasion but I didn't sort of dwell on it.

30:00 **Where were you on that particular day?**

We were out on patrol, we were on patrol same day and all I remember was that the day before when I sent in the last sched. of the day, sending our grid reference in for an exfil the next day on the eighth of April and a sit rep that morning, or that afternoon sorry. For some reason I had a poncho over my head, cause I used to kneel under the poncho, probably to muffle

30:30 the noise of the morse key. And the other four guys, every time I used to have a sched they'd sort of sit around me, all facing out and I'd be in the centre. So the patrol commander'd write out a message, I would then look at the message and encode it with all this code, so I had to do this all under a cover sort of thing, especially when it was raining. And then I sent the message and I'd have to wait for a reply, get a message in, decode it and then send it to patrol commander. Anyway I'd sent this message off with all the information

31:00 for exfil. I got a reply back saying exfil at ten thirty hours or something and I lifted up, I remember I lifted up the poncho and passed the message over to the patrol commander and he took it off me and then they all turned inwards, they all turned in to me and whispered happy birthday to me, in the middle of the jungle. I couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it. And we'd been, I know we'd been near enemy

31:30 area during that patrol because we were on sort of, you know, fairly heightened alert, we were on heightened alert all the time but we were a bit touchy on that occasion. Anyway so when they all turned in and wished me happy birthday by whispering to me, it just cracked me up, and then they all gave me something. And it was the day of exfil or it was the day before exfil but they all gave me a little thing. And in my photo album is a drawing drawn of me by the patrol

32:00 2IC on his army note book. I think the patrol commander gave me a tin of peaches, another guy gave me a tube of condensed milk that he'd saved up, and they'd all apparently talked about this before the patrol, I didn't know. A tube of condensed milk, and another guy, I think the scout gave me a little stick that he'd carved in the shape of, they used to call it a short time stick in Vietnam. You could buy it and it was like the shape of a dragon's head and with a little you know, design down the bottom, it was like a little paste stick thing.

32:30 So they all handed these presents to me and I mean I just absolutely, I just cracked up. Anyway couldn't believe it so we were getting pulled out the next day, that's right, so I shared all the peaches as we could and sucked on the tube of condensed milk that night, put meself to sleep. And then the next morning we got to the LZ, chopper came in, picked us up, we all jumped on the chopper and as it was heading off, probably the co-pilot turned around and said, "Hey Barney." cause they sort of

33:00 knew us. They knew us that well cause they were dealing with us all the time. He said, "Hey Barney." he said, "Look under the poncho, that's for you." I looked under the poncho was one of those hot boxes, army hot boxes, and in the hot box was two bottles of champagne from the patrol funds I think it was, patrol or the squadron commander and the patrol, you know the squadron fund. Couldn't believe it, he said, "Happy twenty-first buddy." And we're just, I remember ripping the top of this bloody

33:30 bottle of champagne and because we were dehydrated and it was still in the dry season, I don't think the wet season started til about June, but anyway it was starting to rain but it was still dry and so we were fairly dehydrated. And I took one or two swigs of this bloody champagne and because there was no seats and no doors and I was dehydrated, it just literally went to my head. I literally you know, almost fell out of the bloody door, Bill Nisbett grabbed me and pulled me back in. And I was just, I just went straight to my head, I was drunk as, in an

34:00 instant I was drunk. Everybody had a sip and we ended up drinking the whole bloody lot before we got back to Nui Dat. So we were all blind as bats when we got out. Staggered up, unloaded our rifles, everybody came up, yah, blah, blah, blah, you know, welcome back and all this sort of crap you know and happy twenty-first. So I went and had my shower which was either a shower, a tub in a forty-four gallon drum of water or we had a shower system rigged up which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't, so it was either hot or cold,

34:30 depending on if the old burner was working. So had a shower, put on a clean pair of greens. We all wandered up the hill after the de, we had a big de-brief as we did after every patrol. And I, and because it was my twenty-first birthday I had to put twenty-one dollars over the bar. And twenty-one dollars U.S. was a lot of money, considering we only got sixty-six dollars a fortnight. And twenty-one dollars, and ten cents bought a beer, so it was about two hundred and ten beers. So we used to have these, those big army trunks the aluminium

35:00 trunks, and they'd fill it full of ice and then pile beers in, so it was like a big esky. And everybody else

came up and started drinking and I think after about three or four beers I was just absolutely maggoted, absolutely blown out of my brain. So they just, I literally fell off my chair and they rolled me out of the bloody boozer, and I must have rolled, cause the booze was right on top of the hill, right under a big bamboo clump. It was called the, oh, what was it called, can't remember,

35:30 anyway it had a great name for this boozer. And I rolled down the hill and I remember waking up that night or very early the next morning and one of these little grey spider monkeys was trying to get my boots off, it was trying to undo my shoes, I couldn't believe it. I was just out of my brain. I must have, I think I must have had one of my old flying suits; I used to wear an old flying suit when I was off duty, the old flying suit, but I had a pair of boots on. And this bloody thing was trying to, cause these little spider monkeys were amazing, they used to get in

36:00 to tents of guys that were on patrol. You know, particularly cause, usually you bunked two to a tent and usually you're in a tent with a guy in your patrol, so when you're on patrol, your tent was empty. And these little bastards, and you'd have all your stuff hanging around, you know, hanging around the tent, drying, airing or whatever, or everything'd get mouldy. And these little bastards would invariably sometimes get into your tent, pinch stuff, and then they used to live in a big clump of bamboo on the top of the hill. And they'd go back up into the bamboo and they'd festoon trousers and tops

36:30 and pieces of webbing and all stuff from your tent. And you'd come back and you'd say, "Who's fucking ripped off me bloody greens?" or something. And it was the monkeys, the monkeys'd do it all the time, they were little thieves, little buggers, you know, but they were gorgeous little things, little white faced grey monkeys, little Spider Monkeys, gorgeous. And that was my twenty-first birthday. Then we went down to Vung Tau that night and yeah probably had a really, I had a really good night. Got magg… horribly, horribly, bloody maggoted though.

Can you tell us a bit more

37:00 **about Vung Tau and what happened there and…?**

Well it was a, Vung Tau was a release and after every patrol, if, in fact it was, Vung Tau wasn't closed because of an alert. Sometimes if there was a bit of a, there was a lot of activity going on in Vietnam, they'd bring out these security alerts, and they had different grades. Either one, two or three or red, orange, green or something. And usually after every patrol,

37:30 we would, after the de-brief, we would already have booked our seats on one of the 9 Squadron choppers going down to Vung Tau. Cause they were based, mainly based in Vung Tau, the air base in Vung Tau. So they'd say, oh yeah, Two Five Patrol, four out of five going to Vungers [Vung Tau] for a night on the piss, you know, after the patrol. Fine, so, literally, all you're doing is like booking a taxi, you know, so they had an idea of how many people they were taking down to Vungers. So,

38:00 you know, five choppers were going back, they could take quite a few people. But anyway so you literally booked this, so we'd come down, have the debrief, have a few beers up in the boozer, grab a pair of jeans and a tee-shirt, cause we never went on leave in Vung Tau in uniform, it was always plain clothes.

Why is that?

Just for security I think, the Americans used to always wear greens, their uniform, We used to always wear civvies, so obviously it was quite easy to see at a glance who was who I guess. But...

We just might stop there and change

38:30 **the tape, just so…**

Tape 8

00:31 **Okay, Vung Tau, you've booked, your booking these seats on these sort of Freedom Birds or whatever they …**

Yeah quite surreal, you basically book your seat on the chopper and as I said my, one of my nicknames was the Root Rat of the Dat and I used to go out to the bush on patrol for a rest cause I used to, I was like a kid in a toy shop. And we'd go down there and usually the day before the patrol, the 2IC or the patrol commander would just quickly ask around the patrol, "Who wants to go to Vungers after

01:00 you know, we get out?" So give an idea and they'd send those numbers back on the last sched if in fact you could. So you'd say, you know, five out of five you know, the whole patrol going. So they'd just radio down I guess or telephone down to 9 Squadron and say tomorrow there'll be you know, 25 Patrol's coming out, yeah five, five guys go down to Vungers for a night out. So anyway we'd all pile down, jump in the Land Rover or something and all pile down to Luscombe Airfield or Nadzab or whatever it was. Which was the air field at Nui Dat where the

01:30 choppers were lined up. And it was just a feeling of, again it was almost as sweet a feeling as when the choppers come to pull you out. You knew you were going down for a night of you know, sex and rock

and roll basically. And so you'd be all excited, you know, the patrol's finished, usually it was a good patrol, successful. So you'd be, you'd jump in, pile in the chopper and you'd be flying down and they'd usually take a bit of a weird route you know, go down a river or

02:00 over the paddy fields and zoom down low. They were a bloody, I mean 9 Squadron [RAAF] and the SAS were very close, that was the chopper squadron. We knew most of the guys, most of the pilots, most of the gunnies. And they'd drop us off at the air base in Vungers. And we always had a standing arrangement that we could just use any of the bunks in the RAAF quarters that were not being used that night. So you'd just pile your gear in there, you'd just pile your sort of stuff in there

02:30 and then get a little lambro thing, three wheel taxi thing into town. And then it'd all start. And we'd always go to the Street of Flags, which was a street in Vung Tau which is still there, I went back there in '95 and it's still there. It's where, was a street of bars, both sides of the bar, both sides of the road. And it was basically one of the main streets in Vung Tau leading down to the beach. And it had a concrete sort of platform thing with

03:00 a big sign with all the flags of the allied nations, you know, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, America, all this sort of stuff. And they called it the Street of Flags cause it had a lot of flags flying up. And so we'd start in our favourite bar which was usually the Purple Shadow or the Li-lo Bar. And we'd have a few quick beers there, then we'd go across to the Thirty-seven Club which was, we used to call it the Steam and Cream place, it was like a, it was like a, used to work, operate under the

03:30 guise of a barber shop. So you'd go there for a haircut if you wanted one, and they'd do your, give you a quick manicure, you know, do your nails, pop all your blackheads and all the rest of the stuff. And then you'd go and have a steam bath, and some little girl'd run up and down your back, clicking all your spine, and then you'd do the business with her, very quickly. And then you'd go back and then we'd literally look around and head off to another bar and have a few more beers. And then

04:00 we'd always try and get in a good, one good meal, we'd always go to the Green Hotel in Vung Tau which was an old French colonial hotel. And they had really good steaks, I presume they were buffalo steaks, but they were quite nice and they always come out on a big sizzling steal platter. And have a nice steak, steak and chips and salad and all this sort of stuff. And then we'd go off and go to a few nightclubs because curfew was either at nine or ten o'clock at night. And you had to be off the streets at curfew because either the,

04:30 the 'White Mice' were the South Vietnamese Police or the 'Snow Drops' were the American Military Police or the Australian bloody Meat Heads ...

What was the nickname for the Australian Military Police?

Meat Heads. Not a popular lot. They had a job to do, I shouldn't be unkind. But anyway they would be quite severe if you were caught after curfew so the idea was to, after meal, go and have a few more beers in one of the nightclubs,

05:00 they had clubs all, little clubs all over the place. And a bar usually consisted of just a long room like this, an entrance onto the street. One side of the bar, one side of the little sort of long room would have a wooden bar built in with all bloody booze and beer and everything on there. On the other side was just cubicles and seats and whatever and some were different sort of patterns. But others had sort of strip shows going on or just loud rock, tape

05:30 music, you know, of old bloody Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin and all the rest of the, all the good stuff. And you'd just there and you'd buy these young girls Saigon Teas, they used to call them Saigon Teas. And what it was just bloody tea and water. But you used to pay the price of a whisky and that's how they existed. And you couldn't sit, you could sit in there and not talk to them and just drink at your own pace if you wanted to. But if you wanted to actually talk or flirt with some of the girls, you had to buy them a Saigon Tea. Because Mama San, who

06:00 was looking after the bar, head lady, you couldn't have a girl next to you talking to you if she didn't have a Saigon Tea there. And they'd just drink it up quickly and order another one so you used to cost, and they used to be twenty or thirty or fifty cents or something, I can't remember. But anyway you'd sit there all night and then towards, near curfew you'd sort of look around or the girl you were talking to, you'd say, "All nighter?" And if you could, you either had to be off the street so it didn't mean off the, didn't matter if you

06:30 were off the streets in a room somewhere or off the streets back at the base. So you had to either allow enough time to get back to the base or grab this bird, find where the rooms were that that bar would allow you to take her to. Pay Mama San, grab her out, race upstairs and that's where you'd spend the night. And I think curfew was lifted about six o'clock so you had to be back on deck at six o'clock. Have a quick bloody, we used to call hepo roll which was a hepatitis roll, which was a roll with

07:00 a bit of meat and a lot of other junk which passed for salad, into it and you'd wolf that down with a hot cup of chai tea or something. And then catch a lambro back to the base and jump on the chopper when, and they used to leave to fly back up the Dat about nine or ten o'clock so. As long as you're on that you're right, if you didn't, well, you'd just have to catch the next one. But the nights were, yeah, I mean, these young girls were just, I shudder to think what happened when the South actually fell and the

North Vietnamese came through,

07:30 because these girls would have been targeted. But I used to love just, I used to go into these bars with these girls, and I mean I used to screw a lot of em, I used to, yeah, I had a good time, they were, I mean, but I, I've always thought of prostitutes as quite nice women. I mean most of them were just, and these girls were just living, doing this to live and survive basically. And if you talked about it to normal people these days, they'd say, "My God, what an animal." But having said that, I mean you gotta bear in mind where we were,

08:00 what we were doing, the age of our, age of us, and just what was going on at the time. But I used to go to these bars sometimes and the guys'd say, "No, no, come on, we're gonna go to the bloody Li-lo Bar or something." I'd say, "No, no, I just want to sit here." And what I'd love to do was, towards the end of the afternoon before the nights, the night sort of hotted up, these, all these bar girls'd come out in a big group at the end of the bar or something and they'd be just chatting and talking to each other. And they'd be putting on their make up and chatting just as, you know, girls do. You know putting on their eye shadow

08:30 and their lip stick and all this sort of stuff. And I'd just buy a beer and I became well known and a lot of these Mama Sans'd say, "Oh Mr Don, Mr Don, come in, come in." And I'd buy a drink. And they knew I would later on get one of them, you know; pay one of them to take away. But I just wanted to sit. And at first they thought I was quite strange you know, cause, I mean most guys just went down there to want to get pissed and root, you know, which I did. But I also found it very comforting just

09:00 to look at these girls, it was sort of like a slice of normality. These girls'd be all be just chattering away and putting make up on each other and themselves and I just found that to be really a slice of peace, you know. I'd sit there just in my own world, looking at them, you know, smiling.

I guess you had so much male company, you need a feminine influence just to balance the…?

Yeah, I just wanted some feminine contrast you know. And I just liked, because they weren't being bar girls then, they were in their other

09:30 mode, they were just girls. But then when the, when Mama San flicked the fingers, you know, had the make up on, and then they went to business. And that was a different side of them but this side they were just young girls putting on make up and it was just classic.

This, did the army, did you use condoms?

S'posed to, yeah I, I don't, I don't like the smell of rubber, I just can't handle it. I got quite a few doses of gonorrhoea but yeah.

The army looks after the,

10:00 **there's, you can go and get treatment?**

Oh yeah, oh you had to yeah. Yeah I remember the first, literally the first patrol or the first time down at Vung Tau. I obviously picked one of the prettiest bar girls that I could find. And a lot of the Vietnamese girls are absolutely just, absolutely stunning, they're gorgeous. And I picked her and the patrol 2IC I remember picked a really ugly one. He said, "Oh." cause he'd done a tour before. And he said, "Oh no, always get the ugly ones mate, always get the ugly ones, they're the cleanest." I said, "Oh yeah, okay,

10:30 I'll do it next time, yeah, fine. This one, she's nice." So anyway we did what we had to do and I remember about a week later back at Nui Dat just before we went out on another patrol, we were both standing at the piss, having a piss and he went, "Ohh." and I went, "Ohh." I said, "See, it doesn't work. It might have worked last time, it didn't work this time. The ugly ones are riddled with it." They were all riddled with it, it's terrible. So I just remember getting the

11:00 bloody shot of Crystalline Penicillin and off we'd go again. Never learn by your mistakes, I mean just kept getting it. I was, as I said, ten foot ball, ten foot tall, bullet proof and just had no sense of tomorrow. I was like a kid in a toy shop, or a bloody bull in a china shop, I just went berko, absolutely ballistic. Used to go back with a very sore back.

This sort of covers my question with contact with locals.

11:30 **Also, did you also speak to the Viet, how did you feel about the average Vietnamese person that you met while you were there?**

I quite liked them. And I've developed a real affection for them since Vietnam. But while I was there, they used to love Australians and I think you may or may not have heard this and you probably will in the future. They actually loved, they used to call us Ook-ta-loys and….

Sorry, what's that again, just for the…?

12:00 Ook-ta-loy, Ook-ta-loy. There was a song, "Ook-ta-loy, cheap Charlie, he no buy me Saigon Tea, Saigon Tea is very, very cheap, Ook-ta-loy he cheap Charlie." Cause we never, the Americans used to walk around with rolls of money and we used to walk around with, we were very, we were typical Australian, very, very stingy with money. We'd always negotiate you know like, "How much did you say, five dollars! Oh bullshit, you know, four dollars twenty." or something, you know. You'd haggle the price over

everything, doesn't matter if it was a woman or a drink or, you know,

12:30 a trinket that you'd buy in the market or something. Whereas the Americans had the mentality that if they got a roll of notes they can buy anybody or anything. And apparently talking to the local girls, because I had some what I guess you would call in those days girlfriends, I had girlfriends, Vietnamese girlfriends, that I used to always look up and if I could possibly get them for the night when I was down there, I would. And I'd always stick, after a while I'd stick, stuck to the same girls because I just, I liked them, they were, particularly one called Sandy.

13:00 She was, her father was French her mother was Vietnamese, her husband was killed during the Tet Offensive '68. She had a small child and she was trying to raise it on doing what she was doing, being a bargirl. And she was just absolutely gorgeous, for a Vietnamese she had freckles, which they don't have freckles, because she had, she was Eurasian. Beautiful face, I got a photo of her here. She was just absolutely superb and she used to sing in a bar and she had a beautiful voice.

13:30 And I used to talk to her, I used to go home with her and I actually went home and it was quite bizarre, she was living with her mother and the child. And when she bought me home, after, the first time it was just like, everybody's, the family's eyes were just down turned and let Sandy get on with the business, that wasn't her real name obviously, but let her do her business cause she was bringing a lot of money in. And they'd just ignore us, we went into a little room with a sheet hanging down, that was our privacy.

14:00 But after a while, I used to keep, my head'd obviously keep reappearing and they'd, "Oh." and we'd sit around as a family and have tea. She spoke French, Vietnamese and English, little bit of English. So I could speak to her, she'd speak to the family and I used to take, I remember I used to take down the odd cake of soap, tubes of toothpaste, toothbrushes, stuff we used to get out of ration packs and we could get at the PX [American canteen unit]. I knew she used to like Lux soap so I used to take her Lux soap. I bought

14:30 some stuff for her little son. And I remember I went shopping with her one day which was really unusual for a soldier in Vietnam to actually go, have a relation, relationship other than a bar girl relationship with a Vietnamese. But we went shopping in the local markets. And she was a bit scared about it because you know, here I was, walking along with her and she was quite short and with the little kid running around. And he was just so cute, he had a little pair of overalls on with a little flap at the back, and when he wanted to have a crap, he

15:00 used to squat down and undo the flap and pull, and pull it up and off he'd run. And we went down shopping and I bought her quite a lot of, a few, I remember on that occasion vegetables and fruit and all that for the house and I'd take her down some soap and toothpaste. So I always used to go around, when I first got to Vung Tau to see if she was there, if she was available I'd give her, I'd take a little pack and I'd give her all this stuff and say, "Oh later, later." And she'd go off and take it home, stash it somewhere and take it home. But the parents used to greet me and talking about relationship, we used to sit around and,

15:30 not have a conversation but it was like, "Oh". And I'd just you know, I'd be holding, have my hand around her, it was like, we were friends, you know, like boyfriend and girlfriend, it was just quite bizarre, it was gorgeous. But she was a lovely girl; I hate to think what happened to her but. Yeah she was quite nice, because she spoke a bit of English too, it was sort of... and a lot of the times when I'd have her for all night, we'd talk, we'd do the business and then we'd just talk most of the night. We just,

16:00 it was just lovely to talk, you know, just, a lot of it was sign language but just talk about stuff, you know. It was just fantastic, cause she was quite, she was quite sad, her husband had already been killed and she had a young family and all this sort of stuff. But she was very pretty.

How do you feel about the Vietnam people now, is there still ...?

Well quite, I went back in 1995 when I was doing security with Bill Hayden [Governor General of Australia], we went to Vietnam and we actually ended up, we flew into Saigon, went up

16:30 to Hanoi. And I've always found the Vietnamese to be an amazing race, they're very industrious, they're quite a gentle, lovely people. And yet they've got this steeliness that a lot of other Asian types haven't got. They've got an unusual strength that, that's what I think made them obviously such good soldiers, they were bloody good soldiers, particularly

17:00 NVA soldiers.

Did you respect your opposition?

Yeah, very much so, very much so. I think anybody that's ever had any contact with the Vietnamese in a war like situation would have nothing but respect for them. They're yeah, very good soldiers, very good fighters. But yeah I've, I quite like the Vietnamese, I think a lot of the problems we've got in Australia with the Vietnamese have given a lot of people that

17:30 don't know Vietnam as a country, have given us the wrong impression about Vietnamese, 'cause there's a lot of "bad" Vietnamese in Australia. But if you go to Vietnam and you see the Vietnamese in their own country, they're just quite wonderful people; particularly the northern Vietnamese are just gorgeous.

Dare I ask, you had a fiancé at the time when you went…?

Well actually I didn't get engaged until after I got out of, after I got, came back from Vietnam. I call her my fiancé because we got engaged in 1972,

18:00 I got, I finished Vietnam in '71 so.

But were you going out together before you went to…?

Oh God yeah. I was going out when I was eighteen. Oh yeah, God. And that's one thing, one reason I guess why I never talked to her about it, you know, about Vietnam. There was that side of it but and she didn't know what questions to ask me. I mean, she'd see I was disturbed about something sometimes but I knew she didn't understand and I, and I think it was just a combination of laziness and just

18:30 I was, I just was too tired to even start to explain because you can't explain one thing without giving a background. So to explain why I'm thinking about certain things in relation to Vietnam I would have had to explain a hell of a lot more, because I don't think she realised at all what I was sort of doing there. I've got some tapes from her, that I sent to her and got back from her, letter tapes, you know. But I don't think she, she or my parents or

19:00 a lot of people didn't have any idea what was going on over there, as far as we were concerned.

Just, you mentioned when we were talking before, you had some contact with Americans, U.S. SEALs [US commandos – Sea Air Land]?

Yeah, SEALs.

Can you tell us a bit about that operation?

We had an exchange program for want of a better term with the U.S. SEALs. And what they would do is send one or two, or three or four or whatever SEALs to Nui Dat to do a week or two weeks with an SAS patrol. And we used to send a patrol

19:30 down to the delta where they were operating. And we used to go out on operations with them, and that was quite interesting to see how they worked in relation to us, and vicky verka. I mean they were one of the more professional units in the American Army I think, or American Navy. Talking about land forces, they were commandos, Seal Commandos. They were very professional sort of guys but their

20:00 operations were so different from ours. They used to go in and do, they used to work on very hot intelligence and go in for two probably six hours would be a, six or eight hours would be a long operation for them. Whereas we'd go out to get intelligence and we would spend two to ten days out in the jungle. And I remember that guy in the photo, John Deacon, he came out with us and he had no idea that we stayed in, night after night

20:30 after night, behind enemy lines or in enemy lines, doing what we did. He said, they used to think we're mad because you know, he just couldn't understand the concept you know, of staying out in enemy territory for all that time. Whereas they used to literally go in and do a lot of ambushes, snatch and grabs, assassinations, and all this sort of stuff. And but they worked in intelligence, and they got intelligence from different sources, agents and all that sort of stuff, and they used to do very quick operations. So

21:00 basically, and he couldn't understand the concept of going out in the bush with a bloody big heavy pack on your back and just living out there for week, not weeks, days. And it was just the interchange of different training methods and you know, and checking out their equipment and their techniques, and giving them a chance to see how we operated. We had quite a close association which I think from memory was continued long after Vietnam with exchange programs in the States. They,

21:30 we used to do courses with the SEALs in San Diego, and they used to send SEALs on exchange with the regiment in Perth.

Can, did you ever, can you describe a particular mission, operation that you went on with the SEALs?

I remember one was an ambush on a little tributary of one of the rivers down in the delta or one of the main waterways. And they decked us out, they decked us out in Levi jeans and Levi jackets because the mosquitoes down the delta were almost bloody

22:00 fighter pilot strength. I mean they were bloody big bastards and they used to bite through, even when we were there, they used to bite through your clothes, anywhere where the clothes were tight on your skin they'd, you'd bitten. And the only thing they couldn't bite through was Levi's, ah, denim. So we used to go out there and you used to smear mud all over you and we just went, I remember this one operation was literally flew out, walked into this ambush site, literally burrowed ourselves back into the mangrove

22:30 type swamps, covered ourselves literally in mud and waited. And a junk came down and we shot it up and got extracted, got taken back out and flew out. And that was the operation and they had in, they

were acting on information that a certain person was on that junk, and we ambushed it.

Can you tell us what happened to the junk, what happened to that particular...?

Shot it up, it sank, and I think all aboard were killed, there was probably about four

23:00 people on board, they were killed.

What sort of weapons are you firing or what's battalion during this...?

Well they, well we had our own weapons but they used to have an array of weapons that most of us had never seen. They had a machine gun called the Stoner Machine System, Stoner Machine Gun. Which used to fire an unbelievable rate of rounds per minute and it had a big drum magazine. And so literally, they used to go out on operations with their jeans on or their cammies [camouflage] just, you know, not bloused up, but just pair of boots, sand shoes,

23:30 cammies, a belt with a knife, a cobar [Böker] knife and a water bottle and just a weapon, this Stoner Machine Gun. And they carried no magazines cause it carried something like two hundred and fifty rounds or something, in this belt, linked belt thing, under the gun. And literally go out and, I only did one operation with them, but some patrols did quite a few operations with them. And other ones were, I've heard guys talking about, rapelling out on the side of,

24:00 on the roof of a village hut or something. Going down, snatching, grabbing somebody, taking them out, blindfolding them, trussing them back up into the chopper and flying back, and it was a kidnap.

Did you ever get involved in any interrogation of prisoners?

No.

Did you, were there any prisoners taken when you were on patrols, when you were...?

No we didn't take any, (a) we didn't have the facilities, when you're out in the bush, we only dealt in sort of kills basically. But no, to my knowledge, and don't

24:30 again quote me, it could have well, some patrols over the five or eight years of our involvement might have taken prisoners, but I don't, I'm not sure of that, I wouldn't know, but no we certainly never took prisoners. We were never in a position to shoot pris, ah, get prisoners.

Did you ever get over towards the Cambodian border or...?

No. We weren't allowed to operate, we operated, all our operations were done in Phuoc Tuy Province, Bien Hoa Province which was the adjoining province, Binh Tuy which was

25:00 another adjoining province, Bien Hoa, Binh Tuy, Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa Province and that was literally. I know there was, sounds were made throughout the involvement in Vietnam of Australian SAS going further north across near the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone] and doing operations with the Americans. And for political reasons or other reasons that I don't know about and I wouldn't even comment on, we weren't allowed to sort of go

25:30 outside the basic area of operations of Australian Task Focer, and was in, that was based as you know in Phuoc Tuy Province. And but we did do patrols in adjoining provinces. And I know our patrol did a couple of patrols in either Binh Tuy, Bien Hoa or, what was the other one I said, Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa Province, yeah.

Can you tell us about the time you fell out of the helicopter?

Yeah that was interesting. We were getting infil'd on a patrol,

26:00 infil'd this time, and because there was no LZ to actually, for the chopper to land to let us in, we had to go down on what they called a jungle penetrator. It was about a sixty foot winch, and this jungle penetrator was on the end of a steel rope and it was literally a, it was designed to extract or insert people through heavy, canopy, heavy jungle canopy. And it was shaped like a, the front of it was shaped like a bullet, metal bullet thing and it had two fold out

26:30 seats, or three fold out seats that used to fold out. So two people could sit on, you'd sit on one seat, cross your legs over and the cable would be up there. The other guy'd sit opposite you and cross his legs over you. Anyway we were going down on this patrol on this insert and I think we were the second drop down. So they did first two, second two then one. And for some reason the brake either failed on the,

27:00 on the cable or the guy let it slip or something happened. And it dropped about ten feet then it automatically stopped on the automatic brake. But just that free falling and sudden stop, I was the one on the outside with my legs over Raz, who was on the other side. And he was sitting under me so I had him, and soon as it stopped, I had my rifle like that, whatever, round the back of him. But because of the weight on my back, it suddenly stopped and I just went tfoo, I fell off.

27:30 And there's, and I fell about probably thirty-five feet I guess. But luckily I fell on the slope and I think, at the time, I think it was an old bomb crater. But I fell on the slope and it was all fairly heavily vegetated

with grass and bushes and. that on the slope, and just fell into the bottom of the crater. Didn't damage the radio, I remember the old rifle had a fair bit of mud on it. Hurt my back,

28:00 as I later found out, years later, that I blew two discs in my back. But strangely enough the whole episode was filmed by the 2IC of the squadron, Robin Letts, he was in one of the gun ships, hovering around on the side of us. And he had an old eight-millimetre movie camera. And he was just filming an SAS infil, he was in SAS, he was ex British SAS, he won an MC [Military Cross] in Borneo. And he was just filming us going into a patrol,

28:30 and suddenly all this happened you know. Bang, pfoo, and it's all on film, I've got a copy of it upstairs. You can just see, it's very old, I've given it to the War Memorial, and they've enhanced it as much as they can, but you can actually see the thing stopping and me just going tvoo, falling, falling down, absolutely amazing. But anyway we stayed in, did the patrol, that was only probably about a three or five day patrol. And I remember my feeling; my concern was that if I go to the RAP

29:00 and complain about the back that was sore, but having said that I was quite fit at the time, they'll take me off operations and send me home basically, and I haven't finished the tour. So I didn't complain too much, I went down to Vung Tau that night, got horribly pissed, got a really good massage and just got some Dencorub, not Voltaren but old Dencorub or something and just kept rubbing that in, and I finished the whole tour, finished the time in the army.

29:30 And it only came to light about '74 after I'd got out of the army, it went out on me and I went to Repat [Repatriation] down in Sydney. And made a claim for my back, and I could see that the panel of doctors I think were all sort of quite interested. But having said that I was in a room with, and there was old guys that had been gassed in the war and you know, arms missing and all this sort of stuff, and I felt a bit of a phoney. But I told them the story and they said, "Oh that's a really interesting

30:00 story, that's a good story." And I said, "Well I can back it up I believe there might be a movie around somewhere and I can get, easily get statements off the other members of the patrol and the helicopter crew basically." And they said, "Oh, that's interesting." and they took all names and addresses and actually subpoenaed the film off Robin Letts who was then working up at Russell, subpoenaed it and got it. And then when, months later they recalled me back to Sydney and they said, "Well, we've looked at the film, you got your claim, you can't dispute that."

30:30 And they had all these statements, Affidavits from all the other patrol members. And there I was free falling through the air - crunch.

Just stop there for a sec. One of the, just going back to your relationship with the U.S. SEALs, I believed they introduced you to Cambodian Gold, can you explain what that is?

Cambodian Gold is quite a good quality

31:00 marijuana.

And what, how widespread was that being used in…?

Well I understand, well I mean, again I understand among the Americans, quite widespread. But I can vouch for the people that I worked with, no drugs were ever used in our operational areas but I experimented. Again, I was like, I was like a big kid in a toy shop and it was just available, and I was a non smoker

31:30 and I remember I smoked it probably on two or three occasions. But the first time I smoked it, because I was a non smoker it just literally make me retch and oh God it was just disgusting, I couldn't believe that people'd do this for enjoyment. But, within that period with the SEALs for about five days or six days or something, I smoked it two or three times and then never looked at it again. Came back to Australia never looked at it, never, it was all part of the Vietnam experience I think.

Would these guys

32:00 **be smoking marijuana on patrol?**

Not the SEALs but again I've heard incredible stories and I can't verify them and I wouldn't even dare but I've heard horrible stories of stuff like that being smoked on operations by the Americans. Talk to Tim Page about that, he's got some good info on that stuff.

Did the Americans have a stronger kind of culture of that in their armed forces from what you saw?

Oh most definitely, most definitely. We didn't do a lot of

32:30 work with the Yanks at all. I think the only American unit that was involved in one of the big operations that we were involved in, was the 173rd Airborne out of Bien Hoa. And that was Operation Overlord on the 6th of June, 1971 when eight Australians, or something like that, were killed in an APC that was hit by a satchel charge, and it blew open and killed the lot of 'em.

33:00 And we were in a cut off group, SAS had cut off groups. It was a battalion sweep with the aid of the Americans and they were pushing the Viet Cong out of an area that they knew they were in, in quite large numbers I think. And they were pushing them down and we were in cut off groups on tracks, on

the other side. And we heard this enormous explosion and bang, bang, bang. But we didn't actually have anything to do on a one to one basis with any American units, other than the Seals, or in my experience we didn't. A lot of guys

33:30 maybe worked with, did some stuff with 'Green Berets' [United States Special Forces] or other Special Forces, Rangers and all that but no, never worked with the rank and file. And I'm quite glad of that from what I've spoken to other people about.

Was their much association on rec. leave and stuff with the American soldiers?

No not really, no. We used to stick in our little patrol group and if we met any other guys from the regiment or if we saw some guys from 9 Squadron [RAAF] we didn't even mix with basically other Australians.

34:00 And that's not, that's not being with any air of superiority or anything, we just stuck with our own lot. I spose when you think about it, we had a short time down in Vung Tau and we weren't gonna waste it sitting around spinning war-ies with people we didn't know, basically. So we stuck together, we stuck together and did our own thing and lived for the moment and went back.

One last question about patrols before we move on from there, you mentioned you

34:30 **uncovered Viet Cong bunker networks on patrol. Can you talk a little bit about one of those?**

Well the bunkers that we uncovered, there was a couple of fairly recent ones; you could gauge that by the freshness of the dirt and the surrounding vegetation. But the majority of the bunker system or one of the bunker systems that we uncovered was, they were mainly old bunkers, quite old and unused bunkers, overgrown. And we never, we never

35:00 did anything, to my knowledge, or we certainly didn't do anything about explore, you know, used to look in bunkers, being wary all the time of booby traps, a lot of these things were possibly booby trapped, you don't know. So we'd inspect them from without, looking in and then if we deemed it necessary, would be all pin pointed and plotted on the patrol map. And then that information would go back to Task Force, and if they desired, deemed it necessary to send a battalion or some engineers in to

35:30 destroy them, they would, or even put an air strike or something in on it or knock it out. But I know certain SAS patrols got engaged heavily in active bunker systems. And a friend of mine was involved in one of those, they got caught in the middle of the bunker system, they were wrecking it. And they got caught right in the middle of it when you know, everybody started to wake up and everything and they had to sort of literally lay low in the middle of the bunker system, You know like complex in a

36:00 big scrubby bush area, throughout most of the day. And I mean that's, again I think that's in the Phantoms of the Jungle book.

Can you just describe what you see and how you come across these things cause they were very well hidden weren't they?

Yeah they were very well hidden but we'd literally be following, paralleling tracks, so you'd get an idea, indication that they were leading somewhere, and then you might come across quite a few track systems. And then they were quite well hidden but having said that, once you got quite close to them they were quite obvious.

36:30 I mean you, it's very hard to disguise, we're talking bunker systems out in the jungle as opposed to bunker systems in a village. We never did any village searches, we weren't involved in that sort of stuff, search and destroy or whatever. But the bunker systems in villages were obviously more well hidden because they were in a sort of a civilian environment and they weren't s'posed to be there. But the bunker systems out in the jay were weapons, like weapons pits

37:00 with covered log roofs, well made, definitely well made and may or may not have been attached to a tunnel system. And as I said, we never, that wasn't our brief to go in and sort of explore tunnel systems. With five men you can't afford to compromise yourself like that so we'd just pin point it on the map. And that information'd be fed back and appropriate action would be taken.

How close would you get?

Oh we'd be right

37:30 in the bunkers. We'd sort of, well you'd stand, sit off and lay low and just look at them for ages you know. If you found them you'd just sort of back off and just look and observe, you know, carry out surveillance on them for a period of hours. And then you'd move slowly in, and if you saw no movement at all, or heard no signs of activity, you'd move in and just, you know, go from one to the other and just look and see if there's any signs of recent movement or

38:00 habitation or anything like that.

Would you find things at those places?

No, not normally, they were, unlike American, old American positions they didn't leave a lot of gear

laying around. Very rarely. I think we found some old bags of rice once, that was about it, but the rice was spoiled so that was obviously why that was left there. No equipment, no weapons, I mean they used to police their areas pretty well.

What did you see of old American positions?

Oh you'd, occasionally, very occasionally,

38:30 go through areas, that Americans'd had a harbour drill or had a harbour at night where they had a position at night, or old fire def, fire support bases. We'd circle around those and some of the equipment that ours and other patrols found. I mean everything from tins of food, canteens, webbing equipment, spare M60 gun barrels, ammunition, grenades laying around. I mean just

39:00 absolutely bloody, and that'd all be used, that all be used by the other guys.

By the...?

Viet Cong, yeah.

Not by the Australian Army?

No. No. Just look at it and go oh, can't believe it. But you know, we didn't have many instances of that. But I've heard a lot of stories of patrols and battalions, Australian battalions doing sweeps through areas that Americans had worked in. And finding the most unbelievable amount of gear just laying around, just

39:30 discarded. We used to have a principal right throughout the Australian Army of bash, burn, bury. You know, bash your tins and all that and burn them and then bury them. But we used to bash, not burn and not bury, we used to bash and take it out in our pack. But battalions, because basically they used to go through a lot more food and stuff than we did, they used to bash, burn and bury. So we used to, they used to police their old harbour drill, harbour areas up quite well. But Americans apparently were

40:00 quite slack on their ability to clean their area up.

Just stop there...

Tape 9

00:37 I can't, I can't...

We'll move on from the NVA. During 1971 as I think you mentioned before, the action in Phuoc Tuy Province was not as hot as used to be.

It was de-escalating, it was winding down.

Yeah. That sense of de-escalation, was that really obvious amongst the Australian troops there?

Well it wasn't to me because it was my first tour, but it certainly was to certain members of

01:00 our squadron at least, that had served in 2 Squadron's previous tour in Vietnam 1968. And they were there during Tet, I think they were there during Tet or at least after Tet. And they were continually telling us, oh you know, this is a doddle, this is a walk in the park sort of thing, you know, there's nothing happening. As opposed to their first tour when it was really hot, and I mean that was, that's when it was really bloody full on. So, when I'm talking about my experiences in Vietnam

01:30 I feel a bit of a, not a phoney but I know what I saw and I know what I went through. But in, by contrast to other people that have served in Vietnam in SAS and other units and they served, you know, they saw a lot more stuff. I mean if you talk to guys from Long Tan or Coral/Balmoral, you know, some of those big actions, yeah.

What news and rumours were you hearing from Australia about when the troops would be going home?

I think the first, the first

02:00 indication that we got that we might be, might not be finishing our tour, our tour was due to finish in February 1972, to do the full twelve months tour. The first indication that we got that we may well be pulled out early was probably around August I think, August, it was in the wet season. And I think it was either something in the paper that we used to, we used to get the army newspaper.

02:30 I can't remember getting any Australian paper, we used to get the army newspaper and we used to get the Australian, the Australians had a radio station there. And there was the news of Australia was read out you know, twice or three times a day or something. And it was said, you know, "Battalions being pulled out, not being replaced, units are rotating back to Australia and won't be replaced." but they didn't give any information because obviously the Vietnamese were listening to the same radio. So they

weren't, but they were just saying you

03:00 know, "We're gradually phasing a withdrawal out." or something. So, but the indication that we were going home I think it was probably, we were told that we were actually rotating and not finishing our tour, probably be somewhere about September, and we're pulled out I think October.

How did those rumours in that period where it was sort of, not sure what was happening, how'd those rumours affect the men?

Well some were ex, some were quite excited to be going, and again, I was somewhat of an entity I think,

03:30 strange. I was a bit pissed off that we weren't finishing the tour. I wanted to do the three, the full tour and I actually remember them asking around, and I was a very junior member of the regiment in those days. I mean, even though I'd been in Vietnam in the regiment and done a lot of patrols, I was still a novice in relation to the experience, the bank of experience that was around. And I remember they were asking

04:00 people to, selected people to stay on and do training roles. If they could stay on and do training roles with the South Vietnamese, after the, during the gradual phase out. And I put my name down for that and because I, and obviously because I was only a trooper, I was only, it was my first tour, I wasn't, I didn't have a wealth of experience, particularly in the training field. I said, they said, "No, no, you're going home, you're going home." So, yeah, I don't know how many, who or how

04:30 many stayed on if any, but I don't think many did.

The rhetoric in America and probably in Australia well, was not so much, losing the war but Vietnamizing it. Did you buy that at the time or did you feel like you were being withdrawn from a losing battle?

Don't worry, Judy's taping something.

That's alright.

Again, I mean, our, I think and I think I can speak

05:00 for a lot of the people that I served with, we were quite naive and quite unpolitical about our views about Vietnam. As to why we were there, how we were going, we knew we were doing a good job, personally. We knew the Australians were doing a good job, we'd heard it, we looked at statistics we had briefings and all this sort of stuff. So as for the concept of Vietnamization of the war, and pulling out and losing the war, winning the battles but losing

05:30 the war, we were frustrated by more direct things like we wanted to do patrols in Cambodia. I know they want, a lot, you know, a lot of the people felt we should be doing more patrols in Cambodia. We should be allowed to do patrols out of Phuoc Tuy and further north. We were frustrated by reports that we had of American bombing missions being sort of, not cancelled but scaled down and not being allowed to, to basically

06:00 make North Vietnam into a car park and, you know, that's a very basic thing. But you know, really, I mean, obviously if America had of been let off the leash and just said right, just flatten North Vietnam and win the war. I mean this is all bullshit, I mean they had the technology and the firepower to win the war. But there was a lot of political things and now I'm reading more about it all the time. I mean there was a lot of political reasons, there was a lot of behind the scenes reasons, the

06:30 bigger picture stuff, as to why that was never allowed to happen. But on our level I mean, we never, well I never thought personally and blokes didn't discuss it. They just said, "Oh, we're going home, we're going home." you know, so, we'll go somewhere else. But little did they know it was years before SAS would be deployed in another conflict situation.

We'll stay on that level then about what you were feeling at the time. Was it a sense of pride or respect for you to finish your tour, how important was that to you

07:00 **at the time?**

Oh it was just, first off you had to do six months to get the second ribbon, the green and white one. So you felt very cheated if you didn't get that. If you, you had to get, to get the first ribbon you had to be there twenty-eight days on the strength of the posted unit, on the posted strength of the unit. And to get the second ribbon, which was the Vietnam ribbon, you had to be there for six months, on the strength, posted strength of the unit. So we all got our second ribbons, and we did

07:30 what'd I say, nine months or something. I think we all wanted to just do the tour, cause I still felt, I still felt able to continue doing my job, although the tenseness and stress and tension was getting to us all, I know it must have been. We still wanted to complete, we went up there for a full tour and that's what we all wanted to do. I'm sure, I guess a lot of guys

08:00 were just quite happy that they were going home but I think most of us just wanted to do the tour. And there's since been studies done, a lot of studies done about SAS in Vietnam. And they've decided that a twelve-month tour doing operations like we were doing them, back-to-back patrols, was far too long for SAS type operations, because there was no respite, no rest. Not like battalions, they were pulled out

after a, you know, they might do a month or so operations, but during that month they were,

08:30 they were allowed to, you know, sort of have a little bit of down time and then they were pulled out as a company or a platoon or whatever and then the rest of em were sent back in. I'm not saying that they didn't do it, they did it bloody incredibly hard, but the tension involved in SAS patrolling was a very high level of tension. And that was highlighted a lot of the times, and we used to laugh about this. The level of tension would be

09:00 described as, when you first, in the first three months, you know, somebody'd say, "G'day Barney, how you going?" And you'd say, "Oh great mate, terrific." Second six, six months you'd say, "G'day Barney, how you going?" "Oh yeah, not too bad." Nine months, "G'day Barney, how you going?" "Oh, alright, bloody terrible, you know." And on the last, we never got to that stage, but on the last of the twelve month period, "G'day mate, how you going?" And they'd go whack, "Who's asking?" You know, and the tension was, I know the tense, people were getting short with each other. I remember

09:30 I had a, I had a really, really ding dong, boots and all fight with my best mate in the tent that I shared with for the whole tour, all over a can of tinned oysters. Mum sent me some tinned oysters from Australia, those tinned oysters. I love tin, the smell, just love, and he actually hated the smell and I knew he hated the smell. So I deliberately waited one night til after dinner, you know, after what we call dinner, which was crap. And we went back to our tent and took a couple of beers with us.

10:00 And he was writing letters I remember, and I deliberately opened this tin of oysters and the smell if you know what I'm, you know those tinned oysters, have quite a strong distinct smell. And I just sat there and just, whoo, blew it across. I was just trying to fucking arc him up basically. And he did, he just went ballistic, and we had to be separated, we had to be pulled apart like a couple of school kids. We were just going at each other's throats. And just little things like, little things that didn't upset me or even affect me in the

10:30 first six months, I could tell were starting to get to me. Things like, if he was reading something, you could be talking to him and say, "Hey Bill, what do you think about this?" And he'd be just like, there, and he wouldn't answer. It was like he was totally focused on what he was reading. Whereas I've got, this weird ability, if I'm reading, even something really interesting and somebody asks me something, I just, "Yeah, no worries." I can listen and, whereas he was focus, and it used to really piss me off. But it didn't worry me until towards the end of the

11:00 tour, and then one day I just fucking jumped on him. You know, I just said, "For fuck's sake!" you know and just stupid things like that. I mean we're good mates and we always have been but that was obviously as a result of tension, I mean you just don't realise. You know, you, we started to drink more, I started to drink more. I was just drinking straight bourbon you know, didn't bother about the Coke, just guzzle the bottle. I mean, and I was twenty-one. I was, fuck, I was, you know, I, when I came back from Vietnam

11:30 I was just over nine stone, I'd had malaria in New Guinea, I had almost dysentery in Vietnam, I had some blood disorder that they've never ever sorted out and I was just over nine stone. And when I got back to Australia I was just a thin, yellow looking wreck, and that was after nine months. So if I had of done twelve months, and I still could have done it, we all would have done it, I mean it's just pride in the unit and pride in what you're doing and bit of

12:00 esprit de corps and probably misguided pride but we would have continued on but we were, it would have certainly taken it's toll, I mean we were sick, sick boys.

When you got the news that you were gonna be rotated out, did you have to go back on patrol after that?

Yeah, oh God yeah, oh yeah, I probably did three or four patrols after that.

And what were those patrols like?

Well one was quite bad, I got, on one patrol I remember I was, again, third in the patrol. I used to forward scout sometimes, I

12:30 used to sort of double in as forward scout. But on this patrol I was sig and the patrol, we were in a fairly hot area, we'd heard signal shots so we knew they were around somewhere and our job was to try and find them. But the first two members of the patrol stepped over this fallen log. And I went to step over it, I did step over it, and out of, and the bloke behind me later told me after I'd woken up out of my coma, out of the hole in the ground under this log came this swarm of

13:00 wasps. And they just all just descended on my head, apparently, head and arms, head and arms, cause we used to wear gloves, camouflage gloves. Everything except, even your face was all camouflaged so there was no white skin. Even your eyelids you used to colour, paint your eyelids. And but all these things came, he said it was just absolutely fucking freaky, they came out of the ground, whoo and tdoo, all went over my head and my whole head was covered with wasps. And they just continually

13:30 bit me and I was just, I was screaming out, I mean I's, even then I was trying to be tactical, by not screaming but I couldn't, the pain was just amazing. Everybody in the patrol, stopped, looked around, grabbed me, ripped my pack off and they were actually batting these bloody wasps, getting handfuls

and pulling them off my head. And he said it was really weird, not one other member of the patrol got one bite. And they were grabbing handfuls of wasps, pulling them off and they were going zzz, tsgch, back on

14:00 again. Wasps apparently can bite repeatedly, unlike bees. And they were, they were literally had handfuls of wasps, not one other person got one bite. And I was, and I literally just, literally was in a, went to a state of unconsciousness coma-ey type situation I guess. They pumped me full of antihistamines. And they found, we found a big patch of bamboo and the other guy in the patrol, everybody in the patrol was double skilled at least, double or triple skilled with patrol skills.

14:30 Like sig, medic, everybody was a medic, we at least had two other members in the patrol that could do morse. But the other guy Bill, who I did the morse course with, he used to freeze up on the morse key, he could send it but he couldn't receive it, and when it started to come back in he used to, he couldn't, freeze it. So all he sent out, all he could do was send out a message that, "Sig stung by wasps, unconscious, can't exfil,

15:00 nowhere near an LZ." We couldn't get to him cause I was out to it, so I was out to it for over sixteen hours. Dead, I was in a coma and pumped full of these antihistamines and basically they just all sat around and looked after me, and I was just buggered. And that was on one of the last three or four patrols before we got pulled out. And when I came, apparently my head swelled up like a bloody football, couldn't see you know, everything was just bloody... But it was just really eerie that nobody else got bitten and they just didn't

15:30 like me for some reason.

Where did you come to, where were you when you came...?

In this pile of bamboo, finally, just groggily woke up and basically they made me, I remember having a great brew of tea. And Raz or the patrol commander said, "Mate, big ask but can you get on the morse set and send em, we need to get you out, we need to get out basically but send a morse because poor old Bill's frozen up on the key. He can't take it, can't receive

16:00 it." So I had to send and I was, you know, try this bloody little ear thing in and my head's thumping like you wouldn't believe, somebody cleaved it open with a meat axe. I'm trying to listen to morse and anyway I got the grid reference for a LZ and the time and that's all they wanted so, we made our way there and we got out. And they chucked me down to the RAP down at Nui Dat and pumped me full or antihistamines and monitored me for a day and I was back up the Hill with a hell of a headache. But that was a scare, I think I've actually had nightmares about that too cause that was quite, luckily I didn't

16:30 see them coming out of the ground or I would have freaked. But apparently he said it was like, it was just quite unusual, they come in a big swarm like a big squadron, they zzzz. And it was just me, nobody else, out of five people, they hated me.

Did you feel like you might have pushed your luck too far after you'd heard you were gonna be going home, you're still out on patrol, you're being attacked by bees, or wasps?

Oh well you had to be, you were just doing what you did. I mean you know, they, I was in a patrol that was still doing operations.

17:00 And the last patrol in Vietnam for all patrols was always called the 'Champagne Patrol'. And you sort of knew, we knew the time, what date we were going home. And our patrol was going to finish literally a day before we were due to go home on the tenth of Aug, tenth of October or something. And it was with a sergeant, it was a ten man patrol with a sergeant called Danny Wright, I remember. And it was a Champagne Patrol, and by that I mean after, when you got pulled out you were back at Nui Dat, after, got off the chopper and everybody come down

17:30 with pegs on their noses basically, and everybody in the patrol'd be given champagne to drink. And I've got a classic photo somewhere of Danny Wright bloody drinking out of this bottle of French champagne, you know, with just the aluminium wrapper on it and all this, just drinking, and that was our Champagne Patrol. But no you just did, I mean there was still patrols to do. It's, I know what you're getting at, I mean it's like air crew, that, you know, were flying missions over Europe or something, knowing that they were going home within the last, in the

18:00 next few days or due to rotate, and they'd be just freaky, just freeze up you know, just sort of. But you know, just, I still wanted to be there, I just, you know I wasn't the best soldier in the world I can assure you, I was probably the bane of the 2IC's life. He'd done a trip to Borneo and a trip to Vietnam, or two trips to Vietnam. One in the battalion, one in the regiment and he was a really good soldier, Ian Rasmussen. And I think he, I was just, you know, I was just the

18:30 bane of his life, just, he didn't think I was a good soldier, and I probably wasn't. I must have been pretty good to be in SAS but as far as SAS standards go I probably wasn't all the best. But he and I, you know, were quite good friends out of, off patrol, but while we were on patrol he used to be on my case like you wouldn't believe, all sign language and whispering but I got the message. Yeah, I'd just do things that he didn't think were quite right but yeah, I wanted to be there, I wanted to continue on.

19:00 I still thought there was stuff to do and I still wanted to be involved in more stuff, you know, quite weirdly, I just wanted to be involved in more stuff.

What happened after the Champagne Patrol for you?

Oh literally we were out within the day and we, we'd already packed all our gear up, all our stereos that we'd bought and cameras and literally burned most of our greens. Had our big kit bag packed, trunk packed. Literally

19:30 threw into the trunk, cleaned it up, had to clean all the mud and s'posed to clean all the mud and stuff off your webbing. Threw it into the trunk, sealed it up, throw it on a big pile of trunks. And I remember the last night, Bill and I, we didn't go down to Vung Tau that night, obviously cause we knew we were going, leaving the next day, flying to Saigon. And I remember Bill and I sitting up, drinking, we didn't sleep at all that night, we were just sitting up, drinking beer in the tent. And you weren't really allowed to drink alcohol in the lines but we did.

20:00 Drinking beer in the tent and just talking about you know, what are we going to be doing now, what's our life gonna be like. I'm gonna buy a sports car, and he's gonna getting married. Or he'd got, just got married before he got home and he's gonna have kids. And we were just talking about, I remember we were like two excited school kids just laying in our bunks talking all night, and then woke up the next morning and bleary eyed and bloody you know, put our polyesters on and got on the Fat Rat down to Saigon. Jumped on the bloody, we came home, I came home on a

20:30 Pan Am 707 flight of American R&R guys, there was about fifteen SAS guys went to Sydney and all the rest of the plane was Americans. And this is a classic story; we all had big bottles of Bacardi, Bacardi and Southern Comfort were the drinks in those days or bourbon. Anyway I had a big, and I've only just gotten rid of it actually, it was a big two litre bottle of Bacardi. Anyway we got on the plane and it had American air hostesses on it and we were just absolutely, called em round eyes. You know,

21:00 round eye girls they were just gorgeous, you know, and we were a bit of a novelty, we were Australians, we had our SAS stuff on you know. And the Yanks just knew who, we had a sort of a really good reputation amongst the Americans that knew. Anyway we were just a bit of a novelty, anyway we were all sitting together and it was just the most happy flight that I think I've ever been on. Anyway we're sitting up, we got horribly pissed before the plane got to Singapore, all the Duty Free booze that we'd drunk had gone. Then between Singapore and Darwin we drank all the booze that was available on the plane,

21:30 little all the little miniature bottles and all the beer. And then somebody said, "But we're got about six hours to go God damn it." This is Yanks, you know. And some idiot came up, and we all had Mikimoto Pearls that we'd bought for our wives, girlfriends, or whatever. And I remember Chanel No.5 which was the perfume of the day in those days, French perfume, God. Anyway some Yank or some Aussie I don't know who it was, yelled out, "Hey this God damn Chanel No.5 has got alcohol

22:00 base." Coke, Coke, cause everybody, so everybody ripped out their bloody Chanel No.5 bottles and the hostesses were just absolutely stunned. And we spent the last two or three hours on the plane drinking Chanel No.5 perfume, putting perfume in glasses with Coca Cola and flicking Mikimoto Pearls, like we were taking, just had all this stuff for our you know, mothers and all that. Pulled the clasp off the end and just went phew and flying,

22:30 bloody Mik, and apparently the hostesses when we eventually all finally staggered off, they went berko running round picking up Mikimoto Pearls, the whole plane was full of em. There was just all these pearls and we all got off, I remember belching and burping in the customs guys face, cause he said, "Whadya got in the bag?" Cause I had a big duffel bag. And I had all my fighting knives, knives that I got off Yanks, cobars [Bökers] and all this. Half of em were still muddy and he said, "You know the story, you know about weapons, you got no weapons in there?". And I had a couple of pistols in Vietnam, which I ended up throwing down the toilet; I should have brought back cause

23:00 they didn't search me. But I had a couple of really good pistols I got off Americans. But we were told under the threat of death; don't take any weapons back, pistols or anything. Anyway I had all my knives which was sort of half legal cause they were part of my training, like I needed them for what I was doing, but pistols were out. Anyway I said, "Oh no, nothing there's just some..." "Got any pornography?" "No, no pornography." "Whadya got there?" and he opened it up and I said, "Oh fuck." and I burped on him and it's just this perfect Chanel 5 burp. And he went,

23:30 "Fuck, what did you guys, what have you guys been drinking?" Anyway he looked at it and the first thing he saw was one of my cobars [Bökers] that I bought back. And it, he pulled it out, he pulled the knife out of the scabbard and it was just covered in mud, and it was the one I used on patrol and it still had mud, Vietnamese dirt and mud and crap on it. And he went, put it in, zipped it shut and said, "Don't say anything to the supervisor, fucking go." you know. I just went, "Oh thanks mate." and I staggered out. And we got greeted back in Australia by rent-

24:00 a-crowd, shit heads throwing abuse and bloody crap at us. Cause they knew when all the R&R flights were coming into Australia and they have their rent-a-crowd out there to welcome them, you know, with abuse, anti-Vietnam protesters. So that was our, that was my welcome back. My mum and dad and my sister were there to greet me but they didn't recognise me cause I was (a) pissed, (b) very skinny, skinnier than when I last saw them and looking very yellow and sick basically,

24:30 in more ways than one. That's my phone I think, I'll just take it off, taken it off the hook, the battery's probably, that main phone there.

Oh right, do you wanna, Rob will just do that while...

Yeah. And I actually walk, and I didn't recognise them cause I was a bit bleary eyed and I'd actually walked past mum before I realised, and I looked out and all I could see was this big line of demonstrators. And I just looked at them and I went, you know, gave em the big thumbs up. And went back trying to find mum and dad and they was just looking

25:00 around, and they saw me and mum just burst into tears, cause she just couldn't believe how fucking, how terrible I looked. I looked, I was tragic, this is about one o'clock in the morning, Sydney time. And I looked a real mess and I was. But I remember getting greeted with abuse and smelling, my faeces and breath smelled of Chanel No.5 for quite a few days after that. And when I told Caroline and mum, "Mum, I bought you all this

25:30 perfume, do you wanna smell it, bleagh." God, couldn't believe it. Absolutely tragic. Anyway I, I went back home and they'd sort of planned to have a welcome home party for me in the next few days. And I didn't, I remember going back in the car, driving, we were living in Dundas, and we drove home. And the whole way from Mascot to Dundas, that's a fair drive, and they said, I remember the questions were like, "What was it like?" "Oh, not bad." And I was really non-committal, I didn't want

26:00 to talk to them about it, I just, I was in my own world basically. Caroline was really sort of like freaked, she was there too sorry, Caroline was there too. And she was sort of freaked, here was this person she didn't know sitting in the car next to her. I was drunk for a start but I mean that was, all that aside, I was just, I'd obviously withdrawn into myself. I was just, one minute you're in the jungle, next minute you're getting eggs thrown at you, next minute you're sitting in a car with your girlfriend, it's all a bit, that's all within a ten hour period, twelve hour period. It's a bit hard to sort of

26:30 get your mind around it. And within about five days I think I left home, just said to mum, "I'm going back to Perth." "But you can't, you can't, we're having all the rellies around." I said, "No mum I won't be here, I'm just going, sorry, I hate to be, sorry, I just gotta go." Had a rail warrant to get back to Perth after my leave, I had about four weeks leave. So I went back to Perth and spent it all in Perth, spent all my leave in Perth. And I thought I'll be the only one, I'll be laying around the barracks with nobody

27:00 there, and in ones and twos over the next two or three weeks they all started to come back. They, and most of the guys just couldn't adapt, they couldn't adjust back to civilian life. And they just wanted to be back with their mates, go down to the Swanny and the OBH Hotel [Ocean Beach Hotel] and just get pissed, and just you know, just talk it out with us. Because what has since been found out is that most World War II veterans came back by ship, they came back in the unit that they went over with so they had a good chance to de-brief

27:30 themselves and each other and get pissed and talk about. Whereas we were, one day I was on patrol, next day I was on a Pan Am flight to Australia, next day I was back in Sydney. You know, with flush toilets and hot showers and people saying, "What was it like son, what was it like?" Couldn't get my mind around it. So, pheow. And that's why I think, and no welcome back in parades and all this sort of stuff, by and large. And we were welcomed back with abuse.

28:00 So, that, to me that was the hard part about Vietnam, and I've never gotten over that. That was difficult, for a twenty-one year old that thought he'd been doing a good job you know.

How did you de-brief if you like?

There was no debrief at all.

Informally, amongst yourselves in Perth?

Oh we just talked about it, just talked funny things. Never any contacts, it was really weird, the only de-brief I ever had about a serious situation was

28:30 literally with Joe Flannery about that contact, that ambush. Everything else was all about fun times, you know, "What are you gonna do when you get back to Australia? What are you gonna do, you know, let's get out and let's have a root and let's do this and let's get pissed." and you know. It was all sort of, and that was obviously our way of just sort of putting it into a compartment in our brain and getting on with life. And it was even worse, and because we didn't have any formal debriefs back in Australia. Literally I got back

29:00 when my leave had finished, I looked up the duty roster sort of thing and I was on a course, I did a course as soon as I got back, I came over to Balcombe and did a photography course. And literally within a week after my leave had finished, after Vietnam, I was still fresh from Vietnam, I was still sick, I was still skinny, I was still mind was all over the place, and I was doing a course on cameras at Balcombe. There was no formal you know, as individually, either individually or as a patrol, or as a

29:30 unit, we were never taken into a room and sort of talked to about it and how you should feel, none of that. Actually none of that happened, none of it at all. So there was no de-briefs, whether formal, informal or whatever, it was all just get on the piss and get on with it.

Did you get on with it, you had to be in the army for another two years?

Yeah I did actually. I got out, I had another two years to go and, or nearly two years to go, and we did get on with it. I had a, I bought an MGB, I bought my MGB, and

30:00 the guy that ended up being our scout for the last part of the tour, he and I, they changed the rules in the army while we were away, and prior to Vietnam we had to live on the barracks, live on camp, in camp. When we came back they'd slackened that off so if you wanted to live off camp they paid you an allowance for food and you could rent accommodation in Perth somewhere. So he and I decided, bugger this, we're returned war heroes, we're gonna go and get a flat, so we got a flat down at Mosman Park,

30:30 right on the beach in Perth. And I had me MGB and we led the life of Riley, and I was posted from 1 Squadron to this squadron, training squadron to 1 Squadron to base squadron. Ended up back in training squadron cause they disbanded 2 Squadron when we came back from Vietnam. Change in policy, government policy, I think Labor was in, they just you know, didn't see the reason to spend a lot of money on defence. And so I got on with it, I did

31:00 courses, did a Pioneer Scout Demolition Course, did a Photography Course, did an Unarmed Combat Course, did an Instructors' Course, just worked, had a lot of fun. Got horribly pissed every bloody, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, I mean you know, just terrible. And I guess that was our way of coping with it. We used to just go down to the pub and we were amongst friends because the SAS almost owned two pubs in Viet, in Swanbourne, or in Perth. One was the

31:30 Ocean Beach Hotel at Ocean Beach, the other was the Swanny Hotel at Swanbourne. And literally, they were SAS pubs. You know, if there was ever any trouble in those pubs, the Manager would just look at us in a group and he'd just go, "Get em out." And we'd just get em out, you know, you don't, nobody, but nobody caused trouble in our pub and so they were, they had free bodyguards, free bouncers.

Except the SAS blokes themselves.

Oh yeah they allowed us latitude, you know, we used to let off the odd smoke grenade or bloody do the odd para-roll off the

32:00 bar and get horribly pissed, and do animal things all over the place but they allowed that to happen because they just loved us. I mean we'd been patronising them ever since SAS was in Swanbourne, since 1957, so.

What happened when you left the army, how did you adapt to not being a soldier anymore?

Well I had a choice to re-enlist and I could have actually re-enlisted and stayed on. And at that stage they were doing

32:30 a lot of exchange programs with the Brits and the American SEALs, the Brit Commandos and SAS and SEALs. And I had a chance that if I signed on doing a HALO [High Altitude – Low Opening] course, parachute course with the American SEALs. But having said that, there was my love Caroline was waiting and I'd signed for six and I knew I was out and I actually couldn't see myself being married in the army and particularly in the regiment. So I literally stayed out, I made plans

33:00 to get out and talked to dad about it on one of my leaves before I got out and he suggested the ACT [Australian Capital Territory] Police. So I made application for that, flown across to Perth, ah, to Sydney, did the interviews and came back out. And as I said, joined after, got out in May, joined in July and got married the day, two days before I joined the police.

How was your relationship with Caroline? It doesn't sound like your lifestyle had a lot of room in it for women?

No, not really it was a real,

33:30 it was a sea change in lifestyles I can assure you being a single, footloose and fiancé-free sort of young soldier, living the life of Riley in Perth. I mean absolutely just, it was just a good lifestyle, but I mean it was one that would quickly burn you out, to suddenly putting on another cap and being a responsible adult, you know, marrying. And but I should have, now on reflection, everybody

34:00 said you're too young to marry, you need to sort yourself out and all this sort of stuff. But I couldn't see, I couldn't understand putting her in a glass, or having her on ice waiting for me to get my life together. So it was either cut her loose and you know, and in my mind in those days and she still is, probably the most wonderful person I've ever met, she's just gorgeous. I couldn't understand, I didn't want to lose that sense of stability because I could

34:30 see, even though I was enjoying and having the life of Riley in Perth in the regiment, and there was no doubt I probably would have stayed in the regiment. I could see that even, even in my young and tender years, I could see that this lifestyle would burn me out and kill me. So I decided, I made the decision to take discharge and get out and join the police and start another life, which I did.

Were you able to start another life?

Well it was quite successful for a while and then,

35:00 and then all went sort of pear shaped. I still had lots of women I needed to have relationships with and it sort of, I couldn't settle down. I don't think I was wired for a relationship but I didn't know that at the time, I had to try it so. The marriage lasted for about eight and a half years, nine years and then it just finished.

How much was that inability to settle down with one woman a symptom of some greater inability to, instability in your life?

I don't know,

35:30 I mean, bear in mind that as I said, I didn't have a lot of time, I didn't have any opportunity at all for having any sort of flings or relationships when I was a school kid. Because of you know, reasons I've already stated. And then I was suddenly let off the leash when I joined the army, and then I'd been exposed to the bigger world. Caroline had remained at home, lived with her parents and got a job in Sydney so she hadn't lived at any, at all basically. She hadn't had relationships with

36:00 anybody else. And I was, I had had a taste of another life, and I now know that the sensible thing for me to have done was to either stayed in the army, or gotten out, travelled around the world. A couple of our guys took up mercenary jobs in Rhodesia and a friend of mine that I was in Vietnam with, what was his name, Mason,

36:30 Paul Mason, Clive Mason, he went to Rhodesian SAS Selous Scouts in Rhodesia and got killed on a bridge raid in Mozambique in 1975. So, and a couple of other guys went to Rhodesian SAS, so I think on reflection, if I had my time again I, with nothing, no deference to Caroline, I would have chosen the other path because I think I needed to get certain things out of my

37:00 system before I settled down to marry. I settled down to marry too early, I was twenty-three in years but you know, I was like, as I said, I had a lot of living to do. I didn't have a childhood as they, as you used to say, we didn't have a childhood, we had Vietnam. So I had a lot of catching up to do and it's very hard to catch up when you're married, and trying to do the right thing and it just, that underlying suppression and tension just finally busted us up I think.

You walked off the plane in Sydney to literal

37:30 **abuse, did that come up again when…?**

I just remember, if you've ever seen the movie, Odd Angry Shot, with Graham Kennedy, he and a mate turn up at the Watson's Bay Hotel and they've got their uniforms on. And the barman says, words to the, he just saw the ribbons and he said words to the effect of, "You just got back did you fellas?" He said, "Yeah mate, couple of beers thanks." And that was it.

38:00 And people didn't want to know base, and what I'm saying is people didn't want to know, even the people over the, next door at Dundas when I came back on those three or four days I was back home. They said, "Oh you're back, you're back." you know, "What was it like?" and then suddenly they'd launch into things like, "Oh'd you hear Parramatta won the League final?" and all this. And I just couldn't give a fucking toss about Parramatta winning the final. I just wasn't interested in anything that, they were talking at a different, in a different language basically, and I, and they didn't want to know. I remember going

38:30 across to a family reunion with Caroline's in-laws, friends, relatives, parents and all this. And I remember one aunt of hers or something asking me, "Oh welcome back Don, it must be, must have been really terrible, what was it like?" And I was just about to give a very short explanation of what it was like and then she was off saying, "Oh have you heard Jenny's having a new baby?" Fttt, I just said to Caroline, "I'm going, pick me up, I'll be down the road somewhere." You know, "I've had enough of this shit." You know, I couldn't,

39:00 people just didn't, obviously just didn't want to know or they paid lip service, "Oh how was it, you alright?" and then they'd launch off into something else. "Have you heard about the specials at Woolies [Woolworths Supermarket]?" I mean, please, I couldn't be bothered. You know it was like coming back into an existence that I had nothing, no bearing, no, I wasn't in touch with it, it was just weird. And I've since talked to other guys and they've had similar, probably not the same but similar experiences. People didn't want to know, they didn't care, couldn't care less about what we

39:30 went through.

Have to stop there cause the tape's run out.

Tape 10

00:30 **We've moved out of Vietnam a little bit but I'd just like to go back and pick up on that, perhaps some of that detail of the psychological operations that you engaged in with the Vietnamese and then the burying of the Vietnamese. Can you just tell us about what you did**

with the bodies of the Vietnamese, the VC?

Well if we had time and very, often after contacts and I'm not just talking about my experiences but after patrol contact, basically was a frantic thing of running down to the track, searching, quickly

01:00 searching the bodies, making sure they were dead and if necessary putting wounded out of their misery, be, you know, we weren't there to torture people. And grabbing whatever documents or weapons that we could grab and getting out of there basically. But if we had time and I don't, I can't remember us doing it, but I know that it was a practice that, and I might have this wrong, but it was either the majority of Vietnamese were Buddhists, were, they were Buddhists,

01:30 were Buddhists, and I think Buddhists have to be buried on their backs so that their spirits can soar to heaven. And it was a quick psychological thing that we just, the bodies were rolled over onto their stomach, so that when they were found later on by Vietnamese, by their colleagues basically, they would be buried, they would be laying on their, not buried but laying on their stomach, which means that their spirit could not escape and go to heaven, and they'd be roaming aimlessly in the ground. And they, and I

02:00 heard that they were very loathe to actually touch the body after that so therefore they could never even turn it over and bury it properly, because it was a bad spirit. Because, and that was a very small psychological thing, again, if you had time. And I think it was a practice with a lot of Vietnamese killed by either Americans or Australians or whatever, it was a well known thing that they would be turned over, and I think I've got it right, put on their stomachs and not their backs, so that they, their

02:30 spirits would wander aimlessly. And also we used to leave, again if we had time, and we didn't actually do it, but that sign that said, "This person has been killed by Australian forces. We suggest you choi han or Chieu Hoi." which means give yourself up to the Allied cause, "Otherwise you, the same could happen to you." basically, that, loose translation, the same could happen to you. And it was a sign of, one side had a skull on it and the other side had a vulture.

03:00 That, you just place it on the body somewhere and they'd find that and just freak. It was just to, playing on their, sounds all very violent and terrible these days, but I mean things happen in war that stay there but I mean that was one of the things, a quick psychological thing that we did. And the Americans were also into heavy other psychological things like broadcasting at night over speakers on planes and dropping leaflets and all that sort of stuff.

03:30 **You mentioned about putting people out of their misery, did that occur with wounded...?**

I guess it did, I mean prisoners were never taken to my memory and to my knowledge; we personally never took any prisoners, SAS. I don't know about battalions, battalions obviously did take prisoners or they took people in for questioning. We didn't have the facilities or the people to do that. And they would have been wounded anyway so they were then put them out of their misery. We didn't have to but it was, I understand that was done,

04:00 you know, put out of their misery, because our aim was not to leave them in agony. I mean you know, but war's war and war's terrible and people are killed but you don't, no, you don't sort of, prolong their agony.

No, it's not a game is it?

No, it's not a game.

We will come out of Vietnam, I'm sure there's, we could spend quite a bit more time on a lot of the details but,

04:30 **I'd like to go on and perhaps you could tell us about your experiences having, you know, that led you to go to Timor and with the peacekeeping. I know we're glossing over a large slab of your career but I don't think that's particularly relevant to how you were involved with the peacekeeping operations in Timor around the time of the elections. Can you lead us up into that and how you got involved in that and what happened?**

Well again I've been quite fortunate for want of a better word,

05:00 that I've actually served in a war as a combatant and also served in war zones as a peacekeeper. I retired after, out of the AFP after twenty-five years in the police force and I'd just come back from touring around Europe. And I received a phone call from a guy fairly high up in the AFP asking if I was willing to come back into the police force to go back to Timor, go to Timor, they were sending a contingent up in the UN [United Nations] to East Timor.

05:30 This was in about April, or, yeah, this was in April 1998, 1999. And I, as I said, I was out of the police force then. And I said, "Yeah, I will come back." And at that stage it was quite unusual because that'd never happened before that somebody that had retired was brought back in as a sworn police officer. So I was given back my old badge number. I retired in July '98 so I was back in April '99.

06:00 I was then given the task of organising a training package for the first contingent to go to East Timor, which I duly did with a colleague of mine. And we set up a training package of two weeks and we were due to be deployed in Timor in about June I think, '99. There was fifty of us, fifty Australian Federal Police and in Timor we were then joined New Zealand Police and police from about twenty-three other

nations. We

06:30 landed in, I was on one of the first, the first lift to Dili, after, out of Darwin. And we landed in Dili to a bevy of cameras and photographers and press people, cause it was a big deal leading up to the election. Bizarrely we went through Indonesian Customs at the airport; heaven knows what they thought we were bringing into the country. Made a big point of actually going through our bags

07:00 and taking lots of photos of us landing in Dili. We spent the night in Dili, my little team was a bloke called Paul Morris, we, from the AFP. We teamed up with two New Zealanders and two Spanish Police. We duly got our Land Rover and under Indonesian police escort we were escorted up to a village in the mountains about fifty, sixty Ks southwest of Dili, a place called

07:30 Gleno in the Province of Ermera. Spent a sleepless night living in a rented room that night, like a hotel type place. And we were the first on the ground there basically so we were the first UN in the area. We had to duly, in the next few days, find somewhere to live. And over the subsequent week or two weeks other UN personnel turned up, other police turned up from other

08:00 nations. Lots of DEOs – [District] Electoral Officers turned up from Australia and other countries. UN staff from New York turned up. And basically we formed a headquarters in Gleno, the town of Gleno of UN peacekeepers. We were there mainly to conduct a census of the Timorese, East Timorese in our area. And after the census, which would last twenty to twenty-two days, we were to then conduct

08:30 a, they didn't call it an election, they called it a Popular Consultation, in which the questions on the ballot paper would be whether the people voted for autonomy or independence. And autonomy was to stay with Indonesia under the control of the Indonesians or independence was obviously to become an independent nation. So we, having sort of established ourselves in the

09:00 town of Gleno, we then became flooded with a quantity of information from various sources, all locals, about various atrocities that'd occurred, some dating back to the eighties. And because we were swamped and flooded with all these amazing stories of alleged atrocities, and I say alleged, bearing on the side of caution. Most of them were obviously not proved

09:30 but they would have happened I dare say. We had to, the UN came out with a policy that any atrocity "so called" that happened pre-April '99 couldn't be looked at because we were swamped with a plethora of horrible stories about what the Indonesians had been doing for the last twenty odd years. So as the DEOs started arriving and turning up, we were paired off, I had a DEO from Australia called Sandra Chestnut. And

10:00 her and I were a team and we had our own little village area of Ermera, which was up in the highlands, about twelve Ks out of Gleno, in the mountains. And between, and I use word investigating quite lightly, because we couldn't actually, we had no powers of investigation or powers of arrest but we had to literally take the stories down of all these alleged atrocities. So between doing a census with Sandra of all the people in our village area, which numbered about

10:30 five thousand people all up, of electoral age or vote-able age, eighteen and over, I also had to conduct quick enquiries of these atrocities that were kept being reported to me. You'd pull up in a village and after the customary cup of coffee or something, you'd get the indication, we were always followed around by Indonesian Police, Polri, who were, they were there presumably

11:00 or, they said, to look after our welfare and security. But they were there basically to make sure that no villagers spoke to us, cause the Indonesians were scared of them, understandably. And they were, and just their presence, by their very presence, they shied the villagers away from actually talking. But we came up with little ruses to keep the attention of the Polri in one direction and I'd go off and talk to people. And they'd tell these amazing long stories about atrocities, murders, rapes,

11:30 kidnappings that had happened over the last months, years. I'd take brief notes, again through an inter, this all had to be done through interpreters because they didn't speak English, I certainly didn't speak Bahasa or Portuguese or Indonesian. We did a census, which took about, probably about twenty odd days, twenty-two days I think it took. Of registering all the eligible people in our area

12:00 and all, through all areas of East Timor the same as being done by all these other teams, doing exactly the same thing. Names, addresses, we would issue, get all their details, their villages, look at birth certificates, look at identification or paper work to prove that they were of eligible age and they weren't ring-in Indonesians, bringing in to bolster the numbers. We'd give them a little registration card, which we covered in plastic and they proudly went away with this hidden, because

12:30 they knew if the militia found it they'd destroy it. Stories of amazing courage and bravery of the local East Timorese people. There was this one lady who had five daughters and she lived in the village of Ermera. And every day that we were there for the twenty-two days of registration, she would walk past with her five daughters carrying trays of food and coffee for us to drink and eat, walk past the militia headquarters of, which was in Ermera. We knew it was open, they were just

13:00 laying there, talking to the Indonesian Army soldiers, to the police. They were, the collusion and collaborating with each other was just visibly, you know, it was almost criminal; they were there, holding hands with each other basically. Anyway this lady would walk past with her five daughters to

the taunts of these Indonesians. So what she was doing, which I'm talking about bravery, she was obviously marked by the Indonesians, they knew she was on our side, she wanted,

13:30 she was all up for an election and obviously was gonna vote for independence. So she was marked and in the early days we'd go into villages and the Timorese would welcome us and laugh, and shake our hands and be all over us. As the mood changed in East Timor leading up to the election, people backed off, and we knew why, because the Indonesians were taking names and during the nights that we weren't there, and we weren't there all the, we used to go back to the main town of Gleno during the night. A lot of

14:00 houses would be burned, people would be kidnapped, murders were happening, we would be told about these on subsequent days of visiting these villages. They had names, we would give all that information to the Indonesian Police who said, they would investigate these things and bring these people to trial. Those, all those reports ended up in the waste paper bin, nothing was ever done about anything, no arrests were ever made. At the end of, we did many long patrols through the mountains of East Timor, amazingly beautiful

14:30 country, the people were just incredible. And I remember and I'll very quickly gloss over that whole two month period and get up to the day of the election. We were all up about two thirty, three a.m. in the morning. We had to be up at the poll, have the Polling Station open at six a.m. in the morning or six thirty a.m. in the morning. We had designated an old school building in Ermera, that had been destroyed, partly destroyed during an earthquake in '78. So we'd set up the previous

15:00 night, tables, we had all the rows, all people registered and they had their cards. And we had all the rows lined up in alphabetical order, had the polling boxes in the back of the Land Rover all packed up and the polling papers all ready to go. Went down to the station at Gleno, piled in the car with our Indonesian, ah, East Timorese helpers. And we wound our way slowly

15:30 up the mountain about five thirty a.m. in the morning. It was foggy, it was very misty and we didn't know, we had registered about five thousand East Timorese and we didn't know, because of militia violence and intimidation, we didn't know how many would actually turn up for the actual polling. And as we round, I remember as I was driving, the head lights of the Land Rover went across the top, there was over two thousand people all sleeping in the basket ball court and

16:00 the wrecked buildings of the school. As we crested the rise, they didn't know whether we were, who we were until they saw the UN on the side of the vehicle and they just drowned us out with cheers. It was the most moving sight I could ever imagine, it was just... I mean these people, just to be there they had slept, they had come there during the night because they knew that on polling day if they left their village, and some of them had twelve kilometres to walk over mountain foot pads, they knew the militia would get

16:30 them on the way there. So to be safe that they actually were there to vote, in the safety of numbers, they all piled onto the place during the night and slept there over night in freezing conditions. We actually had a little ceremony, cut the tape leading to the Polling Station. And we quickly started filing them through alphabetically. I would go along and we had East Timorese helpers to, we'd trained them over the last two months how to sort of, sort the people out in alphabetical order and in what lines we

17:00 wanted them to do. And I was to go along and just check and re-check registration papers to make sure the right people were voting. And I'd look at their papers and look at their registration sort of documents. Everything went swimmingly, we were actually polling people at the rate of about one every minute and a half and people were still coming in during the day. And out of five thousand people, we actually polled about four thousand nine hundred and eighty. Two or

17:30 three we subsequently learned had died of natural causes, or I presume natural causes up and, from registration up to polling, but others were intimidated and didn't make it. But during the day people kept coming in. About eleven o'clock I got a report that there was a grenade; the militia had got in to the crowd that were lining up to vote, got in to the crowd with a grenade. So the little interpreter came up to me and he said, "Mr Don, Mr Don." he said, "Grenade."

18:00 he said, "I'll identify em." And so we walked hand in hand, I didn't want to tell anybody what was going on because they'd panic and probably go. So I walked along hand in hand with this little interpreter and he was going to point out this person to me, but he wasn't there, he couldn't find him. He'd either gone or it was a story that they'd made up, but I presume it was, he'd already gone. The militia weren't allowed anywhere near the polling site, they weren't allowed to wear any militia headbands or weapons weren't allowed anywhere near the Polling Site. But in fact, during

18:30 the day they were screaming past on motorbikes shouting and firing in the air, firing rifles in the air. The Indonesian Police who were supposed to stop all this and have a cordon of two hundred metres around the Polling Site just stood by and laughed as they went up and down. These people, under incredible intimidation just stayed there and refused to be intimidated and leave. And probably about two or three o'clock we'd polled about oh, probably three, three and a half thousand people.

19:00 We were getting near the end of it and the militia leader of that area was drunk, he'd obviously been on, he'd been drinking but he was also on drugs, because evidence was found in that area of drugs being supplied to these people. We found some tablets and tests were done on them, they were bloody, they were drugs, hallucinogenic drugs or something. And they were all revved up on booze and that and

drugs. And he came up armed with an M16, shouting and threatening

19:30 all the people that were still trying to vote. I said to Sandra, keep polling, and these people just hunkered down, they lay down and they were crawling into the little Polling Station, registering their vote by putting a nail through which photo they wanted and then crawling out the back door then going off to, flying off to their villages. And I went up to this militia leader and, first off I said to the Indonesian Police, “Get this man out of here, he’s shouldn’t be anywhere around, he shouldn’t have a weapon. He

20:00 shouldn’t have a weapon, he certainly shouldn’t have a weapon around here and what’s he saying.” And they said, “Oh, he’s alright, he’s trying to intimidate the people.” I said, “Yeah, yeah, okay, fine.” And I was shouting to this guy and anyway this guy was obviously drunk and other stuff. And we came into a toe to toe confrontation and this guy had a, I presume cocked M16, I know it was loaded. And he had it into my nose for about twenty minutes and he was shouting at me and I was shouting at him. The Indonesian Police refused to do nothing about this, they refused to even

20:30 lay a hand on him to take him away. Meanwhile I looked down the road and all this guy’s cronies were in the back of a big truck and there was about thirty of them all piled into the back of the truck. With, amazingly, M16s and Armalites and AKs and all the rest of the bloody modern hardware. And I might add up until that time all they had was the old, traditional Racatan weapons, the old Blunder Bus type weapons. Suddenly they had all these M16s, funny how they got that. And I was talking,

21:00 I was talking to this, shouting at this guy to get him out, get that truck out. Because foremost in my mind was, he was sitting, had the truck parked in a ‘T’ intersection which was about two hundred yards from where we were polling. But down that road which had to go down about two kilometres to another village called Peteto, was a New Zealand Police guy with his team and they were polling too. I was on the radio, shouting at this guy, trying, talking to Wayne down the road, trying to find out how long he had to go. Telling him what the situation was, he had

21:30 no means of escape, he had to come up that road. The only other road out of his village was a steep cliff down into the River of Gleno, which was about six, seven hundred foot steep. So he had nowhere else to go, he had to come through that thing. I said, “Mate, you gotta tell me when you’re there, I’m trying to get this bastard to back off.” Shout, shout, shout. In the end I went up and tried to grab a rifle off one of the Indonesian coppers, I was gonna, bloody, just, don’t know what I was gonna do, I wasn’t a very happy puppy.

22:00 And I succeeded in getting the Indonesian Police Sergeant to get this guy to back off, take his truck about fifty metres back from the intersection, radioed Wayne on the, and told him, “It’s clear, come up, give us a call when you’re about two minutes away, I’ll wave and I’ll give you the all, give you the green light.” We’re all packed up, finished voting, we polled everybody that was there, everybody that turned up we polled. Packed up the Land Rover,

22:30 had to get the ballot boxes back in, had to dismantle everything. All our East Timorese helpers had skived off back into the bush. Got in the Land Rover, engine running, told Wayne to come through, he literally came through the intersection, joined on the tail of us, and this is all within a two or three hundred metre distance. And these bastards chased us twelve Ks down the mountain road back to Gleno, firing over the Land Rover and up into the trees. We could see vegetation running down

23:00 and bullets hitting trees around, all the way back down to Gleno, and from then on it all started. All, a lot of the Indonesian or East Timorese helpers were bought in to our headquarters building for safety that night. They hadn’t eaten, most of us hadn’t eaten all day, I certainly hadn’t had a damn thing. We’re all sitting around eating rations; they were laying out on flattened out cardboard cases, out in the grounds of this,

23:30 this headquarters building. About eight or nine o'clock at night rifle fire rang out, stones hit the roof, rifle shots hit the roof of the building, these people just freaked. We’re inside, having a game of cards I think, and doing our reports. And these people swarmed into the building, the East Timorese swarmed in, we swarmed out. Stood out and between us and the darkened jungle, was

24:00 this line of police officers. They weren’t facing outwards, they were supposed to be there to protect us, they weren’t facing outwards, they were facing inwards. They were all armed with their weapons, not pointed at us but sort of loosely hanging down in that sort of fashion. So we literally gave em the thumbs up, get these bastards out, houses were burning all over Gleno. Rifle shots and screams were going on all over the place, I couldn’t believe it. And so we lit a big fire out of all these cardboard cartons, and literally gave the militia,

24:30 who we knew were in the bushes and trees which were about fifty or sixty metres away, the thumbs up, we were not going to hide in the building, so we all stood around all night on guard. During the night I was on, during my watch about five or six hours, I heard over the radio, Sandra had gone back after the polling, she’d, after she’d dropped all the gear back at headquarters, she’d gone back to the house that she was living in. About two or three a.m. in the morning heard this plaintive cry, she said, “Don, Don, are you around there?” I said, “God, it’s Sandra.” I said, “Yeah, yeah, where are you?”

25:00 She said, “At home.” She said, I said, “How many are there, we need to know how many Electoral officers are around, how many have you gathered?” She said, “I’ve got about ten in this house.” So I

said, “I’ll try and get to you but there’s militia roaming all around the streets.” So I got this New Zealand copper and a Yank copper and we teamed up and all we had was axe handles. So we crawled through this bloody myriad of streets, found Sandra, couldn’t believe it, she was a lovely lady, she, we did a head count of all the DEOs that were in her house. Tried

25:30 to find out where a lot of the other DEOs were hiding in their houses all around the place. She made us a cup of peppermint tea or something and it was so bizarre sitting up drinking a bloody cup of peppermint tea. Meanwhile there’s houses burning all around us, it was like bloody Dante’s Inferno. Then we had to make our way back to headquarters. Went back to headquarters, I woke Jeff up, he was sleeping, he was our boss, Jeff Hazel. I woke him up, told him where some of the DEO’s were. During the next morning we

26:00 endeavoured to get all the DEOs back into the headquarters building. That morning it was arranged that a helicopter would fly in and pick up all the ballot boxes, of which there was about fifty ballot boxes for the whole of the Ermera district, which was a considerable number of votes. The helicopter came in, we had an LZ on the soccer field in Gleno but we decided not to use that because it was right near militia headquarters and everybody knew that’s where the helicopter would land, as it had landed

26:30 before on numerous occasions coming in with supplies and people. So we decided that we’d have it in the river bed, an alternate LZ, so we’d already logged it with UN Headquarters in Dili, and we said, “Use the alternate LZ, the other one’s not safe.” We had all the trucks lined, all the Land Rovers lined up with all these ballot boxes, we screamed out to the river bed, back to Minh. And what we gonna do is call the helicopter in and quickly load these things on, it was gonna go, we were gonna go back to thing, back to headquarters, it all didn’t turn out that way.

27:00 Helicopter came in, we, at that stage it was clear, we radioed that it was clear, the helicopter came down, it was actually on the ground. One of the Electoral officers from Dili Headquarters got off, the helicopter was shot at, got two rounds in the back of it. There was a swarm of militia coming up from the town, which was about five hundred metres away. They’d seen that they’d been tricked and basically it was landing in another place. So they were all running down, shooting as they were running. Most

27:30 of the DEOs, well all the DEOs and most of the police had taken off back to headquarters, a run of about half a kilometre, six hundred metres. We were left with all the Land Rovers and the ballot boxes. And there was seven police, the Australian Police and two American and one, yeah, no, one Cana, one New Zealand, two American and about five Australian. And we just stood our ground and it just, it’s very hard to describe in a quick

28:00 scene, but we just stood our ground while they were shooting around us, nobody got hit, luckily. Three militia peeled off to get me because I was not a well-liked person, as was Paul Morris; we’d been giving the militia in our area a hard time. They peeled off to get us and I had nothing to fight with, not even a baton. So they peeled off and they were shouting and they were running at me. So I leaned down to pick up a piece of bamboo which I was gonna

28:30 clout them with and it fell apart, it was full of bloody white ants, I couldn’t believe it. So anyway they were throwing rocks and we were throwing rocks at them and they were shooting up in the air. And they literally didn’t hit anybody, and I hope that was by accident. We calmed them down, got the militia to separate, got the police to separate them from us. Jeff Hazel did a fair bit of heavy negotiating to allow their helicopter to come back at a later stage and land at the soccer pitch.

29:00 We were gonna load all the ballot papers on, which we did, we did. And one, and as the chopper took off, sorry, one of the ballot boxes was open and all the ballot boxes, all the ballot papers flew around and all over the place. So we were running around through all this gun fire and rocks, picking up all these ballot papers. Cause every vote that was counted, or voted or registered, I mean you know, people sweated blood and tears literally to do it so we weren’t gonna lose one paper. So we ran around, picked them all up, we apparently lost one paper, as Amanda Vanstone [member of parliament] pointed out later. We got it back, secured the box

29:30 put it in the Land Rover, screamed back to headquarters. About two hours later the helicopter came back from Dili, landed at the soccer pitch, we screamed up surrounded by militia all around us. Backed the Land Rovers up, quickly loaded all the, about fifty, sixty ballot boxes on. It took off, we screamed back to headquarters and for about, for the next five days we were literally under siege, we couldn’t leave the building. And just some of the stories that we heard coming in were horrendous. One family

30:00 had been, the parents had been killed, the two daughters, young teenage daughters had been taken by the militia and they were being raped in the market place which was at that time burning. And we all decided that we had to do something about this. It’s just, I mean that was just one story that was happening around in the scene of everything. And about three Land Rovers, we piled, a lot of the police piled into these Land Rovers and tried to get back and we were throw, rocks thrown at us, and machetes hitting the side of things,

30:30 weapons being shown. So they literally turned us around, we never got anywhere near the market place where these things were happening. And literally that was our state of play for about five to six days; we couldn’t get out of the place. And we eventually negotiated a, took all the DEOs down to, DEOs and UN Electoral Staff, including a lot of the local staff, we organised a convoy of them that afternoon down to Dili, Paul Morris and I organised that convoy. We let it out after

31:00 about eight hours of negotiating with these bloody militia and police. We took this convoy down, got in to Dili, delivered them to Headquarters in Dili. Just getting down to Dili, I mean the whole, all the mountains were on fire, we were being chased by trucks. The Yank copper at the back kept forcing militia, truck loads of militia off the road, and whatever happened to em I don't know, forced em down into gullies, but he was playing tail gun at the back, stopping them from passing him. We were under the so-called escort

31:30 of a truck full of militia, ah, Indonesian Police, who weren't doing anything about protecting anybody. We got these people to Dili, couldn't stay at the headquarters there was nowhere to stay so we went in to Dili and ended up staying with a journalist called Mark Dodd and another journalist called Lindsay Murdoch and Hamish McDonald at a house they had on the sea front in Dili. Couldn't get out of Dili that

32:00 evening, couldn't get out the next day because the militia had the bridge blocked off out of the town, so we couldn't get out. The militia were riding up and down outside the house that we were all in. We all equipped ourselves with bloody baseball bats and sticks and bottles and tennis racquets. And if they attacked the house we were sort of going to, you know, take a few with us. It was fairly tragic and in actual fact the next afternoon we went to

32:30 Polri Headquarters, organised and arranged to get an escorted departure out of Dili, back to Gleno, back to Ermera. In the intervening time Paul Morris and I spoke to Senator, sorry, Deputy P.M. Tim Fischer, Senator Maurice Payne and Laurie Brereton. And he took, in great detail what had happened the day of polling and the subsequent days

33:00 between getting down to Dili, he took notes in a book. And he was leaving that afternoon to fly back to Australia, which he did, he and his party, they were up there observing the election. We went back up to Gleno, more houses had been burned, our house was in the process of getting burned, which it was in subsequent days, it was razed to the ground. So we all ended up at our UN Headquarters or what was left of it. All the DEOs had gone, there was only police left.

33:30 We stayed there another two or three days, again, couldn't do anything. I tried to lead a patrol back up to the village of Ermera to see what had happened up there and I was about five hundred metres from the village and got a radio call from Jeff, "Turn around, it's an ambush, they're ambushing the road, they know you're coming." Cause we'd told Polri that we were going and Polri had obviously passed it on because everything that we told Polri was passed on to the militia, as we found out, we assumed and we almost, well we did,

34:00 we did prove. That everything we told Polri was passed on to the militia leaders. And they, the road was ambushed so we turned down and made it back down to the compound in Gleno before dark. We negotiated a release , they tried to evacuate us quite a few times and the helicopter kept getting shot at so we couldn't get evacuated. There was nowhere else to go, we were trying to, we had plans of driving down the river bed to Liquica, that would have been almost impassable but surrounded with militia anyway so. Bearing

34:30 in mind we were unarmed and these bastards were running around with everything. The whole place was being burned to the ground. We holed up in another house the last night. We looked out the window and there's police and militia holding hands outside, looking and pointing at the window, going you know, literally, gestures of you die, we're gonna get you. We barricaded the doors and windows, we signed, I found an Indonesian flag and we all signed it and that's in the

35:00 War Memorial these days, all the names we put on it and drew little diagrams on it, and a few, quite a few interesting remarks. And because everybody was feeling quite tense we had a fridge full of beer, which was reasonably cold. People were feeling fairly upset because we didn't know what was gonna happen, we actually thought we were all gonna get the chop. But we were certainly gonna take a few of these bastards with us. And I suggested to everybody grab a new beer, and Paul Morris, a mate

35:30 of mine had a book sent up to him called Birdsong, Sebastian Faulks, beautiful book. And I said, "Paul, get that book that Elaine sent up to you, we'll read a few passages." So I said to the, it was quite bizarre, all these hardened police officers, American and Australian Police officers, they were the only ones that were there, all the rest had skived off to different houses. All these hardened police officers sitting around, were like school kids. And I just knew something had to be done otherwise people were

36:00 starting to talk amongst themselves, discussions like, you know, what's gonna happen to us, this is bullshit, this is crap. So I said, "Sit down, get a new beer." and I started reading a passage out of the book. Paul read another passage and one of the American Police officers called Randy, Randy Martinack, wrote beautiful poems and he read a few of his poems, recited a few of his poems to these guys. We spent a fairly sleepless night looking out the window and taking it in turns to sort of sleep. And

36:30 the next day we, after lots of again of negotiation with Polri and the militia. We took all the vehicles, trashed the UN Headquarters, took all the use-able stuff that we could out of the UN Headquarters, piled it in our Land Rovers, all our run away stuff, all our clothes and all this sort of stuff. Took our, each driver had, each Land Rover had one driver and that was it, we had twenty-one vehicles and twenty-one coppers. And

37:00 we were so-called escorted past the militia road blocks. And one of the worst times I've ever had in East Timor was driving past these rows of local villages. And they, and on previous occasions they were all waving and cheering us. On this occasion they were all surrounded, there was militia everywhere and

big roadblocks, openly controlled by militia. And these people were literally would be under threat of death and a lot of them were killed apparently after we left. But they were on threat of death to even recognise us so

37:30 as we drove past them, I remember looking out at people I knew, I'd dealt with for the last three months. They had their eyes down and they were crying and we were just driving out through the roadblocks and we were being over sighted by a Huey, a UN Huey chopper. And we had to drive over some of these really bad mountain roads and I remember listening to the chopper going over and on one occasion we were going through

38:00 a very small pass, which big cliff one side, a big drop on another side. And this helicopter kept coming down and hovering and then taking off and hovering over the convoy and taking off. And we found out later in Dili, in Darwin, talking to the pilot, he was unarmed too, the chopper was unarmed. But he said apparently the TNI [Tentara Nasional Indonesia – Indonesian Army] had set up two machine guns on this pass, and as we drove through this pass, the obvious intention was to ambush us, because they'd shoot the vehicles and the vehicles would

38:30 go over the cliff and basically they could get rid of the whole lot of us. But they, and he, at great risk, obviously to himself, was came hovering down, he hovered over the top of the machine guns and just until they got interested or shifted their aim, he took off and then came back and was like a bloody buzzing bumble bee. And waited til the whole of the con, twenty-one vehicles got through and then he followed us all the way down to Dili. And we, Paul Morris and I got evacuated that day with Jeff Hazel, who collapsed just before we got on the plane. And we were then chased to the

39:00 airport by three truck loads of militia who were firing at us as we drove to the bloody airport. And got on a C-130, and we were evacuated on the eleventh of September and flew into Darwin. There was still UN, a lot of UN left in the headquarters compound in Dili and they were evacuated on subsequent days. And that's when the panic happened prior to that, with people, the bastards

39:30 throwing grenades into the compound next door and all these people trying to jump over the razor wire. We flew into Darwin I remember, the C-130 stopped. These old ladies were there, the Country Women's Association were there and basically, you know, we all looked like shit, hadn't washed in three or four days, growths, muddy clothes. And they were giving us sandwiches and cups of tea and Paul and I just broke into tears, just absolutely hopeless.

40:00 I remember ringing up Judy my partner and I couldn't speak to her, I couldn't, I put all this money in the phone and I, I just couldn't speak, she couldn't speak and, "I'm here, I'm in Darwin, safe." Just yeah, it was pretty horrendous bloody time, yeah.

Extraordinary.

And there's lots more to it.

I think we, there obviously is, I'm amazed but thank you for telling us that, I think we might have just stopped there. We'll just, a few...

Tape 11

00:47 **Just briefly though or at that time, did you reflect on your Vietnam War experience when you were over in those situations in Timor?**

I think I did, in as much

01:00 that I drew on experience that I had gained on either serving in Vietnam or previous UN missions. And I gained on that exp., and when I say gained on that experience, when things were happening, and a good example of this, everybody understandably was getting a little bit up, you know, it was quite a tense time, that last two or three nights. And weirdly I could sense

01:30 everybody's mood changing for the worse and I didn't have an answer to what was going to be the solution. And in fact one of the young guys was saying, "Barney, what are we gonna do now?" And I remember, kept saying to him, "Max" I said, "What am I a fucking, what am I, a solution to your problems here, I don't know what we're going to do but this is what I suggest we do do." And that's why I suddenly became very calm. And I think that, I can only put that down to previous experiences, because I didn't know and I

02:00 thought that was probably be one of the worst situations I'd ever been in, because I didn't know what the final chapter was going to be like. But I became unusually calm and in fact and that's why I did what I did. I started reading to these guys and I can only say that I drew back on that experience, probably Vietnam and other UN missions.

You've seen a lot of action and things like that, especially, looking back on, especially on the Vietnam thing in Tuy when you pulled out in '71

02:30 **and the Australians pulled out, effectively the province went back to the VC. How do you feel**

now, or what that, even knowing, closer to when you look back, all that effort and all those, that went into that and all that, very hard personal experience that when you left, it reverted over to people you were patrolling against?

Well I did in a way think it was probably a waste of time but the mood in the Australian Army at that time or at least amongst the people I sort of was talking

03:00 to, was that we didn't lose the war, we exceeded the war or what's the word, we gave it to them, we didn't lose it, we didn't lose it, you lose wars by losing battles, we won the battles or most of the battles. But we lost it by a political, we politically lost it, we didn't militarily lose it, we politically lost it. We no longer had the political backing to continue

03:30 the war. We, it was a war that I seriously think we could have won, we didn't lose the war militarily, we did lose it politically.

What would it mean winning?

In those days the concept of winning would be to maintain South Vietnam for the South Vietnamese that wanted to live there, apart from not being under communist rule basically

Is that what the population wanted, do you think?

Well I don't know, I mean me being a naive young soldier, I didn't know, that's what we were told,

04:00 the Vietnamese wanted to be free, they didn't want communism. And in fact a lot of South Vietnamese died fighting for that ideal, they didn't want communism. And the amount of Vietnamese that escaped Vietnam or fled Vietnam after the war, after the North Vietnamese took over and a lot of them did come to Australia, that shows that a lot of Vietnamese didn't want communist domination so.

Now looking back from this, just somewhat more reflective distance, do you still believe that?

04:30 I've still got this idealistic streak in me that I want to believe that what we did wasn't totally wrong. I don't, personally, I didn't do anything wrong to the Vietnamese. I think, as a nation, we were hoodwinked by the American alliance, the American will. But having said that, the amount of Vietnamese as I go back to that died fighting for South Vietnam to remain out of communist Rule, people don't die for a cause

05:00 that they don't believe in. And there's thousands of South Vietnamese that died in the service of their country. So I think, you can read a lot of political writings and books on why we shouldn't have been in Vietnam, why we were Vietnam, what did it achieve. It really achieved nothing, in the final, in the end of, the final end was nothing, we didn't achieve anything, it returned back to communist rule but...

05:30 **What did we learn?**

I don't know if we learned a hell of a lot, we learned a lot about jungle fighting on the, from the military point of view. I don't think we learned a hell of a lot as far as being, answering to the American drum, and that's been shown or borne out in the last, in the latest since September the eleventh [11 September 2001 – terrorist attack on the US]. That something

06:00 tragic happened in America and suddenly the whole world is fighting a cause that America wants to fight. I'm not saying that's a wrong cause, but similar things were happening and worst things were happening in Europe, pre American involvement in the Second World War and they didn't involved until Pearl Harbor. Britain was being blitzed, America didn't get involved then, they only got involved when Pearl Harbor was attacked. You can look at it that way, but since

06:30 something happened as September the eleventh did in America, they expect the whole "free world", the, what do they call it, the 'Coalition of the Willing', to join America's cause, because, you know, something happened to America and this is happening to the world. Whereas things were happening all over Europe and they didn't step in when Japan invaded China and killed thousands and thousands of Chinese.

So do you think, how do you feel about the military being used as a, effectively

07:00 **for politicians rather than Government. Do you fight for a Government or do you fight for a country?**

Well I can't say I, I fought for a country and I fought because I believed in, I believed was fighting for a just cause, when I went to Vietnam. I've since read more about Vietnam; I didn't read anything about Vietnam, there was no books on Vietnam published while I was going, while I was training for Vietnam and while I was in Vietnam. There's nothing I could read, nothing I could access,

07:30 no information that I could get to form an opinion. And having said that, even if it was around, as a young soldier, fighting, training to go to a war, do young soldiers of any generation really look behind for reasons why their country is being committed to such a war. Did many Australians who served in the Second and First World Wars, actually read and understand why they were being committed to a war that,

08:00 the First World War would have had no effect on Australia, but it was because of the British Empire. But

how many Australian soldiers that actually went to that war, actually looked at the reasons behind their commitment or involvement, other than we're fighting for King and Country and we're fighting for Australia.

It's quite a different war there...

It was a different war.

and also different circumstances where a lot of national servicemen went to Vietnam on conscription.

Oh exactly, oh exactly. I didn't look beyond my involvement other than that I wanted to be there, I wanted to

08:30 be in the army, I wanted to experience something that thousands of other Australians had experienced, a war. I know it sounds stupid and childish and very naive, and having been in a war, I don't particularly want to be in another war, but I guess that's a young man's thing. If you're in the army, you join the army or you join the services to fight in a war. You're committed to a war and I didn't really read beyond our involvement, I read as much as I

09:00 could about Vietnam at the time, which was very little.

Do you draw any parallels between following America, Australia following America into battle in Iraq, with our, the way that the, Australia was committed to Vietnam, and how do you feel about Australia's involvement now in war?

I'm just very cagey, and I have been very cagey since I've understood more about our involvement and America's involvement in Vietnam. I've become very cagey of America's commitment to anything. America is

09:30 a country with a lot of agendas and I just sometimes question those agendas. Everybody and every country's obviously got agendas in their interests, in their country's, in their national interest. Australia's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, I was, I would certainly, I was certainly ambivalent about our involvement in Iraq. I didn't think that we had the case to go it alone without a UN sanction. But having said that, there was no way

10:00 I would have demonstrated against the troops going away, I just wouldn't have. Troops going away to fight a war, whether it be a just or an unjust war, certainly do not need people demonstrating against their involvement and that obviously comes from out of the reception that we got, before going and coming back from Vietnam.

Just a couple of last questions. Looking back, how do you feel about war generally, does it solve problems?

War doesn't solve anything. Doesn't solve, it kills a lot of people and it causes a hell of a lot of misery, it doesn't solve anything. And

10:30 all wars are the same I mean, thousands of men have lost lives over a piece of dirt that possibly fighting a country that now we're a trading partner with and you think, you look back, and at the time you think, my God. war brings out the best and worst in people, and I've seen, I think in my experience I've seen both. It certainly solves nothing, it certainly didn't solve anything in Vietnam and I mean I really don't think

11:00 that it solves much at all. But having said that, war is a last resort, if we hadn't of been involved and fought in New Guinea, what would have been the result of that. They were facing a different enemy which was a physical presence that was going to invade Australia and they had full intention of doing so. If England hadn't of held out against the Germans, what would've England have become. So when I say it doesn't solve anything, it is a last resort and sometimes I guess

11:30 if you have a firm belief in anything, you have to stand up and fight for it, and war is a last resort. And that's what, it's like standing up to the bully in the playground, I mean you can only back down for so long. Appeasement doesn't work as Chamberlain found out and other countries have found out in the past. Hitler made a pact with Russia and then broke it and invaded Russia. I mean war is an inevitable consequence of bad politics I think. But it certainly creates a shit storm of misery. And no,

12:00 there's no winners in war. Even if you win a war, there's no winners. I mean I've since come to understand that, there's no winners, there's just misery. But there's certain things you need to fight for.

One last question, this archive will be kept for indefinitely, hopefully, fifty, hundred years. Perhaps, have you got any final, you know, looking back on your experience as a front line soldier, any message for people who might be watching this in fifty or a hundred

12:30 **years time?**

No, not really, I'll think of something profound obviously after the interview's over. But I can't think of words that would be profoundly interesting to people listening to this interview. But I feel in a strange way quite privileged to have served, doing what I've done, serving in a war, serving in a Special Force unit.

13:00 I feel proud of my service with SAS, I feel proud of my service in the army, I also feel very proud of what I've done in, on peacekeeping missions in East Timor. I feel no shame at what I've done but I feel sorrow at what I've seen, I've certainly been exposed to things that some people shouldn't have seen, you know, in your life time.

13:30 It's certainly aged me.

Thanks Don.