

Australians at War Film Archive

John Jellicoe - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/626>

Tape 1

- 00:36 **We'll start off with the overview that we talked about, so I'll get you to walk me through basically where you were born, where you grew up, when you joined the airforce, those sort of details.**
- Fine. I was born in a little town in the centre of England called Burton-upon-Trent. It's in the county of Staffordshire and to put it into perspective I guess,
- 01:00 Liverpool-Manchester, in between that area. I was born in 1940 and for the first five years of my life, at least anyway, that was part of World War II, and Burton-on-Trent was one of the heaviest bombed areas in World War II because of the industrial areas around and so forth,
- 01:30 but I was too young to appreciate that of course. I do have recollections of activities that were going on. Aircraft dog fights and what have you overhead, and the shells raining down in the streets around our house and so forth. I can remember a Spitfire [fighter] having been shot down on our local soccer field. We had a house bombed out three doors from us and yeah,
- 02:00 and I was all of five when this happened. We immigrated to Australia in 1950. That was myself, two brothers and Mum and Dad and we were sponsored out to a little place called Fairymead, which is just outside of Bundaberg, and Dad went to work in a sugar mill and we had
- 02:30 a short stay in Fairymead and then Dad moved on with his employment. Employment in those days was very scarce and Dad actually went to work for the Bundaberg Rum distillery for awhile, and in 1954 I think it was, we moved out to a place called Inglewood, which is out south-west Queensland, and Dad worked in the power house out there for awhile and unfortunately for Dad they decided not long after
- 03:00 we got there that they were going to close the power house down at Inglewood, so he had to change employment again and finished up working for the butter factory there for a short time. After that we then moved to Melaney and I actually finished my schooling in Melaney and in 1956 I left school. For approximately two years
- 03:30 after that I had a variety of jobs myself, because in those days and in that area all the employment was seasonal, so as in the summer everyone'd be milking a hundred cows so they had to have more staff and then in the winter they'd only milk thirty cows so they'd put all the staff off, so in the span of two years after I left school I was a dairy farmer, I was a the local milkman, I was a relief
- 04:00 postman, I worked in a bakery. And then one of my school friend's brothers came home on leave from the airforce and we started talking about the airforce and he convinced me of the appeal of joining the airforce and seeing the world etcetera. And apart from the fact that I saw it as an opportunity of some permanent employment, I put my hand up and decided to join the airforce and I did so in 1958.
- 04:30 I signed on for six years and I liked it so much that I finished up spending twenty one years in the airforce. I hadn't met my wife at that point in time. This is 1958, and I was based at Point Cook and that's when I met my wife. She was also in the airforce
- 05:00 and within three weeks of meeting Robyn, I'd proposed, we had named our children and we were married in 1961 and this year we celebrate our forty second wedding anniversary. In fact, it's another four days and we'll have been married forty two years. I love her now as much as I did then. Our children prediction
- 05:30 didn't quite work out. We wanted two sons and a daughter but we got two sons and, Danny and Brett, and we named them back in those days. From there I was posted to a stores depot called Tottenham and I spent two and a half years in Tottenham. From there I was posted out to East Sale, which is in the
- 06:00 Gippsland area, and I was four and a half years down there. All of my employment I might add in the airforce was related to stores, and one of the jobs that I had in fact in Sale was looking after their fuel

installations and we had millions and millions of litres of aviation fuel to look after and things like that. Interesting job. Didn't like the weather there, it was awful. So cold.

- 06:30 We actually had one year down there where we had snow on New Year's Day and that's quite incredible and the weather was a lot like Melbourne. In fact Sale, when you look on the map, is actually south of Melbourne, so the landscape surrounding the area was you were ringed by mountains, which were snow capped in the winter,
- 07:00 and then the open sea on the other side and of course any wind that blew either came off the snow or the open ocean. So it was very, very cold. Anyway from there I was posted to Regents Park, which was another stores depot in Sydney, and it was from there that I actually got posted to serve in Vietnam. I went over in April '71
- 07:30 and then I served in Vietnam at Vung Tau and was part of the team that actually wound up and closed the base there, and we were the last of the Australian Air Force bases. There were still some administrative staff in Saigon but, and I don't think they closed until about 1975, but we were the actual, there was sixty eight of us left on the last aircraft, on the 29th of February 1972.
- 08:00 So we leaped out of there on leap day 1972 and it was quite a relief. After that I was commissioned. I went back to school and did my senior, equivalent senior studies, and two years after I got back from Vietnam I was then commissioned as a supply officer and my first duties were I was posted to Townsville, where I became what's called a
- 08:30 barracks officer and I was responsible for the maintenance of the base, which included grass cutting, building maintenance, the airstrip itself, all of those sorts of tasks. It was a bit full on to go straight as a brand new commissioned officer into that role, and we had some millions of dollars worth of major works happening.
- 09:00 The aircraft squadrons that were there at the time were the Caribou aircraft and the Orion maritime aircraft, and we were building new facilities for other aircraft that were coming through the system. After Townsville I was then posted to Richmond, where I became the supply officer for the Hercules squadron. The maintenance squadron,
- 09:30 486, and I had the aircraft on the books for me. I personally owned the aircraft and we were responsible for their maintenance and rescue whenever they had a break down no matter where in the world. You had to mount a rescue and send spares to have them repaired and get them back in the air. That was probably the most interesting job I had. I was there for three and a half years.
- 10:00 I resigned or retired from the aircraft from the airforce in 1979 and I did that for two reasons. There was a lot of scuttlebutt going around at the time that the government intended to interfere with the retirement fund system that was in place at that time and no one would confirm or deny. There were talk of doing away
- 10:30 with the lump sum payment that you got when you left the service and then you got a life pension as well, and they were, there was talk of them doing away with the lump sum. Now for me personally, one of the things that I volunteered to go to Vietnam was to qualify for a war service home loan, so that we could buy our first home, and if that was
- 11:00 going to happen that would then deny us the opportunity to have sufficient money and get a good low interest loan to repay the loan. So, and at the same time my two sons were just in the process of coming out of high school and I wanted to settle them into an apprenticeship and at least get them started. And so I
- 11:30 wrote to the, what then was the Department of Air, and asked them could I remain at Richmond for a another couple of years and they came back and simply said, "No. Subject to our requirement you will proceed when and where." So I said, "Okay well I've done twenty one years service. Here's my resignation." So I retired from the airforce and I was recruited by Prospect Electricity, which is now known as Integral Energy, with the view to becoming
- 12:00 their store superintendent. So I left the service after twenty one years and virtually moved into the same type of employment, only it was on the ground and not running around the world, sort of thing. When I reflect back on our childhood with Mum and Dad, we were virtual gypsies. We had so many moves, it was sort of every couple of years we seemed to be moving everywhere and
- 12:30 that was as a result of Dad 's employment situation more than anything, but when I joined the airforce of course we went into exactly the same scenario, and then I used to refer to us as professional gypsies, so we moved around the country as required. So in the twenty one years of service I spent all of the service, with the exception of my stint in Vietnam, on mainland Australia.
- 13:00 Yeah. So.

Excellent. That was very well done. Now what we'll do is go right back to the beginning

Yep.

And talk more about your childhood in the UK. Was your father involved in the Second World

War at all?

No. Dad was a locomotive driver. Well we used to think he was a locomotive driver, but it turned out he was a boiler, a boiler attendant. He used to stoke the engine

- 13:30 and as a consequence of that he was not allowed to be seconded to the war or because it was essential services, but he told us a couple of times where he had incidents where the train that he was on was strafed by German planes. So he, I guess in his way he did a little bit towards the war effort but no, and yeah so that was Dad 's situation anyway.

Do you ever remember going on the trains

- 14:00 **with him at all?**

No, no. Nothing like that at all. My only recollection of being associated with the trains was we used to get on the side of the tracks and pull faces and yell out at the driver and they used to throw pieces of coal at us, and then we'd pick the coal up and take it home because that was our only form of heating. So that was, yeah.

And we talked a little bit about your memories of World War II but what are your memories

- 14:30 **of a child, as a child of what was going on? What was explained to you about...**

Oh I guess the only thing I could say was it's something like, it was something like an adventure. Everybody was issued with a gas mask in those days and it was something that you pulled completely over your head and it had a filter on the front of it and so forth, but for the children

- 15:00 they had a little rubber tongue on the front of it and when you breathed in and out, this thing used to wiggle and so consequently it didn't frighten the children quite as much because there was something there to take their mind off it. But I can remember when the sirens used to go, the air raid sirens used to go off at night we used to have to go into a shelter that was in the back yard and quite often when something was happening
- 15:30 up in the air that you couldn't see, like they were having dog fights with the air craft and so forth. And when they're shooting at each other people never ever stop to think about it but the shells that they're discharging have to go somewhere and of course they used to rain down on whatever was below them. And I can remember these things clinking as they hit the streets outside our house and there was you know, hundreds of, perhaps thousands of spent cartridges on the roads when you came out the next day.
- 16:00 We lived in a row of houses, I don't know whether you ever recall the opening scenes of 'Coronation Street', where they had the I don't know whether they call them terrace houses, but they were double-storeyed houses and they went from one end of the street to the other, and that's the sort of house we lived in and you didn't have running water in the house. We had a rain barrel out the back door which we used to collect the rain and that was used for washing and all that sort of stuff. And
- 16:30 three doors down from us scored a direct hit with a bomb one night and it took the house out as neat as a whistle, and I can remember that. Again, I was only five years old when it all finished. We used to play a bit of sport and I can remember a Spitfire being shot down on our local soccer field.

Would you go and climb all over it?

Oh yes. Yeah, very much so.

- 17:00 Um but yeah. Not a lot of other recollections but yeah.

Just one question, in your houses were they all joined at the top?

Yes.

Could you...

Oh no, they were separate. They were a double-storeyed single unit.

So you couldn't crawl through...

No. No.

The attics?

In 1945 my second youngest brother was born, and in those days in England

- 17:30 the lady used to have a baby at home. You didn't go to a hospital. And I can remember coming home from school or kindergarten or whatever it was and not being allowed to go back into the house and I didn't understand what was going on, but anyway when we finally was allowed to go back into the house, Mum had actually had my other brother and the nurse said to me, "Aren't you lucky? You've got another brother."
- 18:00 And I said, "I don't want another brother. I want a sister," and she said, "Why do you want a sister?" 'Cause we didn't have any girls in our family. And I said, "I want another mother when me other one

dies." Oh I was five years old and of course you can imagine what Mum thought of all that. But anyway yeah, so Roger, I've got four brothers and Roger's the middle brother if you like. Three of us were born in England and two were born out here in Australia.

Were you the eldest?

18:30 Yes. Yeah.

And what's it like being the oldest brother?

It was interesting. I had a very strict father and any time my brothers got into trouble I was the one that used to get the belting because I hadn't taught them to do things better, but oh we struggled of course, as is everybody did. You know there were food shortages and all that sort of stuff. I can remember Mum and Dad having to queue

19:00 to get rations. In those days meat was very difficult to get hold of. We used to eat whale meat, horse. If you got a real treat you could get yourself, and get your hands on an occasional sausage or perhaps a little bit of bacon, but food was very tight. Very tight.

And what are your memories of the end of the war?

I don't really have

19:30 any memories of the end of the war. You mean like people racing out in the street and all that? No, no we pretty well kept to ourselves and that. No I don't have any memories in that regard.

And how 'bout did the situation change dramatically when the war ended in terms of rations and food or

Well it seemed to. I mean because I was only a five year old child I mean I didn't worry about what you know where the next meal was coming from and things like that

20:00 but eventually the rationing did stop. They had they used to issue little tickets and you had to give so many tickets for whatever thing you were trying to obtain. It could even be petrol for your car sort of thing. We didn't have a car in those days a course, but I can remember going down to the local cricket grounds and things like that and I guess things did become more open.

20:30 You know you could go back out into the public again. You weren't worried by air raid shelters or sirens and things like that. Yeah.

Okay. Sorry my chair's just making a funny creaking noise, and how long did you go to school for in...

In England? Well I left when I was ten years old to come out to Australia, so I guess four or five years.

And what are your memories of that

21:00 **kind of schooling?**

Pretty rough. There was a lot of bullying used to happen in those days. I can remember we used to sit around in groups in the grounds. And in those days they used to give us a small bottle of milk in the schools and also they used to provide some sort of meals because I can remember we used to chant a thing about

21:30 semolina pudding: "Semolina pudding semolina pudding!" and we used to do that sort of thing you know. But I didn't have a very good schooling over there, or I don't have a good recollection of schooling over there, and when I came to Australia we went into a.... Fairymead was a very, very small place and it had a one classroom school but they had two classes in the school, and the way they determined

22:00 what level of schooling I should join was I was asked to answer one of the two questions that were up on the board. And I answered one question which I recognised, only simply because I responded that way, and that put me as the oldest person in my class for the rest of my school life because I'd chosen the lesser lesson so yeah.

What do you

22:30 **remember of your parents talking about coming to Australia?**

Well we didn't actually know what was going on. It wasn't until we actually joined a ship down in South Hampton, which is in the southern part of England, and boarded this ship and went for a cruise and instead of it taking two weeks to come out, which was the normal length of time, it took us something like

23:00 six weeks to arrive in Australia because seemingly everywhere that we stopped on the way, there were strikes in the ports and we didn't arrive in to Brisbane until six weeks after we left England.

And what are your memories of the ship? What was it like?

I apparently, my mother tells me, I got into quite a lot of trouble on the ship because I was down in the

crew's quarters and stuff like that. There was another Jellicoe family on the

23:30 on the boat and apparently they were direct descendants of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, who was one of the war lords in World War I in the British navy. He was Admiral of the Fleet I believe and he was involved in the battle at Jutland and they lost the battle and consequently he was sacked by Winston Churchill.

24:00 So we weren't a direct relation and as such we were in the lesser quarters on the ship, whereas the other family dined with the captain and things like that. But no, my recollection of the ship I got into a lot of trouble.

What would you do down in the crew quarters?

Oh just not be or be in areas that we were not supposed to be in and things like that and it was a huge adventure to myself and my brothers.

24:30 We went through some pretty rough weather. I can remember coming across the Bay of Biscay and the ship was actually pitching up and down, and Mum and Dad found us right up on the front bow hanging onto the hand rail. Something like the scenes out of the Titanic and all these big waves breaking over the front of the ship and so forth. It's a wonder we didn't get washed overboard but yeah, so I was a bit of a handful apparently.

And were you seasick?

Very much so. Yeah, all of the family was very seasick

25:00 and it was another adventure I guess. We were sponsored out to Australia by a family that lived at Fairymead, a Mr and Mrs Lakecombe, and the very first night that we spent in Australia we had to sleep under these things like a it was a like a big curtain over the bed and we'd never ever seen mosquito net of course. And during the course of the evening one of us got out of bed to go to the toilet

25:30 and the mosquito population out there was just horrendous, and consequently the mosquitoes got under the net during the course of the night. And when we woke the next morning the whole lot of us were just covered in, 'cause there were the three boys slept in this big double bed, and we were covered in all these red spots. And 'course Mum thought we had all had the chicken pox but it turned out to be the mosquito bites, and young tender Pommie

26:00 skin and blood was very attractive to mosquitoes. And of course I used to react very badly to mosquitoes in those days. When I got bitten I'd come up in a welt you know, and but yeah, that was our first night in Australia.

Was that a good first impression of Australia?

Not at all. It wasn't a good place for young children to grow up at Fairymead because we lived right next door to the mill and there were canals

26:30 that used to work, go all the way 'round into a cooling pond that was alongside the mill. And there were big eels in the canal system and there was lots and lots of snakes that really freaked my mother out. And I don't like snakes myself, but it was very risky business. I mean quite often you'd go under the house and Mum would be hanging her washing up or something like that and there'd be a snake drop down from the

27:00 rafters, and yeah and I stopped my Roger, the fellow I was talking about earlier, I stopped Roger from picking up a brown snake one day. He was just going over to pick it up. Didn't know what it was.

And where had the ship landed?

In Brisbane. Docked in Brisbane.

And then you'd

We had to go to Bundaberg by train, and it was in those days, an old steam train.

27:30 Yeah.

And what did your parents tell you at this stage about...

They didn't tell us a lot. It was just that we'd just moved and I guess because we'd moved so often it was just another move as far as the kids were concerned and it was an adventure. Dad used to take us fishing and the Burnett River was a magnificent river in those days for fishing and crabbing and all that sort of thing, and of course

28:00 the abundance of food, we just couldn't believe it, you know.

And what was the house like that you...

It was an old weatherboard house. Two-storey high. You had parking facility underneath the house for a car. Dad eventually did get an old, a very old car, and yeah.

What are some of the, I guess, lifestyle differences

28:30 in terms of being a kid that you noticed?

We had a lot more to do with people that lived around us than we did back in England. I only have limited experience or memories of my grandmother for argument's sake, my grandfather. We had very little to do with them at all because they lived, well we used to think, a long way away in England. Of course by comparison

29:00 in Australia it was relatively small distances but yeah, we didn't have much contact with my grandparents. But when we moved to this place I can remember we used to... I became very sports orientated as a result of starting out there in Fairymead because there was a family out there. the mill foreman was a Mr Reynolds, and he had a number of sons that were playing professional cricket.

29:30 In fact Ray Reynolds I think his name was, was playing for Queensland at that time and I used to go over to the cricket pitch with him and I used to field for him while when he was doing his practice and so forth. And the mill was actually owned by, or the plantation was owned by a family called the Young, and Mr and Mr Young were very much respected and looked up to by all of

30:00 the employees and so forth and they used to have Hereford cattle running around the around the plantation as well. I guess as a bit of a sideline or something like that and they were magnificent beasts you know, they were so well looked after and fed. And there was a bulk molasses terminal on the river and in those days they didn't have any bulk carriers. They used to dispense it into forty four gallon drums,

30:30 and if they were sending it anywhere it was loaded on the back of a rail carriage, a flat top rail carriage, and they spilt quite a lot of it. And during the hot weather it used to ferment and if you've ever seen a cow drunk, because they used to lap it up, and then because it was fermented they used to get drunk and you'd see cattle leaning up against trees with their tongue hanging out and hiccuping and

31:00 things like that. And it sort of put me in mind of that scene from the movie 'Cat Ballou' where Lee Martin was sitting on that horse and they were both drunk leaning up the side of a building and that was exactly how these cows used to look. It was quite funny. Yeah so.

And what sort of a, I guess, a bush education did you get living sort of in that part of Queensland? Did you, I guess, did you sort of spend a lot of

31:30 time outdoors and teach yourself a lot...

Yes a lot of outdoors. Like I said, Dad used to take us fishing. He had this old car. An old tilly, utility and used to take us... I can remember, in fact my brother Roger, and I were only reflecting on this just recently, how Dad always used to carry a jerry can a gallon of petrol in the back of the car just in case he ever run out of petrol and that would be bouncing

32:00 around in the back of the utility with us and the dog and all the fishing tackle and stuff like that. But it was a nice place to grow up to as a child, apart from the snake aspect and stuff like that. We used to go down regularly, go down fishing and eventually we learnt to go down on our own. We didn't have to wait for Dad and the bulk terminal,

32:30 it used to be a big wharf at Fairymead and they used to get these ships or boats coming in from the Solomon Islands and things like that, to pick up bulk brown sugar and molasses and all that sort of thing. And on the banks of the river, I think they're still there today, there used to be huge flying fox camps and the crews off these ships used to go into the camps and

33:00 harvest the flying foxes to eat and they reckon that they taste like pork. They've got white meat and all that you know, but I couldn't ever bring myself to eat one of those things but yeah. And there used to be huge sharks come up the river following the boats and occasionally the crew would throw bait in, hooks and so forth, and they'd catch these huge sharks, and us as kids

33:30 would be climbing all over this thing, and fishing off it and I mean if ever one of us had of fallen in you probably wouldn't have ever seen us again, but yeah. It was interesting. An interesting time. In fact all of the places that we lived in Australia were interesting in their own way. When we moved out to Inglewood, that was in 1954, and I think it was 1955 or

34:00 1956 when they introduced myxomatosis to eradicate the rabbits and there used to be hundreds of thousands of rabbits out there in those days, and we lived on the edge of town and I can remember, excuse me, I can remember rabbits used to come on our back lawn at night feeding on our green grass, because out there there wasn't very much green grass at all. And

34:30 after they introduced, only a matter of months after they introduced myxomatosis, you would have to go ten mile out of town to see a rabbit. It just absolutely wiped them out in no time at all and a very, very cruel way of killing them too. You'd see them just sitting and they'd just virtually disintegrate. It was terrible and it's fascinating to learn today that they've actually become

35:00 immune to some degree and that's why they've had to introduce other things to eradicate the rabbits but yeah. And by then I was starting to take jobs to earn my pocket money and things like that, and I

started working the in the butter factory in the butter room making butter boxes, creating butter boxes, and we used to get sixpence a box or something like that to make

35:30 them up and that's how I earned some of my pocket money as a kid.

In the first couple of years that you were in Australia, what were the other kids at school's reaction like to you having come from...

They teased us unmercifully. So did the men at the mill. I can remember the lighter side of it, having come from where we lived we had very broad accents you know. I mean nobody ever picks me

36:00 for a Pom these days and I get quite offended if I'm called a Pom anyway. I like to call myself an English-born Australian but I can remember they used to chant at us whenever they saw us and it used to go like, "Coom coom choom where's your bubble goom?" And that's how we used to talk and of course in various schools I was taken behind the tank stand and belted up for talkin' like a Pom and eventually I talked like an Australian.

Did you do you remember

36:30 **purposely trying to...**

Oh yes, deliberately trying to get away from the accent. I very seldom slip these days, but occasionally I do. Words that, like if you were to say something like, "I've come 'round the corner and I'm standing on the green grass." In those days it would be, "I've coom 'round the corner and I'm standin' on the grass," and that's how we used to talk. And it's funny because three of my brothers, two of my brothers

37:00 plus myself, were born in England and none of us have an English accent anymore, but the two boys that were born, the two brothers that were born in Australia both have English accents and we can only assume that's because Mum and Dad still have broad accents and they never lost their accents. Dad is now passed away. He passed away about eighteen months ago but Mum is still the original Pom. Yeah. She'll never lose it.

And what did these sort of being

37:30 **beaten up behind the tank stand and that, what kind of...**

Well it was just bullying I guess but and just typical behaviour I guess. It was just accepted.

Did it teach you how to fight?

Oh yes. Yeah. I got into a few scraps and I could look after myself after that.

And how 'bout your brothers? Did you feel a responsibility to them?

Yeah I used to look after me younger brothers and of course,

38:00 they in turn learnt to fight as well. My second eldest brother, Peter, who lives over in Adelaide he joined the airforce as well and he did a, I think he only did about ten years in the airforce, but he eventually became a publican and boy, he could look after himself, let me tell you. I wouldn't like to dust up with him. Yeah

38:30 so.

And was there anything particular about sort of Australian culture and things that you really settled into? Any

Ah no. The only time that I ever associated or was associated in school with aboriginals for argument's sake was at Fairymead. And there were two brothers, Dinky and Kiley, used to be in our class and

39:00 they were just another kid as far as we were concerned. We didn't have a problem with aborigines or black people or anything like that. In fact I've often reflected on and never been able to catch up with them just you know, how they're faring today and so forth. Like to see 'em. I had a very good friend in the airforce, Harry Alley, who was a aboriginal. That was when I was based at Amberley and I also knew him in Sale down in Victoria,

39:30 and he was a very nice man, but he used to have his odd times. A couple of times he went AWOL and we used to jokingly reckon that he'd gone walkabout and he probably had on reflection but no, in early days you were with, migrants formed a very big part of the workforce in those sorts of environments. So

40:00 consequently you had Italians and Greeks and you know, all the local fish and chip shops were Greek and you know... I remember the fish and chip shop in Bundaberg was owned by a Greek family and as I should have said earlier too, Robyn came from Bundaberg and we never knew each other when we were both livin' in Bundaberg and we met in the airforce in Victoria and she'd actually left town to get away from Bundaberg boys as she put it,

40:30 and then met me and we hit it off and we've been very happy ever since. Yeah.

We'll just change tapes there 'cause we've just reached the end of that tape.

Tape 2

00:39 **Okay. Now you told us you came to Melaney, tell us when you finished up school and why.**

I actually left school to become a dairy farmer and that was in 1956 and

01:00 I went to work for this lady and she was a widow and had two small sons, and things didn't really work out for me, so I moved on to another dairy farm. And Owen Thomas, the local milk man, had this dairy farm and I went to work for him and I believe Owen is actually still up there on the same dairy farm, but he's in the process of retiring now.

01:30 He'd have to be in his seventies now because I mean I'm sixty three and I was working for him when I was sixteen but again, as I explained earlier, a lot of the employment in those days was seasonal particularly in the dairy industry, where they were milking a hundred cows in the summer and only thirty or forty cows in the winter and as a consequence they used to put a lot of people off.

02:00 I then went into town and I was a greengrocer for awhile. I was a relief postman for a little while and then I met one of my school friend's brother who was home on leave from the airforce and he was what they used to call a fabric worker. He used to work in the parachute section in one of the bases in the airforce and he told me all about the lifestyle and all this sort of thing and painted this wonderful picture

02:30 of how you'd be able to see the world and blah blah, and of course all I could really focus on was, this was perhaps an opportunity to get a full time job for the first time. Actually I've skipped over the jackeroo thing.

That's alright. We'll ask you about that now actually.

Okay. There was a job advertised when I was in between jobs in, I think it was 1957, and they were advertising for a jackeroo

03:00 out of a place called Yelarbon, and in those days a jackeroo was an apprenticeship. I guess it still is today and you did, in those days, you signed on for a five year apprenticeship and eventually you qualified to become a station manager, and you used to do you know, courses, animal husbandry and accounting and all that sort of thing.

03:30 But I only worked for them for eight months before they terminated my apprenticeship because it was, what they called, the end of this seven year drought in those days. This is about 1957, '58 and the boss virtually had lost all of his stock to the drought. They'd gone through a lambing season and what hadn't died

04:00 as a result of giving birth the crows had eaten while they were on the ground giving birth and so they put me off. Broke the apprenticeship and I returned home to Melaney. I then applied to join the airforce in February 1958, but I because of medical reasons I was actually put off for three or four months and so I went back to Melaney again

04:30 and this time the local baker gave me a job. And I was just a working in the bakehouse and we used to start work at five o'clock in the afternoon and knock off at six o'clock the next morning and that was the first time, probably the first and only time in my working life that I was able to sleep during the day, through pure necessity of course.

What was it like working as such a young man so hard?

Hard work has never ever worried me. In fact I brought my two sons up to

05:00 say the same thing but you'd never be out of work if you're prepared to work hard and that worked for both of them for quite a long time. Yeah, it didn't worry me at all. I quite enjoyed it. I guess that was part of life's education if you like. Anyway in 19, in June of 1958 I was accepted into the airforce and we took it from there.

05:30 **And just another question on the being a jackeroo.**

Yep.

What did you notice about this drought? I mean what was the land like?

It was Inglewood, Yelarbon area is normally a very dry area. When you, once you start getting away from the coast on the eastern coast of Australia you go into these semi-arid places and it was different weather altogether.

06:00 It was a drier climate. You didn't have the humidity that we have here on the coast. Because of the drought we were constantly having to move the stock around, the sheep around. It got that bad in the end that we were actually cutting down trees, tree branches on certain trees and not cutting the bough off but just breaking the bough but leaving it attached to the tree so that the sap

- 06:30 would continue feeding the branch, and that's what the sheep had to eat. That in some cases there was no grass for them to eat at all, and it was the cruellest thing to see a sheep on the ground having given birth to a lamb and the crows were standing behind her eating the lamb as it was coming out, and then picking her eyes out and eventually killing the sheep. It was so cruel.
- 07:00 Such a cruel way to die and there was a very big wild pig population out there in those days too, and of course the rabbits were in plague proportions out there, so it was a real battle for the man on the land to exist alongside all of this going on. I always maintained that it was the most interesting job that I ever had.
- 07:30 It's one of the only occasions that I got threatened with the sack. The boss had this beautiful, white stallion and nobody on the station was allowed to touch that horse and of course I made my mind up that I was gonna ride that horse one day, and this particular day Jim, the boss, was going into town and I waited for him to get in the truck and leave the station and then I straight away got
- 08:00 hold of the horse and I saddled it up. And I'd just swung into the saddle ready to ride the horse and Jim had forgotten something and returned, and of course he sacked me on the spot. And being sixteen years old, I was weeping and bawling and carrying on and Jim's wife came along and pleaded the case for me and he rescinded the sacking but I never touched that horse ever again. My daily routine out
- 08:30 there in those days was to milk four house cows, 'cause I'd come from a dairy farm. He knew I knew how to milk a cow so I used to have to milk the cows for the station hands and so forth, and then he asked me if I'd ever driven a tractor, and of course the first vehicle I ever learnt to drive was a little Fergie tractor, Ferguson tractor, and he said, "Well," he says, "I've got a job for you for the next few months."
- 09:00 And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "You'll be cultivating and preparing ground for sowing the winter crop to feed the sheep." So he packed a lunch for me and took me out into this paddock and he pulled up on the edge of the paddock, and I mean this paddock was probably a thousand acres in size, and I could see this little tiny green speck on the horizon and he said, "Oh that's the tractor out there." He says, "I'll pick you up at nine
- 09:30 o'clock tonight." So I had to make my way across the paddock and then learn to try and operate this tractor, and it was an Oliver 80, which was one of the biggest tractors of its time in those days and it had a twenty-disc plough behind it, which was, I believe, was a record for the size of a plough in Queensland. So I spent most of the day trying to work out how to operate this thing. He didn't
- 10:00 show me anything, he just dropped me there and came back and picked me up at night time. And I spent the next, the last, the next three months on that tractor from daylight to dark preparing all the property for the crops. The only time that I had off, the only spare time that I had, was a Sunday afternoon, and I used to use that going out shooting kangaroos and pigs. And I used to skin the kangaroos
- 10:30 for their hides and you would cut the snout off the pigs, because there was a bounty on the pigs, and that earned me a little bit more money. 'Cause back in those days when I started off there, I think I was on five pound a week and keep, and anything extra I could make from the kangaroo hides and so forth. I think I was getting seven and six a pound for a skin, and a big
- 11:00 kangaroo skin when it was dried out would be no more than a pound in weight, so it wasn't big money but I was also doing the farmer a service as well by eradicating some of the pests. Then to try and defend the sheep if you like, there was a product on the market in those days called 'Sapp',
- 11:30 and it was a mixture of molasses and phosphate, phosphate? Phosphorus and you had to sign the poisons book if you ever bought it at the local produce agents, and what they used to do with it was get a pig, get a sheep carcass and they would smear this stuff on them and then the crows would come down and feed on it and this was the only bait that a
- 12:00 crow couldn't spit up. If you gave it arsenic or anything like that it used to regurgitate it and it wouldn't kill the crow, but when they got this Sapp into it, it used to just burn its gullet out and used to kill it that way and it was a horrendous stuff to use. If you got it on your hands for argument's sake it would start burning you like it was burning the carcass and if you put your hand in water it would stop immediately, and
- 12:30 you'd try and wash it off your hands and if you didn't wash it all of your hands properly, when you brought your hand back out of the water it would re-start up. So you know, I can remember a story once of the next door neighbour, they used to go to town in a horse and sulky, and they always used to have a dog with them and the dog was there to guard the sulky while they were in doing their shopping and things like that, and one particular day, they came back
- 13:00 from town and the wife had just made afternoon tea, scones and tea or whatever it was, so he got off the sulky and went straight in and had afternoon tea and when he came back out, his dog was just alongside the sulky, smouldering. He'd bought one of these treacle tins of Sapp and the dog had knocked it over and got stuck into it, and of course it killed the dog

13:30 but, yeah.

Were there any other young blokes?

Yeah, there was two young guys that, they were actually brothers, that lived on the next station that used to come over and we used to go shooting together. I was the only jackeroo on this particular station, but yeah. There was Mr and Mrs Penrose. I don't know whether it was his parents or her parents.

14:00 They also used to live on the station as well.

And so tell us about you told us about joining up, the reasons for wanting to join the airforce.

Yep.

But tell us about the process you went through for applying?

We I think it was Eagle Street in Brisbane. We had to go through the recruiting there and they did interviews and medicals and all those sort of thing and as I indicated earlier, they actually put me off

14:30 for three months which meant I didn't have to go through the process again. What had happened in fact, when I was fifteen years old I think it was, I had rheumatic fever, which is a heart complaint, and I was very fortunate in that I didn't sustain any damage to my heart but you had to be over a serious illness like that for a period

15:00 of three years, and when I joined or tried to join in February there was actually three months to go before that three year period was up and that's why they put me off. So they contacted me in June again and I went in. I was shipped down to a training base called Rathmines down on Lake Macquarie in New South Wales,

15:30 where we were doing, we were to do our recruit training and it was an old Catalina flying boat base back in World War II and they actually did have a couple of Catalina aircraft still flying there, but they were in the throes of retiring those aircraft. Horrendously cold place in winter and like any boot camp, as the Americans call it,

16:00 it was a short back and sides haircut as soon as you got there and they threw your uniform at you and if it didn't fit properly, well that was just tough luck, and you had to wear hob nail boots everywhere you went, and you had these people barking at you continually and learning how to use a weapon and learning a whole new language if you like. For argument's sake a parade ground was never called,

16:30 it was known as a parade ground but behind the scenes we used to call them the bull ring, because that's where you did all your marching practice and when you had a weapon, sloping arms, and how to salute an officer and all this sort of thing. We were, but you never made the mistake of referring it to as a bullring to an officer or someone like that as a bullring. One particular day I was running late for breakfast and I took a short

17:00 cut across the parade ground, which was an absolute no-no and the Warrant Officer, the WOD [Warrant Officer Disciplinary], Warrant Officer Disciplinary, or as they're known in the army a sar [sergeant] major, caught me coming across the bull ring and he pulled me up and he said, "AC Jellicoe," he says, "Where have you just come from?" And I said, "Oh across the bullring." "The bullring?" I said, "Yeah." He said,

17:30 "Do you have a rifle AC Jellicoe?" I said, "Yeah, yeah." He said, "Would you mind going and getting it for me?" So away I went but I didn't go across the bullring. I went back to my barracks and I got my, we used to have a .303 in those days, which was a very heavy weapon and all the time I'm going over to pick it up I'm saying to myself, "Gee here's a guy wanting to see my rifle." And when I got back, he made me stand at attention and he said, "You will repeat this to yourself

18:00 as you go 'round the parade ground, not the bullring, one hundred times, "This is the parade ground, not the bull ring'." He said, "Now have you been taught what's called high port?" And I said, "Yes," and that was a one of the where you did a salute and a the high port was where you held the weapon over your head. You may or may not have seen people carrying their weapons over that was called high port. So I was made to go 'round that

18:30 parade ground a hundred times carrying the weapon at high port repeating to myself, "This is not the bull ring, this is parade ground." So that was my first introduction to discipline in the armed forces and I never referred to it again as a bull ring. It was always parade ground. You had to learn to respect that that was an area that you didn't go on unless you were supposed to be there.

And how did you feel

19:00 **about when you first came in, having to deal with this kind of discipline and the various kind of orders you were given?**

Well I was quite terrified. They had the job of turning somebody from being a cleaner or a jackeroo or something like that into someone that would be a reliable airman,

19:30 and I guess the indoctrination system of those days called for that sort of discipline to shock you into becoming a an airman. I guess that was how it was meant to be.

And did it shock you?

Oh very much so. Very much so. This is the first time I'd been away from home, other than my short stint with the jackaroo, but to be right away from my family,

20:00 to be fending for yourself. There were lots of things that went on in the airforce, in the recruit camp as well, that was generated by the people themselves, not the instructors. You had to learn a sort of ethic if you like on being... I mean our recruit course, there were thirty three of us on the

20:30 course and we were from all over Australia and some of the guys were ex-World War II serving members that are were coming back into the service, and of course they were looked on with high reverence by us that just joined the military. Some of these guys actually had observer badges or one guy had wings. He'd been a pilot in World War II,

21:00 which meant he was probably a Sergeant back in those days and he was having to join the airforce again. I think he came in as a Leading Air Craftsman, which was unusual for someone to be other than, I think we were called Air Craftsmen Recruit, ACRs [Air Craftsmen Recruit], yeah, and it was, I mean in those days the Corporal drill instructor was God. I mean if he told you jump out of an aeroplane without a parachute you'd do it and

21:30 yeah... It was not surreal or surreal whatever, but it was a hell of a learning school curve.

Were there any initiation ceremonies or anything like of this order?

Yes. I can remember one incident where one of the guys on the course was an English bloke and

22:00 he apparently didn't wash. He didn't have very good personal hygiene. So a number of the guys on the course took it upon themselves to corner him one night in the showers and they took to him with a scrubbing brush and a block of Solvol. Ah Solvol. You know the Solvol hand soap, which is made up of sand and so forth. Well they used to come in big blocks in the airforce

22:30 and they took to this guy in the showers with a scrubbing brush and a block of Solvol and eventually Mick was discharged from the airforce. Unfortunately other things were happening as well but yes, that was a bullying thing. If you went out and had a few beers, which again was you know something that we were in the process of learning,

23:00 if you went out on the turps as we used to call it, and come home in the middle of the night after curfew... we used to sneak back in late. It was not unusual to go into your hut, there was sixteen people living in a hut and there were no partitions or anything like that. There were just sixteen beds and a locker. There was nothing unusual about coming home in the

23:30 middle of the night to find that your bed had been dismantled, and I can remember one particular guy had a very heavy night on the turps and he went to bed and when he woke up the next morning he was in the middle of the parade ground in his bed. Everybody walkin' past him going to breakfast. Yeah so and I wasn't an innocent. I was involved in some of it, of course.

24:00 And it was a matter of if you didn't get yourself involved, then they would pick on you. So you had to be one of the crowd to say, to be not picked on if you like. Mm.

And how would those in power, the powers that be, how would they (UNCLEAR)?

A lot of it was ignored. They chose to turn a blind eye if you like. If it got outta hand of course they'd... I can remember

24:30 in those days there was the 'bodgey' and 'widgey' era. This was the old rock and roll thing and Brylcream hair-dos and psychedelic coloured socks and all that sort of stuff and of course those people would pick on anyone. When we went to town we used to, it was compulsory that we had to wear a uniform and we used to wear a white stripe on our

25:00 epaulets to indicate that we were recruits, and if you were seventeen you had a very narrow strip and if you were over eighteen, eighteen and over, you had a half inch strip, and of course the civilians when we went into a pub used to pick on us you know. And they used to call the airforce 'blue orchids' and I think they called the army 'chocos', chocolate soldiers and

25:30 yeah, they we used to get picked on big time. And I can remember there was an incident while I was on recruits where some of our airforce yeah, our airforce recruits, had gone into town and they had been cornered in a pub by a bunch of bikies, and the bikies had taken to them with bike chains with razor blades loaded in the chains and they'd actually put two of our

26:00 guys in hospital and when it was heard that that had happened, of course we were mustered to go in and defend our honour I guess, and we went into town and then we picked on these guys. We found them and we cleaned them up in a local pub and when we left the pub there was furniture floating in the swimming pool and bodies and all sorts of things, and we gave them the thrashing that they'd

26:30 given our blokes, only not using bike chains with stuff like that of course, and when the publican complained to the commanding officer of the base about all this damage that had been done to his pub, the CO [Commanding Officer] called the whole camp together and they levied a fine on every single one of us to pay for the damage, and that's as far as it went.

What town was this?

Toronto. Mm.

27:00 **That's pretty interesting.**

Mm.

So were you feeling this separation quite apparently at the time?

Separation what, from my parents?

No separation from other parts of society, being in the forces?

Yeah, yeah. One of the things that we came to recognise over the years of being in the airforce was that you were a sheltered community. A lot of the bases

27:30 for argument's sake actually had living quarters, single person living quarters, on the base and married quarters for the married people and you would live on them on the base, and the only time that you went to town was to grocery shop or something like that. Some of the bigger bases even had schools on the base so your kids weren't exposed to the outside. Not as much anyway as living in town.

28:00 They must have recognised that that was a problem, because eventually the majority of married quarters were off base and things like that, so you were integrated into the general population, but I can remember someone saying to me while I was in the throes of leaving the service, which was 1979, that we were a protected community and I took offence at that but in hindsight it was quite true. We were a protected environment.

How did you feel about this

28:30 **when you were a young man? Feeling this separation kind of growing?**

It didn't bother me that much because you sort of learnt to adapt yourself. I mean you worked with the people, you slept with the people, you socialised with the people, you know, you were in constant contact with all these sort of people and it was a culture I guess.

29:00 You lived a culture while you were in that environment. For many years I enjoyed the service immensely. The service was my life. We used to say, as far as our kids were concerned, it was good experience for them to be exposed to constantly changing schools and so forth. In hindsight it was very bad for them.

29:30 Constantly moving around, I mean the airforce used to move on average every two or three years. Move families around every two or three years and not only were you going from town to town within a state, but you were going from state to state and for the kids to try and adapt to that it was very difficult. Very difficult and the role as a father,

30:00 I was so heavily involved in my work that most of that was left up to Robyn, my wife, and she put in some pretty tough time with the kids.

And how did you feel when you were a young man about being away from your family and being in the airforce?

Being away from Mum and Dad?

Yeah.

That didn't bother me. I

30:30 used to think Dad was particularly proud of me for being in the service, but he wasn't a man to show that, acknowledge that in a lot of ways. I guess because I got married so young I had my own family to look after. Responsibilities and raising them and so forth. We were very poorly paid in the services for many years.

31:00 In fact I did a comparison recently. When I left the airforce in 1979 as a flight lieutenant, I think my salary in those days was \$18,000 a year. People going off the street as an Air Craftsman today are probably getting about \$45,000 a year. So that'll give you an idea of, mm.

31:30 We were very badly paid and the only way, I guess, and this also brought out something in me over the years too, the only way you could get a pay rise effectively was to get a promotion, so that drove me to achieve great things in my time in the airforce. The proudest day of my whole working life was the day that I was commissioned as an officer.

32:00 I could have burst that day. I could have absolutely burst that day.

Describe that day for us.

I'd been through all the interviews and I had applied for a commission twice before I was actually commissioned, and each time I was knocked back. First of all I was knocked back on the grounds that I hadn't completed my education to the level required, the minimum level required.

- 32:30 And the second time, they had just retired the Canberra bombers and all of the air crew had to be placed in employment because in those days, and I believe it's still the same, you were virtually guaranteed full time employment unless you wished to leave under those sort of circumstances. So all of the positions in the supply branch were actually given to redundant air crew.
- 33:00 So I got knocked back the second time for that reason, but the third time when I re-applied it was something like ten weeks from the time I applied to the time I was standing at Point Cook at officer training school. It happened so bloody quick. The day I was commissioned I was called up to the Commanding Officer with my boss and I said to my boss, I said, "Is this what we were expecting?" And he said, "No, no." He said, "The old man's pretty upset. I don't know what it's all about."
- 33:30 So, and of course I believed him. So I then started worrying about, 'what have I done?' you know. Anyway I walked into the Commanding Officer's office and he said to me, "Sergeant Jellicoe, you're regimentally undressed," and I said, "What?" He said, "You are wearing the stripes of a Sergeant when you are a Pilot Officer. Congratulations." And they all laughed and carried on. So I went straight back to my work place
- 34:00 and went to the clothing store and I was kitted out as an officer, and I asked the boss for a little bit of time and I went straight home and saw Robyn. Robyn was actually working in the tuck shop at the local school, so I went up there and introduced myself in my officer's uniform. I was so proud. So proud.

How'd she feel about it?

How did I she feel about it? Wonderful.

- 34:30 Yeah, yeah. She knew how hard I'd worked to... I mean I'd left school at junior effectively, Queensland junior, and fourteen years later went back at senior level and did what was required of me at senior level, and we suppliers as we were known, or
- 35:00 equipment assistants when I first joined the airforce. You were glorified storemen and for me to have gone from a box packer as our nickname was, or greengrocer if you were an officer, to go from a box packer to a greengrocer was enormous stuff. Really, really, really chuffed I was, and you've seen a photograph of me, I used to sport a handlebar moustache
- 35:30 in those days and the airforce law was that you were not allowed to have your, what do they call them? Side burns below the middle of your ear and a moustache had to be no further at the end of your lips or that way, and when I had the handlebar moustache of course that was more a tradition than anything but the regulations
- 36:00 really didn't allow you to grow the moustache. I mean in the RAF [Royal Air Force] they used to have what they call mutton chops as well, which was the beard that used to grow across your cheeks but then you would shave complete down from there. Anyway, I had a very interesting incident when I was going through the initial interview process and I had to go before the Officer Commanding, this is at Amberley. I had a Commanding Officer that was in charge of our
- 36:30 squadron and then there was an officer commanding all of the commanding officers, all of the squadrons on the base, and you had to go before him for the second final interview before you went to Canberra for the actual commission board interview, and this Wing Commander had seen me around the base with these handlebar moustache and I was sitting
- 37:00 as a Sergeant outside the Officer Commanding's office, waiting to go in for the interview and this wing commander came along to me and said "Sergeant Jellicoe, I advise you to retire to the nearest office desk, get a pair of scissors and cut the ends of that ridiculous moustache." And I looked at him and I said, "Thank you for your advice sir," and sat down, and when I got into the Officer
- 37:30 Commanding, he said to me, he'd detected that I was a little bit upset and he said, "What's wrong?" And I told him the story. He said, "Good on you lad." He said, "It's about time someone told that man off." So I got away with it and I sported that handlebar moustache until I left the service in 1979.

What is it about the airforce which has all these interesting moustaches?

I think a lot of it was to do with tradition.

- 38:00 If you remember, the pilots used to have the handlebar moustache and I guess I, this is only my interpretation, but I would think that that was back in the days when they had a set of wings and perhaps that was the nearest thing that they could create as part of their image if you like. The RAF were very big in handlebar moustache, whereas the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] not so much
- 38:30 but I was airforce through and through. I loved my days in the service.

Were there a lot of men sporting interesting moustaches?

No. Not really. I think the only time I ever saw someone with mutton chops was a guy, he was actually an officer, an air traffic control I think he was, at Richmond. He had special permission to grow the mutton chops because he was going

39:00 to be the Father Christmas and they wanted some authentic beard if you like. So they allowed him, but he had to whip it off the moment he'd finished his role as Father Christmas.

How do you apply for special permission to grow...

Oh you just go to the Commanding Officer, but there was one regulation if you like that was impacted by having a beard, ah having a moustache, and that was, you had to have a new

39:30 identification card issued, and I guess it'd be the same for me today if I my driver's licence carries an image of me with a beard and I've had a beard since 1979, since I left the service, and if I shaved it off tomorrow I would have to go and have a new ID [Identification] card, a new drivers licence photograph taken, and my wife lives in fear that one day I'm going to shave it off and she's not going to notice.

Alright we'll just pause there

40:00 'cause just at the end of the tape.

Yeah.

Tape 3

00:36 **So what sort of things were you learning initially in your training?**

Well how to conduct yourself as a military person to start with. Then we used to have marching practice and we went away on a on a bivouac to do map reading. You had to

01:00 learn all about the weaponry of the of the day, which in our day was .303s, the [Lee] Enfield .303 [calibre rifle], Bren [machine] guns, Thomson submachine guns and then pistols, but we didn't we didn't do anything with pistols because that was for officers only. Yeah.

And what sort of, I suppose it might have been a bit hard for you to tell being just initially

01:30 **in the airforce but what was, what sort of transitions was the airforce going through at the time?**

Ah well as I indicated before, there were a number of the people on our course had previously served in the airforce in World War II and a lot of the people that were already in the service had been in the service for a long time.

02:00 Yeah. I'm a little bit lost on that one.

That's alright. We can come back to that a bit more and you were going to tell me about how you sort of got divided up into what areas you'd be working. I don't quite know what it's called.

When we first yeah, I think I know what you mean. When we first joined the airforce you were given the opportunity of employment in various fields and these, the term used was "a muster".

02:30 It was called, you had a job, it might be an equipment assistant as I joined, and that was my mustering. If you wanted to change jobs you then the term was you would then re-muster to something else and I joined as a storeman. Coming from a background of dairy farming there obviously wasn't going to be anything like that in the armed force but I'd been a store, I'd worked in a grocery

03:00 store and things like that, so they cottoned onto that and I guess to some degree it was a glorified labourer's position. There was a mustering called 'general hand' and they were just doing gardening and road maintenance and things like that but I went into the stores branch as an equipment assistant and it was my

03:30 job wherever I went to be involved in the resupply or the stocking of supplies to support, logistically support whatever theatre I was in.

And how did they go about training you in this?

We had what they call trade tests that you had to pass, so you studied various things and then they gave you exams and then you

04:00 would, you started off as an equipment assistant provisional for argument's sake, and after a qualifying time you'd then have to pass the required exams and then they would confirm you in the mustering and from then on you would do a series of training courses to expand your knowledge and your experience

and so forth, and also at the same time of course you were looking at promotion

04:30 opportunities as well. The promotion in the equipment branch was very good, hence you would get pay rises on a regular basis if you were good enough to be promoted.

And how did obviously there's a lot of different things to keep track of in stores, so they are divided up into different...

Yes. For argument's

05:00 sake, you could specialise in certain areas. Ammunition was an example. You could do special training courses and be employed on ammunition dumps, and I mentioned earlier on that I had a job down at Sale where I was in charge of the fuel installations for the aircraft, so you had to have specialist knowledge. Do testing of the fuel and

05:30 for water content and all and temperature and all that sort of thing, and catering was another area where you did special training and you went into the catering part of the equipment branch. General stores or stores depots you were virtually like a big Bunnings store sort of thing, and you were supplying people all over Australia and sometimes overseas bases as well with the equipment that was required to

06:00 have them carry out their role.

And how about in terms of a plane? How is a plane registered in a store? Is it in pieces or in...

No, the aircraft is brought into the service as a total entity but at the same time they buy the supporting spares and maintenance equipment to maintain the aircraft and that's what goes into your stores at the squadron level.

06:30 Then quite obviously they're not going to carry the entire stores range for a squadron of aircraft so that then goes into a stores depot, where I spent two postings at stores depots, and not only aircraft spares, but every sort of spare that was required by the military, and as I say, that could be food, ammunition, things as mundane as blankets

07:00 for your bed and sheets. Even the mattress you lay on, or the bed. In some postings like Darwin and Townsville, the airforce used to provide furnished married quarters, so there was a specialist area that equipment assistants were employed in, in the housing section, and you had to you know if some lady rang up, some wife rang up and said that her machine,

07:30 her washing machine had just blown up you had to go in there and change it over and this that and the other, so you had to carry stocks of that sort of thing as well, but that was only in the tropics. Down south all the married quarters were unfurnished.

And I'm assuming that it would have changed a lot over the years that you were in the airforce, but when you first began what sort of what sort of system of cataloguing was used to keep track of stores?

Um

08:00 initially it was all done in through our stock control area and they used to just have stock control ledgers. As we progressed over the years we then went into microfiche cataloguing and eventually they went onto computer. That was in the throes of coming in as I left the service in '79 but yeah, so

08:30 your inventory control and that was done through stock control. Interesting things about aircraft in particular is whenever the aircraft were introduced into the service they became the responsibility to monitor the movement, if you like, of aircraft in and out of servicing, if they were if they were taken to another organisation, like for argument's sake, the Hercules used to be

09:00 the major servicing used to be done, or some of the major servicing used to be done by Qantas. So the aircraft would actually have to be attached from the squadron to Qantas and our role in the squadron supply section would be to get the inventory of the aircraft, which virtually detailed everything that was in the aircraft. All the instruments,

09:30 all the fittings that were in the aircraft. Even down to, in the older days, the crystals that were in the radios. They all had to be identified by serial number and so forth. So every time the aircraft moved we would have to get the log book and do a complete log book of the aircraft, log book check of the aircraft, and then in some instances you actually had to have someone accompanying the aircraft. Another area that we used to do,

10:00 have major services done was Parafield in South Australia and they would go they would take the aircraft say from East Sale, like a Dakota [transport] aircraft, and an equipment assistant would have to accompany that aircraft, take it over to Parafield for the servicing and hand it over to a liaison officer at the other end, and he in turn then would have to do his check on the log book

10:30 of the aircraft. So it was interesting, and I touched earlier on when the aircraft, when the A-model Hercules arrived in Australia in November 1958 I was actually an equipment assistant at Richmond when they arrived and I was one of the very first airmen to step on one of those aircraft to help unload

it when they arrived. And ironically, as it had seventeen years later, when I was a commissioned officer and I returned on posting to

11:00 Richmond, the very first job I got was to retire those same aircraft out of the airforce.

What was that like? I guess that's kind of what I was gonna touch on earlier, of having these sort of new aircraft arrive and what was the talk and....

Well it was fascinating stuff. I mean I still run out and look up in the air when I hear an aircraft fly over. I just can't help myself. I it just comes into your blood if you like, but I was

11:30 only recently reflecting on the amount of aircraft that turned over in my service of twenty one years. In 1958 when I first joined, they still had Catalina flying boats at (UNCLEAR), where we did our recruit course. The sort of aircraft that were in service in those days were Mustangs, which were the fighters, there were Meteors, which were one of the first jet [fighter] aircraft in the airforce,

12:00 there were Vampires, there were Neptune bombers, which were piston-driven aircraft and later on they were modified to take jet boosters on them. The Dakota, which was the work horse of the airforce, the training air craft was I think they'd just got out of Winjeels and moved into Wirra, no, they'd just got out of Wirraways and

12:30 moved into Winjeel. The bombers, there was a Lincoln bomber still in service at Amberley when I first joined the airforce. So that was they actually took me out to the Amberley base as part of the recruit initiation if you like, not the not the recruit course but it was a day out at an airforce base to introduce you and they had a Lincoln bomber out there that

13:00 I remember had been, it had flown through one of the atomic tests and had been contaminated and they had it fenced off sitting on the air field and they used, eventually they started using it for fire fighting practice but that was a Lincoln bomber. They were flying what's called a Jindavic, which was a radio controlled missile that was down at Woomera.

13:30 So all of those aircraft were in use. Oh they had the Sabre, Sabres. They were the pre-aircraft to the Mirage and the French Mirage [fighter jet] that was introduced. Ah

And,

Later on oh sorry.

No you're right. Continue.

Later on they introduced the Hercules [transport aircraft] to replace the Car, ah the Dakota.

14:00 The Caribou aircraft was also introduced at that time and they were a sort of mid range, a lighter transport plane if you like. I believe there's still a couple of those flying. Still in the airforce. The Dakotas I think have all gone now. The Neptune bombers were retired in my time. The Sabres [jet fighter] were retired. The Wing,

14:30 Wirra, Winjeels were retired. Even the Mackey. There was an Italian aircraft introduced as a jet trainer, that was retired in my time. The aircraft leased some Phantoms [jet bomber] while they were waiting for the late delivery of the F111s. They were a pretty impressive aircraft and of course the F111s [fighter jet] just blows you away. That's a

15:00 flying computer that thing. It's amazing what they can do with that aircraft.

What was the general, I guess what were your impressions in the early days? Like around '58 of jets? Air craft? Was it still new technically?

Well it was all very new technology. I mean the Meteor was I think the only big jet. Oh no, there was the Meteor and the Sabre were flying at that time, and of course the Sabre I think had evolved as a result of the Korean War.

15:30 Yeah, it was fascinating stuff to be around aircraft in those days. Part of the duties we had, the extra duties that we had, we used to do guard duty, and that was generally you were seconded into a team of people that went around securing the base and if you were on a flying base securing the aircraft and yeah, wandering around night with these things and there used to be guards and

16:00 guard dogs and we used to have to be rugged up because it was pretty damn cold in those days you know, particularly down south, and yeah.

And were a lot of the new planes coming in based on American models or American planes?

Oh I would I wouldn't be sure about that, no. I guess the Sabre was one that would have been. The Meteor

16:30 I think came from the British side of things. There was another aircraft, transport aircraft that the RAAF used to use in Australia and that was, oh I can't remember the name. It had a two huge doors that used to open like that up on the front of the aircraft and they used to be able to drive vehicles into the... there was a lot of American air craft based

17:00 in Australia too. Still are, yeah.

And you spoke just a little bit before to Keirnan [interviewer] about the traditions of the RAAF in terms of moustaches and stuff like that.

Yeah.

What sort of link or relationship did you feel the RAAF had to the RAF at that stage?

Well I guess my only thought on that would be the fact that the RAAF evolved from the RAF

17:30 when Australia realised that they needed a military presence in the air I guess. The Australian Airforce actually started its working life in the Australian Armed Forces with the army. There were I think, they used to call it the aviation wing or something like that and then the RAAF was born at Point Cook in Victoria,

18:00 and the father of the RAAF was Sir Richard Williams and he actually, while he was still alive, visited the Amberley base while I was there and I actually got his autograph, in the 50th anniversary commemoration book that was produced in those days, and I've got it somewhere around with his autograph in it, but

18:30 yeah, and that started in the early 1920s I think. I'm a little bit rusty on my airforce history but yeah. And of course Point Cook being the birthplace and Richmond played a pretty big role too, because it was Richmond I think that Kingsford-Smith flew into when he did his London to Australia flights. And when I joined in 1958

19:00 a lot of the original hangars and so forth were still in place at Richmond, but eventually most of them have been pulled down and replaced with more modern buildings.

Well tell me a bit about Richmond as your first posting?

Richmond was an interesting base. I started work in the stores system there and my very first contact with

19:30 aircraft movement if you like was, I think it was 77 or 76 squadron of Sabres were attached to Butterworth and we'd just received the Hercules and they actually took the wings and part of the tail section off a Sabre and put it up into a Hercules and flew it up to Butterworth inside the Hercules.

20:00 That was pretty amazing stuff to see things like that and the Hercules could actually take fire tenders and aircraft within the bowels of the aircraft.

Well tell me what it was like when like how did the Hercules arrive? Tell me about that.

Oh they had a big ceremony and I think the Minister of Defence was there. I can't even remember who that was in those days. I remember Bob Menzies was the Prime Minister,

20:30 and they had this big welcoming parade and the aircraft actually flew in formation across the base to start with and then one by one they peeled off and landed, and of course they were all chockablock full of spares and that sorta thing and after the big ceremonies had died away then we were given the task of going in and unloading the aircraft.

And what are the, what's a Hercules like to...

Well it's

21:00 almost like a big flying garage. They're huge. I mean when you stood alongside them if you were in a hangar where you could over overlook them, which a lot of the maintenance hangars you can do that, they look like tennis courts. They were so big on the tops of the wings and the fuselage and to actually be allowed to go up into the cockpit of them and I think I had, my first photograph was taken with my head

21:30 hanging out of the window of, off the flight deck of one of the Hercs.

And what was the sort of, I mean did people stand 'round and go "Oh look at" you know was there any talk about the Hercules and...

Oh not that I recall but I mean it was such a thrill I mean to be part of it. Yeah.

And how do you go about like where do you even

22:00 **start making that sort of log book inventory for a new plane?**

Well when the plane arrives it's got similar paperwork by the manufacturer and then the airforce has their own set of forms and paperwork and so forth and then you transcribe it and you do actually do a physical test or check against the information that you're receiving when you initially received the aircraft.

22:30 Because in there, so often instruments have to be changed and so forth and I guess civilians don't think

about this, but when you have an instrument in an aircraft it's a very integral part of the aircraft and the instrument itself is tracked, the entire life of that instrument is tracked while it's in the airforce as well, so if it goes in for testing

23:00 or if it breaks down and they've gotta pull it down and find out what's caused it.... Each instrument generally used to have a serial number so you had a serial number to record to your log book. You had a full description to write out about the instrument if it was an altimeter, if it was a gyrocompass or something like that. Radios were the same. I touched earlier on it that a lot of the radios had crystals in them so you had to know...

23:30 They were colour coded and they had part numbers on them and things like that so, yeah. It was interesting work.

And as your first posting, what was your exact job on the Hercules?

Ah I wasn't on the Hercules. No, I wasn't a part of the aircrew, I was just a part of the stores system that supported the role of the aircraft.

So in terms of...

Well I was an aircraftsman,

24:00 that was my rank. My mustering was an equipment assistant, which was, to interpret to civilian terms, a storeman. I was a storeman and I was employed in maintaining stores for the various roles. You had different things you looked after, different things in different squadrons or different bases.

24:30 Not every base that I served on for argument's sake was a flying base, but I came in contact with a lot of the flying spares because we were bulk storage if you like for, I mean at squadron level when I was the supply officer for the Hercules squadron at Richmond, I had twenty eight people working for me and I had an office and stores complex built into the hangar where the actual

25:00 aircraft were rolled in to do the maintenance and then as they started pulling the aircraft to pieces they would then come in and say, "We need an altimeter for this air craft," and hand the old one in. Then we would have to record on cards the movement of the particular instrument, so yeah.

What do you do with the old equipment?

That's sent away to test, the airforce maintained a lot of their own test cells. Some

25:30 of the stuff had to be sent out to civilian contractors. So again you had the task of monitoring the movement of all this stuff, but it wasn't only just aircraft spares that I was involved in. I got involved in fuel supplies, ammunition. If the staff were required to be involved in weapons training you had to

26:00 obtain the weapons that they were to use. You had to store the weapons, you had to obtain the ammunition so that they could be trained with using of the weapons. You had to store that ammunition. You had to know the rules and regulations of where you could store it, in what quantities you could store, what the temperatures had to be, what the buildings were, what the limitations around the buildings had to be for clearance and things like that so, yeah. It was interesting stuff.

26:30 I mean I loved my time in the airforce.

And how 'bout what was your interaction with the other parts of, for example say the ground crew or something like that?

We were in regular, in a squadron situation, we were in regular contact with the servicing crews, the tarmac crews. They had a set of people

27:00 that were responsible for having the aircraft placed ready to go out on a day's sortie. Making sure that the aircraft were refuelled. If they were going out on range training for argument's sake they had to have the ammunition and what have you in place. The air crew only joined the aircraft when it was ready for flight,

27:30 so you had all these people that were responsible for towing the aircraft around, taking it out of the hangar, putting it on what they call the flight line where the aircraft are set up ready for the crew to join them. The refuellers, that was another area that we were in constant contact with. The ground crew were responsible for the refuelling of the aircraft but the supply branch was responsible for the

28:00 replenishment of the fuel, the storage of the fuel, the maintenance of the actual fuel facility. So that was our role, was to fill the tanker and then the air the refuelling crew would then drive the tanker out to the aircraft. Later on they started underground installations where they could just couple an aircraft up to a fuel installation. You see it now at major air ports for argument's sake

28:30 where they just put a big pipe into the ground effectively and then it's connected to some area on the on the aircraft and they do a direct fuel like that, rather than a vehicle, but some aircraft require different fuelling facility and they bring in tankers. So there was that part of it. The air crew were also supported by people on the air

- 29:00 craft that were actually extracted from our branch, or some of them were at least, where they were trained up to be aircraft loaders and they actually flew with the air crew, they were part of the air crew, and it was their responsibility to make sure that the aircraft was loaded correctly. That all of the safety equipment was regularly serviced for the air crew or the passengers.
- 29:30 That the catering side of things, for inflight meals were in place when the aircraft was ready to do a long journey. All of those sorts of things, so it was, there was a lot of things to be aware of. Yeah.
- And how 'bout, in terms of, I guess, Richmond being your first posting, so we'll use that as an example, what were you finding of, I guess, the lifestyle of the airforce?**
- 30:00 Oh it was all gung ho. I mean how do you think a seventeen year old, eighteen year old would respond to being part of a military force and the aircraft? I mean I'd come from a home life where I was involved in cows and milking and things like this and all of a sudden I'm surrounded by people and aircraft. It was yeah, whiz bang stuff.
- And**
- 30:30 **in terms of lifestyle, what sort of things would you do in the evenings and I guess on a social level?**
- Go out and get drunk. That was another new thing in our lives. Smoke, I learnt to smoke, and the military has a very social part of their life. The camaraderie is quite different to civilian life. That was some of the
- 31:00 culture shock I had to go through when I left the service, to go back into civilian life. In civilian life, five o'clock knock off, everyone went their own way. In the services you knocked off, you went back to your barracks or your wife, you showered and then you went to a barbecue or you went to a do in the mess, you know a function in the mess. They had the Airmen's Ball,
- 31:30 they had the Sergeants' Ball, they had the Officers' Ball. Social, the social part you were actually assessed on your social graces as well in the services, particularly as an Officer, but a Sergeant as well. Yeah, in the Sergeant's ranks.
- Was it hard just at the beginning say when you were living in the barracks, I guess not having time by yourself?**
- 32:00 When I did our recruit course I said we were in barracks that were, it was just one big open room with sixteen bunks in it and that sort of give you an initiation if you like. When we went out onto the bases, the majority of airmen were in rooms of four people and quite often in double-storeyed situations. So as I earlier
- 32:30 intimated, you worked with the people, you lived with the people, you drank with the people, you socialised with the people. You were just one big family I guess is one way of putting it, yeah.
- Did you ever just want to have your own head space?**
- Yeah there were times, yeah. I can remember when I moved on to my next posting down at Point Cook, I was fortunate enough to get a single
- 33:00 room, and in my social life I'd started going out with a girl from the navy, and I can remember in the middle of the night one night waking up and bursting into tears, and I'd had this premonition that I was about to break up with the girlfriend. Sure enough a couple of days later I got this 'Dear John' letter and we broke up.
- 33:30 That was around about the time I'd just, after that I met Robyn. Not on the rebound. Not on the rebound but yeah, you had to generally learn to live with other people and even when I served in Vietnam, our sergeant's mess accommodation was four men to a room, so you didn't get much privacy.
- And was this, you mentioned that you'd**
- 34:00 **go out and get drunk in the evening sort of thing, was this drinking culture a big part of...**
- Yes it was. Again, in hindsight not real clever but it was fun at the time. I mean young people have to do this I guess to grow up and evolve.
- How was it sort of I don't know quite what word I'm looking for, but how was it..**
- Let
- 34:30 me try and say something to you there. To give you an example, when I started my recruit course I didn't drink. I just didn't drink you know, and our introduction to drinking was full on in the airmen's mess. The moment you knocked off. If you had some studying or exams to do you had to get them out of the way first, but you all got together and you all
- 35:00 got off your brain, and of course in New South Wales the pub system in those days was six o'clock closing and instead of just getting a glass of beer, you would get a variety of glasses of beer and you used to start with a little tiny what they called a pony, then you'd go to a middy, then you'd go to a

schooner, then you'd go to a cruiser, and I think they had one above the cruiser. A cruiser by the way was about

35:30 a pint and then I think they had an albatross. I'm not real certain about that one, but when we got leave we would then go into town and the first pub you'd go to, you'd start drinking ponies. Then you'd move to the next pub and you'd start drinking middies and I can remember doing a pub crawl in Newcastle and we were all sitting up at a bar talking and drinking and carrying on, and the people on either

36:00 side of me were sitting on bar stools and the people on either side of me were, you'd talk to him and then you'd talk to him and they looked back and here I was laying on me back. I'd passed out 'cause by this pub, this stage we were on schooners and that was an enormous amount of beer to drink and you know, but yeah, that and again that was the sort of the culture. You went into that and

36:30 you had to learn to cope with it.

What do you remember anyone who didn't drink?

Ah not a lot of people that I can recall. I'm probably painting not quite a true reflection of what was going on for me personally because I didn't do a lot of drinking. I did in that circumstance but later on, particularly after I got married, you know I had to start

37:00 acting responsible and so forth, and I can remember when I was posted to East Sale there were a group of people that I worked with that used to give me a hard time because I used to, I didn't used to go to the pub with them on Friday afternoons when we knocked off or drink with 'em on the weekends in the pubs and so forth and they used to give me a really hard time about it. You know all the time ribbing me, and I said one day, one guy bailed me up one day

37:30 and he said you know, "You're mean," "You must have your first dollar," and all this sorta thing and, "Why don't we see you in the pub?" And I used to, and I thought to myself, well here's a guy that was talking to me about spending all this time in the pub drinking and I knew his family were at home and his kids weren't properly dressed, they didn't have shoes on and they were sitting on butter boxes around the table in their house 'cause they couldn't afford the furniture.

38:00 And I said to this guy, "If I've got to buy your friendship in the pub it's not worth having," and from that moment on they left me alone and I really astounded myself by being so deep and meaningful but that that's just how I felt at the time. That if I had to buy his friendship in the pub, it simply wasn't worth having and I found after that that they did respect me for it, which was good,

38:30 and I guess they must have learnt something themselves.

Was there ever a point like a line where you had to make a decision not to drink as much or not to...

Certainly when I came back from Vietnam. The routine up there, if I can call it a routine, was to go to work, knock off, come home as I said to you before, I would sit down and write a letter to my wife,

39:00 and then I would go over to the mess and I would have anything up to a dozen Bacardi cokes before tea. Then I'd go and have a meal and then I'd come back to the mess after the meal and get serious and we practically drank ourselves off the face every night, because there was nothing else to do. You know you weren't allowed off base after ten o'clock at night. You had to, if you went to town you had to sign out and sign back in so that they knew you were home.

39:30 Our spare time consisted of playing darts, playing cards and drinking and smoking. I smoked in those days as well, and that was just the environment you were in, and when I came home, I had to severely curtail my drinking. Robyn indicated to me that there'd been a character change in

40:00 me as a result of being over there and that was partly down to the drinking and other things. So yeah, I did have to make a conscious effort. I can remember one night in Sai, not Saigon, in Vung Tau, we went to someone's farewell and there was a mix up in the drinking arrangements and usually when you went to a party like that you took your own drinks. You didn't

40:30 buy them in town because they were, it was all black market in town and you paid the absolute earth by comparison to what you could buy it on the base for. To give you an example for argument's sake, we were buying a forty ounce bottle of Bacardi for a dollar forty five American. We could buy a case of beer for two dollars, ah two dollars forty. That's twelve cents

41:00 a can for beer. Fifteen cents a can, ah fifteen cents a nip over the bar for spirits and you'd just get into it, and I started out to say I we went into this party and the arrangements got mixed up and it finished up that the forty ounce bottle of Barcadi [rum] I took along with me is what I actually drank for the night and I drank two fingers off the bottom of that bottle on my own that night, and it's the

41:30 only time in my life that I went to work the next day drunk. I had a hangover for at least a week and it burnt my gullet and I had to finish up going to medical section and getting some pills to put a lining back on my throat and stomach. So that was a heavy night.

We just have to change tapes now. We've just reached the end of that tape.

Tape 4

00:36 **Okay. I'd just like to ask you about meeting your wife. Tell us the story there.**

Ah, I'd been going with a navy girl. She was in the Signals Corp in Canberra and we'd just broken up and something had happened to one of my legs and I had

01:00 my, I think it was my right leg, in plaster and I was on crutches and when you went for a meal in the old days to the mess you had to take your own cup, knife, fork and spoon and then you would go up to a servery and they would serve stuff onto your plate and so forth and then you'd go and sit at a table and have the meal. And of course being on crutches I couldn't

01:30 do that and some of the mates used to have to do it for me and I'd just go over to the table, and apparently Robyn and her girlfriends, who Robyn was in the airforce then, had been eyeing us off and she'd made a comment about me to one of her girlfriends and her girlfriend said, "Oh don't worry about him, he's already taken care of by someone from the navy," but they didn't know

02:00 I'd broken up with this other girl. Anyway one thing led to another and I can't remember whether I asked Robyn or Robyn asked me. It would more than likely it would have been me asked Robyn if she would like to go out to the movies one night and it really started off from there. Robyn had only been in the airforce a matter of months, and at that stage I think I'd been in the airforce about eighteen months and we were

02:30 both working in stores and within three weeks of meeting Robyn we were engaged and we had named our children, but we couldn't get married straight away because we had to wait for about eighteen months until we saved some money, 'cause we were, both being single we were not in the saving mood sort of thing so, that's how I met her. She

03:00 joined the airforce, and this was down at Point Cook and it was funny because she said to me later that she'd joined the airforce to get away from Bundaberg boys. She'd broken up with her boyfriend up in Bundaberg and of course when we met, we both realised that we'd both spent some time in Bundaberg but we never knew each other back in those days. In fact we

03:30 worked it back to realise that at one stage we would have been in contact with each other in that I was the ice-cream boy in the local theatre, picture theatre, and Robyn and her boyfriend would have been up in the back seats snoggin' when I was floggin' ice creams and lollies and so forth. So that's where we would have known we would have crossed paths, but we didn't actually know each other.

04:00 So yes, and that was in, we met in 1960 and we were married in December 1961. December the 16th.

Why was it so quick, like the three weeks 'til you were engaged?

We just fell in love and that was it. It was wonderful and I love her as much today as I did in those days. She's been the making of me,

04:30 absolutely.

And what was she doing in the airforce?

She was doing a similar role to me in the stores branch. She used to, I think she was running the clothing store for the WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] recruits that used to come through and I was working in the ration store at the time at Point Cook. So yeah. Used to be my job to help

05:00 distribute the foods to all the kitchens and so forth and receive the foods in from the contractors and supplies and so forth. Fresh vegetables, fish, meat, all that. Back in those days we had butchers. They were actual trades in the airforce. Butchers, cooks and yeah.

And did you have a kind of military wedding at all?

Absolutely. I'll show you our wedding photograph

05:30 on the wall later on. We were the first military first airforce wedding in Bundaberg since World War II, so we got quite a write up in the local paper and so forth and yeah. I got married in uniform, mainly because I didn't own a suit in those days. Yeah, but it was a lovely wedding and Robyn's parents lived in Bundaberg at that time and

06:00 her father died a couple of years later. So I didn't get to know much of Stan. Mum, Robyn's mother, Nan as we used to call her, she passed away about four or five years ago now. She actually moved up here to Gympie with us. Went into a nursing home and eventually passed away.

06:30 **And so tell us about becoming a family? An airforce family?**

Ah what is there to tell?

I mean children. Did you...

Oh children.

Yeah.

Yeah okay. Back in those days of contraception I should say we didn't want to start a family straight away. In fact

- 07:00 what we set out to do was to buy a new car before we started the family. I think we lasted a month and a half before Robyn fell pregnant. So we never did get that new car but Danny, our eldest son, was born in 19, god 1962, '63. '62 it would have been. 1962 and
- 07:30 unfortunately Robyn went through a couple of miscarriages so we never got our daughter and then later on our youngest son was born when we were in Sale. So yeah, so our gypsy family became a little larger. Life wasn't real kind to us when we first started off. We struggled like every couple did, and
- 08:00 of course back in those days you really struggled to make ends meet. I can remember our airforce wage at that time when we first got married was totally taken up with house keeping and paying the rent and buying briquettes to get the heating in the home and the electric light bill. We didn't have phones in those days. We couldn't afford a telephone
- 08:30 and our entire wage in fact was spent each fortnight. So I think we used to give ourselves two shillings each pocket money. So we really did it tough for awhile. We lived, the first house we lived in was in fact the back of a shop in wonderful down town Footscray in Melbourne. We went to an auction
- 09:00 house and I think we spent thirty pound to buy ourselves all the furniture we needed to go into the house, which included a kerosene refrigerator. I've never seen one since but it was run by kerosene. We didn't stay there very long because basically we couldn't afford it and then when the first baby came along it was
- 09:30 even bigger struggle. So we moved into a house and shared a house with an old pensioner for some time but back in those days the airforce didn't take a lot of time out to look after you. You had to fend for yourself really. It wasn't an automatic thing to be transferred between bases and automatically go into a married quarter. You used to have to find
- 10:00 interim accommodation and quite often there were some pretty unscrupulous type of people around who would prey on people and charge exorbitant rents for very inferior accommodation and stuff like that. I can remember moving into a house in Sale and we nicknamed it the convict house. It had very
- 10:30 narrow doorways and very low doorways with a sort of an arch on the top and most of the rooms didn't have doors on them because of this style of doorway and there were five open fireplaces in the house, there was a woodchip heater over the bath, there was a wood stove for Robyn to cook the meals on, so consequently any spare time
- 11:00 I had was out with an axe cutting firewood. Back in those days you didn't have chain saws. So I used to spend the whole winter cutting whole trees up and bringing them back, and I'd take the family with me to help me and the kids' jobs used to be to pick up all the chips that were cut out of the Vs that I'd be cutting into the wood to split slabs off for the open fireplace, and they'd pick up the chips and put them in a potato sack
- 11:30 and that's what we used to use to heat the water to go into the bath so it was pretty crappy stuff but we were happy in our own company, so I guess, and being in love and so forth we laboured together.

And at the same time, what were you hearing about Australia being involved in the war with Vietnam?

Oh that was well before the Vietnam War. This was

- 12:00 1963 I think we went to Sale. So Vietnam hadn't really started. I'm not absolutely sure of the date when the Vietnam conflict started.

'65?

'65 was it? Yeah. Okay.

Yeah. So

Yeah.

When you heard the news that it started. I know your service was later but...

Yeah.

At the time what were you thinking of the news that...

Well it was all pretty sketchy to us you know. Most of what we heard was in the papers

- 12:30 or on television and we did have television back in those days, even though it was only black and white, but yeah. So military wise we weren't informed. It was if you weren't involved in it directly you weren't involved in it at all. So

What about through the airforce what kind of things were you being told about communism?

Nothing that I recall. No.

- 13:00 **There was no talk of the domino theory or anything like this?**

I guess I didn't move in those circles. It might have been different if I was in the officers' mess in those days. I would have imagined that they'd be talking about those sorts of things at that level, but we were the troops. We were the ones that did all the work.

Well talk to me about the lead up. I know this skips a few years but talk to me about the lead up to your involvement.

- 13:30 It started out with me volunteering to be posted over to serve and the basic reason that I volunteered was to actually get war service up so that we could apply for a war service loan to buy a home. That was very important in those days. To give you an example for argument's sake, the interest rate repayment level was three and a quarter per cent

- 14:00 and you simply couldn't get loans like that from an outside organisation and the criteria to be able to apply for a war service loan was that you actually had to be a returned air man from an active war role. You couldn't, today I understand a lot of the people can apply for war service loans and so forth. They mightn't even call them war service loans anymore, but

- 14:30 if you've done three years service you've qualified. Whereas back in those days you actually had to have been in a war theatre and you had to be in for a qualifying period too. It's the same with the medals that are issued for campaigns. You've got to do a certain amount of time for certain medals.

And how did Robyn feel about you volunteering?

Ah she didn't have a lot to say

- 15:00 about it at the time, but in hindsight she wasn't real happy about it. I get quite upset sometimes when I see today's soldiers and families getting on television and carrying on about the lack of this and the lack of that and being paid two hundred dollars a day to be over there and coming back with huge amounts of

- 15:30 money and buying houses and such like that, whereas in our day you went over, you got a bit of tax relief. You got very little else. The day I left to go to Vietnam I put Robyn in hospital with a miscarriage, so that was my farewell to Robyn, and people have asked me, "Well why didn't you object or..." Well you simply didn't back in those days. You just, you had a job to do. You were being sent off to war.

- 16:00 You just met that responsibility. I didn't have a close relationship with my father, but I can remember having being given pre-embarkation leave and he took me to the movies, which he never had done before, and we went and saw 'A Man Called Horse' with Richard Harris in it where he was part of an Indian tribe and initiated into an Indian tribe and all sorts of things, and that

- 16:30 imagery stuck with me for a very long time, but the fact that Dad had actually taken me to the movies and taken the time out to be obviously concerned that I was going over and may not come back, but it was horrendous for Robyn. She was left behind with that. Her mother was living with us at the time. So at least she had someone to look after her and that would have been, we had both our sons

- 17:00 at that stage, so she had the task of looking after them as well. Our youngest son apparently took my absence very hard. So much so that he said to Robyn after about two weeks of absence of me that I must be dead because I hadn't come back. He didn't understand that I was over there for a long period of time and what it actually

- 17:30 involved and so forth. So the only way that Robyn could actually placate him was to actually hang one of my uniforms in his bedroom each night and that settled him down and he would go to sleep then, but Brett became a very troubled person after that and unfortunately today he's listed as a missing person and we believe that he's dead. He got himself into a serious drug scene and

- 18:00 I don't know what's happened to him, but he's been missing for nearly twenty years now and he was recently featured in Queensland's missing persons program, and at the Royal National Show the police had him on their, had his information on their stand and there's been absolutely no feedback. We lost total contact with him

- 18:30 nearly twenty years ago. It was quite out of character for him too because he and I didn't see eye to eye because of his involvement and carrying on, but he was always reliable enough to get in touch with his mother and then just one day it all stopped. Just... and we never heard from him again.

What do you do in that situation?

Not a lot. It's

19:00 difficult to deal with in that you don't have a body to bury so there's no closure. Even the next step in the process for the missing persons thing is a coronial inquiry, at which we anticipate that he'll be declared dead and they write him off the books, but it's little of no consequence or

19:30 consolation to us in that we still won't have someone to put to rest. So he'll live in our memory forever as a young man and, yeah.

And how do you think he got into these troubles?

Ah the police have asked us the same thing over and over again, and I guess I was a very strict parent,

20:00 just as my father was a very strict with me. Brett was a show off and I think he got that from me. We met every school teacher they ever had, every headmaster, headmistress. We poured our life story out to social workers, police, magistrates. The police once told us

20:30 that they were the politest pair of kids they ever had through the police station. That was no consolation under the circumstances, but they just fell into the wrong company basically and they got into drinking and womanising at a very young age and then eventually serious drugs. Our eldest son, Danny, came through it. He didn't get into the

21:00 serious stuff and we can talk today about it and laugh and reflect on it, whereas Brett's been taken from us and it'll never be resolved between us, which is sad really. Yeah.

And you said before that you somehow relate this to you being away.

Whether or not I can state that it was a result of me being in Vietnam that he went in this direction,

21:30 I don't really know. It's quite feasible it could have attributed to it or contributed to it but no, I think that's just another unfortunate circumstance in our life.

So tell us about actually going through the process of being taken in and to go to Vietnam. What happened?

22:00 I volunteered. Yeah we did start this earlier on didn't we?

Yeah.

I was I volunteered. I was then posted to Vietnam, which meant that I had to leave the family behind. I arrived in Vietnam and I was based at Vung Tau, which was about, oh I think it was about fifty miles south of Saigon. So,

22:30 and my role was I was in charge of the stores system and we were supporting our squadron was called number 1 operational support unit, 1-OSU [Operational Support Unit], and we had two other squadrons, flying squadrons with us, but it was our prime responsibility to supply the needs of the staff as well as the aircraft spares

23:00 and so forth. The facilities themselves were actually run by the two squadrons themselves and they also did their own replenishments on stores and so forth, but if we were doing a trip through to go and get other things and they wanted something they would call and ask to collect it for them as well, and when I first got up there, we started going by road in convoy to a base called Long Binh, which was about

23:30 fifty miles north of Saigon, and we had so many incidents on the road that our CO, our commanding officer, turned 'round eventually and said, "No more, no more road trips," and anything that we had to do then had to be by aircraft and that was either the fix wing Caribous or the Iroquois helicopters and

24:00 they would fly us up or we would, initially we would go up by road and we would put our replenishments on the American system to get our spares, and that was quite an experience. The base was enormous. You could drive over this base in a vehicle all day and not see the same thing twice.

24:30 It was rumoured that they had something like forty thousand men on the base, and it was a flying base as well. The U.S. [United States] Army had all the helicopters and all the fixed wing aircraft and that up there, and that was the second biggest airforce base or army base in the world outside America.

25:00 So eventually we used to fly up, and I can remember on one occasion that the corps computer, of the American base at Long Binh, broke down and I don't know whether you've heard around the traps any of these interviews and so forth but the war actually stopped for ten days because this computer broke down, because the Americans couldn't get anything out

25:30 of their system to support the air part of the war. And it was, you hear different stories about World War I for argument's sake where they used to call truces and get out of the trenches and go and get the wounded or dead and take them back to their lines and bury them. Well I guess to some degree that was a modern day version of that sort of incident and it impacted on our little base as a result

26:00 in the way that we started to run out of things like soap. Soap for the kitchens and things like that, and hygiene was a very high priority over there because dysentery and all that sort of thing. So I've got photographs, which I've already shown Naomi [interviewer], of me in I didn't explain this to her, but I was actually sitting on some bags of soap powder. They had to fly

26:30 me in an Iroquois helicopter up to this Long Binh base and walk through a requisition, through their store system so that we could get these supplies for our kitchens to maintain our hygiene. Yeah.

And did the VCs [Viet Cong] stop fighting?

Ah.

During this period?

No. That part I don't know. I don't know, but

27:00 the mechanics of the system broke down for us.

I'd like to kind of talk about leaving and getting to Vietnam. When you left around 1970...

'71.

'71.

Yep.

What were you thinking about the anti-war kind of movement that before you left?

Weren't impressed. There was a bad feeling I guess between

27:30 civilians and military. What the civilians didn't seem to appreciate from a military point of view was that when we were told to do something you didn't argue about it or sit down and debate it, you just had to go and do it. So we were told that we were going to a war theatre, so that's exactly what we did. It was just another part of our job. It was work that we were trained to do and it was our job, so

28:00 we didn't hesitate. You couldn't hesitate. Those that did found themselves in the clink.

And how did you feel about leaving under this kind of atmosphere of argument?

It wasn't comfortable, but once you'd left the country you left the problem. You then became a new community if you like in another theatre.

Were there any incidents when you were getting onto a plane was it or...

No.

28:30 We were actually ambushed on one of the road trips and that's what eventually made the boss' mind up that we were not to be exposed any more on the ground. What happened was we were driving through a village and what they did was to tether a water buffalo and one thing you never ever did was kill

29:00 a water buffalo because if you killed a water buffalo you killed a village because that's what used to grow their crops. What used to plough their ground and so forth and they... It was funny because we were told that there was a compensation system in place over there and believe it or not, human beings weren't on the top of the list. The water buffalo was on top of the list for this, for these people 'cause as I say, if you killed a water buffalo

29:30 you kill their crops, you kill the people. Starve the people. So when this thing came across the road tethered on a rope, our convoy had to stop and of course when it stopped then we were fired on and of course when we went back to our base, we continued the round trip and got our spares and so forth, and when we returned to our base of course we had to be interviewed by the intelligence people and report what had happened and

30:00 we didn't return fire, so they asked why we didn't return fire and all that sort of thing. 'Cause we were right in the middle of a village and we weren't considered to be elite combat troops or anything like that, so. Anyway as a result of that, our boss - there was myself and Sergeant Grant Hamilton - were both nominated for a Mention In Despatches, and our boss was so convinced that we would get it he actually gave us the oak leaf that

30:30 you mount on the ribbon to signify that you've been given that award and we didn't get the award. So it was highly embarrassing to Mick, our boss, but yeah. So after that we flew by air and we didn't have any incidents in the air. Aircraft were often fired on, there was no doubt about that, particularly helicopters because you were within range from the ground.

31:00 **How do you survive a fire fight without fighting firing back?**

We just got out of there as quickly as we could, that's basically the convoy was escorted by vehicles that had M60 machine guns mounted on them and they were in the front of the convoy and at the back of the convoy, and they were there to protect us and

31:30 I don't know what decision-making they made, but we were all armed of course but they were there to protect us, but they didn't respond and I don't know what the circumstances were.

What's it like being in the middle of that?

Bloody awful. I can honestly say that day my hair did stand up on the back of my neck. It's quite a thing to watch a television show with a high noon and gun packin' cowboys

32:00 and all the rest of it, but when someone's out there with live ammunition shooting at you it's quite daunting.

What exactly were you seeing?

We were seeing nothing. You could only hear. You couldn't see anything. They were in the middle, we were in the middle of a village.

And what was the sound?

Well the people of the village were racing around of course, 'cause they were in the line of fire too I guess, but no, that was the extent of it.

32:30 **And what's the sound like?**

Someone shooting at ya? Bang bang bang bang. Like the you know like the (UNCLEAR) "Let's get the f'ing out of here!" and yeah. You just pack you panic. So that was it.

And what were you looking for cover or...

No, we were all in vehicles so we just followed the leader. Got out.

And you said you when you got back you were interrogated. What

33:00 **kind of things would they ask you?**

Well exactly word for word what you saw, what you heard, how you responded. All that sort of stuff.

Would they ask you separately?

Yeah, we were all, yeah the whole convoy was interviewed. Probably more so the guards than us that were part of the convoy.

Okay, we were just talking before about leaving Australia. Was there anything

33:30 **at the airport or anything said to you just before you left?**

I was trying to reflect on exactly what happened. Back in those days the airforce didn't have the 707s they've got today. The government used to lease Qantas 707s to actually take the troops backward and forward,

34:00 mainly change of crews for the airforce base in Malaysia, Butterworth, and there was the airforce and the Australian Army up there, so they were taking the replacements. If you'd done your tour in Butterworth a tour would be approximately two years. So at the end of the two years, and if you were married your family went with you, so at the end of the two years they would send over a

34:30 replacement and then you would return on that aircraft back to Australia, posted to a new posting and new duties. So but I don't have a clear recollection of when I was leaving because they would bring the aircraft to the airforce base at Richmond. We didn't go through the civilian airport leaving, so therefore I guess your question's leading up to demonstrations and so forth like that. So we didn't

35:00 have that exposure if you like, and it was deliberately done that way. Coming back was quite a different matter. I actually did two trips back and I flew into Mascot and the first time I was not allowed to go through the terminal. I had to go through the back door sort of thing, and when I returned on the second trip, which was the end of my posting,

35:30 we were ushered through customs and then again we weren't allowed to go through the main terminal. We had to meet with our families out of public sight I guess. You touched on a question earlier on about my feelings about civilians. Some time ago,

36:00 just recently in fact, I actually met up with one of those people that was one of the protestors and she's a very dear friend believe it or not of Robyn in particular, and I've got to know Margaret as a result of Robyn's friendship with her. Margaret actually apologised to me, and this is only last year. She said that she was one of the protestors and in those days they didn't realise what it

36:30 was all about. As far as I was concerned, and she agrees with my comments, the people that were protesting at that time were busy smoking pot, getting off their face, having sex orgies or whatever and just generally making a nuisance of themselves and as far as a military person coming up against those sorts of situations, we didn't like it at all and

- 37:00 it did, for some people, get quite violent. Not for me but you know there was actual fisticuffs and throwing things at people. Throwing blood at people, all of which is quite disgusting. Quite disgusting. People have the right to make a point, I acknowledge that, but a lot of those sorts of people don't think far enough into what they're doing to the actual individuals.
- 37:30 It's one thing to challenge a government's theory on war or policy on war, it's quite another to tackle a person that's been given the job to physically do what the government wants done. So I'm getting a little bit shaky over it.
- That's alright. So how did you feel about this apology from this woman a year ago?**
- It was quite, it took me back quite a lot. I
- 38:00 got quite emotional about it, yeah. It was also a wonderful experience if you like when they gave, the Australian people gave us the welcome back parade in 1988 and I participated in that in Sydney and that was twenty-three years after we'd returned from Vietnam and it was the
- 38:30 first time I got back in contact with a lot of the guys that we'd worked with over there. And it was funny because we had people saying things like "John Jellicoe, we heard you lost a leg," and I said, "George Patchett, I heard you had a heart attack and died." and here we are talkin' to each other and I had two legs and he was still alive. The atmosphere on that day was just absolutely electric. I mean you could have you could have grasped the feeling in the air.
- 39:00 It was so emotionally charged that day and so many people, you know men openly weeping and embracing each other. It was big stuff. Powerful stuff and that was the time when I guess the Australian people in general recognised our contribution. So, yeah.
- 39:30 **Alright that's lunch.**
- Another tape.
- That's lunch.**

Tape 5

- 00:36 **Okay so we were just talking about when you left Australia and got to Vietnam and just in terms of the plane trip over there, did you stop off anywhere on the way?**
- Ah yes we stopped at Singapore and that was our first introduction to
- 01:00 American-type food and it was bloody awful. They served up, it was a breakfast and it was about four o'clock in the morning something like that, but it was a breakfast stop and they had grits and weenies, and grits we thought were scrambled egg, but in fact it's a concoction like porridge but it looks like it's been made out of sweet corn,
- 01:30 and it was bloody awful and that was the grits, and the weenies were like little tiny cigarette-type sausages and they were awful and the coffee, the coffee you could bitumen a road with it, it was that black and yucky you know. So that was our first introduction but it was only a breakfast stop and then we carried straight on to Saigon.
- And did you go through Singapore airport at all?**
- No. No they just had a separate area,
- 02:00 otherwise it was a matter of going through immigration and all that sort of stuff. So they must have had some sort of pre-arrangement that transient planes to Vietnam could call in there and have a meal, stop and stretch your legs and all that.
- And did you wear your uniform?**
- Oh yes. Yeah.
- And what sort of briefing were you given either on the plane or before you left about what to expect once you got off the plane?**
- It happened both ends in fact. We were given
- 02:30 paper work guidance on booby traps and what not to drink. You know drink water, local water and all this sort of stuff. Just general information really. I guess we were treated a little bit different to the combat troops, where they were going, actually going in for armed conflict whereas we were only on a support role sort of thing but when we got into Vung Tau
- 03:00 we were met by the padre and the service police and we were taken on a tour of the town to be shown where the off limits areas were and the service police had samples of drugs that were available at the time, and with the exception of cocaine you were allowed to try them to see if, to recognise of course,

well I certainly didn't. I

- 03:30 spent my whole tour up there and never involved myself in drugs. I never have, right up until today ah but yeah, and so that was you know, that was our introduction. Yeah.

What is how did this affect you, this kind of an introduction?

Well it was like going on some sort of a tour. You know the service police'd be driving us through town and they'd say, "That's an off limits bar and that's an off limits

- 04:00 bar but you're allowed to drink in this one," and na na na na na and then the padre was doing the same thing and giving us the virtues of being faithful to your wife or family at home, and blah blah blah blah and if there was any problems, and you weren't doing the wrong thing, that he would go out of his way to help you. That actually paid dividends later on in the tour for me, because I had to have a quick trip home with a problem with Robyn and

- 04:30 I went to the padre, I went to the padre on the Thursday I think it was, and the following Monday I was home in Australia but it was only a couple of days and then straight back, so. Mm.

And tell me what your first impressions of Saigon were like?

Hot, sticky, smelly. You just didn't know what you were in for.

- 05:00 With our stop off at Saigon we stayed on the airforce base. We didn't go into Saigon itself and we just transferred into another aeroplane that flew from Saigon to Vung Tau.

I've heard that Saigon the air port there was one of the busiest in the world at..

The Tan Son Nhut air base, which was the American air base, was one of the biggest military aircraft facilities in the world and it was said that

- 05:30 there was something like an aircraft movement every thirty seconds, twenty four hours a day and they had, like you hear stories about the air traffic controllers these days with aircraft stacked. Do you know what they mean by that? Yeah. They've got them in tiers in the sky and then they bring 'em in one at a time, so that if they have five aircraft arrive at once they've got to circle four while one lands and then the next one comes down, and so

- 06:00 forth and of course in a war situation quite often those aircraft will come back and they've been hit with fire power and they've got leaking fuel tanks or they've run out of fuel or some and they've got to get in straight away, but they had something like seven tiers of aircraft in a twenty four hours a day just stacked up waiting to land or being held up because there were combat aircraft leaving, and

- 06:30 I mean the flotilla of aircraft over there was just unbelievable. The Americans were there, the Australians, the Koreans. I don't know whether Singapore aircraft were there or not. I can't remember now but yeah, it was so busy and of course getting towards the end of the, our Australian air commitment they had declared a general withdrawal by

- 07:00 that stage and I think they said there was something like seven thousand helicopters a week going through Vung Tau, being shipped onto aircraft carriers to go back to America, and some of those films you may have seen where they were kicking helicopters off the decks of aircraft carriers and that into the sea, that actually did happen up there. They just reached the stage where they couldn't carry any more so they just pushed them off into the sea.

Did you say that

- 07:30 **when you first went in there was a general withdrawal happening?**

Not when we first went there, no.

Oh okay.

No. Towards the end of our stay.

Right.

Yeah.

And what I mean what was the sort of sensory experience like of stepping into this new country in such a busy air field and...

Well the very first thing that hit you was the smell of the place. I mean it absolutely stunk, and Vung Tau was a fishing village and of course what they used to do, they used to bring their hauls of fish in

- 08:00 and they would lay them on the ground and dry them in the sun and they had no such thing as sewerage or anything like that. Everything was just running in the streets. People were going to the toilets in the streets. If you went into a building that did have some sort of a sewerage system, it was only an open trough that used to run from house to house to house and you went to the toilet and then watched your neighbour's going through,

08:30 and the toilet facilities over there were nothing like we have here where you sit on a pedestal. Over there it was just two footprints with a hole in the centre of it and you bobbed down and that was it. It was very crude.

And how did they transport you from Saigon to Vung Tau?

We had a Royal Australian Air Force Caribou pick us up from the air port and flew us home to Vung Tau, yeah.

And can you

09:00 **describe the air base for me at Vung Tau?**

Ah it was a U.S. army base and there was a large strip on the base and we the Caribou Royal Australian Air Force Caribou squadron and the Iroquois were virtually as couriers, I suppose would be the best way to describe it.

09:30 One of the things that when I first got up there, one of the things that I got caught with, as everybody else did, they used to say, "Would you like to have a fly around and have a look at Vietnam?" And of course, "Oh yes, yeah." "Well be down at air movement section at four o'clock in the morning and you can join the milk run." So, "Okay." So we front up at the next morning and the milk run was just that. The Caribous would load up with milk

10:00 and food supplies and take it all over South Vietnam dropping it at different airforce bases and so forth for the Americans, and milk was part of that delivery, so hence they called it the milk run. What they didn't tell you, and they used to say to you, you know, "Come along. You can see Vietnam. You can take a few photographs if you like." I went on one of these milk runs. I got caught like everybody else did. After you've dropped the food off, which was only a couple of hours work

10:30 first thing in the morning, after that you were running ammunition, rockets all that sort of stuff into hostile territory. So I think I took two photographs the whole day and I've never worked so hard in my life 'cause a lot of the places we went into you couldn't even stop the aircraft. We would just land and kick the pallets of stuff out the back of the aircraft onto the strip and then just take off and keep going because the fear

11:00 of being shot at by snipers or whatever you know, was very high. There were, I think I saw two Australian airforce Caribous that had been shot down in the sea off the coast, and they were still, you could still see them quite visibly from the air under water and there was a couple of American planes as well, but yeah.

What was this like as an introduction to the country?

Amazing stuff.

11:30 Another thing that they used to catch the newcomers to Vietnam was everybody was big on partying and so forth and you were only brand new into the country and you'd say to people you know, "What's happening tonight? Where are we going tonight?" And they'd say, "See that bus sitting out the front gate." We'd say, "Yes, yeah." "Be on that and at six o'clock they'll be taking everybody to the Ba Ria RSL [Returned and Services League]." Ba Ria was the name

12:00 of a little village somewhere down the road. What they didn't tell you of course was that it was just a joke, so you'd get all... you could always tell who were the new arrivals because you'd see these blokes sitting at six o'clock at night in the bus that was going nowhere, but they'd been told you were going to the Ba Ria RSL. So that, yeah, but we had a young bloke working for me in the store and he spent every spare

12:30 moment he had hitchhiking with the Americans all over Vietnam, South Vietnam, just going up into combat zones, flying in all sorts of aircraft, just as a passenger, but yeah.

How legal is it to...

I wouldn't say it was real legal, no. No. I'd probably go as far as to say it was an accepted practice, but if there'd been an accident or an incident,

13:00 there woulda been a lot of paper work generated I would think but yeah, it was one way of getting around and seeing what was going on. 'Cause we had Vung Tau and what was the other, there was another airforce base further north but that closed down just before I arrived in country. I can't think of the name of it right now but yeah so we had a couple of bases, 'cause the Australian Canberra bombers used to operate out of it. I'll think of the name shortly but

13:30 they'd closed that down. They were in the process of doing the final shut down just as I arrived at Vung Tau so, mm.

And tell me a bit about, you were telling me earlier about Vung Tau and the situation with the beach?

With the beach. Whenever you got the opportunity, and we only used to have Sundays, Sunday afternoons off, you could go to the beach and the beach was

- 14:00 a small stretch of sand and it was always a big joke because the people that were on the beach were South Vietnamese Armed Forces, Australian Armed Forces, American Armed Forces, North Vietnamese Armed Forces and they all had their little segment on the beach. And it was, you know, I couldn't
- 14:30 swear to it that it was actually, you know, the fact that there were North Vietnamese there, but you never knew. I mean how do you tell the difference between a North Vietnamese and a South Vietnamese? You couldn't, and it's the same as we were told about incidents that they used to have in the jungles. The Americans had a helicopter that used to go up and do patrols at night and they had armament on the helicopter that was infra red sensor and
- 15:00 it could pick up a man's body heat twelve feet underground and the moment it detected anything, this thing would go off like a giant roman candle and it would put a missile into every square foot the size of a football field just like that and they'd go off like that and the next morning, if they had a contact like that, next morning they'd send out the ground staff to do a body count on whatever was out
- 15:30 there and more often than not, when they got out to where there'd been a strike, there would be all these dead monkeys because the monkeys were asleep in the trees at night and then these things'd fly over, pick up their body heat and just go zap. So yeah but they, on occasion of course they would get other targets. Yeah.

Is that a smart way to fight a war?

Well I mean it was a dirty war all 'round. There was no

- 16:00 you know, nice things about it. It's always been my reasoning to say that the Vietnam War was a waste of time, a waste of money and certainly a waste of life. The North Vietnamese were very clever, given what they had to fight with. We were told stories of people picking up a rocket
- 16:30 and strapping it to a push bike and walking all the way from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, selecting a target, cutting some bamboo poles and making a tripod, getting a torch battery and setting a rocket off after a target and then they'd just turn around and go back and get another one. And the Americans'd be jumping around in the jungle smoking cigars and transistor radios going and off their face with drugs and that's why they didn't win the war. Oh well that's
- 17:00 my opinion but no, interesting stuff.

And what was it like, when did you sort of, or I guess, initially what interaction did you have with American troops?

Our only contact, ah well we had daily contact because they had spotter aircraft that used to go out and either identify a target by dropping flares

- 17:30 for an air strike or they used to go out and do surveillance trying to pick up enemy movements and then they would call in air strikes on those targets and they were all based at the same in the same place. A lot of the, excuse me, a lot of the combat missions were run from Vung Tau. They had, the Americans had the Cobras, which were the gun ships, and they were they had awesome
- 18:00 fire power. Just absolutely awesome power, fire power.

Were they helicopters?

Helicopters, sorry yeah. Yeah.

Okay.

I assumed you might know. Yeah. They had cargo aircraft as well. I can't remember what the names of them were. I remember one was, it was like a miniature Hercules only it only had two engines,

- 18:30 and we used to call it 'the fat rat', and in the time that I was there, the Americans started handing over responsibility to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, and of course airforce had to take over some of these planes, and it was quite comical because quite often, I mean the Vietnamese people are, as a race, are very short people, and half the time these people couldn't see over the top of the panels,
- 19:00 the control panels, to land the aircraft and very often they used to crash the aircraft trying to land them and the Americans'd just pull up a bulldozer or something and just push that aircraft off the strip and give 'em another aircraft and send 'em on their way. There were all sorts of things just happened like that.

And what was your opinion of the way the American troops were behaving?

It's probably fair to

- 19:30 say that the majority of them were off their face most of the time. There were so many reported incidents of them actually shooting themselves, deliberately wounding themselves, to go back home or to get the 'purple heart' or whatever but to actually talk sense to many of them were just out of out of their tree. The hard drug situation over there was horrendous.

- 20:00 I can remember walking to work each day. Here in Australia you would see empty cigarette packets discarded. Over there heroin used to come in little phials like in the old days they used to supply flints for cigarette lighters in the little plastic tube. Well that's what they used to put the heroin in and they'd be discarded along the sides of the roads like this,
- 20:30 empty cigarette packets and we were told at the time that, I think today the strength of heroin in Australia is around about twenty per cent, or even lower, in those days in Vietnam it was ninety per cent plus and there was so many of the Americans killing themselves on overdosing and stuff like that. It was just absolutely amazing, and the behaviour of the
- 21:00 black Americans in particular, in regards to the black power movement. We just couldn't believe that they were a military, a disciplined military, force when we saw them getting around with frangipani leis on their heads or 'round their necks, and if they ever, if a man in the ranks came across an American black officer they would give them the black
- 21:30 power salute rather than the proper salute, and it was just like you were in some sort of a dream sometimes. You just couldn't comprehend what they were doing, what they were about. But we often used to talk to the army, Australian army guys, at Back Beach, which was just near Vung Tau and they used to refuse to go out in the bush with them. They were just too dangerous to be with.
- 22:00 Smoking cigars for argument's sake, you could smell these people a mile away. Radios going. You know they could hear them before they were even arrived. So the Australian Armed Forces as far as I knew, didn't have a drug problem. The airforce was practically a hundred per cent clean. The navy we didn't have anything to do with and most of the
- 22:30 time they didn't come ashore anyway. Ah the army I don't know, I can't comment on the army, but I don't believe it was bad but the general armed forces of America, and they used to fail, they used to drug test them whenever they went out on R and R [Rest and Recreation]. If they left Vietnam to go on R and R and things like that they would drug test a hundred per cent of the Americans and we were told that if they detected anybody, it was automatic court martial and dishonourable
- 23:00 discharge in country, and they would relieve them of their passports and quite a lot of the black market apparently was being run by these sorts of people that had been kicked out of the service and couldn't get home. So, yeah it was it was really bad news. If, for argument's sake you went into a, if you went into a bar for argument's sake, even in Vung Tau, the kids would come in.
- 23:30 The Vietnamese used their kids in most terrible ways. They used to put the girls into prostitution from eleven years of age onwards and what they used to do, they'd send these kids into bars. We call them bars or hotels, but over there they were cafes and stuff like that, and they would come in with a tray, just like see the
- 24:00 kids at movies with the trays of soft drinks and lollies and all that sort of stuff and these kids would come in and they would go to person to person in the bar and you could get, you know condoms, all sorts of drugs, pornographic material and these were little kids selling that and there'd be someone waiting at the door to collect all the money off them when they came back out. Another ploy used to be to send the young girls in particular
- 24:30 and they would they would come up to you and try and sell you a lei and they would hand you a note and I remember it used to say, "Please help me. I'm a poor unfortunate bastard of this war. Any donation or gift of money, clothing or food would be gratefully accepted. God bless you." And of course the first thing you would do is reach for your loose change to give them and the moment you gave them you'd be absolutely inundated
- 25:00 by other kids, and then of course, there was always that person on the door collecting the money off them when they went back out, and then if the girls couldn't sell you a lei, they would then start rubbing themselves on you to try and take you to bed. So it was awful. It was just awful.

And what sort of effect was this having on you? I mean what how were you feeling about the whole situation?

Well I took the attitude, I mean there were people up there that played up,

- 25:30 let's face it, but I took the attitude that I respected Robyn, I certainly didn't want to be contracting any diseases and so forth, so I just give it all a long, a big wide berth. I just concentrated on getting drunk. So yeah. It was a long stay up there I can tell ya.

I can understand. Well talking about I guess the social life, tell me a bit about the social life on the base on the airforce base?

- 26:00 They used to run movies every night. Sometimes they were repeats but quite often they were first time movies and there was a combined cinema on the base for air men, sergeants or officers. They used to have social nights in the mess but every night we drank in the mess anyway but they had, like that Melbourne Cup night we had. I showed you the photographs of that.

Well tell me about that.

26:30 **What did**

Well I think they called it the Province Cup. We were in the, what was the province we were in? Um oh I can't, it'll come back to me in a moment. Yeah but and we all you get dressed up and they had the horses in the squares on the ground and then they'd roll there was a couple of big dice and whichever horse had to move and blah blah blah, and you'd bet on it and all that sorta thing, you know. So

27:00 there were things like that. Sometimes we used to go across to the Australian army base at Back Beach and we might have a darts competition with the sergeants' mess at Back Beach or table tennis or something like that or just go over for a drinkie, drinkies and what have ya but, yeah. As I said to you earlier that in my stay over there

27:30 I only ever went to town about five times and Saigon, I think we went I went twice and Saigon was an enormous rabbit warren. If you saw Saigon from the air in those days, it was just like one big corrugated iron sheet laid out on the ground. All of their streets were covered it went from roof top to roof top,

28:00 but it covered the streets as well and it was just like a, you know a rabbit warren and of course there was so much area that you just couldn't go into, it was just far too dangerous.

And tell me about the 'white mice' in...

The 'white mice'. One of the one of the things that used to happen in Vung Tau in particular which was where I had my experience, was they had this, there were the South

28:30 Vietnamese police, they were civilians, but they had power of life and death really and they were all dressed up in a grey suit and then they had a white helmet, white gaters, white (UNCLEAR) belt and a whistle and a gun and a baton, and the practice was, if they blew that whistle everybody had to stop. And if you could picture a movie scene and someone stops the projector,

29:00 that's exactly what it was like and I don't exaggerate when I say that if you made a move they were prepared to shoot you and kill you without question. So as a consequence of that, when that whistle blew you stopped, and then they sorted out what their problem was and when we came home from serving over there they used to hand us a sheet of paper, and it was a light hearted thing I guess just to break you going back

29:30 into civvie life or back to normal life with your family, and it used to go along the lines that 'if the postie was going past your front door and blows the whistle, please don't be surprised if your husband freezes or dives under the bed because he's heard a whistle blow', and it was just done as a light hearted thing you know but yeah, yeah.

And you mentioned that you saw a white mice, white mouse

30:00 Ah no he was a South Vietnamese police man but he wasn't a white mouse. We'd gone into town this particular night and we were waiting for our bus to come back and there was an argument going on between two people and one of them was one of our staff and one was we later found out to be South Vietnamese police man, but all of a sudden

30:30 the South Vietnamese guy pulled a gun and put it to the head of our bloke and he was threatening to blow his head off there and then, and to this day I don't know what the argument was about, however one of our service police men was on leave that night with us, and Lee was his name, I can't think of his surname now, but Lee stepped forward and actually talked this bloke down and got him to lower his weapon and then our guy got on the bus and we all shot through, but what it

31:00 was about I don't know. Whether they'd had a fight in a bar or something like that but yeah, this guy was all set to blow his head off. Yeah.

Scary.

Yeah, well that was another reason why we didn't spend that much time in town. It's too dangerous. They used to pick more on the Americans than us Australians, but unless we opened our mouth they didn't know the difference.

Was there any sort of, I suppose these days it would be called terrorism, but

31:30 **around Vung Tau and these sorts of...**

Oh you mean blowing things up and oh yeah, there was a lot of that. There was a lot of civilian activity in that regard, but the Americans also had their own problem with their own people blowing up their officers and that, with rolling grenades into their tents and stuff like that.

What was the civilian...

Oh they'd be just picking on a bar, not unlike the Bali thing where you know, how you've got a

32:00 packed bar full of Americans and they just wanna roll a couple of grenades in and kill 'em. So you know, and most of the places were you know, prostitutes and all that sort of stuff so, but yeah.

And tell me about some of the locals that would work on the base.

Well the Australian Airforce was slightly different to the Australian Army. Each of our bases had a South Vietnamese

- 32:30 work force and they would come in and, in the air force's situation, do our washing, make our beds or whatever, clean shoes, clean your boots, whatever, and help in the kitchens and all that sorta thing. It wasn't quite that good in the army and as a consequence, they used to, the army guys used to often give us a hard time over it, 'cause we used to see warrant officers in the army
- 33:00 doing their own washing and ironing and then we'd be telling them as sergeants, "Oh no, in the airforce we have someone do that for us." It was funny. I actually had an incident with one of these girls when I first arrived there, and it started off she'd taken away my washing and when she brought it back I was missing a pair of swimming togs and I couldn't, whenever you
- 33:30 got into conflict with them, all of a sudden they couldn't talk English. So I had to get our own Australian interpreter to come over and talk to this girl, and all I was wanting to know was where my swimming togs were, and we'd been told to watch out because these girls used to steal a lot of stuff off us as well. So naturally I assumed that she'd stolen me swimming togs. Whatever for I don't know. Anyway, this went on for some time and then all of a sudden I had
- 34:00 other sergeants turn on me saying that I'd put the hard word on this girl and that I was getting, I was making life hard for her by creating, making up this story, and of course that was so far from the truth. But however a few days later after it started to settle down again, this little ball of melted plastic turned up on my bed and what had happened, she'd taken my washing away and these swimming togs
- 34:30 were rayon and she'd tried to iron them and they'd all shrivelled up and she didn't know how to tell me. So rather than tell me, she just claimed she couldn't understand the English. So that's what that turned out to be.

Did you talk to her about it?

Oh yeah you know. It was all squared away eventually but I got into more trouble with the guys that reckoned I was doing the wrong thing and...

Well what sort of feeling of I mean that sounds a bit like protectiveness towards the girls that would or the people that would work for you.

- 35:00 **Was there any element of I guess what sort of relationship or friendship did you form with the...**
- There weren't many girls that I would associate with over there, and we're still talking about the civilian staff, because some of the girls used to go and sleep with the men. Missy Moi, which was the bar maid
- 35:30 in our sergeants' mess and the officers' mess, was the only, what I would term nice girl over there and she was in rather unfortunate circumstances. She had been engaged to one guy and, a South Vietnamese guy, and he'd gone into the army and was killed and I think she might have married another guy and he was killed in action as well and she finished up buying a couple of
- 36:00 children and all I could understand from that was that, by having the children, she was no longer available if I could use that word, to other shooters. Not our guys but everyone had a very high respect for her. She was a lovely little petite thing. She would have probably only been about four foot, four foot ten maximum and very slim build, very elegant.
- 36:30 And I think I showed you a photograph of her and no one would ever interfere with her. Everyone would stand up for her.

Would people yeah protect her or...

Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Do you remember any examples when...

No, not really. No nothing specific but I know that you know a couple of guys tried to put the hard word on her and they got their marching orders from fellow members of the mess. Yeah, yeah.

- 37:00 **And when you were talking about the beach earlier and how you never really knew if there were North Vietnamese or not or you know that sort of tension and confusion. Was there any of that given the fact that there were Vietnamese people working on the airforce base?**

We were constantly reminded by the service police and the officers about being aware that, you know, these people could possibly be

- 37:30 infiltrators and stuff like that but the main problem we only ever had with them was they used to steal our underwear for their men folk and what they'd do, they couldn't take them off the base because they were always searched going in and out, for mainly for weapons, but they would bundle them up and throw them over the fence and one of their mates would be on a motorbike on the other side of the

fence and take off with them. But currency

38:00 smuggling used to be like the black market with currency. The Americans had a military currency, which could only be spent in Vietnam, but every so often they used to have to change it. They would say "Righto." They might say to you at five o'clock this afternoon, "Righto tomorrow morning we're changing all the..." MPC [Military Payment Certificates], they called it,

38:30 and military MPC military something. Anyway and they would they would just pull a switch, which meant instantly the money that you were holding in the old currency had to be changed straight away. If it wasn't the following day it was no good to you. It was just paper. So and the South Vietnamese civilian staff quite often were caught trying to get

39:00 this money out into the general community. So

After it had been changed or...

No, no. After it had to be the current issue and they could do big things with it on the black market apparently. Yeah.

What other stuff was available on black market?

Anything you wanted to name. From cigarettes to a helicopter. Anything in between.

39:30 We used to have what's called 'poncho liners' which were a big trade item over there. You could trade booze for a poncho liner. A poncho liner was, do you know what a poncho is? A poncho's a rain coat, right? You see them, they've got a hood on them and then they just hang over you like a pyramid tent. Well they used to have this liner that would go inside and they're ultra lightweight but because they're made of fibreglass they were

40:00 good for keeping body heat in. So they were a big trading item and I went up to Long Binh on one trip there and I was trying to get a couple to bring home as souvenirs, and I went to about seven different units on the base and nobody would talk to me about concho concho liners, ah poncho liners. I said, "What's goin' on?" And I finally got to talk to this particular supply Sergeant and he said, "Oh the service police are looking or the military police are looking for something like a quarter of

40:30 a million dollars worth of these had been stolen." And a quarter of a million dollars in 1971 was big bucks you know. Anyway yeah, so yeah but there for some reason the Americans in particular liked the Australian Land Rovers. They would give you anything for a Land Rover. If you could work a swap, there was a standing order that I knew of,

41:00 there was a brand new helicopter. All you had to do was supply a pilot and you just swapped 'em. The Americans were very big...

We're just gonna reach the end of this tape. Yeah, so we'll just...

Tape 6

00:38 Yeah I don't know what the fascination of the Australian goods that the Americans were interested in, but for some reason they had a great fascination for our Land Rovers.

01:00 This was all black market stuff of course. It's the same as when we went drinking anywhere off the base. We always used to take our own booze because you simply weren't allowed to deal on the black market. It was a definite no-no. You know there was some serious stuff. We heard a lot of stories but I didn't actually come in contact with anybody that had anything to do with the black market, but they were out there. There was no doubt about it.

01:30 I mean there was so much stuff stolen off the beaches and that as soon as they'd hit the country from the, you know the military supplies and that, and on a lighter side, quite often it was one of the padres that would be stealing stuff to help build an orphanage or something like that, you know. There'd be the odd pallet load of cement disappear here and there. Building supplies and... you know.

What would happen if you were caught dealing on the

02:00 **black market?**

Ah automatic court martial and back to Australia and dishonourable discharged and all that. Yeah. Probably prison time. Yep. Oh yeah, they took it very seriously. The Americans, I think my previous comment was there, were big on swapping things and I had an occasion on one particular, I won't mention names

02:30 or anything like that, but a guy approached me one day and said did I have my own personal weapon and I said, "Yes I have," and I had a .45 pistol and a F1 submachine gun, which were standard issue to Sergeants. He said, "No, no, no," he says, "I mean your own personal weapon?" And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well I'm going home," he said, "and I've got this thing and if I can't give it to

somebody I've got to strip it down and drop it down a toilet." And I said, "Well away you go and

03:00 strip it down and drop it down the toilet." It was an Armalite rifle and it wasn't the rifle that we see today. It was one that had been, it was a military modified, it was a short barrelled Armalite, had a flame arrester on the end of it, a skeleton butt that you could fold down. It was the state of the art weaponry at that time and this guy was offering it to me, to give it to me. He'd

03:30 obviously won it from somebody else or whatever. It might have been in a card game or you just don't know, but I just told him no, I wasn't interested. The Australian government and the armed forces had a policy, if you came in contact with particular enemy weapons, and wanted to bring one back to Australia, you had to apply

04:00 to the police commissioner of your home state and it was, you were allowed to bring it back on the understanding that it was disabled and donated to your local RSL Club. And Queensland funnily enough was the only state that would allow it to happen, and we actually had a couple of guys taken off that last flight home on the 29th of February where they had got permission to bring a weapon home.

04:30 But they'd stripped down another couple of weapons and were calling them spares. And they took them off the aircraft in Darwin and I believe they were court martialled, and yeah. 'Cause they were smuggling arms. Pretty serious stuff. I don't know whatever happened to them 'cause we didn't get to hear about it, but yeah, but you could, the old Americans they'd give you anything. I mean I used to be in charge of our social club for the unit and we used to have a barbecue

05:00 every other night and the Americans used to treat themselves like kings. You know, you'd get rib eye steak and turkey and all the best foods and it used to be my task when we had a barbecue on, to go to the nearest Yank kitchen with a case of beer, Australian beer, and for a clean swap I could get forty pound of rib eye steaks for a carton of beer that cost me two dollars forty.

05:30 Yeah so things like that used to happen then. It was quite funny and I guess an Australian way, anyone that was home on R and R in Australia, there was a standing offer by one of the pie mobs in Sergeant's Pies or something like that in Sydney, that if you went to their bakery they would give you as many pies as you could carry back on leave to Vietnam, and quite

06:00 often we would get a phone call and someone'd say, "Interested in a barbecue tonight?" And we'd say, "Oh not another one." "Oh yeah, but we've got sausages, Australian sausages or Sergeant Pies." Or we even had blokes bringin' back sides of lamb in their luggage and they'd have an Australian barbecue so, yeah.

Interesting stuff.

Oh.

What about slouch hats and

06:30 **uniforms sort of thing?**

We didn't wear slouch hats. The Australian airforce had the peak cap or the green jungle green floppy hat.

Would you ever swap these?

No, because the Americans had 'em as well. The peak caps, no you wouldn't. Our boss over there, actually because we were in contact with the Americans for our supplies, I guess to make it easier for recognition

07:00 our boss had us wear our equivalent counterpart's ranks, like U.S. sergeants. I was a sergeant and I had three stripes on my arm but my the same seniority in the U.S. army or airforce had three stripes, three stripes and three stripes like a rising moon over the top of them, so we used to have to wear those lapel badges as part of the

07:30 liaisons whenever we met with the Americans and my boss, who was a Flight Lieutenant at the time, the equivalent of an Army Captain, he used to wear two bars of a Captain in the U.S. Forces.

How were your interactions with some of the senior Americans? What did you think of

We didn't have, I didn't have all that much to do with the senior, not

08:00 really no, no. 'Cause over there, their other ranks were quite different to ours. You had something like four levels of warrant officer. In the Australian Airforce we had one, but the top graded warrant officer in the U.S. army or the U.S. airforce had almost the same powers as a senior officer, and a lot of the

08:30 pilots for argument's sake were all warrant officers. They weren't commissioned officers but they had the same privileges if you like as officers. In fact the warrant officers, I think it was the warrant officers, used to eat in the officers' mess with the officers, whereas other ranks like the sergeants and that, they had their own sergeant's mess as we did, but ours were sergeant, flight sergeant, warrant officer whereas their's was only sergeant

09:00 and staff sergeant and master sergeant and things like that, but when they got to warrant officer they actually were seconded to the officers' ranks.

Now you mentioned...

You didn't salute them of course.

You mentioned before to Naomi about some of the black soldiers in the American forces, what did you notice about the interaction between black and white in the American forces?

They were bloody terrible to 'em over there. I've often reminded Robyn when I see the,

09:30 you know the shipping containers? They used to use those as holding cells for people had been court martialled or had been playing up or something like that, and caught, and they used to pack anything up to sixteen, twenty people in one of those and all they did was with a welder just cut slots in like windows so that no one could escape from them, but how the hell they survived in the temperatures that we had up there was just amazing. And as I said before,

10:00 the black air men used to salute the black officers with the black power movement salute. It was just quite unreal, surreal.

And you mentioned something what they'd wear but describe it for us in more detail?

Well you'd see a soldier in full uniform and he'd have, he would have a frangipani lei around his neck or wrapped 'round

10:30 his hat on his head or flowers over his ears. It was just like you know, San Francisco, they were acting just like that over there, and I mean half the time you couldn't understand them because a lot of the a lot of their accents were difficult at the best but when you had someone that was on drugs as well, and you had to be very careful around them because you sometimes you didn't know how they would react. If you misunderstood them or made a

11:00 comment. They didn't understand us, our dialogue, you know. You had to be very careful.

And what kind of states would you see these people on drugs?

Oh, if you didn't know, you'd just think they were drunk but you know, their eyes'd be rolling 'round their head sometimes. And we had a an exercise to carry out as part of

11:30 the withdrawal, and we had a number of vehicles on lease from the U.S. Army for the Australian Airforce and when Gough Whitlam announced the withdrawal we had to then start putting things in motion to hand all of this sort of stuff back, and we took a convoy of vehicles up to Long

12:00 Binh and we spent nearly all day going from unit to unit and we couldn't talk to anybody. We couldn't get any sense out of them at all and most of them were on drugs and we finally established, we finally got to talk to somebody that could tell us that their system was unable to take back serviceable equipment. There had to be a major fault with the

12:30 thing, a major break down or whatever, so until such time as you had something that was almost ready to go on the scrap heap, you couldn't hand them back. So what we had to do was we had to fix the vehicles to be able to hand them back and we had, I don't know how many vehicles, and we just towed them. We went down into a creek bed effectively and put a crowbar through every moving part and then just towed them back.

13:00 And we said to them as we handed them over, "Now what are you gonna do with them now?" They said, "Oh she'll be right. We'll put 'em on a boat and send 'em back to the States. They'll get fixed up and returned here for the war effort." So they were creating an industry from the war effort by doing things like that, and when you saw all those helicopters being kicked off the decks of aircraft carriers and that, more of the same I guess, but it

13:30 was just unreal. Absolutely unreal. Even our Australian forces, we weren't allowed to send anything back to Australia that had been in contact with soil for obvious reasons, contamination and so forth, but we had a number of vehicles that simply had to come back to Australia so we got to the stage where we were virtually scrubbing them down with a long piece of wire and toothbrushes to get all of the mud and everything from

14:00 under the mud guards and things like that. And we heard after we came home that those same vehicles were landed back here in Australia and sent straight to disposals to be auctioned off. What the hell did we do all that for? Crazy. Crazy.

Yeah, it's insane and did you notice a difference between the kind of drug people were on?

No I didn't because I've never had anything to do

14:30 with drugs in that regard, I didn't recognise any of the symptoms or in fact more often than not used to think the bloke was drunk but they weren't, they were on marijuana and stuff.

I guess I was asking if anyone was on speed or hyped up or...

Well speed, we didn't know the term 'speed' in those days but it was cocaine. There wasn't crack or anything like that around in those days.

And how were some of the kind of popular culture movements infiltrating the

15:00 **military and things like changes in rock and roll and changes...**

You wouldn't believe it, the Americans had coloured TV over there and FM radio stations. We didn't have FM in Australia and we only had black and white TV, and these guys used to publish their own paper and of course yeah, Elvis was singing every other day and yeah. It was just unreal. Yeah,

15:30 I mean they brought their culture with them. The Americans brought their culture with them. I can remember going through one of our kitchens one day and there was some beetroot, canned beetroot, and it was in khaki cans and that was not unusual. Most of the military stuff was in khaki food-wise, and I picked it up and had a look at this particular tin one day and it was

16:00 dated 1945 and we were eating this stuff in Vietnam in 1972, '71, '72. They used to have powdered eggs, and what quite often used to happen was you'd get an etherised egg and they were bloody awful when you went to eat them and you copped all this gunk and you either spat it out or swallowed

16:30 it before you realised what you had in your mouth. But yeah, but in general the Americans looked after us very well food-wise. In fact sometimes it was too good. You got sick and tired of eating steak and ham, and they used to eat, sit down and eat a steak and cover it with ice-cream and stuff like that on the same plate.

And did you notice like a I kind of asked it before, but did you notice a kind of separation of the black and white

17:00 **soldiers in the American forces in the way they were living and...**

Yeah, communicating. Yeah my experience was that very often they would only talk to a blackfella if they had to and the black people generally came over very, very angry, and I guess rightly so too.

And how would they be living like in their bases and...

We didn't go into their quarters or anything like that, no.

17:30 **And you mentioned earlier to Naomi about going to the bars and bar girls. Did anyone you know form a relationship with any...**

Yes. Yeah there were guys that went with girls over there. I guess I have to be careful. I certainly won't mention names but there was one occasion, as I arrived

18:00 in country I recognised someone that was being escorted onto the aircraft. He was hand cuffed to two service policemen and of course I made enquiries because I knew the guy, and I said to someone else later on I said, "What was going on there?" And they said, "Oh they attempted to send him home several times and he'd kept on disappearing when he was supposed to turn up to go on the aircraft, so they were taking him home by force." And it turned out that

18:30 he'd married one of the local girls but in fact I knew he had a wife and family back in Sydney. So that's how they used to get what they call 'clean-girls'. Used to marry 'em and then of course they wouldn't tell them when they were posted home. They'd just jump on an aircraft and go. There's some bloody cretins amongst us males. Yeah.

So the girls

19:00 **were basically thought they were married or...**

Of course they did. They were married. They were married in a church by a minister. Guy just neglected to tell the woman that he was already married with a family back home.

Would they have children?

I didn't know of any, but I guess there'd have to be. I know that a lot of the prostitutes had children.

19:30 **And what were the prostitutes like? I mean not that you'd know, but just from second hand...**

Well observations, I mean they were around us all the time.

Oh okay.

Some of them were very attractive. Some of them were bloody awful. They were usually generally very young and I often used to say after I came home, Robyn and I'd talk about these sorts of things, and

20:00 these girls there'd been generations of these women that had never lived on the land, like traditional South Vietnamese people would do. They'd been in brothels and that since they were ten, eleven years old and they'd never known to live a normal village life and so forth, you know, and they were only

attracted by, you know, the concentration of

20:30 the male tribe and people were makin' money from them I suppose, things like that.

What kind of things would they say to you when they approached you?

A couple of times I went to town, I went to town for a massage and of course brothels in those days were regarded, not as they were massage parlours but they were brothels, right, and when I asked the girls to give me a massage, a proper massage, they didn't know how to do it.

21:00 They were there to service you, that was it and you know they'd run their hands all over you and try and do this and try and do that and so I used to just get up and leave or just have a steam bath and that was pretty hard to resist. They were pretty convincing but it was the same with those, excuse the term, but the girls that used to work on the base were called hut sluts

21:30 for obvious reasons, and it was said that you could get a hut slut for a bar a soap. Dreadful.

Would some men talk it up about all this kind of...

What, brag about it?

Yeah.

All the time. Yeah. Big deal, but men are like that. You know you listen to some of the conversations in pubs these days. They still do it, you know. What are you grinnin' at?

22:00 **Just ignore her. She's hiding. She's trying to hide. So what kind of things would they say about...**

Oh, I'd only generalise now. I can't remember specific remarks.

How would that make you feel, hearing all this talk?

Well like I said, I shut myself off from a lot of it. If I got into bad company I moved out of it real quick. You know I wasn't interested in that sort of stuff.

Was there a

22:30 **harshness to it? Like a quite an almost an inhumanness to it?**

Um. The word that comes to mind for me is brutish. You know they used to treat the women like dirt and they were there, they were there just as sex objects, you know but at the same time I must qualify that those girls were highly trained to rip you off and get you into bed you know.

23:00 But the incidents of venereal disease and stuff like that is just for me it wasn't worth the risk. I had too much, I used to, how I used to put it was I had too much respect for the family jewels. Yeah.

And how do you think sort of the local people felt about this kind of activity going on?

I would think that, you mean the South Vietnamese community?

Yeah.

I would think in general they would look down on those sort of women and the men that ran it

23:30 'cause they were I guess they were legitimate bloody criminals. They really were and you, again you had to be very careful where you went and what you said, or if you made a wrong remark to one of the women and she made a, you know, people would come after you with knives and guns. So you know and that's maybe what was happening with that guy that I spoke of before, that had a South Vietnamese policeman

24:00 put a gun to his head. For all I know the policeman could have been a pimp and he's upset one of his girls, you just don't know. You don't know.

What about, not so much the prostitutes, but the clean girls which would hook up with some of the men?

You didn't see a lot of that in that they were specifically there to entice the men. I had one

24:30 occasion where I met the family of one of the guys that was working for me. His name was Vun Lap Phu and we used to call him Phu for short, P-H-U, Phu. In fact he actually come to me one day and I noticed when I first got up there, this guy used to meticulously pull cases to pieces and I saw him quite a few times

25:00 flattening out Coca-Cola cans and beer cans and stuff like that. And what he was doing, I found out later, was he was making tiles for the roof of his house and also the building material was going into making another room on his house or something like that. And I had one occasion where he asked me could he take some of this stuff home off the base and he told me what it was to be used for

- 25:30 and I sort of said, "Well I'm gonna turn a blind eye," and you know I knew he wasn't stealing anything of value or anything like that, and I actually went with him on the truck to take it to his home and we pulled up on that vehicle and I can tell you to this day, it took them seconds to unload this vehicle. The people just came from everywhere and just took all this building material and the Coca-Cola tiles and "pfffffft"
- 26:00 it was all gone. And it was quite funny afterwards because he wanted to reward me for doing what I'd done, because he knew I was taking a risk on his behalf, so he said, "Can I buy you a drink?" And I said, "Oh don't worry about it." He said, "No, no I'll buy you a drink." So I said, "Oh okay." So on the way back we pulled up at this little, well it was a little shop but it wasn't a shop, sorta thing. We went in and the
- 26:30 shop keeper said what did we want and he said in Vietnamese to him that we wanted a cold beer. So this guy brought out this glass and it was a pint glass and it was so filthy you couldn't see through the glass, it was that dirty, and he went back out the back and then come back again and he had a block of ice and he put it on the dirt floor and he got a piece of pipe and he smashed the piece of ice with the pipe,
- 27:00 picked up one of the pieces, rubbed it on his clothes like that and put it in the glass and then poured the beer over it and it was a cold beer. Well I was very hesitant in drinking that beer, because I could see myself going straight into hospital with dysentery or something like that you know, but I guess I had to save a little bit of face as well so I drank the beer and then we went back to the base, but his family you know, you wouldn't see those sorts of people in town. You know,
- 27:30 they were good people if you can say that. You know those people suffered just as we suffered. They didn't want to be part of the war any more than we did.
- You mentioned to us before that you spent a lot of time in the base and you didn't get out much.**
- At all.
- Was it kind of a strange way to be...**
- You just had to accept that there was nothing else you could do. They were very strict about the curfew. You were not allowed to break curfew.
- 28:00 Yeah. One of the jobs I took on to fill in some of my spare time, the Australian Airforce, Army had a radio station at Vung Tau and they'd had records and everything donated from back here in Australia, and it was a substantial catalogue of library of records and that. There was 45's and
- 28:30 78's and what have you in those days, and I volunteered to go in after hours, up until curfew time at least, and help catalogue the library and eventually when that radio station closed down it was moved over to Singapore I think, and they used to entertain the British forces in Singapore with it but, yeah and all the announcers and that were volunteers and from our own people. Yeah.
- 29:00 No professionals. They had a station manager, who was an officer in charge of the station itself, purely for the administrative side of things but yeah, it was yeah.
- What kind of shows would they have on?**
- Well it was all radio but they'd play requests and some of the girlfriends or wives back home'd write to this station and say, "Could you play this record for John," or whatever. Yeah that sort of thing.
- Did they have any DJ talk or...**
- Yeah, oh yeah.
- 29:30 no talk back or anything like that but yeah, they'd have a couple of people they'd interview people on air and stuff like that.
- And what kind of interviews? Just with...**
- Just general stuff, yeah. They'd talk about where do you live? Where do you come from? What's your name?
- What, so service people?**
- They wouldn't talk about what we were doing there of course but they're not allowed to do that. Yeah.
- Would they bring news from home on the radio?**
- Yep.
- 30:00 We had access to the American radio and everything too. Of course we used to get the world news from them as well. Ours wasn't quite as elaborate as that. I was telling Naomi before, another thing that we used to do in the entertainment thing was I sent a Vietnamese doll back to my son's school, to his class, and there used to be a

30:30 competition run on the base when we went to collect our mail and each day's winner would be announced on who got the most letters, and on this particular day I got sixty or seventy letters in one day and of course hands down I think I won the whole year competition, and it was all the school kids in the class had written back to me as 'Mr Jellicoe' and they made comments like, "Are you enjoying your holiday in Vietnam?"

31:00 And all this sorta thing you know, because they were only six and seven year old kids, but they'd all been put up to, obviously by the teacher, to do this. It was great. It was a great buzz to get that back, that feedback from home. Yeah.

And what did you think of the idea that they thought you were on holiday?

Well I mean kids just didn't understand that, kids of that age just didn't understand you know.

Where did they get the holiday idea...

Oh I suppose the teacher would a put them up to you know. ""Oh yea,h Mr Jellicoe's over there and

31:30 in Vietnam having a holiday and look what he sent over to us. Think we should write him a nice thank you letter?" And that's virtually what happens you know.

What was the doll? What did it look like again?

Um they looked a little bit like a Chinese doll with big hair dos looped hair dos and silk. That photograph of Missy Moy, that was a very similar, it was like a traditional dress if you like. Yeah. They used to wear pants

32:00 and then a long dress over the pants. Yeah. So we I sent this doll over. That was the response. It was great.

So what was your day-to-day life like with the...

Very boring. Apart from the trips we had to do away to pick up supplies it was just a matter of, we had a constant flow of people coming into the country or going out of the country therefore they all had to be kitted out

32:30 with a uniform. And back in Australia, quite often someone would be sent to Vietnam without a pair of boots or something like that, simply because they didn't have them on hand at that time. So it was our job then to get a pair of boots for him straight away because the very first thing you were not allowed to go out without boots on and the GP[General Purpose] boots, the general purpose boots, that we wore in those days had a steel plate in the sole so that if you stepped on something like a mine or anything like that, you got

33:00 some form of protection. The equivalent foot wear in the American forces was almost like sandshoes. Like they were strapped half way up their leg and laced up and all that but they were made of canvas and just rubber soles, and of course if they stood on anything 'bang' and there were so many booby traps up there you know, you're not necessarily standing on a mine you might be standing on a bamboo slither or something like that or going into a pit that's got things in the pit and all that.

33:30 So our boots were very sought after afterwards from the Americans. Very sought after.

Did you ever hear or see or know of any evidence of the steel plate giving protection?

Of giving protection? Yes. Yeah I saw a photograph of one guy that stood on a mine one day. He didn't have much flesh left on his leg, but he still had his leg. Yeah.

34:00 **And so what other kind of things would you have to do in your day-to-day role?**

Well it was kitting people out or replenishing bed linen or food for the kitchens. Medical supplies, 'cause we had our own medical section there as well. Flying gear for the flying guys. We used to have to dispose of anything that was to be

34:30 got rid of. Yeah.

And what kind of paperwork did you have to fill in?

What sort of paperwork?

Yeah.

Well it depended on what you were gonna do with the item, but if you were gonna write it off for argument's sake you would have to put the appropriate paperwork together and have a witness to say that it's been destroyed or burnt or whatever you had to do with it.

35:00 **And how many copies...**

Oh it depended on what function, yeah.

Was it fairly...

It was very strict.

Easy?

No, no. Everything was very strictly controlled. Very strictly controlled and of course they were always on the look out for people dealing in the black market. I actually got called in on one occasion where they thought I was the doing black market and it involved boots in fact.

35:30 Quite often people would turn up from Australia and I didn't have the size boots they wanted either, but the Australian Army used to have a quartermaster supply sergeant at Back Beach and what I used to do, was I would take over some of the enormous sizes which are you know, the size fourteen boots and stuff like that, that our guys never ever used but we had to stock them just in case.

36:00 And we would take them over to the Back Beach Australian Army guys and swap them. Just swap. I used to have to sign a voucher to take the ones off him but generally there was no paperwork from me. I would just give him one pair and go away with another pair, different size. On this particular time I got called up to my boss and there was an army captain with him and he said, "This guy's come to investigate you on black market activities." I said "What?"

36:30 And he said, "Well we've just knocked off one of the guys over in Back Beach for trading in army boots with the Americans and," he said, "your name has come up on some of the paperwork." And I explained what I'd been doing and what apparently he was doing was not putting them back on the shelf but selling them on the black market, but I could prove on every occasion that I'd actually been issuing them to our own staff so

37:00 I was dismissed. Didn't go any further, but you had to be so careful. So careful.

And so tell us about receiving that first message from Robyn or the padre that you had to come home for.

What had happened, Robyn was having a great difficulty in health

37:30 and she'd had a couple of miscarriages and she'd been to a specialist while I was in Vietnam and she had been told that if she fell pregnant ever again she would either spend twelve months, ah the nine months, in hospital during the pregnancy or it would kill her, and we'd actually both

38:00 been booked on a flight to meet on my RIC [Rest In Country], which is different to R and R. 'Rest in country' it's called, R and C, and the airforce was going, the Australian Airforce was going to fly Robyn from Sydney up to Penang in Malaysia and I was going to fly from Vietnam to Penang for my R and C and we were gonna meet together

38:30 and talk all this over. And unfortunately for us Gough Whitlam got up in Parliament and said, "This is it. We're pulling out." And as a result of that, the aircraft that Robyn was booked on to come from Sydney got cancelled and she went to pieces, and I got a message that I was needed back home and I went and saw the padre and the padre said, "Remember when we first got together and I told you

39:00 if you were toeing the line and doing the right thing and you needed help, it would be there when you asked for it?" I said, "Yep." That was on the Thursday and I was in Australia on the Monday.

Do you know what he did to pull this off?

Oh no. It was all done through legitimate channels. One thing though, Robyn didn't know I was coming home and it was quite a surprise. Quite a surprise.

What did she do?

Well we

39:30 landed at the Richmond airforce base and I had a driver pick me up and was prepared to take me straight home but I just said to him just out, I don't know what made me say it, but I said, "Look, as we go through Penrith, do you mind just popping into a friends of mine because the chances are Robyn might be there." And blow me down she was and I knocked on the front door. I was still in flying uniform and everything and I knocked on the front door of the house and Gloria,

40:00 the lady she was visiting, came to the door and she nearly couldn't believe it was me 'cause you know, and I said, "I'm here to see Robyn. Is Robyn here?" And she said, "Yeah just a minute," and Robyn came to the door. Well just absolutely blew her away and we wept over each other and the kids were down the back, and I've got a photograph and I'll show it to you after. Both the boys were helping with the barbecue and they were black. Absolutely black with the grease off the top of the

40:30 barbecue and of course they jumped at me as well. Yeah.

Stop there because we're just at the very end of that tape. I'll just put

- 00:38 Okay, we touched earlier on about recreation in our spare time. There was another thing that I should tell you about. During some trading in time past before I arrived over there, somehow someone got hold of a speed boat.
- 01:00 Ski boat in fact and they traded off some grog for this thing and at the time they got it I believe it had been sunk, so they had get it up and repair it and that used to be sometimes an avenue of recreation for us. We would go out into the Mekong Delta water skiing, but it was water skiing with a difference because whenever there was a marine
- 01:30 ship called the Jeparit from Australia that used to bring supplies over, and whenever that was coming to town the North Vietnamese used to get very active trying to float mines down to sink it when it was at berth. So when we went skiing, a lot of the Americans' ammunition was stored on barges in the delta.
- 02:00 So consequently when you were water skiing you were water skiing around all these barges full of ammunition. And each barge had a guy on the barge every twenty four hours a day and every fifteen minutes they were dropping percussion grenades into the water to stop frogmen coming up and attaching mines to the barge and blowing them up. So you had all of this activity going on and of course it was another trick
- 02:30 that they used to play on newcomers in the country. They'd say, "Would you like..." you know, "Do you water ski?" And a lot of blokes'd say, "Yeah, yeah." "Oh well, look Sunday afternoon be down at the beach and we'll go water skiing." But what they didn't tell them of course, once they got them up onto the skis they used to just go full bore in and out of all these barges and of course they had to warn them if you saw any white object floating in the water go 'round it because that's likely to be a mine, and that was some of our recreational activities.

03:00 But yeah.

Does recreation like that help you relax?

Well it does certainly take your mind off things. But one particular day we were out skiing like this and we started getting some incoming shells exploding on an island that we were skiing around. So we beached the boat and went up onto the island and we decided we'd investigate it. We'd had a few drinks and were gung ho and all the rest and when we got to the other side of the island,

- 03:30 it was only a very small island, when we got to the other side of the island, the American maritime navy had launched some of the barges up onto the beach at high tide and as the tide went out they were doing some sort of maintenance on the hulls of the boats. These were those landing type barges that they used in World War II and that. They used to move supplies around in them and ammunition and all that. Anyway this guy was walking up and down
- 04:00 on the beach decided that they'd have some fish for lunch and he had these percussion grenades, so he'd just pitch 'em into the water and then 'bang' and it'd knock the fish out and they'd come floating to the surface and they'd just gather 'em up and throw them on the barbecue. So we thought this was a bit of alright. So we traded a case of beer for a case of these percussion grenades and we went out in our ski boat and
- 04:30 we used to just sit in the ski boat, pull the pin out of a grenade and just drop it over the back of the boat and then gun the boat and these things'd put a spout of water a hundred feet up into the air. It was amazing and you know we stopped and thought about it afterwards, what would have happened if we'd a stalled the boat. Well we'd a blown the back out of the boat, sunk ourselves, but yeah they were the sort of the some of the antics that we got up to you know.

And did you collect many fish?

No. No, no, no.

- 05:00 We were just interested in the fun. That's but these guys were doing it to get a feed, and that's what attracted us to it. 'Cause we thought it was someone shelling the island but yeah, but all these sort of things used to go on. There was two ships that used to be tied up permanently in the bay at Vung Tau and they were owned by the Venell Lighting Corporation, which was an American-based organisation
- 05:30 who sent ships all over the world to theatres like this. And they were floating power houses and they used to supply all the electricity to the Vung Tau base and we got to know the guy that was the ship's captain, and on one of these ships and by jingoes they used to throw some parties. Yeah.

Were they much of a target?

Oh absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Yeah but the Yanks looked after 'em pretty well, but yeah, yeah it was

- 06:00 ingenious the way the North Vietnamese, they used to just get a an esky or something like that with polystyrene and they'd put a Claymore mine in it and then just float it down with the tide and try and hit the boat and our guys would have to be on permanent watch to make sure none of 'em got through.

And what sort of parties would these boats throw?

Oh they had strippers and heaps of grog and all the rest of it. Yeah, yeah. It was I guess, listening to

what I've had to say so far,

06:30 some people would think it was just one big party, but you had to do things like that to get your mind off what was going on around you. Yeah.

And like talking about work, we'll talk about that for a little while, tell me about if you were sending a transport say to Long Binh or somewhere like that, how would an order come through? How like what sort of things would it typically be? How would you like what was your job

07:00 **in terms of that?**

Well we would have to go and collect... we'd get notified by our boss that we had to go to Long Binh and pick up some aircraft parts or whatever, and we'd be handed the equivalent American paperwork and then we would go up and when we arrived at the base we'd be let on the base with orders to authorise us to go in. And

07:30 we would just find the base the particular squadron we were looking for and pick up the spares. Go through the system, put our requisitions in and then collect physically collect the stores, load them on the trucks and or in the aircraft later on and just take them back to our base for inclusion on a maintenance program or something like that.

And what sort of stuff typically would you be...

It varied every trip we did.

08:00 You know as I say, it could vary from anything from food supplies to ammunition to aircraft spares, that sort of stuff you know. Yeah.

And would you take transports to Nui Dat at all?

Nui Dat was the Australian Army, and we had very little to do with that. The only time I had anything directly to do with Nui Dat was the night that I went up on that night mission on a helicopter.

08:30 We had I think it was five helicopters go up and they identified a target and two helicopters stayed up at a certain height and dropped flares down onto the target then the other the other aircraft made runs over the target. They had mini cannons mounted on the side of the Iroquois, rocket pods and then they had an M60 submachine gun mounted on each

09:00 side of the back of the aircraft operated by a gunner. So that what you did, you went down on the target, you sprayed a few seconds burst of cannon fire 'cause you couldn't, I think it was only about fourteen seconds at a time, otherwise the barrels of the guns would heat up to the degree that they would start warping and they couldn't you know, they'd malfunction or whatever and then they'd

09:30 launch a couple of rockets as they started to pull away from the target and then as they pulled away from the target and the target became behind us, then they would spray the M60 machine guns at and it was at night it was just absolutely spectacular because I think something like one in every five rounds was a tracer bullet and it was like a big snake going down to the ground and then ricocheting off and yeah.

10:00 **How did you end up in the helicopter for this?**

Believe it or not it was a joyflight. We put our hands up and we asked if we could go out on a trip and more often than not you'd get knocked because it was, there was a element of danger there of course. I guess it really depends on the pilot or what the CO was telling the pilots they could or couldn't do but, and like I say, that young bloke that worked for me in the store

10:30 I mean he put hundreds and hundreds of hours up in the air, flying in all sorts of American aircraft so you really had to make an opportunity for yourself and I guess by doing that sort of thing you weren't doing other illegal things or getting yourself into the drug scene or whatever. So you really had to make your own entertainment if you like.

And so where did you think this helicopter trip was gonna be going?

It went it took off from Nui Dat but we weren't

11:00 told what the target was. We just went with it.

And just to begin with, what was Nui Dat like?

Nui Dat was a an Australian Army base and it was located virtually amongst all the rubber plantations out there and what the Americans and the Australians, well the Americans in particular, were going around setting mines around all the plantations

11:30 and that to protect the villages and what have you there. I can remember one night going into the sergeant's mess at Back Beach and there were a few guys had come down from Nui Dat as well, and we were having a darts competition and there was a guy standing at the end of the bar and he was shaking and of course curiosity got the better of us and we said you know, "What's wrong with this guy?" And

they said, "Oh he's our mine delouser."

12:00 We said, "What?" They said, "Oh yes when he goes out into the field he's like steel, but when he comes home he goes to pieces." And I guess they're the sorts of guys that we're now seeing bob up in the system for disability claims and so forth, and rightly so. Some of those people did it really, really tough. By comparison the airforce was negligible in that regard. I had a friend killed up in Vung Tau in a helicopter crash. He was one of the crew men and

12:30 got pinned under an aircraft and died but yeah, there were, you know, there was a few people up there that were genuinely thrown in, thrown to the wolves you know.

And this helicopter flight that you went on, what did you wear?

A flying suit, helmet. All that sort of stuff. Just typical general flying gear.

And...

I've got a photograph of that in the album. Mm.

And whereabouts

13:00 **did you sit in the helicopter?**

We sat behind the gunner. The helicopters can take about fourteen people, but they only had the pilot, the co-pilot and two gunners and then if they felt inclined they would take passengers. I really don't know whether it was an active mission or a training mission. We weren't told. Nobody shot back at us, so that was the most thankful thing at the end of the trip I suppose.

13:30 Mm.

And what does, it might seem like a simple question, but what does it feel like to take off in a helicopter and...

It's quite a buzz actually. It's a lot different to flying in a fixed wing aircraft of course. I had quite a few trips in helicopters, not only in Vietnam but back in Australia in different base different bases that I was stationed at and one of the most interesting ones to fly in was the

14:00 Chinook, the big twin propped helicopters. You know that sky crane photograph I told you it was lifting one up? Yeah, and we used to call them they always looked like two angry palm trees and I actually saw one, when the aircraft is flying the propellers are actually integrated like that. They're synchronised in like that when they're spinning around and this particular day,

14:30 it was lifting off with a full crew and combat troops and they got out of synchronisation and they started chopping and it fell out of the sky about a hundred feet and chopped the whole, chopped itself down to cabin level and I don't know, people got injured in it but I don't know, we didn't hear whether or not anyone actually got killed but yeah, just to fly in one of those, it's got a big

15:00 tail shaft, if you could call it that, that run between the two propellers the two rotors and it's like sitting in a forty four gallon drum with something, all this noise going over the top of you when you're flying. You've gotta have good protective hearing equipment to protect your ears. Yeah.

And what sort of this, the helicopter

15:30 **trip you went on was at night?**

Yeah.

What sort of feeling is it to be up in...

Well we as I said, we weren't told what the mission was all about. You know whether it was active or just a training run. I suspect it might have been a training run because we didn't come under fire or anything, but as I say, to go up and fly into the unknown it was thrill seeking stuff I guess. Yeah.

And

16:00 **you said that the helicopters dived down.**

Onto a target, yeah.

What does that feel like when...

Like being on the big dipper. Only with machine gun fire all 'round you and rockets. Yeah. Yeah it was again, it was part of the overall experience that you know I can sit here today and talk about. Unlike some people that didn't come back.

And were you strapped in?

Oh yes. Absolutely. Yeah.

16:30 Yep. Again, I've got a photograph of me sitting in the helicopter behind one of the M60s after we landed. Yeah. There was three of us went up that night. My boss, myself and I think Grant might have been with us too. Grant Hamilton. Mm.

And tell me a bit about Grant.

Grant was a... I never met him until we actually

17:00 arrived in Vietnam and we sort of hit it off as friends straight away and he, and what was his nickname... was 'Flaps.' That's right and he was like the rest of us, a heavy drinker and that. At one stage there he started this silly act of spiking people's drinks, and what they used to do is open a can, 'cause all of our beer up there was canned

17:30 beer, no draught beer, but we did get Australian beer up there. We had every state sent their beer up there and they used to pull the ring and then pour vodka into it, and of course you couldn't taste the difference and before you know you don't know where you were and half way through the night you were off your face and couldn't understand it, and it was a huge joke to him, and we sort of warned him you know, "This is dangerous practice. You could kill somebody if they had a bad ticker or something like that." Blah blah.

18:00 He wouldn't let up, so in the end we finished up spiking his drinks and we did a real good job on him and he never ever did it again. But no, Grant and I we weren't in the same room together but we spent a lot of time and we worked very closely together. We were the two Sergeants in charge of the stores branch really I guess. Mick Tulka was our Flight Lieutenant boss overall but yeah. We had some fun times and barbecues and

18:30 those photographs of us having that barbecue. Grant was one of the chefs and I was one of the chefs and yeah, and I lost contact with him after I came back to Australia and I don't know where he is today. I did ask Brett if he could track him down because it's only a matter of writing to the Department of Air or whatever they call them, Defence Air or something they call them today, write to them and they will, if they've still got a

19:00 current address on Grant they would contact him and give him our information and then he contacts us, rather than the Department just saying to us, "Oh he lives so and so." So it's a sort of a security thing I guess. Yeah. So.

And just a question about that drinking culture again, when did that sort of start for you? Was that an immediate thing when you got to Vietnam?

19:30 When you got off the aircraft, that night is when it started and when you left Vietnam, that night is when it finished.

How hard is it to finish?

Ah when I say finish, that meant that you didn't have, you didn't get home in Australia the first night and go to the cupboard and get stuck into a dozen Bacardi cokes. You sort of straight away had to back off and I don't have a clear recollection of just how I responded. Robyn would have to tell you that but

20:00 she noted straight away that I had changed. I wasn't violent or anything like that. I might have been a little bit abusive but it wasn't very long before I gave it away, and I think I'm, in the last seven years I think I've been drunk once and the local policeman brought me home, who happens to be a mate of mine in the NSA [National Stone Association] Mines Club. We drank together that night. Mm.

20:30 Yeah. It's good to have a...

Were you in the front seat or the back seat of the police car?

No, the front seat. Front seat. Good to have a guardian angel occasionally. He's a nice bloke. I like Vic. I wouldn't like to mix it with him on the job but he's a nice bloke off the job. Yeah.

So in terms of say if you'd been drinking that much in Australia and then had tried to stop it, do you think it would have been harder? Do you think that the clean break in terms of the physical change...

21:00 Having come home to a family situation I think that was what made it easier, for me. I don't know how other people handled it but yeah. Well I didn't have a drinking problem before I went over there so I really can't say, but I would think it would be hard for someone that was drinking heavily in Australia and then had to make the decision to stop. Generally those sorts of decisions are made

21:30 for you in the way of your health breaks down or your wife walks out or whatever. Those sort of things. Robyn was very strong for me when I needed it. I should perhaps take the opportunity to say that Robyn was always there for me and I often say to people that I believe it's the wives that should have got the medals, not the husbands

22:00 for having to put up with what they had to put up with back home, and dealing with kids on their own. And there were the occasional wives that went off the tracks of course because they couldn't handle it, things like that. But no, Robyn was really great and we had very good support from Robyn's mother as well, who lived with Robyn while I was away.

And what sort of ways did Robyn support you when you got back? I guess what sort of support

22:30 **were you in need of?**

Oh emotional, the drinking part had to be settled down. She'd done a wonderful job with the kids as best she could, given the circumstances. The kids would have been '63 to '72. What's that make them? '63 to '72?

Nine?

Nineteen. Eighteen, nineteen?

23:00 **No. Nine.**

Nine. Nine. Yeah. Been a long day. Yeah so it was probably around about then that they started being troublesome.

When you got home?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah and of course it was twelve months out of my life that they had grown up without me and I had to get to know them again too of course,

23:30 and they had to get to know me of course.

Did they have any sort of I guess with all of the stuff that was going around about Vietnam, did they have any sort of tough questions about

Not at that age. No. No. I guess because of the way that we were in the armed forces, constantly moving around and so forth it meant any time that you were posted you just didn't pick up your family and move to the next post. I always

24:00 had to, any person had to go ahead and you lived on the base in single quarters until you found a house and then you went back to your old base and organised a removal and picked up your family and brought them to the new house, and then eventually you would get allocated a married quarter and then you'd have to move. See you were constantly moving and as I quipped earlier on, we became professional gypsies. You were constantly moving around

24:30 and as I said before, in hindsight it wasn't a good thing for the kids. We recognise that now and I'm hopeful that the services today have recognised that problem in and addressed that problem in looking after the service man's family.

What sort of ways do you think that it affected the kids?

Possibly because

25:00 as a father I wasn't home to administer discipline if you like, the image and I can all, I can see young families today going through the struggle when you hear so many young people splitting up and going their own ways and the kids are left behind to try and work out what the hell's going on and to some degree I guess it would have been the same.

25:30 How Brett coped with twelve months of me being away I never got into. Simply because I wasn't here but yeah, they got into a lot of strife at school, constantly at school, and stealing and all sorts of things but as I say, Danny, our eldest son didn't get into really bad trouble whereas the young bloke went off the planet unfortunately.

26:00 So there. Yeah.

And in terms of moving schools a lot and that sort of thing for the kids, do you think that that had a...

Would have been very disruptive and Brett, our youngest son, actually got very clever at doing nothing at school. He could actually move through a school and the result of that was he was, by the time he left, well he was actually

26:30 dispelled from school, expelled whatever you call it. Expelled. By the time he left he was nearly illiterate and he started running away from home at fourteen. Yeah. So after four times you know we all went searching for him and got him back and on the fourth occasion we were advised to let him go. There was nothing we could do to stop him. Today they have a description for his behaviour.

27:00 Back in those days we were just told he would simply grow out of it by the time he turned nine or by the time he turns fourteen or, and they kept on going until he was in his twenties and then by that time of course he was in and out of gaol and all sorts of serious things. Yeah.

And...

Silly boy. Silly boy.

how hard is it to when someone says, "Oh just let him go"?

Well we were really at our wit's end. We just didn't know what else to do. We'd been to

27:30 counsellors. We'd... child welfare. We'd been through magistrates courts. We'd been to police meetings and no one was able to understand what was going on in him and it was, I can't even remember what they call it these days, but it's a behavioural problem and they can do it they can control it now with medication, whereas back in those days

28:00 they couldn't because they simply didn't, they hadn't identified it at that point in time. But from the time Brett went to school, we met every headmaster and headmistress he had. Every teacher he had. He was belting up kids two classes senior to him when he was still almost in kindergarten. He was a very wilful person and a very destructive, more so to himself than anybody. And then of course he used to show off a lot and

28:30 I mean at age fourteen he was knocking around with women, not girls, women. And we had one woman ring us up one day and said that he was running away with her to get married and he wasn't, I don't think he was sixteen at that stage and yeah.

How did this, you've spoken about the discipline sort of that was part of being in the

29:00 **airforce and this sort of thing, how did someone in your family sort of not being disciplined and not respecting discipline how did it affect you?**

I didn't apply myself as if I was a military person, with my family. I just did the best I knew at the time. I guess on reflection of how my parents raised us and

29:30 we went through tough times in England. We went through tough times as immigrants. Not that I'm looking for sympathy, but by way of an explanation, and I always wanted the best for our sons and I wanted to improve their lot better than what my lot had been, but unfortunately they both weren't around long enough to learn from me. They rebelled when they got old enough to

30:00 break away they did just that and they went, I mean they went from being really model kids to outright bloody outlaws almost overnight. And Brett really, I think really outsmarted himself when he started performing the same way with people in the drug scene, the bikies gangs and stuff like that and those people don't muck around. If you get in their way they'll just run over you and bury ya.

30:30 So that's where we're at with that I think. Danny, our eldest son, has grown into a lovely man. He's got three lovely children. His wife is Swiss. Interesting person. We won't go into that but he's made a real leap back into the real world. He used to smoke weed a lot and tried to convince me

31:00 that was the way to go, and bring home books about it and stuff like that and then he left home and started living in caves and stuff like that, and when I heard that I said, "No son of mine is living in a cave." So we got him back home and he was an alcoholic by the time he turned nineteen, and at sixteen he'd never had a drink. So yeah, we've had a fairly tough time of it all. So.

In terms of

31:30 **you dealing with like with a son who's drinking, were you able to use any of your experience as advice for him of...**

I never got the opportunity. Before he left home he wasn't drinking. As soon as he left home he was into it big time, but we could never catch up with him. We had one occasion where he was actually travelling from Queensland down to Melbourne and he stopped in to see us in Sydney and I

32:00 could sense that he was in trouble. So I offered to allow him to stay with us and try and reconcile and the next day we went off to work, Robyn and I were both working at that stage, and when we returned home that night he'd robbed us. He'd cleaned everything out and he took everything to Kings Cross apparently, tried to exchange all the stuff that he'd stolen from us for heroin,

32:30 and all they did was roll him. They overdosed him and then stole everything off him and we never saw any of it back again. Never. It's the only time we've been robbed, by our own son. Pretty tough. Pretty tough. I can laugh about it now, but I was very angry that it all happened. So.

And so did it how did a reconciliation sort of happen with...

It didn't.

With...

Oh hang on. No, we're mixing it up. That was...

33:00 **That was Brett.**

That was Brett. Danny, I guess Robyn played a more active role than I, because again he communicated readily with her, whereas he had difficulty with me and I recognise that now but at the time I didn't. One of the things I did pride myself in raising our kids, I was never violent with them. There was no sexual abuse or anything like that. My way of trying

33:30 to deal with it was to shout at them and that didn't work either. You know we tried the normal things like withholding pocket money and grounding them and all sorts of things but none of it worked. They got into such bad company that we could not dissuade them otherwise and they both were introduced to drugs in high school and when I confronted the principal of the high school, under no circumstances were there drugs in his school and he

34:00 just didn't want to know. He probably acknowledged that it was happening but wouldn't admit it and wouldn't do anything about it so

And for most of this time when they were I guess around sort of fourteen or something, were they were you still in the airforce?

Oh yes.

Were they living on airforce bases?

We lived on the airforce base at Richmond, yeah. That was happening when we were at Richmond, and that was just prior to me getting out of the airforce.

And I guess

34:30 **did they get themselves into trouble on the airforce base? Was there any, did they...**

Not so much on the airforce base. They used to go into town and mix up with we actually bought a house, our first house, when I was still in the airforce at a place called Kurmond, which was up the hill from the airforce base at Richmond and when we moved up there they started associating with a lot of the civilian youth

35:00 at a place called North Richmond and they lived in accommodation after they left home, or ran away from home, they lived in these sort of squats with young girls and booze and drugs and all the rest of it. And no matter how much we pleaded we couldn't get them to come back home and realise what they were letting themselves in for so, yeah. Did your mother ever tell you not to bite your fingernails? That's a matter of record now.

35:30 **That I bite my fingernails? I'm listening intently. Yes, she did tell me not to bite my fingernails.**

Moving right along.

Yeah. Back to Vietnam. One question which you were telling me about earlier, the calendar the...

Oh the 'Figmo' calendar. Yeah okay. I have

36:00 my original Figmo calendar and what it is, it's an outline of South Vietnam superimposed with the image of a woman in the altogetherness and there are three hundred and sixty five squares on this calendar and the routine was each day, at the end of each day, you would colour in one of those squares, starting at three hundred and sixty five and moving

36:30 backwards, to eventually number one when you went home and just about everybody up there had one. It was sort of given to you when you first arrived in the country and said you know, "This is something to focus on. Fill in your Figmo calendar."

And tell me what figmo stand for?

"The 'F' word. I've Got My Orders." Yeah so.

And did it help?

Again, it was just a diversion

37:00 if you like. You look forward to being able to fill in certain sections of it, not for that reason, but the fact that you were approaching R and C time or you were approaching R and R time or you only had a month to go and as I said before, sixteen sleeps and a wakie or something like that. That was sixteen days to go and the wakie was the night you woke up, or the morning you woke up of the day you were leaving, and of course we were the very last of the

37:30 Australian Airforce at Vung Tau. In fact I formed part of the team that closed the base altogether and there were sixty eight of us left on the last Hercules on the 29th of February 1972. So it was leap day, leap year, and we leapt out of the place let me tell ya. There was a lot of rumours going around leading up to that time where the North Vietnamese were actually going to hit our base

38:00 and it was going to be a propaganda exercise basically to have them turn 'round then to the South Vietnamese and say, "Look we've chased the Australian Airforce out of the country," but thankfully it never happened, but we were on high alert right up to the end expecting it to happen.

Well what was your reaction when you heard the news that you were being withdrawn?

We were happy in one respect. Unhappy in the fact that Robyn and I had plans

- 38:30 set in place to be able to meet over our personal problem so that was a bit devastating there. Didn't thank Gough Whitlam for one thing, about it, but yeah, we were pretty pleased we were packin' up and going home.
- How 'bout in terms of I guess the situation of the war? That you were being withdrawn, leaving?**
- Yeah it's a bit like the
- 39:00 landing scenes you see of Gallipoli only it's in reverse and instead of boats you're flying out in planes. There was a big push on to extract everything and everybody out. Not only the Australian Airforce but the American forces as well. So consequently there was high traffic movement in aircraft despatches simply going home, and they were going home by various means. Some of the
- 39:30 jets I think were flying home. A lot of the helicopters and that were taken on board of carrier, aircraft carriers and that. Some of the fixed wing aircraft were taken the same way. The Australian air, the Australian navy came up with, I can't remember whether it was the Melbourne or the Sydney, HMAS [Her Majesty's Australian Ship] Melbourne or HMAS Sydney aircraft carrier and they took back the helicopters out of 9 squadron. The Caribous had to fly out
- 40:00 through Malaysia I think and then back down through Darwin. Back into Australia but it was, yeah. There was so much going on you know. You really, for the entire time we were up there we didn't have a lot of time to dwell on feeling sorry for ourselves or worrying about what the protestors were doing back in Australia. Things like that, you know and
- 40:30 you just made of it what you could. Made of it what you could.
- We'll just change tapes.**

Tape 8

- 00:40 **We were just, before we were packing up to go to Australia, we were just talking about that calendar and you mentioned you'd wait for R and R time. How often would R and R come up?**
- Once in your twelve month tour and I came home for my R and R
- 01:00 trip on boxing day and had to return to Vietnam on New Year's day so that was my R and R trip back to Australia, yeah.
- Was it good?**
- Oh, yes. You don't want any personal details do you? It was very good. Robyn and I got together and we virtually stayed in a motel for the whole time. It was a good homecoming. Oh, no I
- 01:30 said g'day to the kids and all the rest of it, of course you know. Robyn's mother looked after the kids while we were home but yeah, yeah it was, and I guess every person that went over there needed something like that, you know, attached, contact again with your family and all that. Back to reality. That was a big part of it, I guess. Resting in country was, you had a couple of days
- 02:00 either to rest in country or you could go to, I think Hong Kong or somewhere like that and I, I think I spent my R and C down to Malaysia. I went down and saw some friends of mine that were based in the airforce down there. Yeah, so.
- And what about within Vietnam, did you ever have time off there?**
- No. No, we worked six days a week,
- 02:30 no public holidays, nothing like that. In fact half the time you didn't get the word to stop on Sundays either. But, no it was, it was okay. I guess the serviceman's attitude to that sort of thing was a lot different to civilians. You know we, we didn't have union movements to worry about and, like I've said so often to people, after I left the service, we weren't asked to do things, we were told to do things.
- 03:00 And you had to respond straight away to, to go through the worst case scenario for argument's sake, you could be in a war theatre situation where the people around you, their lives depended on your responses. So, it had to become second nature to do what you were told, when you were told. You didn't, you certainly didn't get up and argue about it like you know so many civilian counterparts do these days and pull in their union reps and make all sorts of
- 03:30 ridiculous demands and so forth like that. We were a very, very sort after, ex-serviceman were very sought after by local government for those sorts of reasons because they knew that we were prepared to work hard and do anything that we were asked. I mean the seventeen years I spent with Prospect Electricity, the normal life span of someone joining the organisation would be perhaps one promotion because someone died in the, in the chain. Well, I finished up in

04:00 17 and half year's service with them, something like 19 re-grades or promotions and I was going backward and forward across ,you know, the line between clerical positions, doc control and back over in to warehousing. I finished up as their senior store superintendent and eventually was promoted one last time in to the warehouse and distribution manager's position which was a newly created position and that's where I finished my

04:30 career with Prospect Electricity but yeah.

You mentioned a bit of politics before and you said you didn't have time but could the men follow what was happening politically in Australia, not just from the protest movement but within the political kind of realm?

I guess, well for me it was like watching a soccer match, you know who had the most goals on the board and who was the, who was the opposition on the

05:00 playing field and that was obviously the North Vietnamese and we got a lot of feedback, not so much political feedback but certainly what was happening in the war theatre, yeah.

And what about back home? Were you able to follow what was happening back home?

No, no because we didn't have that much contact. And any time Robyn, Robyn wrote to me and I wrote to her every day. We used to have to number our letters

05:30 so that they didn't cross over, which sometimes, occasionally they did but writing to your husband, you're not going to say, oh yeah the Courier Mail said blah, blah, blah about Gough Whitlam or you know, we didn't hear that much of it and we quite frankly weren't interested. We were there to do a job and that's what we did.

Do you remember this election? Did you vote for that?

Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. It was compulsory. Always has been compulsory. We had a special polling booth over there for any

06:00 election situation. Correspondence and communication was very difficult up there because most of our stuff went through the American system and believe it or not. We were second or third class citizens in their postal system so a lot of our correspondence and that took a long time to reach its destination. And if you've ever had, tried to have an argument with your wife in a letter, over a span of a couple of weeks, or three weeks or four weeks,

06:30 it's very difficult, very difficult. But we managed. We managed but yeah.

Were you hearing any news about some of the tactics that were being used in the war such as napalm [ordnance-explosive petrol jelly]?

Oh, 'carpet bombing' all this stuff, yeah I saw some of it yeah. I was just explaining to someone the other day about the... I'd liked to have been in the situation to have got hold of some of those

07:00 protestors and taken them through some of the things that we had to see. You spoke of napalm, the couple of times that I went to Saigon, we used to go through what they called the World Free Gates and that was the gates off the airforce base in to Saigon. In other words in to South Vietnam and they used to say you were going, if you were going back on to the gates you were going in to the free world. If you were going back in to Saigon you weren't going in

07:30 to the free world. And there used to be a beggar at that gate. And that man had no fingers, no toes, no ears, no nose, no eyelids and he looked like a plastic doll that had been set on fire and melted and in fact he had been hit with napalm, and the South Vietnamese government of that time apparently didn't have any repatriation system in place and all of their casualties

08:00 were just turned on to the streets as beggars. We had a hospital that was at the front gate of the US army base we were attached to and we were told that the patients in there were only in there if they had major amputations or they'd been gut shot or you know, with a sniper or you know blown up by a mine or something like that. And if those people's families didn't go in and feed them in hospital,

08:30 they actually died in the hospital of starvation and, like I say, there was no repatriation. You know you're not going to get a disability award or pension because you've served in the South Vietnamese army or airforce or whatever, whatever and it was dreadful, you know, dreadful. And our people today complain about this and that and you know, they just don't know how well off they are. And like I say, I would have loved to have got hold of a handful of those protestors, given them no money

09:00 and dropped them in Saigon for a month. And then had them come back and then tell us all about it. I'd like to do those sorts of things with the unions sometimes too.

What goes through your mind when you see sights like that?

Sights like what?

The beggar.

Well, it was quite repulsive of course. Yeah, there are things that I saw up there that I'm not allowed to talk about.

09:30 You know, casualties of mines and stuff like that. We used to try and make light of it at one stage there we were told in Nui Dat that the Americans would lay mines around plantations and the moment they withdrew the North Vietnamese would come in and dig the mines up and hang them in the trees and as a consequence, the first patrols that went through thought they were walking

10:00 through a minefield with a map, with the locations of the mines and they'd walk in to these things hanging in the trees and of course one would go off and it would set a whole, whole lot of them up and they'd just blow people to pieces. So, yeah. Not nice stuff.

Were you hearing from infantry men and people who went out on platoons?

Yeah, the guys that we made contact with the US, with the Australian Army at

10:30 Back Beach had stories to tell like that. And because we weren't in infantry ourselves we didn't have a proper appreciation of what they were going through. And it was just, you know, go and have a few drinks with the army blokes and yeah we beat them at darts and that was the extent of it. And it's a bit like, I sort of compare it with being a doctor or something like that in an operation theatre. You sort of draw this

11:00 veil down over yourself and you see things but you don't take it in because you've got to protect yourself from that sort of stuff. You saw a lot of the imagery that came out of Vietnam from the correspondents that were over there. That young girl that was running out of that napalm, out of that ... village that had been bombed with napalm. She was burned. She was naked. Running down the street. She's alive and well today. I think they just turned around and said

11:30 she became a doctor, I'm pretty sure.

She wrote a book.

She probably wrote a book but she made something of her life after that anyway. But, yeah again you know we had these people fighting us on our own, home ground, the protestors and on the other hand we were faced with situations like that so we didn't take a lot of notice of what we would refer to as the rabble in Australia because

12:00 we didn't think it was the general feeling of the population because there were so many people, so many families that actually had people in Vietnam. And I never really did appreciate what they were trying to do. Were they trying to show off themselves? Were they trying to get benefits for themselves? Was it one just big joke to them? One big party? Who knows?

What if some of them were

12:30 **directing their energies towards the government which put the war there? I mean...**

Well, obviously they would have been doing that. That would have been one of their goals, I suppose and trying to put pressure on, to bring people home but what we didn't understand, I guess, is why they were picking on us when we did come home. You know, throwing blood over people and stuff like that, not being allowed to face the public on certain occasions. Having to go

13:00 through back doors and airports and stuff like that. It was very confusing I suppose. Very confusing to us. Robyn only told me just recently that she did, she had a pretty hard time from the civilian neighbourhood that we lived in while I was away in Vietnam. And she was referred to as "That Vietnam's person's wife", you know and she never ever told me that. She only told me that very recently.

13:30 Yeah.

Did you see a lot of children suffering in Vietnam from the war?

Only from the prostitution and drug thing in town. I never saw, apart from that ambush thing that we went through, I didn't see any active service in the field so, no I can't comment on that.

How do you feel about some of the tactics, like using

14:00 **napalm?**

Oh, it was a dreadful, dreadful business the whole thing. They did their own thing to, to counter I suppose by setting booby traps and things like that and blowing people up. I don't think there's any right answer for a response to a war situation. There's, as I said earlier, to me it was a waste of

14:30 time, a waste of money and certainly a waste of lives and it destroyed many family lives back home as a result of being exposed to that. Talking of being exposed, there's questions coming up now. I mean when I was first back, excuse me, I was asked what effect Agent Orange [chemical defoliant] had on me and I simply said, "Well, how would you know?" You couldn't see it. You couldn't taste it. You couldn't feel it. It was just

- 15:00 simply in the air. It was a defoliant far more powerful than any of the things that they use today. It had obvious purpose of defoliating the forest so that no-one can sneak in and mount attacks against our forces. I actually, on one of the trips on that milk run trip, we flew over countryside that just resembled the landscape of the moon. There were just as
- 15:30 far as the horizon went was just bomb craters and that was where they'd done the carpet bombing and there wasn't a single tree standing on some of the holes were full of water from rain but it was just a moon, like a lunar surface, scene, you know and they wiped out so many South Vietnamese people doing all of this as well. But of course, like I said earlier how did you tell between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. They were the same people.
- 16:00 **In that situation, I know the North Vietnamese did terrible things as well but could they ever have won the war if they were doing this to some of the Vietnamese people?**
- I can't, I don't know what to say, to respond to that. It was... I mean all of these war theatres are not run by someone in the country. They're run by politicians back home.
- 16:30 Sure, the generals have got to make the decisions on where they place the troops and what they did with this, that and the other but you know employing things like napalm and all that sort of stuff. I mean, where do those orders come from? But totally destructive. I mean, the idea was that they were trying to wipe out the enemy but in doing that they wiped out a lot of innocent people as well and that's what war unfortunately brings on.
- 17:00 **You mentioned before, booby traps. Were you taught how about how to deal with these ?**
- Yeah, yeah. The main one that we were warned about was grenades on a trip wire but they had sneaky things like trapdoors and the trapdoors, you would step on them, you wouldn't know it was a trap door because they had it covered with grass and all that sort of stuff and your leg would go down in to it and as this thing,
- 17:30 it was hinged to go down on your leg and when you went to pull your leg up they had nails sticking in it so as soon as you pulled your leg up, the nails automatically went in to your leg and you simply couldn't get out of it and like any warfare all of this is designed to slow people down. If you get someone wounded then it's got to be two people to carry the person out so
- 18:00 then you're reducing the effectiveness of the patrol and all that sort of stuff. There were mines, what they used to call Jumping Jack mines and you'd step on them and they wouldn't go over, but the moment you lifted your foot off, these things would spring up at shoulder height and then blow up. And they were full of nails and bolts and all that sort of stuff. And you simply didn't get away from it. You just had to either be killed by them or,
- 18:30 or severely wounded. Another one, another favourite one for the army patrol guys was that if they were going down a narrow track in the jungle the North Vietnamese would hang a sort of a pineapple up in the trees and it would be hinged so you hit a trip wire and this thing just come and stuck in you, you know, and it had big
- 19:00 barbs mounted all the way through it like a pineapple and it would just hit you in the chest and either kill you on the spot or and a lot of guys, the first reaction when they see this coming down would be to dive off the track in to the jungle but of course what they'd done then was that they would booby trap both sides of the road as well so you're trying to dodge this thing that's going to stick in you and you jump off the road and get blown up by a mine.
- And what were you, what were you told in training about how to**
- 19:30 **deal with the booby trap?**
- Well, we were just simply made aware of what they were, not necessarily how to deal with them. Yeah, just to watch out for them and of course if you did detect something, you had somebody else do something about it.
- Now tell us about closing down the base after you received orders.**
- It was simply a matter of then organising to work out what had to come back to
- 20:00 Australia and what was going to be left behind, either destroy or just left in the hands of the Americans and what we did was, I think I touched on the subject of taking back those vehicles when we were talking about the drug scene with the Americans, so we had the task of taking all those vehicles back so that the Australian Airforce stopped leasing them from the US Army. There were tents that we had earlier
- 20:30 people in Vietnam, in the airforce had been living in so and they'd been stored just in case they needed them again, if our compound was attacked and we needed temporary accommodation or something like that. Anything that had been exposed to soil had to be burnt. It wasn't allowed to be sent back to Australia because of the soil factor, the contamination factor so we had the task of getting rid of all that stuff. The day, the aircraft was
- 21:00 slowly staged back to Australia by various means and the accommodation was then just, we walked out

at, I think we were something like four or five o'clock in the morning, it was my job, my very last job to collect everyone's weapons from them and load them on to an aircraft pallet and then put all of our personal luggage over the top of the weapons so no-one could access them and that's how it came back to Australia.

- 21:30 As far as the accommodation was concerned we walked in out of the gate, in particular the South Vietnamese walked in the gate and even as we were walking out of the place they were walking out with electric fans and beddings and mattresses and they just cleaned the place out. We had some American, Australian vehicles over there, Land Rovers, I mentioned before, most of them were sent back to Australia
- 22:00 and we had some Holdens that had been converted to the left hand drive because everything over there was left hand drive so we just stepped out of the vehicles and the Americans took those over at the airport. And when we got to the airport we were met by a Hercules which was flying out of Darwin to pick us up, and our CO who was with us received a high security
- 22:30 message saying that the Hercules had been grounded in Darwin and that they couldn't come and pick us up and he could have very quickly got on the system and said, "I don't care if the bloody wing's fallen off the aircraft. Get over here." We are in the situation now where we can't reverse our, our evacuation. So, it turned out that the Hercules, the Hercules has two ramps at the back of it and one is lowered and one is raised up in to the aircraft,
- 23:00 and that's how they access putting stuff in and out of the aircraft. And the bottom ramp actually goes down and touches the ground so they can run vehicles up in it and all that sort of stuff. Well, what had happened, this bottom ramp had ceased in position, up so all they could do was raise that like that see. So we had all of our weapons on a pallet to be slid in to the aircraft when it landed. We had, when the aircraft eventually did come it still had this US door,
- 23:30 unserviceable door, so we had to hand load all of our luggage and weapons in to the aircraft which made us very late leaving. And when we got to Darwin, we couldn't believe it, but the customs people decided that they were going to give us the going over and we had to unload the whole lot back in Darwin. And that was when they picked up... I sometimes think they must have got some sort of a tip because there was one of the guys on the aircraft
- 24:00 smuggling weapons back in to Australia. He'd picked up authority to bring one weapon back to Queensland and donate it to an RSL and what he'd done was strip other weapons down and call them spares, but of course if he'd have got them back through he would have just reassembled and then he would have had a state of the art weapon. So, they caught him and pulled him off the aeroplane and then we had to load the whole lot back in. We stayed overnight in
- 24:30 Darwin instead of being able to fly straight home to our loved ones in Sydney which we did the next day, and we just got off the aircraft in Mascot, we didn't land in Sydney at that time, in Richmond Air Force base and we were ushered through customs and they did another search on us and then we were ushered through a side gate to meet our families and we just went home and that was

25:00 it. It was all over.

What was it like to see your wife again?

Oh, it was very emotional of course. The kids as well. Yeah. But yeah we were sort of made to feel like we were something that people didn't want to look on, you know. And we didn't understand why, I guess.

Were you kind of angry at the time?

- 25:30 Oh, of course we were, mm. We weren't probably so angry with the government as we were angry with the protestors because that was something physical we could attach to. Whereas the government was someone down in Canberra.

Were you talking about it at the time, as you were being ushered through Mascot?

What about the politics?

About the situation of being ushered?

To us it was just, you know, we were asked to go this way instead of that way. It didn't dawn on us that we were,

- 26:00 we were being denied public access, I guess. We just finished up in the car park with our baggage and our family.

It was more of a reflection was it?

Reflection?

Like a couple of days later. Like, at that time

No, at that time you know we were just said, "Well, okay you've come through customs, now you've got

to go out this way and your family's waiting for you out there." But it wasn't in the lounge or somewhere like that. Lot of people made a big thing

26:30 out of it later on. I had actually forgotten about most of it until I started answering the questions with Brett, so yeah.

And how did it, you kind of talked about this before but how did it feel after a year's work having to pack the whole base up almost like...

No different to be being posted to another base and packing your house up and moving, you know. It wasn't that big a deal,

27:00 no.

How did it feel from a kind of mission point of view.

It was a relief to be going home. We really couldn't see any result of our presence there. We were just there to help support the aircraft that were flying out of that base and we thought we'd done a good job. In fact I know we did a good job, yeah.

But how did you feel about the whole kind of 'Vietnamisation' kind of policy

27:30 **of pulling out of the war and...**

I don't think, certainly for me, I wasn't that interested in the political side of the whole issue. As I say the protesting and so forth was more visual to us and we did have people venting their anger on us which was hard for us to understand. And as I said earlier, or I may

28:00 not have said this, but Robyn's got a very good friend that we met last year down in Sydney and she was actually one of the protestors and Margaret actually apologised to me when she learnt that I was one of the people that she was protesting against. And that was, I guess a compliment and she apologised saying that she really didn't understand what it was all about herself but they had

28:30 an ideal and they were pushing their ideal, and yeah. But I don't think you'd meet a single military person that would be impressed with their antics.

I have one quick question about the pack up too. Did you have to dispose of any items anywhere? Like,

Yeah, like I said we had tents and so forth which we had to burn. Excuse me. The

29:00 vehicles we had to get rid off. We handed the buildings over. The aircraft flew back. We vacated all the hangar facilities and all that sort of stuff. That was about the extent of it, yeah.

And how did you feel when you saw the images in '75 of Saigon falling and...

I think I remember sitting in front of the TV cheering

29:30 when we saw that tank go through the palace, no I've got that back to front. No, that was the North Vietnamese wasn't it? So, I didn't, I didn't cheer at that occasion, no. Actually, I felt sorry for the people that had actually worked for us because I often wonder what happened to these Vietnamese, South Vietnamese guys that worked, the

30:00 civilians that worked for us, particularly the ones that we had working for us in the stores. We were led to believe later on they were went to indoctrination schools and all that sort of stuff and whether they actually survived I don't know to this day but yeah.

Was it hard for you to watch those images?

Yes it was. Yeah. We saw the, he was one of, was he a

30:30 prince or something? Was disposed by the North Vietnamese when they took over the country and he finished up going to America I think and becoming a store owner or a shop owner or something. But it was hard to... we felt sorry for the South Vietnamese because we sort of had a pretty good inkling what they were going to be in for when the North Vietnamese took over. Today people are taking holidays over there. There's

31:00 no way in the world I would go back and see that place again because it would be totally different to what we knew, and I would feel too uncomfortable to be there, to be perfectly frank. I would like to meet up with some of my friends. I'd like to think that Brett was able to make contact with me in Hamilton and Nick Tolt, my ex-boss just to say g'day to them and to see if they're still around.

31:30 Nick would be getting on in age a little bit now, yeah.

Is it hard for you at times to think back to the memories?

Sometimes I get a little bit emotional about it, yes. I was a fairly upset after the interview with Brett. Not as a result of what Brett had to say just the things that came back to me and I'm anticipating that might happen again this time round. I just went through a Queensland university study

- 32:00 for post, what do they call it? Post, stress, stress, post traumatic stress disorder. And I was claiming that I was one person that didn't have it. And the university doctor who spoke to me said, well she said to me, "You're only one of two people that I know that doesn't have it. Would you mind participating in this study?" And I think it was a surreptitious way of actually
- 32:30 sussing me out, and the results came back the other day about that and I have very high anxiety traits and I guess that's part and parcel. One of the big unknown quantity of Vietnam was what damage it did to everyone that served over there as far as the chemical aspect of things were concerned, mental, physical, all of those things.
- 33:00 And now that I am taking up this role as a welfare officer with the RSL sub branch I'm going to be in direct control, direct contact with some of these guys that were in the bad theatre of war over there and yeah, and I decided recently that I wanted to give of my time, help some of these people through it. In my
- 33:30 estimation there's a lot of people out there that need help but at the same time there's a few in there that are not so genuine and I've got to be careful what I say about that because I've got to go in to the role to help anybody that, that approaches us and be sympathetic and what have you, to their needs.

34:00 **Do you ever dream of the bad things?**

No. No, I perhaps did when I first came back but no. One other incident I saw when two people were killed was in a truck and motorbike accident and two South Vietnamese civilians were killed. They

- 34:30 went through the grill of a Land Rover and I was the main witness to what happened and they court martialled our driver and sent him back to Australia and it really wasn't his fault, but they had to do something to show the South Vietnamese that they'd taken some course of action on this guy. But basically he was driving a right hand vehicle, a right hand drive
- 35:00 vehicle on a left hand system and we were in a con race, convoy situation and someone pulled out in front of us and slowed the whole convoy down and our men moved our vehicle out to see what the hell was going on, just in time to have this couple of civilians on a motorbike, and in Vietnam there's two speeds, stop and go, on a motorbike, and they just drove in to him at top speed and one bloke went up like a rag doll and the other bloke went straight through the grill of the
- 35:30 Land Rover. So, yeah. I saw that a few times over. A good mate of mine was with me at the time and George Patchett was a Sergeant in the transport section and we were all armed whenever we went on this, on this convoy and George said, "Oh, I'm going up to have a look what happened."
- 36:00 And I said, "George, don't go. Don't go." He said, "No, no, no, just, here's my weapon, hang on to my weapon, I'm going up there." Well, he come back about five minutes later and he was violently ill and he said to me later, he said, "I should have taken your advice."

Looking back at your service time what do you think was the best of times?

The highlight of my career was when I got commissioned.

- 36:30 I'd started out as a storeman in the organisation and I finished up rising to commissioned ranks, had very interesting and challenging jobs in the short time that I was an officer. I actually left the airforce having asked the airforce to let me stay where I was for a couple of years so that we could get both our sons out of trouble and into apprenticeships and settled down and so forth, but they just simply said no. And the other thing
- 37:00 was this superannuation that they were talking about mucking around with and it wasn't until the defence then, Jim Killen got up in parliament and said that they definitely weren't going to interfere with the superannuation. And they circulated to everyone that had resigned and all of the officers that had resigned, the opportunity to rejoin but it was too late for us. We'd bought a house and taken out a large bridging loan and so I left the service for the good of the kids and of course that didn't work out
- 37:30 real flash, so I started a new career with Prospect Electricity and did very well, yeah.

And looking back what do you think are the worst of times that you...

The worst of the times, I guess some of things that we saw and witnessed up in Vietnam. I love

- 38:00 service life. I live for service life. I was very proud to serve in the Australian Air Force for my country. I think it was in 1975 there was a declaration made that all armed force personnel that weren't Australian born had to be naturalised. So, I went up in front of the mayor in Ipswich and was naturalised and I said, "Well this to me seems a bit crazy." This is
- 38:30 1975, 1972. "I returned fighting for the country from Vietnam and now I've got to be naturalised." Anyway we went through that process and now I refer to myself as an English born Australian, and proud to be an Australian.

Do you feel part of the Anzac tradition?

Absolutely. I march each year with our local submarines here in Gympie and I used to do the same thing when I was down in Sydney.

39:00 I'm not one for standing on the roof top and boasting about it all. I like to be fairly private about it. That's probably a contradiction having sat in front of this camera for about eight hours but no, this had been good for me in that it's the first time that I've probably sat down and openly talked about anything and everything of my life in general. Not only the Vietnam scene. So, I can get a copy of what

39:30 has been recorded. This is something that I would consider to be valuable to my son to pass on. And I've said earlier we're looking down the barrel of only having one son in the not too distant future, so it's fairly important to me, so I'd really appreciate it if the department could do something for me.

Excellent, well I'll just finish with, because we've got about a minute left.

Not really. I want to thank both of you for making me feel comfortable going through this exercise.

40:00 I've tried very hard to tell you how, how it has been for us. I'd like to finish the interview by saying thank you to my wife. That's it.