

Australians at War Film Archive

Matthew D'Arcy - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 14th August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/709>

Tape 1

00:37 My name's Matthew Bowman D'Arcy.

Could we just stop actually. So Matthew if you could start off by giving us a summary of your life from start to present day?

Okay. I was born in Glasgow, Scotland.

01:00 About the age eleven or twelve I got a scholarship and went to a boarding school down on the border of England and Scotland. At age, about year eleven - halfway through year eleven we decided to migrate to Australia. I came out here halfway through year eleven. I completed year twelve, matriculated and entered the Royal Military College Duntroon

01:30 in 1956. I graduated from Duntroon in 1959 and was posted to the Australian regular army. I was in the Australian regular army in Australia up until Christmas 1965 when I received word of my posting to Vietnam. I eventually arrived in Vietnam beginning of February 1966.

02:00 I served with a training team in Vietnam until August 1967 when the Australian Army wouldn't let me stay any longer and I decided that I hadn't yet won the war and I wished to stay in Vietnam so I resigned my commission and took up an appointment with the Americans. I remained in Vietnam then for another nearly two years and returned to

02:30 Australian in 1969. I then became an executive for a major insurance superannuation company looking after the southern half of New South Wales for about four years. I then did one year some private consulting. I then went off in the end of 1975

03:00 to Taiwan and was employed by the Taiwanese military - the Kuomintang forces there, lecturing at the political warfare academy and advising the PSYWAR [Psychological Warfare] divisional commander. I then returned to Australia in end of 1977 and decided to work

03:30 for myself and make my fortune being a property developer and investor. And I did extremely well in that but unfortunately I was a lousy financier and I'd financed all my fortune in Swiss francs. After a hundred years the Australians decided to float the Australian dollar and I was unhedged, the Australian dollar plummeted to half its value and

04:00 I had to do a major retreat and give up my dreams of cruising the Mediterranean in my hundred foot yacht. And in 1990 I joined a New South Wales senior executive service working for Sydney Water Board looking after their property portfolio and twenty-five other independent businesses not related to

04:30 water. I then left the Water Board in 1994 and basically have been devoting myself to writing and studying since then. That's a very brief summary of my short and boring life.

Well, it's far from it and thank you, that was a great summary.

05:00 **Okay, let's go right back to the beginning. If I could get to restate where and when you were born?**

I was born in Glasgow in 1937. In Glasgow Scotland. In the suburb illustriously known as the Gorbals which were the rather underprivileged and poor suburbs, right? And when I was at -

05:30 I suppose I was lucky I was rather bright and could always manage academically. As I'm saying, I won this scholarship to go and spend four five years in the boarding school. Except it was rather difficult returning to the Gorbals with the blazer with gold trim round it and the hat with a tassel on it. You had some explaining to do to the local toughs.

06:00 But nonetheless I survived that. Now in some ways I regard myself as a child of war inasmuch as that World War II broke out when I was only two years old or so and where we were was located near the

steelworks at the time and the Germans used to come over and attempt to bomb the steelworks. In those days, like now,

- 06:30 most of the bombs never hit the target and they used to fall on the surrounding suburbs. All the children were evacuated out by the government and at the tender age of four or five we were sent out to a farm. I think I remember that we had to go out and pick tomatoes to earn our keep on the farm. We didn't like that so our mother came and picked
- 07:00 myself and my two sister up without permission and we went back to the city. My father then decided that it was too dangerous. He decided it would be safer if we relocated mother and the children to Belfast in Northern Ireland. At that time it had been untouched. So we had to sail across the Irish Sea dodging U-Boats [Unterseeboots - German submarines] and I can always remember
- 07:30 that everyone had to be silent so the U-Boats would not pick up the sounds of crying children or any noise. So we made it safely. We arrived in Belfast. That night, for the first time, the Luftwaffe [German air force] bombed Belfast. Belfast eye witnessed the breakdown of basically law and order where all the essential services people -
- 08:00 police, fire brigade - abandoned the city and took to the hills. The Glasgow fire brigade had to be called over to extinguish the burning city. After that we then relocated to Dublin for twelve months or so before things quietened down and the Royal Air Force [RAF] had reduced
- 08:30 the number of bombing attacks on Britain so we then returned to Britain. So I can always remember Belfast lining up on the hills next to ack-ack [anti-aircraft artillery] batteries which fired away all night. So this was my introduction to war. My father also worked - he was a civilian but he was an electrical
- 09:00 engineer and he worked for the air force at Lossiemouth air base in the north of Scotland where the Lancaster bombers used to do the night raids on Germany. So again, I used to in the evening go out and sit on the end of the runway and watch the planes take off. And then return next morning. So I
- 09:30 always had a desire to join probably the air force. First, was my first choice. When I came out here to high school I found the vast difference in the mathematics and physics and chemistry to what we'd been doing in England. I had decided to ensure I got a good pass and matriculated in Year Twelve, had to
- 10:00 drop my three unit maths and do a two unit maths. Then I knew I would get through because I didn't want to have to repeat or not get a good score. Unfortunately, that then meant at that stage I could not become eligible to be a top gun in the air force. You had to have good maths for some unknown reason. So
- 10:30 I then decided to join the army and then applied for Duntroon, got selected and went off to the Royal Military College in 1956.

Just before we do go on to Duntroon, because I'm interested in finding out a bit more about that as well, I want to find out a bit more about your family. Could you describe the personality of your father?

My father was a

- 11:00 shall we say self-educated person. So in other words he had not I suppose gone beyond the equivalent of a school certificate in those days. But he had been a great reader and lover of the arts and so on and was forever taking us on tours of the museums and art galleries and encouraging us to study and read.
- 11:30 And he had basically got himself qualified as an electrical sort of engineer by studying part time and working at various jobs working his way up until he got himself qualified. My mother was a
- 12:00 an Italian - so we came from an Italian background. Again, this lead to certain discriminatory problems. And also we were a Catholic family. In Glasgow then it was predominantly Protestant, anti-Catholic and shall we say didn't highly regard the Italian community so I
- 12:30 used always have to battle on the school playground and in the streets to retain myself. My father was also a very keen boxer and trained people in the gym, so I was quite a proficient boxer and able to handle myself.

Were you close to him?

Yes. He had to work away a lot. One, during the war he was posted

- 13:00 up north. And then after that again he tended to do contracting in remote locations because that was where the big money was. Then again he had to come out to Australia twelve months before us. He had signed a contract with Broken Hill Proprietary Steelworks. The deal was if he worked for twelve months with them they would then
- 13:30 sponsor our family out and guarantee a house on arrival. So again that - now before we came to Australia we had basically decided to get out of Great Britain and we felt that in the early fifties Britain didn't appear to have a great future. It was still depressed and recovering from the war. There was still rationing and

- 14:00 the weather's atrocious. My father then went to America first. We were going to relocate to America. But in '49-'50 American was in something of a bit of a recession and he thought that New York winters were unpleasant. American was a great place if you were on top, but if you were starting off it was rather tough environment. Australia looked more
- 14:30 beckoning so he then decided to try Australia. Again, we all went with him and were keen to go. I had the choice of either staying behind and finishing year twelve in England, because when you moved to Australia you lost six months because of difference in school years and so on. So I could have remained there for a bit over twelve months
- 15:00 and graduated in England or come here. But I decided no I'd come out here and try my luck. Australia sounded a great place. I then came out with the family. Here in Australia again my father happily completed his contracts with the steelworks, then went contracting up in places like Magnetic Island. He built the cables from the mainland over to Magnetic Island.
- 15:30 Then the Snowy Mountains Scheme - he worked on that. He then went to Western Australia and opening up all places like Port Hedland and so on. So he was always travelling and always away for much of the year.

What about brothers and sisters?

I have two sisters. One, one year older and one, one year younger. My eldest sister went into nursing and my younger

- 16:00 sister was a high school teacher.

You mentioned that you won a scholarship. Could you tell me a bit more about your schooling? For instance, what was your favourite subject at school?

I was fairly good at most subjects. I found I never had to exert myself. I never really got

- 16:30 fired up with most subjects. I liked history particularly. Some sections of economics. But my reports always said, even at military college, said that I only ever worked at half-pace. Because I used to know what I had to do to pass. I was never particularly interested in becoming the
- 17:00 dux or anything. So I was always busy on other matters that I felt were much more interesting than the standard school matters. So I only ever applied myself sufficient to get through which used to frustrate various headmasters and so on who knew I could do much better but I knew exactly what I needed to do to get whatever mark to achieve so that's what I did.

Was there pressure on you to perform, being on a scholarship?

- 17:30 Yes. But I always - whatever the minimum mark to do I did. People kept saying, "Oh you could do better." And I would agree, but I never found - I only ever found one or two teachers who would light the spark, shall we say? And I had - I always used to clash with teachers. I can remember
- 18:00 my clash with authorities. I was only in kindergarten or something and I had read about Darwin and evolution theories. So we had to give an essay on a topic at school which was run by the nuns and I had got up and made this heretical remark that humans were descended from monkeys which was
- 18:30 I thought logical, and scientific, and reasonable. I was then basically branded as a heretic and I was forced to confess in front of the entire school that I hadn't meant it. I was only attempting to be funny. And I have never forgiven this retraction purely on theological grounds,
- 19:00 not on rational grounds. No one ever attempted to counter my argument or prove me wrong. I was just ordered to retract that. Again, I used to be a very keen student of a comic that was very widely distributed in England called Eagle Magazine which was based on this character journeying out into space. So again I wrote this article about
- 19:30 developing a rocket to go to the moon. And again I had to force to recant that this was not possible. And again I was just being troublesome and ridiculous. So again I was being forced to recant and after that I promised myself I would never recant again. So it put me on a collision course often with authority and academia. I probably haven't ever fully adjusted to it.
- 20:00 Often leads to great problems later on in life. But I still persist in being rather thick-headed and stubborn at times. Now as I'm saying, at the military college it was a very demanding course because not only had you to perform well academically, you also had to perform on the military sides and the physical and this type of
- 20:30 side so it was a very demanding course. But again I was probably regarded as a bit of a troublesome cadet. They had of course then and occasionally it erupts in the army or academy the code of bastardisation. At that stage the academy internally was run by the cadets. So virtually all discipline
- 21:00 and control was run by senior cadets over junior cadets. I found this quite - I said, I didn't put up with this at boarding school and I'm only ten years old and I didn't think I should have to put up with it as an adult. So I refused to conform. The choice was that you had to take the punishment. So in other words I

spent virtually the whole time in

- 21:30 the military college on defaulters' parade at six in the morning and again at four in the afternoon. You had to perform these extra drills that the senior class could award as punishment or confined to barracks. I probably logged up a thousand years confined to barracks. I probably still haven't fully worked them all off. I wasn't going to bow or bend. Physically, I was able to look after
- 22:00 myself so no one would attempt to bash me or nothing because they realised it would be at great cost and I would never forgive them and I would keep leaping out in the dark for revenge. I'd earn my punishment, but it was difficult. Providing I passed my exams and I was also particularly good at sport - I was in the soccer team
- 22:30 and I used to also play rugby union, I used to play Australian Rules, I used to also be in the athletic team. So being good at sport and passing exams - if you failed two exams you were out so I did not normally cross official rules. So in other words I never broke any military rules
- 23:00 or that. It was just cadet rules I broke. As a result I was always under threat of expulsion but because of good academic marks I never failed and occasionally if something interested me I would top that particular exam.

Just backtracking a little bit because I find it - I think Duntroon's a very interesting

- 23:30 **area. How did you come to apply to Duntroon? Can you go right back to the beginning?**

Yes. I had not heard of Duntroon, being a fairly new arrival in the country. I hadn't actually had any clear career path. When I first arrived I joined the cadets right away. The school cadets. I was a private and then I had a

- 24:00 meteoric rise to fame. So I did particularly well in the cadets, so every two weeks or every month I got another stripe till I worked my way up to the lance corporal, corporal, sergeant, so by within six months I was up at staff sergeant or warrant officer or something.

Was that cadet corps run through your school?

Through school, yes.

And what school were you at?

Christian Brothers College Wollongong.

- 24:30 Wollongong in those days there was only about twelve in Year Twelve. Most children did not go on then. There was only twelve in Year Twelve in the Christian Brothers. There was only one other high school, Wollongong High and they had about twenty or so in its class. So in the whole of Wollongong there was only thirty people did their HSC [Higher School Certificate]. And only in our class at Brothers there was only two who went on
- 25:00 to full time university. Myself who went to Duntroon and the rest tended, four or five others joined BHP as cadet metallurgists and they studied and worked. Took them fifty years to ever complete the courses if they ever did. So it was unusual for anyone to go on.

So what was - sorry to butt in, but what was Wollongong like in the fifties and sixties?

It was a very

- 25:30 backward, quiet little country town as it were. Literally there were twenty-five, thirty thousand people. Years behind Sydney for example. Now I saw an ad [advertisement] or somewhere along the line for Portsea Military College. First of all at the end of Year Eleven I went to the officer cadet school - this is with the cadets - and graduated as an
- 26:00 under officer so I did my final year as a cadet officer. Somewhere along there I met up with regular army instructors who ran some of these courses and I thought what a fine bunch of chaps they are. Somebody said you ought to apply to officer cadet school so I looked up the phone book and here was Portsea or they were in an ad and I went along and the recruiting
- 26:30 officer said, "Oh you don't want to go to Portsea. You're a bright lad. You want to go to Duntroon." I said, "Where's that?" He said, "Oh that's this and you get your degree and so on and so on." So I thought, "Oh, that would be fine." So I then wrote off and they said come up for an interview. So I went up to my headmaster and said, "I want the day off next Monday. I'm going off for this interview for Duntroon." He said, "No you're not. You're not getting the day off." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Duntroon's a nest of WASPs [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants]. You'll never get
- 27:00 in being a Catholic from Wollongong. No one from Wollongong's ever got into Duntroon. No Catholic's ever got into Duntroon." I said, "I don't care. I'm taking the day off." He said, "No you won't." I said sort of, "Up you." I took the day off, went up and was determined to get into Duntroon. So I got through the initial selection and then did a whole series of panels and so on. Now the commandant at Duntroon then was a chap called Major General Ian Campbell

- 27:30 who has a great Scottish ancestry. Now somehow or another I got on particularly well with old General Campbell and I got through the whole series of selections and got there and said I'd be accepted providing a reached a particular matriculation mark in the higher school certificate. Which I did. So I then received a note saying I'm off so I
- 28:00 believe I was the first lad from Wollongong ever to get up and darken the famous doorsteps of Duntroon - much to their chagrin I think you see.

So could you go into a little bit more detail about the selection process for Duntroon?

As I'm saying it was a multi-stage thing. You had to fill out this application form and state your reasons. And again the cadet, my cadet history of being an officer in the cadets

- 28:30 was a great - you're obviously not sure how they scored it, but presumably you got various points by the activities. Again, I was fairly good at sport and so on. You then had to go through a number of group activities. So you would turn up at a number of these selections and you were divided into teams of half a dozen and you had to get over obstacle courses and climb over pits filled with alligators
- 29:00 with planks balanced on stones and all this type of thing. And you then had to go through a I suppose an etiquette selection. They arranged this formal lunch or dinner and you turned up there in the officers' mess and here was General Campbell with all these very senior officers. You sat down and you had twenty-four forks, spoons and different glasses and
- 29:30 so on. And it was a subtle test. So the old general started off and the entrée would be served and he would reach out and he would pick up the main course utensils. All the snivellers would be watching him and they would pick it up. Either they didn't know or they were just hoping to get points. I picked up the right ones. Again, this was my good
- 30:00 English boarding school training. While at boarding school used to be like something out of [Charles] Dickens. You used to have to work. It wasn't quite like boarding school at all. The poor pupils had to do all the cleaning and assist in cooking and so on, so I never particularly liked the great gangs that polished floors and washed up. I got myself into the kitchen for a start and the rather
- 30:30 obnoxious chef used to sack his appointed kitchen hands left right and centre, but for some reason I got on particularly well with him. Mainly because you had to get up early and light - they were all wooden Aga type stoves and you had to have these at the right temperatures and the water hot when the chef arrived to cook breakfast. I always managed to do that well. So I started off there. Then I graduated onto looking after the visitors.
- 31:00 So when the parents of the boys came up to visit in the school they had a special visitors' area, dining room and so on, and I used to be the head waiter and lay out all the tables and serve the visitors because I was apparently quite polite in those days. I went bad later. So I was fully familiar with all the correct sequences to elaborate meals and so on. So again this
- 31:30 and I realised what General Campbell was up to and he knew that I knew what he was doing so we hit it off well. I got in and passed through the selection process. There were various psychological tests and medical tests. We basically had to be in the top one per cent of the population intellectually, academically, physically to get in. They were very selective.

32:00 What form did the psychological test take?

The various batteries of psych tests were used. You know, tick and flick. Match squares and boxes and so on. I think these were the only ones I ever passed. From then on I failed psychological tests and I get thrown out of job interviews when I complete one of these. I've gone mad since my service days or something. But

- 32:30 in those days I could breeze through standard intelligence tests and so on. I just deteriorated. Stupidity's hereditary. I caught that from my children I think.

How long were you in Duntroon?

Four years. It was a four year course. So I graduated at the end of 1959 and received a posting as a lieutenant platoon commander to the 2nd Battalion

- 33:00 Royal Australian Regiment which was then based at Holsworthy. So Christmas '59 I joined the battalion. Now at that juncture the Australian Army was what I call the old army. So when I joined in December '59 I was the youngest man in the platoon. I was twenty-two I think. And these old gnarled
- 33:30 veterans who were forty and so on who had been in World War II and Korea and Malaya and so on. So I was a fresh faced novice thrust in upon these - most of them were permanent professional soldiers and heavy drinkers and gamblers and womanisers. It was quite an experience to be in charge of some forty of these
- 34:00 ancient villains.

Did you feel like your time in Duntroon prepared you for that experience?

No. It's like many - put it this way, in some ways it did. So in other words, purely on the technical side, so you learned your weapons well which you could handle. We did a whole training in a whole series.

- 34:30 We did courses at the armoured school and engineering school and artillery school. So you could virtually do everything, fire a gun, command tanks. I was in infantry but as I'm saying that way you were perfectly adapted, but management wise you were not. I suppose the management theories
- 35:00 were not designed for running infantry units and - you had to win the respect presumably of these gnarled veterans. Because when you came out you didn't know anything. What could you possibly tell some forty year old who'd been through World War II, Korea and Malaysia about soldiering? So you had to then
- 35:30 demonstrate, as you do - to me one of the criteria of leadership is that you've got to basically convince them that they should follow you and that you are going to help win battles and you are going to help them save their lives. That's what it's all about. So if you can demonstrate that to the soldiers they'll follow you. If they think you're going to cost them their lives or
- 36:00 then they won't follow you.

So how did you win them over?

I'm not sure. This is it. When one tries to work out - I mean people talk about leadership and all that. I presume you have to be born with it. It's largely genetic. Plus you then polish various techniques and so on

- 36:30 as you go along. You have to learn. I mean, I can remember - I was the only non-drinker in the whole battalion. They didn't have soft drink in the mess or anything else. I never drank. That was - first job I was given first week or something was to clean out the canteen. The canteen was the military boozier [bar] where they all went to get drunk Friday nights. It was
- 37:00 always a great problem closing it down at the appointed legal hour. You'd come in and say, "Right, bar closing in two minutes." Whereupon they'd all rush up and they'd all order fifty schooners of beer and be sitting there all night. When they were drunk they were quite aggravating, quite violent and so on. There were always fights and riots
- 37:30 and so on. So I decided I'd stop all this. So I said, "Righto, irregardless you've got five minutes to clear up and shut up and get out." They wouldn't move. So it was going to be a showdown. So there's a hundred of these drunken soldiers all sitting there and a fresh faced officer. So I said, "All right, call out the guards." So I called out the guards and we all lined up. "Fix bayonets."
- 38:00 "You've got one minute to get out." So the place cleared. In retrospect it was not the way, but it worked. At least everyone then knew who I was. Probably some Duntroon prick or something. Cause there wasn't many Duntroon people around in those days. We were a rarity and not highly regarded.
- 38:30 **It sounds like, just backtracking a little bit to Duntroon and also this first experience that there was a culture of violence and brutality in the army and in Duntroon at the time, I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that?**
- There was. I was always against it. We lost fifty per cent of our cadets from joining until graduation. Many of them left because
- 39:00 of this harsh culture. The army condoned it. It was never official. In theory it was always condemned. But the barracks were run by the cadets and the officers only ever sallied in on very rare occasions. Now there are many in the army believe this was a good thing. Now war unfortunately is a brutal violent thing.
- 39:30 They believed that you had to be hardened so that you would then ultimately survive it. That we're not training kindergarten or Sunday School teachers. You have to train killers basically and control them. They felt that this was an accepted way of doing it.

I'll just get you to stop there and we'll continue the story on the next tape.

Tape 2

- 00:32 **We were just talking about Duntroon.**

Yes, so as I'm saying, it was very difficult especially your first year there where you were called a fourth year cadet and they were at the bottom of the rung. Everyone was senior to you and picked on you. You virtually couldn't eat because you had a limited period for lunch. You'd do all the marching and you had to sit down. There were thousands

- 01:00 of rules and regulations. Junior cadets were not allowed to for example, lean on the back of the seat. You had to remain rigidly to attention, sitting to attention. All the others got served first. You got served

last. There was a communal plate banged onto a table where you had to serve out. So whatever portion was left at the bottom went to the fourth class cadet.

- 01:30 And you had to answer everyone who asked you questions and you were continually bombarded with stupid, ritualistic questions. So you virtually couldn't eat your meal. Then the whistle would blow and everyone had to go back to the next training session or lessons and so on. Again, your room had to be in inspection order. All your items of clothing had to go in particular drawers and there had to be so many inches folded in so many inches.
- 02:00 The senior cadets would come in and inspect it and they would throw everything on the floor and say, "Not good enough." You'd have to redo it all. You'd end up spending half the night till the early hours of the morning polishing your boots and restacking all your wardrobes ready for the next inspection at first light in the morning or something. Some broke under this. Then there were others who actually physically bashed junior cadets.
- 02:30 They were forced to scrub toilets with toothbrushes and all this type - down on hands and knees in corridors. They also had to tidy up senior cadets' rooms. If you resisted this then you got punished by this extra drill which meant you were up early before anyone else got out of bed and you had to go out on the parade ground fully
- 03:00 dressed with all your equipment packed and polished and perform thirty or forty-five minutes or an hour of drill, marching up and down to various commands. And again you'd be inspected and anything out of place, you'd be punished. The packs were very heavy and it had to be all done so I used to pack mine just with cardboard and empty newspaper because then it looked nice and square and it was nice and light. Occasionally,
- 03:30 these were opened and inspected so I worked out for the extra drills you got for not having it packed - you were only inspected once every couple of weeks so you'd play your odds and do it. And again, it was all rules and regulations. Many made no sense. We used to have these visiting lecturers come and the cadets used to come out and you had to always
- 04:00 keep changing your uniforms. In other words, a whole series of different uniforms you wore at different times, different weather conditions and a famous army saying is, "Greatcoats [long heavy warm coat] on, greatcoats off." So one's ordered to put it on and ten minutes later to take it off. For these lectures you had to wear your full dress uniforms which again took a lot of effort and work in cleaning and getting them all done. Then you'd do that and you'd be told to
- 04:30 put the greatcoat on because it was cold. Didn't make much sense. So this night we were told we were wearing greatcoats, so I thought, "Oh why bother? I won't put on my full dress uniform. I'll only put on my football jersey under my greatcoats." So off we go to the great lecture. And for some reason or other - some visiting dignitary was coming in - they decided on the rare occasion to put on the heating and also we were running late so the hall became warm.
- 05:00 So the adjutant gets up and says, "Greatcoats off!" So everyone stands to attention and takes the greatcoat off except me. So they all sit down and I'm sitting there and the adjutant says, "Staff Cadet D'Arcy, didn't you hear me? I said greatcoats off." I said, "I think I'd better not, sir." So marched out of the lecture - another fourteen days' detention or something.
- 05:30 This type of thing went on.

When you got to fourth year did you partake in what had happened to you?

No. I originally had been promoted to the rank of corporal in my final year and then I got blasted back down to private because of disgraceful conduct.

What was that for?

Oh, I was classified as a country boy because I came from Wollongong

- 06:00 as distinct from the city boys came from Sydney. Now when you went on your semester breaks you were allowed to go home. I had to catch a train to Sydney and then a train to Wollongong because I couldn't go from Canberra to Wollongong. I said I wanted to go with the Sydney boys because if I caught their train which was an express train then I could catch the train to Wollongong the same evening.
- 06:30 Whereas they said, "No. Country boys leave different hour, different train." And I said, "But I'm still going to Sydney." "No." I said, "But I miss my Wollongong train. I've got to spend in the station at Central. I can't get a train until four-thirty in the morning to Wollongong." Didn't make sense. So I then went and dropped, thought, "This is ridiculous." So I decided I would charter an aeroplane. So I rang up Ansett [Airlines] and I chartered this aeroplane and sold all these
- 07:00 tickets to all these cadets. It was going to be great. We were going to fly there in a fraction of the time and all that. It went well. Plane full, everyone was happy. And the only problem was that stupid Ansett - because we didn't have a phone number or nothing - so they wanted to confirm that everything was going so they rang up the college and said, "The plane's all right." "What plane?"
- 07:30 "Oh the plane taking the cadets to Sydney." "What's the name?" "D'Arcy! Report to the commandant's

office!" Off I march see. I was always doing that. Another thing was I used to be captain of the sailing club. We had a sailing club. In those days Lake George used to be filled with water. We had a sailing club and we used to sail against the navy and so on. So there was a big event coming up against the navy and we'd

- 08:00 never beaten the navy and I wanted to beat the navy at sailing. We had our own boat club down at the lake, but there was no power there. We wanted to scrape down and re-polish our top yacht, see. So we decided we'd bring it back to college. They were twelve foot boats. I can't remember the category. But anyway.
- 08:30 One of the great skills we had mastered was we'd mastered how to make a master key for all the locks in the place. So any cadet who was absent, died in hospital and that, we stowed this yacht in his room. There was just enough room to fit the yacht in his room and that way we had power tools and so on. The only problem was on inspections. Periodically there'd be inspections and once every while there was a big major inspection where every room was opened. Normally cadets who were absent,
- 09:00 their rooms were locked and the inspection went by, but periodically there was a big inspection. Now also the cadets' code of honour was you had to put in your mates who were breaking laws. So someone obviously tipped the authorities off. So there was a great inspection put on to find out what was going on. They obviously weren't sure what was going on, but obviously you didn't believe that anyone could conceal a boat in the college. And to get this boat out of the room you had to have four other rooms
- 09:30 to manoeuvre it cause it was big. There was a two storey block we were in and a stair at one end and one the other. It required tremendous military precision as the inspection party came up one stair you had to zip zip zip in and out all these rooms down the other stair just as they come up and then hide in the some other room and then as they exited - back again. And it was rather nerve shattering, but we managed to do that. The authorities
- 10:00 couldn't find the boat. But this was too much effort and it required some of the less brave cadets to join the conspiracy. They weren't happy. You were never sure when they were going to break. So I had to find another hiding place. So I decided to hide it behind the Anglican altar in the church. I thought, "Oh, no one'll go there." So we hid it there.

- 10:30 All went well until some particularly nasty officer for some reason went and looked - "What's this? Who's this? Lieutenant D'Arcy report to the commandant's office." Oh once again. So periodically we'd do that. And another time after my venture afield on the airlines I decided I would hitchhike to Sydney. So you had to actually say you were staying with friends in Canberra. "So why aren't you going home?" "I'm staying with friends in Canberra."
- 11:00 You'd go and hitchhike. The only problem was we got out hitchhiking when lo and behold the adjutant came by and picked us up. So another twenty-one days confined to barracks.

You sound like you were a real rascal.

We were. We dug tunnels. I had this great ginger beer plant going to make my fortune, see. It was horrible stuff. All junior cadets had to purchase dozens of these bottles and drink them. All went well until we had to go off on an exercise

- 11:30 and I had to leave the ginger beer plant in the hands of some junior cadet. And these things are very dangerous. You had to feed them and control the temperatures. Otherwise the reaction got out of hand and it keeps multiplying. This lad forgot one day and the ginger beer plant apparently exploded or something down this tunnel that we'd dug under this room. Another twenty one days
- 12:00 in the slammer. That was my continued ... Again I had a short-wave radio and they were rare in those days. You needed a big antenna. Outside antennas were prohibited so I strung this line up from the commandant's office to my block outside and it looked like a phone wire or something. Wasn't discovered. In the senior year - oh no you weren't allowed to have cars -
- 12:30 but in the senior year everyone - I went out and bought this great three point five litre Riley - a big black Riley. I used to park it outside the commandant's office and everyone thought it was the officers. The only problem was because I was always confined to barracks I could never get time to take my car so the battery'd go flat. On a Saturday morning the senior class was excused drill parade on the parade ground and that's when we took the car out. Now I'm up there
- 13:00 outside the commandant's office which was on a hill behind a parade ground and you had to push start the car. So here are all the officers lined up but they've got their backs to the office, facing all the cadets and all these junior classes are standing googly eyed as we push this thing. We start it down the hill, jump in and hide under the door and off we went. That was my life in the ...

- 13:30 **It sounds like despite the obvious brutality that did happen at Duntroon there was also this tremendous fun and light-hearted...**

There was. You built up this camaraderie among especially your own class. When I got to senior class I would never bastardise the junior ones. Instead I used to make them

- 14:00 learn great paragraphs of poetry. They used to have to get up and make poetic speeches or something rather than ask all these stupid questions, the history of the military or something. Because I didn't believe that was necessary. I still don't. You can be physically hard and demanding and all these things.
- 14:30 But you don't have to have that sadistic element in it. Once you go out on the battlefield the lessons of life sort you all out anyway. And it's better off that you have this positive attitude because then you learn more and co-operate more. You don't have these lifelong antagonisms towards some of the senior class which you still have.
- 15:00 And again towards many senior officers. A number of senior officers used to persecute me. The adjutant announced that I would be crucified and it was his aim to throw me out the college. So we had these lifelong battles with them that still continue. They're still shadow boxing now.
- 15:30 **So there must have been - when it came time to graduate from Duntroon, how did you feel?**
- I vowed I'd never set foot in the place again. I didn't up until about two years ago when we had the thirtieth or fortieth reunion, I'm not quite sure now. So in '99 we had a reunion after thirty
- 16:00 years or forty years I think it was. Forty years reunion. So I got persuaded by some of my classmates to come and revisit the place. You were even to go and look at your file.
- That must have been interesting.**
- Yes.
- Was there a sense of relief when you graduated from Duntroon?**
- Oh yes, I couldn't wait to get out of it.
- 16:30 It was a constant battle to survive. I skated right on the edge. I was always on the point of being dismissed, thrown out or not allowed to graduate. So it was not easy by any means. But I was determined to. Because a lot of people said, "You have no business being in the military. You should get out." So I said, "Oh well just for spite
- 17:00 I'll graduate and prove you wrong." So I did.
- So then you got your first commission and you were discussing earlier that they were a bunch of old veterans.**
- No. As I'm saying the army then changed. Within twelve months I was virtually the oldest man in the platoon. Now what happened was that it could have been -
- 17:30 I haven't quite worked out what it was, but these old people obviously decided that this new army wasn't for them and they all left. We ended up having all these fresh faced eighteen year olds in. And right away you had no problem. You were older, knew more than them so life became a lot easier. Except that I still learned a lot from some of these older soldiers and
- 18:00 I can always remember we used to always have a major exercise period in the middle of winter for some godforsaken reason. So in August you'd be out there on the Holsworthy field firing range for months on end. I can always remember you'd be sitting around a fire, it'd be minus eight degrees out there, and these old soldiers would be telling all their great tales. You could learn a lot from say the practical
- 18:30 aspects of soldiering from their stories. You had to deduct a certain amount of bullshit and bravado. But underneath there was a lot of stories. I can always remember asking one old sergeant about the difference between incoming rounds and outgoing rounds. This is artillery rounds. In peacetime we never experience a round coming towards you. For safety reasons
- 19:00 live firing is rare. Whenever you fire and you'd fire artillery, you'd go out there and you'd fire your twenty five pounders at some beat up old 1950 Pontiac. You'd be out on the range and shoot hundreds of rounds into that and go out and look at it. But it never really gave you much idea about anything. Now I used to sit and think, how could you tell the difference? Because one of your problems being an officer and a gentleman
- 19:30 you had to always work out how you reacted to your soldiers, cause they're always watching you. If it's one of your own rounds going overhead and you have to stand there unflinchingly, unblinkingly pay no attention. If however the round's coming for you it's rather foolish to remain in a grand upright position waving your stick at the enemy. So you have to know when to
- 20:00 jump down to the bottom of the pit and hide and grovel and when to not do it. Now you don't want to get it wrong. You don't want to jump down and here's all your soldiers looking at you and say, "Oh sorry. It's one of ours. It's going that way not this way." Now you could have explained it by the ballooning effect of decreasing frequencies when rounds come towards you left and right. So I asked this old soldier and he thought for a minute and he says,
- 20:30 "Don't worry, you'll know." Now, at the time I thought that's not a satisfactory explanation, but he couldn't explain it any differently. Now, when I get to Vietnam and the first round is coming towards me I remember what he said and I said, "Ah! that's the difference." And then you jump down and cower in

the bottom of the pit when it explodes next to you. There is a lot

- 21:00 to be gained from extracting this information out. You don't find this in the platoon commander's notebook or the platoon in battle or something else like that. You have to get it from people who have experienced it. Now this is always a problem in military training – even today – that the army must get experience from those who have personally experienced it. You can't get it from a book. It's different. Certainly you read all
- 21:30 about it in the books and histories, but it's different. You have to get it firsthand. And when an army doesn't get it firsthand and relies solely on people who have been taught by someone who got it from a book and you drift off the reality and then the army gets into trouble. Now, this happens when an army's been at peace for a long time. You have got to counter that by attaching
- 22:00 your officers and senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] to other armies. So it's much better to practice with another army in another country and you can leave your mistakes behind. Because one of the things you learn in war – it's like learning anything – you make mistakes. And mistakes can be rather costly. So it's better off that you practice with some old fuzzy wuzzy than you all die gloriously and you come back home and spin a yarn.
- 22:30 As long as you bring the real lessons that you can instil to others.

Just to clarify, where were you based?

Holsworthy. It was with the 2nd Battalion. Now after about one year – at that time we were involved in the Malaya campaign, counter terrorism in Malaya. That time, when I first joined the army we had switched from desert warfare, basically from

- 23:00 World War I on Australia trained on desert warfare or Western Europe warfare. They decided then to switch to tropical warfare. Also then we began co-operating much more with the Americans. So we decided to change from the British organisation to an American organisation and they formed what was known as a Pentropic Battalion which had about thirteen hundred men. A British battalion had eight or nine hundred.
- 23:30 But in Malaya the battalion worked with the British. So when the battalion left here to go there you had too many men, so three hundred or so had to remain behind. So when my battalion went to Malaya they picked me to stay behind. So I then joined 2nd Battalion which left Malaya and came here. So I did another year with the 2nd Battalion. Now in the meantime during the three or four month changeover I got banished to Kapooka because the commanding officer didn't want me
- 24:00 hanging about having a good time. So I went off to Kapooka to be an instructor down at the recruit training. This is where the army first inducts people into it. Again, it was good experience down there on training people, civilians and turning them into the first cut.

Were you frustrated about not being able to go to Malaya?

Yes. I really wanted to go. Cause I looked forward to going

- 24:30 but that's it, again it's one of the penalties you pay. You're not the star boy of the commanding officer so when he has to leave a certain number behind or give an unpleasant job to – I tended to be the first on the list. One of the many things I used to be sent off when I was particularly naughty or something was Canungra.
- 25:00 They used to always send me off to these courses in Canungra because the training in Canungra was regarded as particularly tough. I ended up doing ten courses in Canungra or something. I used to call them the substandard subalterns course. They had different names. It was a survival course or this course or that course. But really they were all the same. You spent half your life on obstacle courses in Canungra and the other half out in the jungle
- 25:30 surviving on what you'd caught and eating snakes. I didn't mind it. I quite liked it.

Might have helped later on.

Well, it did. Tremendously. And I could breeze through it. Now, I was always physically fit. I was captain of the unit soccer team and I was captain coach of the army team and coach manager of the inter service team. So again my aim was to spend as much time

- 26:00 I believe in the English officer business that your troops shouldn't know who you are and they should just catch you up by reading the social pages. "Oh there's our platoon commander." of skiing or running somewhere. I used to also run one mile cross country and so on. The army would only select me for sporting activities so I used to tour the country with these teams.

Just getting back to Kapooka,

- 26:30 **what were your duties there as an instructor?**

I used to run a new platoon that would come in. They would arrive in civilian gear and be head shaved

off, kitted out. And you began a week one day one of this intensive training program that was designed to turn the civilian into a soldier within three months. And all soldiers underwent that no

27:00 matter whether they were infantry, artillery, armoured or medical corps anything. They all underwent this basic training. Once they graduated from basic training they then did another three months specialist training on whatever – gunners would go to the school of artillery, infantry would go to the school of infantry. So your job was to convert the civilian into a soldier in intensive twenty-four hour a day boot camp type

27:30 of thing. So it was very intense. Very physical. The poor cadets would go night and day. Many of them didn't make it. Your job was to sort out those who would survive and do well in the army life and those who didn't. So those who got through their interviews and psych processing you had to then do the reality testing. It's better off for

28:00 somebody that if he's not suited for the military life you discover that early on and return him forthwith rather than have ill matched and disgruntled soldiers. But again it stood me in very good stead in Vietnam when I was doing training and recruiting and so on.

28:30 **I believe that you were also trained in interrogation techniques. Was that around this time or was that a bit later on?**

Yes. During my period at Holsworthy I went off to the school of military intelligence and undertook a code of conduct course. This was a course that was designed to train people how to handle being a POW [Prisoner of War] based on the Korean War experience where large

29:00 numbers of American and British troops were captured – and some Australians – and most did not perform well. So this was designed to inoculate you to what life was like if you got caught. I was most impressed with the course.

It sounds like a fascinating course. Could you describe, take us through what ... ?

Better off I describe what happened then when I got –

29:30 I did some further studies on the matter. I then became a part time lecturer and instructor there. So the army always gives you multiple jobs. Saves money. So you've got to dash between – things are quiet here, off you went and did that. Now the idea was that one of the great problems with a POW

30:00 is the shock of encounter. When they first get captured it disorients them. So you would attempt to duplicate that. First of all the course was a secret. Nobody knew what happened on the course and every student was sworn to secrecy that they would not reveal what happened. It was fairly well waterproof. Cause the students wanted part of it as a great joke, would never tell anyone else and

30:30 more or less think, oh we'll see how you react. So people would get the notice that they'd attend this course at the school of intelligence and thought, "Oh, great." Cause it's a lovely location on Middle Head overlooking the Harbour. You thought, "Oh, great. Tea, muffins and lectures." So you start off like that. So first day they'd come in – morning tea, lecture, lunch in the mess and all that. Then last

31:00 lights in the afternoon, the doors would suddenly open and in would rush these characters all dressed up in Chinese military uniforms and take them all prisoner. You would then march them all down to the old garrison place. There's some tunnels under North Head and there's a labyrinth of these old tunnels conducted in the 1850s when we feared the Russians were going to invade. So you'd whip them down there and they were incarcerated

31:30 down there and treated just like POWs. I used to be... Interrogation and indoctrination was my speciality. I would be the nice guy. I was basically dressed up as a Chinese colonel and I would be the nice guy. I used to run the nightshift. I'd come on at midnight and everyone would have a file and everything you ever did or said would be recorded and down on the file.

32:00 So I'd spend a couple of hours studying your background in the file. And to soften you up I would have you woken up and beaten every twenty minutes. So by the time I got to you – no sleep, I used to spend the afternoon swimming at Balmoral and going to the movies and coming home – now someone would probably think they were smarter than me. Now they may be, but after a couple of days of no sleep and getting beaten up they weren't quite as smart.

32:30 Then I had my access to all my reference material and I knew what you had said and thought and I knew your background and so on. So you were no match for me physically or mentally in your present condition. So I used to say I could break anybody in forty eight hours. I would specifically design specialist treatment for various officers. The idea that the military relies a lot on rank

33:00 and exterior symbols such as badges or rank, we strip it all off right down to stark naked it doesn't hold for much. Many can't stand that. Senior officers don't like – it has a great impact on them when they are reduced to...

Were they in cages at this point?

Yeah. Oh yeah, you were in cages and got beaten. It was not mucking about. It was

- 33:30 full on. We had to make sure we didn't actually physically damage you, but you got rough handling and no food and no water and I'd be the nice guy and say, "You smoke?" and he'd say, "Oh yeah." I'd say, "Well here's a cigarette." I'd give them a cigarette. I wouldn't give them a match. So he can't have it. And he'd go back to his cell and I'd have the cell raided and say, "What? Got a cigarette?" and beat him up. Punish him. And
- 34:00 again there's always a fair amount of jealousy between the officers and ranks and you'd appoint someone as a senior British officer. You'd be in charge of the camp. And then I'd demote you and appoint somebody else. If you were senior to the next fellow who was put in charge there'd be animosity and then we'd bang your cell and you'd be never sure whether it was your cell mate who put you in and get you to sign things and then I
- 34:30 invite you for breakfast and you'd be starving, come out and I'd do a nice big bacon and egg breakfast. You'd sit down and we'd photograph you and then march other prisoners by and they'd all think you'd shopped them. So you're completely devastated. Again, they couldn't match your argument. We used to - one of my favourite tricks was to use the Geneva Convention. Now we had been taught in the military under the Geneva Convention you gave your
- 35:00 number, rank, name and serial number, nothing else. Now Australia was lax in not briefing its military that the convention changed and as of 1957 or '58 you then had to give your date of birth. But the good old Australian Army never taught this. So I would ask your date of birth and you would not give it to me. So I'd have you beaten and all that. You wouldn't give it to me. I would then say, "Right I'm going to beat your
- 35:30 cell mates." So your cell mate would come out and I'd say, "What's your date of birth?" and you'd refuse to give it and we'd beat the cell mate. Then we'd say, "Right, we're going to execute him. If you don't give me your date of birth we'll execute him." So you wouldn't give your date of birth. So we'd take him out and there'd be a shot rings out. I'd say, "Well, we've shot him. It's your problem." And then I'd produce the Geneva Convention which said you must give it. These psychological shocks, especially if you had obviously been deprived of sleep
- 36:00 and we pumped Chinese music day and night, tea picking and march a mile, you begin to believe it's real. Surprising a few days down there in the darkness and all that.

So this is like over - can you give me a time span?

About a week or so. So this was basically it. Now it was

- 36:30 initially quite embarrassing. I got people to sign all sort of dreadful confessions and oh dear. And then you'd publish these up on the wall so everyone else would see it. No, it would be turmoil. For example, one case we had two English naval officers. They came out. We used to run this and naval and air force would come. These poor old naval were submariners and at that time a lot of our submarine force was English.
- 37:00 And they didn't know anything. They'd just arrived in Australia. There was a long weekend coming up. The old navy shafted them and said you two go on this course. So they'd only been in the country two days, didn't know nothing. Turned up and they went down the slammer. Turned out that one of them, his father was a communist. He'd been an old union man, communist. The dear old son he was a lieutenant with a certain
- 37:30 left wing link. It became too embarrassing and I had to take him off the course because I wasn't allowed to ruin his career by exposing his Marxist Lenin upbringing that way. And again, this other major who I never particularly liked, I gave him a particularly hard time and some months later we were at a cocktail party. And he said, "I know that voice. I met you." I said, "No, no
- 38:00 you've never met me in my life before." He said, "Yes, yes. That voice." I said, "No, no sir. Not me." He couldn't quite recognise because I used to have full makeup on and my Chinese uniform. He said, "I know that voice. I'll remember it someday." Rush out.

How did the course finish?

Suddenly, you let them all out and then you had the lectures about how you should behave. Now later it was used as a selection

- 38:30 procedure for training team to go to Vietnam. So in other words prospective advisors had to undergo this course and they had to perform adequately. If they didn't perform adequately they got weeded out. You couldn't afford - it exposed people who were not psychologically or physically robust enough to withstand POWs. Most POWs
- 39:00 in Vietnam did not - other than the ones shot down in the north, but if you were shot down in the south almost none of them survived. So it was excellent training.

How did you learn these techniques?

I don't know. You just know these things. I must have a devious mind or something. No, I studied. I would select something and think

39:30 that's important and I'd studied up all about the British in Korea and so on. Techniques and whatever I could read about the Chinese methodology - brainwashing and so on. It's probably very similar to the Catholic Church methodology of inducting priests and nuns into the establishment. There's not much difference.

Tape 3

00:34 My other part-time job was in the days before they had the SAS [Special Air Service] fully active I was part of this ready reaction force. Right so the second part time job was this ready reaction force that you had to be ready to go anywhere in the world

01:00 instantly. When the secret code word was flashed on the screen of the cinema you had to rush off to Richmond and get ready to go. Again, it was a cheap trick to save money. The only problems you had is that you had to receive inoculations for every known disease in the world in every theatre. So you constantly were like a pin cushion cause you didn't know when you were going to be going to Africa or New Guinea or

01:30 Afghanistan or anywhere you had to be ready. And then you never knew if it was real.

So was this all part of the code of conduct course?

No. This was another part time job I had. So I had my regular job and then I was part time lecturing at the military intelligence school and then part time whenever the code was flashed I was off on the ready reaction force ready to smite villains throughout the world.

02:00 **For how long had these initiatives existed? Both the code of conduct course and the ready reaction force?**

The code of conduct course I think lasted about maybe five or six years or something. I don't know why it was terminated. I think probably some of the army became alarmed that the - cause you had to study up your Marxist learning

02:30 to be able to spruik it and I suppose they start looking at you askance when you're so good at it.

Was there something also about the psychological impact of the course?

Oh yes. As I was mentioning during the break, you had to be very careful you didn't damage people. It was like a smallpox inoculation. You didn't want them to catch smallpox. You just wanted them to be slightly exposed so they could react against it.

03:00 People can be fragile psychologically or they can have backgrounds and history that many of this stuff would bring out. I mean, we're dealing with people whose fathers would grow up during the Depression days at a time when communism was quite strong in Australia

03:30 and socialism and so on. So you often find that this is passed onto sons and so on. So all right they haven't followed the red flag but they're still more there than they make known.

And there was great militancy after the war as well.

Oh yes, of course. This was it. And there was this - so you had to be very careful that you weren't -

04:00 my job wasn't there as a counter intelligence officer to sniff out moles or something. So you didn't want to prod too deeply when somebody began to bring out this uncovered, latent stuff. Again, you had to watch you didn't brainwash yourself. So as you become the world's greatest expert on Marx Leninism and all

04:30 this stuff you have to keep yourself in check and tell yourself it's not real. You're not really out to break them. Because you'd get these personality clashes and you'd think, "That son of a bitch, never liked him."

Did it ever get to the point where you felt that it was affecting you?

No. Not necessarily others. They always can look at you askance sometimes.

05:00 Again, later in Vietnam when I had various organisations that used to look at me slightly askance and it was always a great discussion as they said as to whose side I was on. And one article I wrote was called On the Side of the Angels - there was great discussion among various organisations as to which side I was on. Various times I've been accused of belonging to all sorts.

05:30 Americans tended to think in Vietnam I was head of the military Australian intelligence. They'd say, "All this other stuff's a cover. You're really an intelligence operation in charge of Vietnam." The Vietnamese used to think I was Kuomintang. Others thought I was a Red Guard and Viet Cong and others thought I was with the Shin Beth. I said

06:00 "Well I might be careful of my pennies, but I'm not really Jewish." Or with the French intelligence. I said, "The last D'Arcy who worked for the French went over with William in 1066 and had nothing to do with it since. We're glad to be rid of it." So you have this. At one stage in Vietnam I received this banner from the Lao Dong movement in Quang Nam province.

06:30 Now Lao Dong is the official Communist Party and not too many people get decorated with this great banner. So I used to have to explain this is different Lao Dong or this is a different workers' party, not that workers' party. So there was always this look of askance sometimes.

So to get back to what was happening at Middle Head, how many of you were there as instructors?

07:00 There was only six or seven instructors. And a few NCOs and lower ranks as guards. And virtually all of them were intelligence. I was the only non-intelligence corps officer there.

How did you come to be involved in this in the first place?

I don't know. First of all I -

07:30 Major Joe DeCosta was one of the senior lecturers there. When I was a student undergoing it I got on particularly well with DeCosta. Then as I'm saying I had - it whet my appetite and I had then done some studies and so on. Now again I must have come across Joe again at some stage and we were discussing all this and when they were short and they had to pull someone in - because intelligence corps was terribly small -

08:00 so here was a potential resource. I don't know whether he was also trying to recruit me into joining the intelligence. I hummed and ahhh about whether to switch to intelligence, but I decided no, I was going to become a field marshal. So the infantry offered more promotion.

Nothing wrong with a bit of ambition. So this was

08:30 **at the time of Malaya?**

Malaya was going on.

So basically this was part of the general move towards jungle warfare.

Yes. We had switched as I'm saying in 1960 from old desert warfare type things into jungle warfare and the battalions more green. So we wore jungle green, the rest of the army wore khaki. And when I went to Kapooka

09:00 I was only wearing jungle greens so you were right the way you were totally distinct. I wouldn't give up mine because I was posted to the battalion therefore I demanded to wear my allotted uniform. You've always got to wear something different to everyone else. Show off or something. But that's - this period the army was undergoing this jungle warfare. And you had all this ludicrous business like we always went out training in the jungle in

09:30 August in New South Wales. You'd be up in the Penrose State Forest and it'd be snowing and you'd pretend you were in the jungle. You couldn't put up your hootchie, your plastic tent, because in the jungle it rattled or something. So you had to lie out there. You only needed a half a blanket in the jungle. But they wouldn't let you cut your blanket in half. But you only had this one blanket. You used to have to lie there in the rain and sleet and pretend you were sweltering in the jungle.

10:00 And take lots of salt tablets and pretend. Now again like the ready reaction force we would scramble when the code word, 'Spaghetti', or something was flashed on the screen. I'd say, "Is it for real?" And they'd say, "Oh, can't tell you." I'd say, "What I tell the milkman? Can he come on Monday or not?" "Oh, can't tell you." So you rush out there and it'd be an exercise. The air force couldn't even afford a plane. So you'd line up

10:30 these chairs on the tarmac and pretend it was a C130 and all sit there ready to jump out. Red light green light, go.

So can you tell me a little more about the purpose of the ready reaction force?

It was designed if there was trouble anywhere they would send you quickly.

How many people were expected to be part of the ready reaction force?

We had about a company. So about two or three hundred

11:00 soldiers were drawn from different things. You were supposed to go in and secure the airfield and make way for the main body that'd come later. Again, we had to - I had to learn how to load the aircraft up. No one taught you. The air force was too busy. So the first time I loaded it, I thought stack it all up the front. The poor old pilot came in. The centre of gravity was a hundred metres in front of the nose. It could never

11:30 have lifted off. So there's a skill to this. So I made all these slide rules. I could never work a slide rule. And then later also I was in charge of the [HMAS] Sydney. The army had gotten Sydney the

decommissioned aircraft carrier and the navy had done this trick on us that we had to pay for it but they still sailed it. We had to clean it up. So I had to go on and again I had to load it all up.

12:00 I thought, "I'll load everything logically all on one side." So they all tipped over. And loading is a bit of a skill. And I nearly sank it because we were loading mortar ammunition. I wanted it to go quicker and you were less turns around the wheels, but there's a certain limit to which - you can have too many less turns. Less turns the quicker you went, but the crate

12:30 just couldn't hold it and there were these eight boxes of mortar ammunition and okay to let go of the rope and it descended these eight - here we go! Goodbye Sydney. But luckily nothing happened.

You had visions of it plummeting through the bottom?

Yeah, the bottom because the place was all rusty. They'd obviously hit a spot on the rust. And then I had these trucks and I was driving them on and they were going down the aircraft. No one explained

13:00 the load limits of these things. So I was having one truck on and then I thought, good economy, if I can put two trucks on we'll cut the time down by half. But two trucks overloaded and all these bells were ringing and the thing began to sink and we couldn't get it up. As it came up we tried to drag the trucks off, but it re-sank. So they'd bang into the side. Again I had visions of these two trucks saying, "Certainly they'll be sent to the bottom." But luckily

13:30 I managed to coordinate the driver so when he brought it up he could take off and he just got his wheels over and balanced the load. So I learned by error.

Where was the Sydney moored at this time?

In Sydney.

At Garden Island or somewhere?

Yes. And then I got expelled for eating the admiral's toast.

What?

The navy they used to - the officers lived in much better luxury than the men. In the army there's no difference

14:00 virtually. You sleep in the same sort of circumstances and eat the same as the soldiers. But the navy don't. You'd have great big cabins. I said, "Where do my soldiers sleep?" and you had to sling these hammocks in the corridor. You used to all dress up for dinner. You used to have all these rules that you - different changes of uniforms every ten minutes. And we only had

14:30 one uniform. The navy looked at us askance. In the army, you all sat down - even in the officers' mess you all sat down at the one table and toast came out and everybody shared. In the navy you didn't. The admiral had his own seat and his own little toast. I sit down next to the admiral ... the admiral gives me that look of disdain. "What's happening? These barbarians allowed on the ship." It was all good skilling practice.

15:00 You have to learn to do everything and work things out for which you had no guidance and training and so on. Just God help us if we ever had gone into action. That was... Luckily the crises always passed before we were despatched.

So you mentioned these two activities as part time? How part time were they?

Yes. Well you would get summoned periodically. You'd rush off and spend - for the intelligence centre

15:30 I'd spend a couple of weeks away. For the other ones it would be three or four days at a time. Whenever the crisis came near they all got you together and you had these special stores you had to bring with you that were separated from the normal battalion stores. This type of thing.

Were they genuine crises or were they just training exercises?

No, some of them were - a situation looked like it may be developing

16:00 so you'd have to assemble the people to make sure they were all there. Otherwise somebody'd be on leave or away on another course in some part the army can never find you. So you'd all be summoned and spend a couple of weeks at Richmond waiting to see if it was going to hot up or not.

So what was your first awareness of the eruption of the Vietnam War?

I had decided on Vietnam early 1956 while at the military

16:30 college we had a visit from the military attaché of Saigon who was out. He came to the college and he gave a talk and I had lunch with him. He told me these wonderful tales of Saigon in the 1950s. At that stage Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] had just taken over as president. They'd gone into the commercialisation of the public service

17:00 in a big way and he auctioned off the police force which was won by the local mafia. They were the top

bid. So the Binh Xuyen [Vietnamese Mafia] as they were known won the contract to run the national police. They guaranteed there'd be no Viet Cong [literally - Vietnamese Communists] left in Saigon and they were very efficient. They also ran very efficient drug, prostitution, standover, robbery and everything else. They were very powerful.

The Diem government was basically a puppet government wasn't it?

No. Well ...

It wasn't? But he had been installed by ...

17:30 He had been installed but he was by no means a puppet. America ended up feeling he was not as much puppet as they liked.

But that was the intention, to place him there as a puppet.

Yes, the intention was, but basically Diem came from a family of mandarins [high public officials]. His father was a senior mandarin under the old emperor and so on and a very religious family. He really wanted to be a

18:00 priest, not a politician. So actually he didn't do much. And he studied - he'd gone to America and he had been befriended by Cardinal Spellman. Cardinal Spellman was a close friend of the Kennedys. So when [JF] Kennedy became President Spellman put forward Diem as a patriot and a trustworthy pro-American

18:30 person. Because the Americans were looking for someone to run the South Vietnam when the French abandoned the place. So Diem apparently met all their requirements and Kennedy was much taken by Diem and specially with the old cardinal who was his personal chaplain as well putting in a good word in for him. So Diem got the job. Diem relied on his

19:00 brother Ngo Dan Nhu and his brother's wife, Madame Nhu. They ran key areas like the police intelligence and all that. Diem himself was not corrupt but the brother was. And they were Catholics running a predominantly Buddhist country. Now Diem - again Americans wanted to move as many northern

19:30 Catholics down south. So they ran a major psychological warfare campaign when the cease fire with the French and Viet Minh came about the country was split at the seventeenth parallel and for six months anyone could move anywhere in the country. So communists down the south could move north and Catholics in the north could move south if they didn't want to live under the two different

20:00 governments. So the Americans had a big propaganda campaign to destabilise and say that the Virgin Mary's moving south. A big campaign among the religious and priests. In countries like Vietnam which was a rural society educated people - and the only educated people tended to be priests and so on - so they were not just priests, they were

20:30 community leaders as well. So they were told the VC [Viet Cong] were going to kill them all and all this. And Americans put on ships and moved a couple of million of them south. Now Diem had two problems. One, he had to resettle the refugees. He wanted to use them cause they were Catholics in a Buddhist country and any communists. So he then resettled these

21:00 Catholics in villages around the outskirts of Saigon to provide bastions against the communist invasion and so on. And many of the former French officers were also Catholic. It wasn't a matter of religious discrimination, but educational. Now, the only education was run by the French and most of it was run by French religious orders

21:30 so educated men - Catholic. They then joined the French Army. So your officer corps was a largely northern and Catholic. So Diem then appointed them. Now if you were a local Buddhist you saw all these northerners or Catholics getting the key jobs. Now Diem then relied on those and didn't trust Buddhist officers and so on. So there was the seeds

22:00 of future conflicts and political manoeuvrings going on at the time. So there was supposed to be elections in '56 - free elections through out the country. American rightfully assessed that if elections were held Ho Chi Minh would win, therefore cancelled the elections so no election. That was the trigger mechanism for the war. Now the Viet Cong, actually they were known as the Viet Minh and they'd been anti-French

22:30 so lots of people who had been anti-French were part of the Viet Minh. They weren't all communists, but eventually the communists infiltrated and took over the Viet Minh and ran it. They had all the key jobs and in the end - you joined because you were anti-French and then you suddenly found you were being directed against Diem and then against the Americans. They attempted to persuade everyone that

23:00 the Americans were the same as the French. They were colonisers, therefore be against Americans. So again a psychological disadvantage.

So what was it that most interested you about the situation in Vietnam?

These tales. I mean Australia was rather bland, still living on cornflakes and corned beef and you hear these tales of this exotic country and all these

23:30 wheeling and dealings and powers and coups and you think ah, that's it. Now also I said that to me strategically Vietnam was a strategic place. The domino theory was in vogue then and it was valid - I mean, people sneer at it, but it worked in Europe where they had taken over Poland and East Germany and so on. And it was part of the plan in Asia

24:00 to take over Vietnam, Laos and so on.

And there'd been the big wake up call with Korea as well.

Yeah. Korea as well. And it was obviously the height of the Cold War and possible nuclear - it wasn't long after the Bay of Pigs [Invasion in Cuba]. So I decided that Vietnam was a strategic area and that it was the most likely area that Australia would become involved in. Because we had formed this great alliance and Americans were buying all their equipment and tactics and techniques so

24:30 I said like it or not we're going to be in Vietnam, therefore - so even as a first year cadet I decided I shall become the world's greatest expert on Vietnam. So off I go. But everything was written in French. My French was hopeless. So it limited me. I read The Quiet American and Bernard Falls' Street Without Joy and whatever I could read on Vietnam and Time Magazine, Newsweek. Anything.

25:00 I also wanted to study Asian language but couldn't find any Chinese or Vietnamese, but there was Japanese radio - Radio Japan - so I used my great short-wave with illegal antenna to listen to my Japanese. Konichiwa. Arigato. Gozaimasu. So I start. And then when I graduated I applied to go to language school to learn Vietnamese or Chinese. Now then I don't think they taught Vietnamese, but they did have Chinese

25:30 but it was run by the air force, Point Cook. And they only allowed two army officers on cause officers don't need to speak these languages, it's more important your drivers speak it. All you have to do is shout. If they don't understand, shout louder. They'll get the message.

You're talking about the perceptions of another age there.

This is it. So, "No, you're not going. And besides, you just want to goof off as is your custom. Get out of here." Peeling potatoes in the mess halls you see. And we get to Hong Kong and chase

26:00 oriental ladies - which is partly true. So every year I applied twice a year. Wouldn't let me go. In the end I was persisting and they said, "All right. You can go and do the aptitude test." So off I went, did the aptitude test and they said, "Oh you'll never learn any language. It's remarkable even you can master a few words of English, now get out." Wasn't that bad, but they more or less said, "We've only got two positions, one has to go to an intelligence

26:30 officer and your score wasn't high enough to win first point so off you go." So that dampened that, but nonetheless I still kept standing up. Then in 1962 they sent the first advisory team over to Vietnam. Half a dozen or so advisors went over. They were originally

27:00 confined to training camps. They were forbidden to go out on operations because Australia didn't want anybody killed. So only training camps and so on. Then they allowed a couple to join American Special Forces because Americans didn't know much about jungle warfare and wanted our expertise. So the others complained, look these people can go off on operations and Special Forces, why can't we? So

27:30 eventually mid '65 they allowed the Australians to go on operations. The Americans also wanted them to go out to the field as advisors. At that stage there was only seventy or eighty advisors of which only about five were officers. So very few officers went. They were all NCOs and so on.

So these are still members of the training team [AATTV - The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam]?

Yes. And they went over there as members of the Australian Army Training Team. But you were allotted to

28:00 American units or Vietnamese units. And there's this myth that we were a separate presence. But Americans fed and clothes and armed you. You worked under them. It was only a token Australianism that we were supposed to command and report to. And all good officers used to volunteer because it did your career good. You volunteered even though you knew you wouldn't be selected.

28:30 You showed you were a keen, keen officer. Now if you went you were pretty safe. You were in the training camp and you got your war service loans. So it was great. Military secondary called me up one day and said, "You're the world's greatest expert on Vietnam." I said, "Yes." He said, "Why haven't you volunteered?" I said, "I'm not a boy scout." At that stage I was against Australia committing a battalion. Australia was considering committing a battalion to Vietnam

29:00 and I said we should not commit a battalion.

Why did you feel that?

I said we should send advisors because as advisors you can practise and learn. But if we send a battalion over there it is not sufficient on its own. You have to send more. The Australian Army only had three battalions, which meant you had to have some form of National Service or mobilisation. And I

said, "This is not going to be popular. You're going to have trouble. The army

29:30 is not geared up for this. And also it's very complicated and not a very nice war. And no need for it. A battalion does nothing. Whereas the advisors you get more bangs for your bucks and also they learn more. So it's a cheap way of practising and learning the skills necessary. And you don't have the political repercussions." So I was a bit unpopular

30:00 in certain army circles. Then in about July August '65 they sent a team out from the training camps into the field and suddenly they all began to get killed. So all good officers stopped volunteering then.

Can I just ask a question relating to, at what level were you offering your advice? What sort of people were you talking to?

I talked to everybody, anybody, even though I'm not asked. Which is always - at this stage

30:30 I was adjutant of the infantry centre.

Who was consulting you?

I would get - all these VIPs [Very Important People] would come - the infantry centre is the peak training body. All officers going through promotion exams would come through there. All NCOs undergoing would come through there. All visiting VIPs would come there political - that was a showpiece to demonstrate the latest weaponry and military theology and all that. So

31:00 we'd have the chief of the general staff, [General] Sir John Wilton, would come and being the adjutant I'm the man who greets him and shows him round and sits there with lunch and bashes their ear on my philosophies and theories. The CO [Commanding Officer] would be kicking me, "Shut up. Don't you speak to him." "Yes Sir." I was never in awe of my superiors and felt they deserved the benefit of my great wisdom

31:30 and experience.

Now I interrupted your narrative flow there. You were saying that suddenly officers stopped volunteering.

Yes. So immediately then I was one of the first non-volunteering officers to go to Vietnam. At that stage I had been sent up to - in '65 I was sent up to Queensland as adjutant of Royal Queensland Regiment which was a CMF [Citizens Military Force] unit. Then national

32:00 service got introduced. Draftees had the option if you joined the CMF or the army reserve it was you could be excused COM UP [increase CMF numbers] so suddenly the numbers in the reserve burgeoned. So they decided to reform a defunct unit in Lismore. Lismore had been the home of the 41st Royal New South Wales Scottish Regiment.

32:30 It was one of the targeted areas to handle these new recruits that were flowing in. So my job was to go down and raise this long illustrious regiment from the museum and fit it out and train it. So off I went there. Also to get me out of the way - banish me into the wilderness cause I had a fight with the commander of Queensland over living out allowance.

33:00 I don't know, I got fifty cents a day living out allowance. What happened, when I went to Lismore there was a married quarter there, but I could not occupy it because I was not married. So it was empty, but I had to go and rent in the town. And I said, "For fifty cents I can't board a large dog." He said, "Where's your price list?" I said, "Well I've got a quote from the kennel here, I'm happy to go to court martial." Back to Lismore. Shut up. So off I went. Raised this and then joined the rowing

33:30 club and was a great sculler up and down the Lismore river.

Oh, the Clarence [River]?

Yes. And then rescued the town - big flood. My little house I rented was really a converted garage behind this old ex-dairy farmer on the outskirts of the town, next to the aborigine quarters. I was told I couldn't live there. "Officers couldn't possibly live there." I said, "Tough luck. You want it you pay for some luxurious accommodation, but until then..." But it was called Lake Street and I used to wonder where the lake was

34:00 until the flood came in. Luckily this old lady said, "You better move out of there." I said, "What do you mean? A bit of rain." So I said, "All right." Big truck moved everything out. Next morning I could only see the chimney. I said, "Ah that's why they call it Lake Street." So I went home on holiday that Christmas. On Christmas Eve or something I'm down the beach at Wollongong and I got home and my mum said, "Oh, a phone call. The army wants you to ring up.

34:30 Sending you to Vietnam." So I ring up. "Quick, next plane back. Off to Vietnam instantly." So I said, "All right." So I rushed back. I had to go to Brisbane. Then from Brisbane I had to come back to Sydney. You had to go back and log out and then come back to Sydney. So I arrived in Sydney on Christmas Day or something and everyone said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm going to Vietnam." "Oh too busy, nobody's here to sign." So I languished for another couple of weeks in the depot there. Then we had to fly out to

- 35:00 Manila to go on commercial planes. So the beginning of the Vietnam dissection happened so you had to board in uniform. The moment you were on board you had to rush up to the toilet and change. Which was really clever. We weren't sending anyone to Vietnam, you see. But you wouldn't change your boots cause they were heavy. So you wear your boots and army trousers and this big Hawaiian shirt,
- 35:30 shaved head and a big pack. I arrived in Manila – cause there was no direct flights – and in Manila I missed the plane. I was supposed to get an early call and somebody mixed up Sydney time or Saigon time so plane missed. So I said, "No not my fault. I'll sign the chits, I'm not paying anything." And that time was lunar New Year in Vietnam and that was a heavy time – only one flight a weekend so they're all booked out.
- 36:00 All the Vietnamese and Chinese going over there. So I spent a couple of weeks in Manila. Got kidnapped by some charming young ladies from metro Manila who thought I was Sean Connery cause of my accent and I had dark hair then. And I wasn't game to tell them I wasn't. So I spent evenings out cavorting metro Manila. And day I spent out looking for General Yamashita's gold because the Japanese had left all this gold in the Philippines when
- 36:30 they left defeated. But Marcos had beaten me to it, but I didn't know it so I was out looking for it and touring the old battlefields of Bataan and so on where the Americans and Japanese battled out. And signing chits [money owed]. And I had another Australian there, Bill Cunneen, who was an army photographer. Poor old Bill was terrified. I said, "Don't worry Bill. I'm in charge. I'll sign your chits, so just eat and spend up and someone'll pay."
- 37:00 Never knew who did.

What was he terrified of?

He was supposed to be in Saigon and you're supposed to report.

And here you're having a good time and ... ?

We'd gone missing. Nobody knew where we were or what we were doing. And he's not used to this business. you need orders for everything. And I'm saying, "Don't worry, I'll sign. I'm in charge now. Just enjoying yourself." He thought he'd be hanged or court martialled on why he'd run up this huge bills in this top

- 37:30 hotel and all this. So we arrived in Saigon and this other officer, Captain Belleville, had been killed during my missing period. The fellow met me at the airport and he said, "Get in quick, we're putting you straight on a plane and you're going up to I Corps and you're going to Panang. You're going to fly from Panang to Quang Tri and you've
- 38:00 got to be out of this district." I said, "Wait a minute! Look, I won't get to Panang till five o'clock at night. I won't get to Quang Tri, it'll be dark and you're going to send me out the district. I haven't got a weapon. I haven't got anything. I'm not going. No. What are you going to do? Send me to Vietnam? Piss off!" And also the CO at the time was a Colonel McNamara. Now he had been relieved of command two days before I arrived during my missing
- 38:30 period. And I'd known McNamara from Canungra days and he had been the CO of the battalion who was there and had then been promoted up to take over the team. But while he had been in the battalion there had been this incident where a soldier had been chained to a picket fence in a weapon pit cause he'd gone mad. There was no way else to restrain this fellow.
- 39:00 So the company commander said, "Chain him up for his own good and the safety of others." So McNamara said, "All right, we'll have him picked up in the morning," because it was too dark. By chopper.

Can I just stop you there cause we're just about to run out of tape on that.

Tape 4

- 00:35 **Just pick up from the chaining of the man to the weapons pit.**

Okay. So Colonel McNamara had acknowledged that this fellow was restrained. I don't know if he'd gone into the details, but they basically reported they were holding him, had him

- 01:00 restrained and McNamara said, "Yes that's fine. We'll pick him up next morning." The press then got hold of it and it got blown out of proportion and these stories he's chained up in a weapon pit sounded like some third world country chaining people to the machine guns. So poor old McNamara wore it and got sent back home. So he only commanded the training team for a couple of weeks. So I arrived
- 01:30 and effectively there was no CO. Now no one would tell me. It was all hush-hush cause it was only days old and they were confused and not sure what was going on.

So where did you actually arrive?

In Saigon.

And where did you report to in Saigon?

No. I met this officer on the tarmac who was going to send me up north. I presume they knew I was an old friend of McNamara's and

02:00 might start an agitation knowing my habit so banished me. Also, I meant to mention, just before we came in we had to go through the International Control Commission. The United Nations in theory was still running this supposed ceasefire agreement as a result of the Geneva Convention from the French. No one was supposed to be sending military personnel to either side. So we had to go

02:30 through this and it was composed of a Canadian representing the West, the Indian who was a neutral country and I think an East German or Pole. So I turn up in my boots, green trousers, Hawaiian shirt and a big army back pack, shaved head. "What have you come to Vietnam for?" "Backpacker." "How long will you be here?" "Twelve months." So the Canadian winks and

03:00 the Indian looks down his nose at a perfidious albion and the East German or Pole snarls at you. So you join this fabric of lies and deception that was officially being woven. Then I met this major who wanted to despatch me up north and I said, "I'm not going. I want to acclimatise, get armed and I shall make my way up in good time."

That's quite an auspicious beginning.

03:30 Yes. So up you.

What was the response?

Nothing. Actually made sense to him. It was ridiculous I go up to this outpost land at midnight. Unarmed and first day in the country - it doesn't make sense. So I then went and joined an old friend of mine, Adrian Nesbitt, who was a classmate of mine and was in Saigon working for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. He had a great villa there.

04:00 So we went and whooped it up for a few days and attended some American briefings. I didn't go near Australians. I went through American briefings and you hear these amazing tales. First of all they tell you that they're winning and it's all safe. Then you get on this bus and it's all got wire on the windows. You say, "Why is there wire?" They say, "To stop people putting grenades in." I thought we were all friendly and we were winning.

04:30 **So who briefed you?**

Americans.

Americans. So it was the CIA that actually briefed you or ?

No. I first of all stayed with the CIA people. Cause my friend was working directly for them. And then I reported to MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] because I was going to be allotted to MACV. Obviously we'd no commander so no one on the Australian side knew what to do with me.

So could you explain who MACV was?

MACV was the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. So USMACV - United States

05:00 Military Assistance Command. They ran the American advisory team. I was basically being allotted to them and in turn they gave me to the Vietnamese so I get further and further from Australia. Also, that night, this outpost I had to go to was over run and everybody killed. So I said, "You sons of bitches were going to stitch me up. So definitely I won't have anything

05:30 to do with Australian High Command from now on." So I'm saying I went through this American briefing which was most odd. Telling all sorts of dreadful tales, everyone's a Viet Cong or some of them tell you everyone's a Viet Cong, trust nobody and the others say, "We've got the war won."

Did this seem in any way realistic to you?

No. What rubbish! Obviously. I've got to find out for myself.

06:00 So I then get on a plane up to Da Nang, get to Da Nang and I was allocated to the Da Nang garrison which was the militia headquarters in Da Nang. I had to then - knowing my theoretical background of Vietnam - I had to quickly get on the ground and work what's going on here.

06:30 What officially's happening is not realistic. In Vietnam there are a number of armies. The first thing you have to do is learn which army's which. Not like Australia or American or England you have one military and so on. There you have different militaries. So you had your regular army divisions. I was posted to the 1st Corps Headquarters, which was called I [pronounced 'eye'] Corps because of the Roman letter numeral.

07:00 They had two regular Vietnamese divisions and they had a regional force which was like a fulltime army

reserve, then they had the militia.

This is South Vietnamese?

Yes. South Vietnamese. At that time the US marines were in I Corps. That was their headquarters too. So the marines had a marine division up there. They operated mainly in the bottom two provinces.

07:30 I Corps consisted of five provinces that ran from the demilitarised zone. So there was Quang Tri province on the demilitarised zone, Quang Binh province, Quang Nam province, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. So five provinces. Each provinces were then divided into districts and there were something like twenty four districts in the I Corps. And in each district, under that you had villages. And under the villages you had hamlets.

08:00 And in each of these hamlets you had a militia unit. Now this history of the militia was that it was an old French organisation under the French. You had to understand - to really know Vietnam you had to understand the French connection shall we say. Cause it was all inherited. Now they'd set up militias.

Could you define what you mean by the militia in this context?

Yeah. Militia

08:30 were part-time troops. My soldiers' official name was the Dan Vey Neo Quin, which meant the Volunteer Army of the Hamlet Militia. They were part-time soldiers. Originally they were designed to be half farmers and half - so when they rang their big gong when the enemy would come you would lay down your ploughshare and pick up your weapon and shoot them as they came into the village.

09:00 Diem had set up this civil guard which was his organisation of militia. They followed the British concept that was used in Malaya by General Templer set it up and then I think Thompson took over and an Australian officer, [Hon] Brigadier Ted Serong [first commander of the AATTV] was a great

09:30 advocate of it. So they set up these defended villages based on the Malaya model where they pulled everyone into a village and then had the militia defend it against the Viet Cong. Now it failed disastrously under Diem. It didn't work in Vietnam. Because Vietnam's different to Malaya. Your villages are all spread out and you couldn't relocate them in to nice squares. If you could, you didn't have enough troops.

10:00 When you do the mathematics and you say you need so many soldiers on each checkpoint you needed thousands to defend the villages. Vietnam's a much more populated area than Malaya. Malaya had lots of rubber plantations. It was easier to mass the plantation workers into them. They all went to the same job, same time.

There was a lot of geographical diversity in Malaya as well.

Yes. So anyway it failed. It collapsed. The American's CIA.

10:30 who'd be financing it refinanced the new volition and they then changed its name and called it the popular forces - which were neither popular nor forceful. The Americans always called their names and it meant one thing to them, but the Vietnamese carried on with them. You didn't realise it was the same organisation because when you spoke to Vietnamese about popular forces they didn't know what you were talking about. When you said hamlet militia, oh yeah right.

11:00 Now each of these platoons was more or less autonomous. They were volunteers. You could go home - if you didn't want to fight you went home. Now militia are always difficult bodies. If you look at all the trouble in the world it's militias. Whether you're in Liberia or Bosnia or East Timor militias are bad news. My militia conformed to what I call the twenty per cent rule.

11:30 Out of each platoon twenty per cent didn't exist. District chief was just collecting payroll. Twenty per cent was Viet Cong cause you recruited in these villages that were largely contested or Viet Cong dominated. So you get a fair percentage of Viet Cong. Twenty per cent were deserters from the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] so they didn't want to go in because ARVN could be sent anywhere and they wanted to be home with mum or wife and kids

12:00 so they deserted and hid in the militia. Twenty per cent were draft dodgers because if you were a member, a serving member of the militia, you could more or less defer your draft. And then twenty per cent were in it for a bit of pillaging and looting and ravishing. Because if you were the only man with a gun in the village you have considerable power. Also, in the villages there was no national police presence. So the militia were responsible for policing and everything. So they were the armed authority. So you had to watch out for your militia.

But the one alarming thing that you've mentioned as

13:00 **part of this already complicated mix is that the militias - the South Vietnamese militias also contained a percentage of Viet Cong.**

Yeah. Because you're a rural society. The seat of power in Vietnam tended to be city dominated. So outside you could geographically plot if there were square roots depending on how many kilometres outside the city the power would wane.

13:30 And the Viet Cong power would rise. Then it was these areas that were contested.

So it certainly wasn't like North and South Korea.

No. And it's more complicated than that because in Vietnam you owe allegiance to a number of groups. You have your family. Family first. Always in Asia whether it's Vietnam or China, family first. So you have blood ties and marriage ties.

14:00 That's predominant. Family comes first. Because it's the only stable organisation that exists throughout history. So first duty is to the family. So what do you do if your brother's with the Viet Cong? Puts you in a position. You can rise up, be a senior ARVN officer, your brother can rise up there. You don't put each other in or take action. You've got to protect it. If he comes home for New Year

14:30 what do you do? So. It becomes – what happens is the more you go into this the more murky and confused it all becomes.

I see a vast field of splinters actually.

Yeah. Then you have your religion. So you're a Buddhist or you're a Catholic. They're the majority. Eighty per cent Buddhist, twenty per cent Catholic. And then you get mixes. You can be a bit of both.

15:00 You can be a Catholic and still go to the temple. The wife can be a Buddhist and the husband Catholic. Then you have the Chinese which are Confucian. You can be a Confucian Catholic and a Buddhist all together. So it's all mixed up. You're then to these. Now religions are not just religions as I'm saying. They are centres of power, community and many of them had their own armed groups. Or controlled armed groups.

15:30 Then you had the political parties. You had forty two political parties. All armed, all vying for power. And then you had your Viet Cong. The Viet Cong had various labels. You had the equivalent of the militia Viet Cong. Then you had your regulars. So the villagers were farmers and fighters. So you'd farm some and then you'd go out at night and shoot, snipe or

16:00 join in the attack and so on. Then you had a regular unit that only operated in a local area. So little Johnny would join that and would always be within twenty k's [kilometres] of home. But up in the hills there'd be fulltime regulars. Then you had your North Vietnamese soldiers. Now ours was a bad area inasmuch as let's look at the Australian Task Force. The Australians

16:30 were in Vietnam for ten years and they lost five hundred and forty two dead [actually 520]. In our area, the marines – US marines – had twelve thousand during the period I was there for this almost four years – marines had twelve thousand dead, thirty five thousand seriously wounded, US Army four and a half thousand dead probably twenty thousand injured. Vietnamese regular army had forty thousand

17:00 dead. Hundred and twenty thousand injured. Viet Cong NVA [North Vietnamese Army] had two hundred and fifty thousand dead.

This is by the end of the Vietnam War?

No. This is in this four year period. Not the end of the war. So while I'm there, during that window there's the comparison. Now the Task Force five hundred totally. But only perhaps a hundred and fifty during that period. That included training team and so on. So

17:30 when you want to know scale of fighting, I used to send wife and kids down to Vung Tau for a holiday because I thought it was a safe place to go. We had perhaps forty thousand regular Viet Cong in that area plus we had four divisions of North Vietnamese on our side of the border and another six divisions just on the other side within an hour's march.

18:00 So there was lots of bad guys. In our area you had a very narrow part of Vietnam. It was part of central Vietnam.

Now can I place you in more of this story? After you arrived, what did you find yourself doing in the immediate sense?

Right. So I turned up and I had to take over the responsibilities of the dead Australian captain, Captain Graham Belleville. Now Captain Belleville had been ambushed a few days before I got

18:30 there on a place called the Hai Van Pass. I'll try to briefly explain geography. Narrow part of Vietnam. You had a thin coastal strip of paddy fields. Then you had the mountains going up to the Lao border. Very high peaks, ten thousand metres. Very high. At one point they actually run down and touch the sea. A bit like Bulli Pass [NSW] but four times higher.

19:00 That was the Hai Van Pass that separated Da Nang and Hue. Belleville was doing some work up in Hue and he commuted back to Da Nang on the weekends. He had this bright yellow jeep. Because Belleville was undercover so you painted your jeep yellow to let people know you weren't in the army, you were undercover. So you didn't have to be a very bright Viet Cong to think, "Four thirty every Friday afternoon this yellow jeep full of round eyes [westerners]

19:30 unescorted comes up this winding pass." So one Friday they were already there and poor old Belleville

and his whole crew get killed. One American second lieutenant escapes badly wounded. So I arrived. I inherited this jeep with twenty-five bullet holes in it, couldn't drive it and a blood stained notebook that's got "appointment next Tuesday Quang Tin. Watch out for Captain Fuk." There you are, that's my mission.

20:00 Nobody knows what to do.

Nobody...? Nobody was briefing you?

Nobody knew. Nobody was interested. No. I was the only person going to look after the militia because nobody wanted to look after the militia. Bad for your career. They were bad news. Nasty pieces of work, won't fight. Rebellious. Will kill you. So nobody wanted it. Nobody bothered.

So the blood stained notebook was your briefing?

20:30 That was it, these three words, 'meeting next...' So all right. I then had to find out my troops, what they were. So I ended up having one thousand approximately platoons – independent platoons – in all these hamlets and villages. Approximately thirty-nine to forty people each in the troop. Now they were independent.

21:00 You were part time. You weren't obliged to fight. You could go home or anything else. You had no uniforms so you wore black pyjamas.

You were wearing black pyjamas?

Well, they were. And if I went out – you don't want to stand out. When the bad guys are looking through binoculars you don't want somebody in this immaculate uniform. Big antennas. So you have to melt in. So luckily I'm not too tall.

21:30 I'm not a big six foot six blonde – black hair and all that. When I dress up in my local hat and dark glasses on you can't tell until you've got a side view that I've got the wrong shape nose, but you're that close and you've got problems. This also led to problems with Americans. We'll go into detail later. No uniform. You wore what you could – black.

22:00 You had a light gun – an M2 carbine semiautomatic and twenty rounds of ammunition and two grenades. You'd no radio. You got no rations. You only got half the rate of pay that a regular soldier got. Of that half you got quarter in cash and quarter in food. So you weren't well paid. You weren't entitled to medical

22:30 treatment in a military hospital which meant no medivac, no nothing. You're wounded you went and found your way to your local GP [General Practitioner] and got treated. Or I performed surgery. You'd have to saw legs off at midnight after the battle. Bring people to the local public hospitals on hand carts. In the days of

23:00 Dickens. It was unimaginable. People wonder why they didn't perform like heroes.

So these were all your responsibilities.

Yes. Fifty-five thousand of them.

Fifty-five thousand militia you were responsible for? In one particular province?

Yes. Five provinces. I operated out of the corps headquarters. Now we don't have corps in Australia. They're too big. You have platoon company battalion regiment division army group

23:30 corps group. So you're like heaven.

So whereabouts was the corps headquarters?

In Da Nang. We were separate from the main ARVN headquarters. We were in this place called Da Nang Garrison which was an old French fortress in the middle town that they ran the city from in the old days. We took over. So we occupied French bunkers and – these magnificent wide verandas.

24:00 You adopted French custom. You had your siesta from twelve to two. Nobody fought. Nobody did anything religiously. Nobody knew what to do. We were responsible for the platoons, but we didn't run them operationally. It was run by the district chief. So the district chief was responsible for operational of the platoons.

24:30 But the contract was the platoons could not operate outside their own village hamlet. So they couldn't despatch you off five kilometres, ten kilometres up the Dong, you'd just say, "Sorry."

It sounds like an organisational nightmare. How did you administer it?

It is. Okay. So I'm sitting there and I think you look up the recent battle and it doesn't fit in. You say, what model can I use? I thought the only model that doesn't have – cause also I'm

25:00 on my own – a couple of Vietnamese officers. So I couldn't handle paperwork or nothing. So I thought the only model that fits this is the Mafia. Mafia have no paperwork, no paper trails. You have ultimate

responsibility but ultimate accountability. So that was the way I operated. So each platoon, onus on but you're responsible to me to perform. If you didn't perform I'd take action against you.

What sort of action?

Well I paid you. So if you didn't perform you didn't get paid or

25:30 I'd shoot you if necessary.

Literally?

Yeah.

For simply not doing their job?

No you never shot then. I'd only shoot for bad rape murders. Not even for pillaging. You'd speak to them heartily about pillaging and looting, but if they really had bad rape murders you'd execute them on a range. Blood money. Sometimes you'd arrange blood money

26:00 if there was unauthorised killings. You would negotiate a year's pay of the dead person and they would pay it.

Who would perform the execution?

Some of my troops. I just - try, sentence you summarily. Take you out in the bush, bang they'd shoot. It was never contested. So in other words they never claimed innocence. They would admit guilt.

26:30 No. When you think back I had no legal jurisdiction or anything else. But you never worried about it.

How often was this happening?

Not often. You'd only have to do it a couple of times. What it is is, you have to operate in a feudal society. You're not talking about 'all be Tonys' and this type of thing. The rules have to be clear. You've got to tell them what the rules are. You say, "Okay I don't care what you did before, from now on this is the rule.

27:00 You do that you'll get rewarded. You go against it you'll get punished." They've got to know you mean it. You only have to do it a couple times. A couple of heads on pikes and the word gets out you mean business. As long as you're consistent. Got to be consistent. You've got to be sure you can enforce it. There's got to be rewards for following the path of righteousness.

27:30 You do all these things. Also it means you've got to be out and about. In theory I could not leave my headquarters. The rule for trampling outside of your headquarters where you needed two jeeps both with round eyes in them - that's Americans or Australians or some other white personage - and a platoon of local troops in three different trucks. So it meant there's five convoy

28:00 to go out. Now you couldn't get it.

So this is to defend you?

Yeah. Before I was allowed to go outside. That was the rule for MACV. So as a result nobody ever went out. I had a couple of other American majors who looked after the regional forces - these were the regular army reserve or CMF - and they never left the compound. They went from the compound to the mess hall to the BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] and back down the main street of the town. Never went out, refused to go out because they never ever got

28:30 the right support. So I was operating against the rules. I should not have gone out.

So how did you go out?

I just went out. I had no choice.

In any form of disguise?

Everything all right? And transport because my jeep didn't work. Took twelve months to fix it. The Vietnamese would say the Americans can fix it and the Americans would say that's not part of the American army, fix it. And the Vietnamese, "We've given money to the Vietnamese government, they fix it."

Oh, the jeep had been so badly shot up?

Oh yeah. Twenty blooming holes. Shot to pieces. So it was a big battle for months

29:00 and months before it ever got fixed.

So you basically go out incognito?

Yeah. Anywhere I could. So what happened was that I did a province per week. So I went out Monday morning I'd take off and I'd fly to the next province. So I would never go by ground across a province. One of my own rules of preservation was never cross a province boundary on the ground because that

was no-man's-land

29:30 because province headquarters is in the middle and by the time you got to the end you were too far for help and too far from the next one. So no one did it. So Viet Cong always dominated the province boundaries. So you flew to the province. Then from the province I would have a briefing with the province officials to find out what's happening in the province. I then went to the district. I'd pick a district and I'd go down to the district and I'd speak to the district chief, again

30:00 that afternoon or next morning. Then I'd go out and visit a platoon in location in the hamlet. I originally would stay with them. In the end I couldn't stay. It was too bad news.

Why?

Cause I got targeted. People would say, "We love you, lovely chap, but would you please not stay in the house tonight?"

So you became known after a while?

Oh yeah. Well and truly.

30:30 This was my methodology. My nerves could only stand three or four days of this. So by Wednesday night or Thursday morning I'd be quaking and have to get back to my desk and have tea, muffins and recover. And do my other duties. Because I did have to attempt all these other logistics and so on, plans that I had.

So let's just explore this for a moment. So you would basically go back to the fort to normal surroundings, normal routines.

31:00 Yes. By Thursday I'm back in civilisation. One of my other duties was, I ran the Psywar [Psychological Warfare] Platoon which was a two and a half - beautiful young dancers and musicians. So I had to team up dancing girls and musicians that we used to boost the psychology. So they went on tour. They were in great demand with the ARVN. ARVN always had parties on Friday and Saturday night.

31:30 Regimental balls. Because they never got too fanatical about the war. So my troops - all good singers and dancers and that - would go and perform for the generals and so on.

A morale boosting exercise?

Yeah. Well for them. They wanted them for the party, but for the troops. So Monday to Friday they'd be out in the field entertaining the troops and Friday night and Saturday night they'd be entertaining senior officers.

Can I just return to something for a moment? You said that you would have to retreat, basically

32:00 **go back to familiar surroundings and routines - can you talk about the effect of being out on the field on you in terms of stress?**

In the normal army situation you're part of a unit and you have people over you and under you and you're a homogenised group. Everybody knows who everyone is and what their roles are. There are historical precedents for everyone's

32:30 actions. Now, I'm out there on my own. No other round eyes. I have virtually no language skills, no radio - which means I can't call for back up support. If I go down I'm down.

A solitary figure in the landscape?

Yeah. I found getting transport difficult. When I went to the province or district I had to ask them to provide

33:00 me with a jeep for example. They'd say, "No. Nobody's been out on that road. You're only going to get killed and lose the jeep. We're not giving you a jeep. Not giving you a radio. If you want to go, go." Cause they often didn't want me to go out. Because of the phantoms - we'll come to the ghost soldiers next. So I went out there against the wishes of the province chief for that, often the district chiefs - to the platoon and

33:30 stayed on site.

So can we explore the psychological impact on you of this?

Well you went out assuming you were not going to come back. Because statistically speaking you could not survive. Your own men would turn on you. Once I became known I had the equivalent of ten years income on my head by the Viet Cong. Cause one of the programs

34:00 I introduced was the motivation and indoctrination program which was a lift out of almost their programs. Cause I was running a psychological battle in the villages against that. So I was targeted. They realised the importance and effectiveness of my work so they were going to eliminate me. And if they got rid of me then the whole program would fall apart.

- 34:30 **So you went out assuming that you would not be returning. What effect did this have on you on a day to day basis? Were you sleeping well for instance?**
- Sleep was the sleep of the just. Yes. Because one of the things you had to train yourself to do is you had to model yourself on predators like big cats. Now they sleep anywhere. And you can go from sleep to instant action instantly and then the moment's over you can go back.
- 35:00 Cause if you don't sleep you're dead. If you're tired you make mistakes. You make mistakes when you're tired and all that so you've got to learn to sleep so you have to switch on and off. So you've got to also wake up quickly. So I used to have this power to levitate. I used to be able to at the correct moment virtually rise up from bed, rotate round. Because I used to go to sleep - I had a .45 [pistol] under my pillow, I used to lay my weapons
- 35:30 out next to me. You had certain procedures - slide it out and you'd come out all shooting. Later on for example, even in my subsequent married life in my great villa to show you what happened is that I had a number of defences. You had your big wall with a barbed wire, a couple of guards and inside the house I had a trusty retainer who was about seventy five years old and slept lightly.
- 36:00 And at night he used to come and sleep across the bedroom door. So if anyone had got in by the guards, come in, he would wake up. Now his job was just to knock on the door and then lie on the floor cause I'd come out shooting. So as I'm saying I had to be able to get up and rotate and so on. Now, one instance this led to somewhat traumatic circumstances. I went back to Saigon for a meeting.
- 36:30 I'm staying in some hotel there. At three o'clock in the morning next door to me is a pilot with an early call because he was on a dawn flight. Poor old bellboy knocked on the wrong door. Now I'm sound asleep and I forgot I'm in Saigon. Also according to your Chinese astrology you have to sleep in certain directions and so on. but in this case the bed was the wrong way round. So I took off, levitated, grabbed my gun and I went straight
- 37:00 into the concrete wall, see, at great speed. And bang! It all lights up and I think they've got me. Thrown a grenade at me. Fall on the floor. You slowly wake up and think something not right here.
- Certainly not.**
- But you had to have that instant reaction and you had to be able to do that now.
- So we've covered the angle of sleep, but I'm just returning to this point before where you said you would have to return to familiar surrounding.**
- 37:30 **Why would you have to return?**
- Well, you have like a metre. And you've got to know yourself. And you've got to make sure - I said I'm in this for the long haul; I'm not there for a couple of months. I'm in there forever. So you have to pace yourself. You're like a runner. You can't just sprint on the City to Surf [Sydney running race]. You've got to pace yourself out. Now you've got to do that if you want to last. Most people burned up. Most of the
- 38:00 other American officers and many Australians only ever did any dangerous job for six months. After six months they were taken out of that position back to an easier job running the mess or PX [American canteen unit] or something. But I was there forever so I had to pace myself. Now I knew I couldn't do it forever. And I also had this - cause I also picked up a couple of other jobs - I pretty soon
- 38:30 became the political warfare advisor. And on the anti corruption committee. So I had these other duties I had to attend to besides my dancing girls because I had to keep the predator generals away from the dancing girls unless the dancing girls wished to further their career - but I didn't want any forcible. Now there was always this thing. And also it gave me great influence with all these other senior officers I'd meet. I'd meet armoured, police, you name it.
- 39:00 And the corps commanders and all that in these parties that normally I may not have been senior enough to attend. And also I used my Psywar troop to reward my platoon. One of the first things I
- Actually can I just stop you there because we are actually out of tape?**

Tape 5

- 00:31 **Matt, we were talking about your range of responsibilities so let's continue talking about organising the militia.**
- Okay. So I inherited this great disorganised mish-mash. Now originally when they were founded, when a village first decided to have a militia they were recruited and they were sent off to a regional training centre and then came back.
- 01:00 Now once they were back in the village the district chief would never let them go loose for training again. Because the village would then be - first of all it declared itself on the government side by having

a militia and therefore was vulnerable to predation by the enemy if the militia ever left. So the district chief wouldn't let them go. You had a high casualty rate and turnover rate so - thirty per cent a year - so within a year or so, couple of years there'd be no one left

- 01:30 who was trained. So you ended up being untrained. So they were largely untrained when I had arrived. So one of my first priorities - I had to give them basic training. They couldn't handle the weapons or nothing else. So I designed an in situ [situation] training course for two weeks. How I did this was I personally recruited and trained the top squad of instructors
- 02:00 at the corps level. They in turn trained two squads in each of the provinces. They then went down and trained the platoons in the districts. So the platoon didn't leave its village. Our team would arrive and train them. This involved me going to the district chief before, arranging with him to agree that we were going to train these men, agree to timetables and some resources from him,
- 02:30 and a promise that he would not interfere or do anything. Then my team would arrive. We would train them for two weeks. So I would turn up for the initial couple of days. I'd pop in occasionally and then I'd be down for the final graduation and so on. Now if the team scored well I'd bring down my famous Psywar team. And this was a great event. You have to remember you're in a village.
- 03:00 No electricity, no radio, no TV, nobody can read or write. So I turn up with my team, we do this great show singing and dancing. We had propaganda sketches and also we do a film. Normally I used to show John Wayne or some cowboy film. Cause it's still all in English, but it's simple. You knew who the baddies were, the goodies. The goodies always won.
- 03:30 We would declare a local ceasefire and anybody could come to this great night out. No identity checks would be done. Normally you had road blocks and so that meant the VC were welcome to come to the night out. So it was a tremendous pacification tool.
- 04:00 And also a condition was there had to be no trouble before the event. Otherwise we'd cancel it. So you were guaranteed for at least four weeks before the event there would not be a hostile incident in that district. You'd get ten or fifteen thousand people would turn up for this show and movie. Now most of these people had never seen a Vietnamese officer. Cause you're out in the
- 04:30 sticks. Never mind the foreigner. So this was the first foreigner who had appeared since the French left. And I'd get up there and have a little talk and the Viet Cong would be watching. So you would cheek at their propaganda, because their propaganda was all these Americans and Australians were horrible people, cruel, you'd disembowel ladies and eat babies for breakfast.
- 05:00 It was, he doesn't look that bad, quite a nice chap. So you would plant this seed of doubt in their propaganda that if that was a load of codswallop maybe everything else they tell them.

Plant the seed through example you mean?

Yeah. And reality. Now also I would give my platoon a certain number of resources that they could then

- 05:30 distribute to the villagers and they would help the village fix up the school and dig the well and so on. So there was a positive gain that if you had one of these militia platoons and it did well everyone could benefit. And also it would protect you from predation. Because if you're a little village and you're unarmed anyone can come in with a gun and they make the rules, make you jump.
- 06:00 So we offered them stability and everything else. We didn't mention a great government or anything else like that. So it all went well. Unfortunately we then got targeted by the higher Viet Cong because they didn't want the local members to defect or begin to question. So the platoons in training ended up becoming a target the more successful they became.
- 06:30 So it was always a problem. This required me to drive this program. So in other words I had to be there to arrange it and I had to start it and I had to finish it and put the pressure on my training people and everyone to do it. Now it was the only way to work this personal intervention out. As I'm saying, you were then exposed getting to and from and when you stayed there. So if I stayed in the village I had to move houses
- 07:00 during the night. So I couldn't spend a night in one house completely. You had to do a Saddam Hussein. You kept moving. It became very tricky later on in the end. In the end I couldn't stay in the villages cause it brought - I wasn't there to bring trouble. People say, "Oh nice chap but please don't stay tonight. Don't stay at my house."
- 07:30 Oh dear. You draw the crowds. You're like the honey in the bear pit." You're guaranteed major attacks or assassination attempts.

Did anything like that happen to you? Can you give us an example? What sort of instance of that nature stands out.

Oh yeah, continually. If I can go back to attending my funeral -

Yes. Which we haven't recorded yet. Can you talk about attending your funeral?

It was one of these cases we had to go down to this district down near

- 08:00 Hoi An, which was again a hotbed for old Viet Cong and I had to set up a meeting with the district chief and his officers and get them to sign up for my training program. It was only twenty k's [kilometres] outside of Da Nang so we were going to drive there. But at the time I was down visiting in Quang Ngai – a normal, scheduled visit. I was going to fly down from Quang Ngai to Da Nang. My driver
- 08:30 was going to be at the Da Nang military air base, pick me up and off we – pick up the rest of my cadre and down we'd go. But while I'm flying from Quang Ngai to Da Nang we took some hits, rounds from Viet Cong shot the aircraft and we did a forced landing in Tam Ky province. We weren't hurt and so on. But the word went back to my
- 09:00 driver that the plane was down. They didn't know what the circumstance was. But definitely I wouldn't be able to be back. So he then went back, picked up my cadre and they said, "Oh well it's only fifteen ks to this place, we know it well." I'd already spoken in advance to the district chief so they thought seeing they had all the officers there they might as well go and do it because they felt confident they didn't need me by this stage.
- 09:30 So they all drove down. Now the Viet Cong had planted a bomb in the meeting room and the district chief, eight of his officers and eight of my staff all got blown up. And in the meantime I got picked up by a chopper and I caught an Air America [CIA airline] plane and I landed at a different air base and I thought, "Oh everyone's gone by now, afternoon, I might as well go home." So I just
- 10:00 went home. Next morning and everything I turn up at the office and everyone goes, "Oh, the ghost." because I'd been reported dead. My driver was there, my staff there, they never left without me. So I then had to rush down just in time for the funeral. So they had all the coffins laid out and here was mine. They'd bequeathed a dozen medals on me, I thought, "I can't really take the medals." so lay the flowers out and that's it. As I'm saying,
- 10:30 this lead to the rumour that I had actually risen up. Because rumour spread in these rural communities that they had actually seen me get out of the coffin. It reinforced and I thought, great. I'd also been – the Buddhist patriarch informed me that I had been blessed by Buddha and was immortal
- 11:00 in combat. Which is a very handy attribute.

If I can just have you take it from you were attending your own funeral?

So as I'm saying I had to turn up, all the bodies laid out so I laid the wreaths on that I had and saluted well, but I had to refrain the set of beautiful posthumous medals.

- 11:30 So rumour spread that I had risen up from the dead and couldn't be killed. As well as that one of the Buddhist patriarchs down in Quang Ngai – like the equivalent of a Buddhist pope or something – he had also bequeathed on me that I was blessed by Buddha and was immortal.

Did that help your stakes?

- 12:00 Tremendously. It did create some problems. First of all because you didn't actually hear from Buddha itself you didn't know if there was any conditions attached to this contract, or whether it could be terminated on certain conditions. And also it meant when you were in a fire fight a scrum formed round you because people assumed that it may have radiated out and the closer you are to the blessed one you often got this immortality so you suddenly find a great
- 12:30 gaggle squeezing next to you which would draw the enemy fire. Cause they said, what's that? But as I'm saying it all helped to create this great myth that as a leader you don't dispel. It's a great asset.

For how long did that myth endure?

Presumably it goes on forever. Some years later I also got given the mantra of immortality

- 13:00 by some Buddhists in from Taiwan. It wasn't just only for battle, it presumably was for everything.

We'll deal with the Taiwanese situation later.

But anyway it all helped. But continually I was being specifically targeted. Now you'd have problems that you'd be driving up

- 13:30 these country roads and a local VC – might be a farmer or something else – would always do some hours sniping. So they'd always set up and snipe at vehicles coming along. So you had to have a strategy so they didn't pick on you and also ambushes. I used to carry more fire power than the Bismarck during World War II or something. My poor old soldiers had twenty rounds.
- 14:00 But I used to go in my jeep and as I sat in front of the jeep I had a carbine sitting in the little panic handle there that had two magazines strapped to it. So that was say forty rounds there. I had five rounds of additional magazines for that and I've got another box of ammunition in the back. I had a Colt 45 revolver. I had a M79 carbie [carbine] I used
- 14:30 to carry in my hand with a round up the spout – they fired a great exploding cell. You know, the Terminator.

Arnold Schwarzenegger.

He uses one of these on some of his adventures.

Presumably you had someone driving the vehicle for you.

Oh yeah. Cause I didn't drive. You couldn't manage everything. And I also had two of my bodyguards in the back and they also had weapons and they faced out

15:00 and if it was my own jeep I also had a 30 calibre machine gun on one of those mounted things here. So everyone was fully armed. I had four grenades, huge knives and the works. So we'd drive along the road and if anything happened everyone used to fire. It didn't matter. You just fired out each side and created this - I'd fire twelve of these rounds from my exploding grenade before I reached for my carbie and kept spraying.

15:30 It's a wall of flame and fire you threw out. Phosphorous grenades and the works. So the poor old sniper would think, "I'll leave these all alone. Pick some stupid Yank."

Sounds like a travelling volcano.

And the moment something happened the driver had to hit the accelerator and you would weave, you see you would start - take off at great speed, weave and escape. So we used to escape lots of rounds and

16:00 shots and so on. Another occasion, for example, I liked travelling in, it was a quarter ton truck. It was bigger than a jeep. It was sort of like a truck. But I wouldn't sit in the front. I would stand up in the back. You had more room. But on one occasion we were driving through the market and there was this clunk on the metal floor. Now when a grenade hits a metal floor it rolls and makes this distinct noise and a

16:30 chemical change - you have to develop this ability like - I suppose it's a bit like Bradman [Don Bradman - famous Australian cricketer]. When Bradman plays cricket obviously he can slow the ball down relatively. That's why he can hit it. I mean, I can never see a ball playing cricket. But in combat you could pump the adrenalin so the process speeded up and you could then focus and it looked as if it was slow motion and you could see this grenade rolling around the floor.

17:00 Luckily, in the Australian Army you always put the rear tailgate of the truck down because it meant easy access, so luckily we had it down. So we were busy kicking the grenade out the back of the truck and it fell in the market place and you'd speed off. But conversely, you were so hyped up. One day I was driving this other jeep that was a covered jeep and I had the

17:30 rear panel up. Now I hit a bump and the rear panel came down and bang! Now I am driving and suddenly there's this God almighty bang! And I assume somebody's thrown a grenade at me so I would take off doing my weaving and then you would suddenly look and these locals would be looking at you in amazement as you hit a hundred k's doing these wheelies and you think, "Uh oh nothing's happened."

18:00 **So throughout all of this, throughout the close brushes with death, the survival, were you a believer in fate at all?**

I don't know. I suppose I was. I was quite prepared to die. I accepted the fact that I was probably going to die. Everyone else - I lost three complete staff teams, all dead, I was the only one who survived. And you get this -

18:30 sometimes you get tired of surviving and think, everyone around you died and there was constant death. The place was just full of bodies. Every LG [Logistics Group] you went to the bodies were lined up and getting flown out. In your chopper you always carried bodies or wounded with you back. In your jeep you're always nursing wounded soldiers. So it was this

19:00 constant death. Sometimes it appeared it was a relief if you did die because living was difficult.

But this must have been a huge strain.

Yeah. And it was just - it was like a touch away. You could die any moment. You could reach out and allow yourself to be killed if you didn't struggle against it. So there was this constant

19:30 invitation to cross over to the other side as it were. You'd be lying down behind the paddy bunds and the bunds are only small bunds around a small paddy fields that are about this high and there's just enough for you to lie down. You'd be lying down face in some buffalo dung or something and the bullets would be clipping the top of the bund and thudding into the bund and you could feel the wind as they whisked over you.

20:00 You'd be saying your Hail Marys and your Our Fathers and praying for choppers. "Dear Lord, send in the gun ships." And then you'd hear this, ah you were saved. When you hear the beat of the chopper coming in, ah. You're saved. That's what saved us, the American air power made that different. When you got into trouble you were gone unless they could get this air power.

20:30 Our problem was we didn't normally have a radio. No one would give us a radio. So you couldn't

communicate.

So how did you communicate?

Well, often you didn't. And often when they came you were on the wrong side. You're dressed in black. No one told the Marines that not everyone in black was a Viet Cong. We had constant fights with the Marines friendly fire, getting bombed, and strafed. You got napalm [highly incendiary liquid used in fire bombs] once and all

21:00 my hair singed off. So I didn't have any actual jelly stuck to me, but the heat completely singed off as we run out the villages. We got blown over by B52 [bombers] blasts and so on.

So did you have any particular religious beliefs to sustain you throughout all of this?

I pray to all gods, you name it - Buddhist, Catholic, you name it.

21:30 **Would you pray in any tight situations like this?**

Always. You did. For a few minutes till it was all over and then it was oh forget the latest promises I made to repent until next time. The Lord was obviously forgiving. But we had this major problem with Americans and this lead to when my next second thing to get my main uniform. So first get the training underway and uniform.

22:00 One of the triggers of was that part of your test for graduating; you had to go out on an operation. So the platoons had to go out on an actual offensive operation. Normally the militia - there are a number of phases of war - attack, defence, advance, withdraw. They were never known to attack so you never taught that. They

22:30 never advanced anywhere so you dispensed with that. Defence, yeah a bit interested, but as long as it didn't involve too much digging. And the only phase of war that they excelled in was the retreat. They were superb at the retreat. They could retreat in thirty seconds. One cough and you're gone. Most of the advisors who died weren't aware of this. They thought they were dealing with these British troops where the officers stood up and said, "Follow me chaps."

23:00 And you waved your stick and - I don't know who he was, not me. You didn't do that with them. You had to raise forces - especially ours. They were gone and straight off the uniform and clever shots at hiding the weapon and saying, "Who me? No I'm not in the army. They went that way." Now as a good advisor you had to be one pace behind and commanding urging them to run faster. We got despised by the Americans

23:30 and many but we'd no choice. We had nothing. Twenty rounds. You could fire those off in a couple of seconds. And we always met superior forces.

You always met superior Viet Cong forces?

Yeah. And North Vietnamese forces. They used to us as practice, the idea you have to blood your troops. We used to do it.

How would you blood your troops?

24:00 You pick an easy target. So on your graduation we'd teach them how to ambush and we'd go out and we'd get a known trap or something where Viet Cong messengers or something come. So you'd wait for the poor old one legged, blind Vietnamese post mistress with a guide would come down and you'd all lie there and you'd open up and chop her to pieces and everyone would shoot and you made sure everyone shot and everyone killed her.

24:30 And the great hero - you know it's a tough line but that's what you have to do. You've got to train killers. And you've got to have them successful. You can't get them out and let them get totally defeated. They'll never recover. So psychologically they've got to have a number of kills under their belt to boost their morale and so on. It's like the animal kingdom. Lions don't know how to kill. They are trained to kill. The mother lion trains her

25:00 kids to do it. Greyhounds you know are legally get them set on cat and rabbits to something happens to you when you psychologically you change when you've killed. My job was to train killers. And train them quickly. So we'd do that. Now the opposition did that to us.

How could you train a killer to actually pull a trigger without hesitation?

Well you have to do it. You've got to get them all

25:30 to do it and you have a problem - often in combat soldiers won't fire. Because it draws fire. If you're under fire you aim for muzzle flash or the smoke or something. So for safety if you didn't fire you're unnoticed. So if you've got fifty soldiers, only ten per cent are going to be actively engaged. You can force

26:00 a number of others to by checking up on them. When they come back from action you open your, count the rounds and smell the metal and stuff and then you fire in the air or on the ground. But you can

persuade a group to do it. Some won't fire ever. So you work out who's what and you don't put those in key positions. Right? They may fire if they're actually - somebody's ready to shoot them self defence will trigger it off. But you have to as I'm saying

26:30 put them in situations where they can fire easily. They know they're going to win and they're not going to be hurt. So you pick these poor little inoffensive easy targets, not a North Vietnamese regiment with colours flying coming down the valley. Now the North Vietnamese used to do this to us. They had a huge draft and we chewed them up so they were always getting new regiment to replace so they'd come across the border and they'd pick out a little platoon sitting on a hill. And they wanted

27:00 to win so they'd throw a regiment - three thousand men - against these thirty little semi armed militia sitting on a hill and they'd vanish in minutes. And they'd go away. They'd be happy. They won, they had a victory. Everyone fired. Even if they didn't shoot. But that's it. That's how you do it.

We've interviewed a number of

27:30 **World War II veterans who expressed very strong views particularly against the Japanese. They seemed to have more of an opinion of the Germans, but what was your view of the Vietnamese as an enemy?**

Very capable and competent. Highly regarded. I just wish I could have commanded a couple of them. If I had a battalion - if I could pick a battalion of Vietnamese soldiers and train them I could conquer the world I think. Because they could put up with

28:00 what we wouldn't put up with. Hardships.

Did you ever gain an insight from talking to anyone about how the North Vietnamese trained their troops?

Oh yes. Since, after, before that. I've got a number of relatives who were in the North Vietnamese Army.

Did they ever talk about what the essence of the success of that training was?

No it's simple. It's all the same. No matter what age whether you're in the Roman

28:30 Legions or now. The rules are the same. You have to train your people how to handle their weapons, know their weapons. You have to train them in tactics. Attack, defence and so on. Co-ordination. And you got to have the leaders. They had better leaders than we did because their leaders were motivated. Ours weren't. Or ours weren't motivated to fight. They were motivated to make fortunes or get up in politics, but not to fight. That was the last

29:00 "Oh please don't mention the word fight. Forbidden."

So the North Vietnamese were very much motivated to fight?

Yes. Better trained, better motivated and better armed than us. Now the war changed. Prior to say early '62-'63 was a guerrilla war so most of the soldiers that were fighting Viet Cong were locals. And they often had home made weapons and they got all the weapons

29:30 from the militia. The militia captured them or sold them. But from '66 onwards when the North Vietnamese started coming in regular the war changed. And this was something that many people including I think our great military planners didn't realise the war had changed. It had gone from a guerrilla war to a large scale conventional war. And as I mentioned earlier we had four regular North Vietnamese divisions.

30:00 Division was between ten to fifteen thousand men. Inside our borders. And it was only a day's march from Laos to the sea. And they had six divisions outside. So we ran into major things. A huge logistics re supply. We were forbidden to cross the border. I was forbidden - the border is only a creek at the top of a hill. And the bad guys could retreat. Once they crossed that stream you couldn't fire at them.

30:30 Court martial or something and you couldn't cross.

So yours was an entirely defensive operation?

Yes. We were sitting ducks. We couldn't do anything. You had to wait till they at their time and place and effort they attacked you. We always reacted. We seldom initiated anything. My people in particular weren't meant for offensive. They weren't geared. So you weren't armed, you weren't rationed, you had to feed yourself. So it means you went out on obs [observation].

31:00 Mum came along carrying chicken. The eldest son carried your gun. You all get into the bunker and cook lunch. You go in the bunker and one of the sons would be manning the weapon and dad would be having his sleep and mum's plucking the chicken, kids are playing on the floor. It was a ragtag army you went to war with, women and children included.

How difficult or easy or possible was it to identify

31:30 **the Viet Cong?**

You couldn't. They're the same people. They're the same villagers. Some of the villagers were this, some were that. What you have to do is try to transpose it to Sydney. Now let's assume there was a major split between Liberal and Labor - you can't tell the difference. And that's it. Simple as that. And you could change

32:00 sides. Now in the village, whoever was in control, that's what the village was. So they had a picture of Ho Chi Minh and one of Thieu or whoever and you'd change it. Some villages we worked a gentlemen's agreement that we would go in at eight in the morning and leave at four in the afternoon and the VC would come in. You'd leave a buffer in case you were running late so you wouldn't meet - terribly embarrassing. And the poor old villagers listened to your propaganda by day and theirs by night.

32:30 And didn't get any sleep.

And both - you, with the South Vietnamese and Viet Cong were aware that village's daily routine?

Yes. But both would chalk it up as this. Cause one of the things was what I used to call the homogenised hamlet plan. Every month - computerisation just came in. It's the first war with computerisation so you had your Harvard MBAs [Master of Business Administration] running the place so with these

33:00 big forms you had to fill out each hamlet had a hamlet evaluation form. You had criteria - did they have a school, school teacher, bang bang, chief, bang bang. So you all ticked this. Went into your computer and that decided whether you were winning the war. You had a big map and you had these green spots spread out and you were winning or the red spots spread out - they were winning. So you had these things. Now a lot of it was rubbish.

33:30 A typical example - a new advisor would arrive. He'd just get off the plane, he'd have flown out from some desk job in Washington and suddenly here he is. It's the middle of winter in New York and there he is in the tropical heat, doesn't know nothing. The first thing he - "You've got to fill out your hamlet evaluation." You think, "Oh." You know, he hadn't left the compound. So he goes to the

34:00 friendly district chief and the district chief says, "Don't worry I'll fill it out." Tick tick tick tick. Send it off. Oh, the village is pacified so he joins the land of the free, green colour and so on. Next month, next month and then an advisor - you know, I meet up with the advisor - and I was the advisor's advisor cause I'd been there forever, knew everything. Advisors would come to me and say, "Well what do I do? I haven't been to those." I said, "Well insist he takes you out."

34:30 So you say to the District Chief, "Next month I want to go to village Phu Lam." He says, "Right. So next Friday yep." Friday comes, "Oh jeep's in for service. Can't go." Hamlet evaluation's due that afternoon. Oh well last month, tick tick tick tick. Of it goes. Next month his grandmother's taken ill, can't go. You see, after about five months the advisor begins to think, "Something fishy

35:00 there." So I say, "Why don't you go and borrow some jeeps from province and you don't tell him and suddenly say during morning tea, is there anything on today?" The District Chief says, "Oh no it'll be a quiet day." And you say, "Well I've got these jeeps, why don't we go and visit Phu Lam." And the District Chief says, "Oh I'm not going there it's too dangerous. It's a VC village." But you have tick tick. So what do you do? Do you then say, I lied and all my predecessors lied or

35:30 I've only got another month and I get a job running the PX. Tick tick tick. So there was all this going on.

Very tricky, slippery war by the sounds of it.

Oh it was. Now who owned the villages, you didn't know. It was a favourite trick of the district chiefs I fell out with - I tried to keep my movement secret so I didn't, you know. But if they wanted to get me they would

36:00 publicise. So you'd go here and the Vin Loc Chronicle, "Dai Uy [captain] D'Arcy's going to visit this village at ten o'clock by driving up this road." This particular character I was after - there was two villages, Phulan One and Phulan Two. One was communist, one was government. We had a platoon in one. He said, "Oh, platoon's in Phulan Two." So I said, "I'm going out to visit."

36:30 He said, "Righto." So we were going to go by chopper and then the chopper's cancelled. Because we're well down on the priority list, so it was cancelled so you think oh well the visit's off. We're sitting there having morning tea and one of my lads said, "Oh my cousin's got a boat. Go by river." So right. We hop in this canoe and we go by water, zoom up, we arrive about eleven o'clock. The village

37:00 street comes right down to the river, nice and sandy. We hop out and walk up the street and suddenly everybody clears the street. One of these western movies, just chung! Silence. I think, oh dear. So the village chief comes up and says, "Excuse me gentlemen, can I help you." I said, "Oh I'm looking for the PAXX platoon." He said, "Sorry lads, no PA platoon here." I said, "Isn't it?" He said, "No. That's Phulan One you want." Oops. Sorry. He says, "I think you better leave."

37:30 I said, "Don't worry, we're off." So in the canoe and off we go and just as we leave the old Viet Cong come back over the hill. They'd been waiting for us because they'd been tipped off by the district chief. They were going to ambush us. Then the word went out we weren't coming and they'd gone back to sleep. And then we arrived. So there was always this ... so we waved to them and they waved to us. So there was always this. So you had this problem in the village, be they government or Viet Cong or

contested meant

38:00 that neither side fully controlled them. So you'd have these endless games and battles and so on.

And who were some of the key people that were closest to you that you relied on in your liaison with people or your organisation of what you were doing?

I basically had an interpreter in the office who didn't leave it. That was a female interpreter. So she did all my translation work there. Because I used to monitor all the reports

38:30 on the Vietnamese side. So I'd get all the Vietnamese reports that were coming in in Vietnamese and I would get them translated so I would know I wouldn't rely on Americans. I'd go to the American briefings. I was also honoured, I also went to the CIA briefings. Because initially the militia or the civil guard and militia had initially been funded by the CIA. Then eventually it had gone over to the Defence Department.

39:00 But we'd kept up these links and I had been pro CIA. I built up this vast intelligence network. So I had fifty five thousand troops who've all got families, uncles aunts relatives so I have a tremendous source of info.

We've got to change the tape.

Tape 6

00:31 **Let's talk about the staff that you had. You had an interpreter. Who else did you have working with you?**

Yes. I basically had a Vietnamese second lieutenant and a couple of NCOs and a sort of a bodyguard and a driver and a bad habit of losing them all. They'd all get killed and I'd be the only survivor. We'd get ambushed or

01:00 all sorts of things. You develop a number of rules. For example, if they ever did things without me they were more or less doomed.

If they ever did things - sorry?

Without me.

They were dumped?

Doomed.

Oh doomed, right.

Yeah they all got killed, turned to jelly. I don't know whether it was my luck or perspicacity or great abilities

01:30 or whatever, but I could keep my team out of trouble normally. I had a number of rules. One of the rules was you had to watch what time you went up the road in the morning and you had to be back before a certain time. And you were never the first vehicle up. One incident we had to get somewhere and it was a long journey to get there and get back. So we got up a bit early and I get to a checkpoint. And, again I always stop and ask.

02:00 Which Americans never do. All these checkpoints might mean so I'd jump out and say, "Hello lads," and then I'd find out what the problem was and then I'd say, "Anybody gone up the road yet?" They said, "Oh no, nobody's gone up the road." So I said, "I'm not going up the road. I'll wait." So then the school bus comes and then we follow the school bus and you drive in the wheel trucks you see. So up we go and bang! The poor old bus goes up over the edge.

I believe that every now and again you would surround yourself with children.

02:30 Oh yeah. That was in the village. But this poor old bus - I always felt guilty.

So this was one occasion where the bus literally did explode in front of you?

Oh yeah. Cause it was meant for us. I wouldn't let them stop because often in an ambush you detonate something - that's only to stop the group - and then the main group open up. So we took off and you leave behind the poor old

03:00 bits of kids hanging in trees. You look like a doll but it's only half a kid hanging up there and they're all burning, screaming and you drive on, don't stop.

I imagine that experience has stayed with you?

It does. Many of these things do. You have to make these tough choices. You don't know. You keep thinking, should I have done this, should I have done that. But as a result when the team stuck to me

they were all right. Now the moment I

03:30 was busy or went somewhere else they'd end up all being killed in an ambush or dead or something. Because again they were aiming for me. Because we normally went everywhere together they'd pick out my jeep or my route and ...

Well that's another very good illustrative story. Could we just list what their actual functions of your staff were? So you had the interpreter,

04:00 **you had this - did you say second lieutenant?**

Yes. They were mainly liaison. Because the interpreter stayed in the office, couldn't go out.

So how many people among your staff are we looking at all together?

I ran virtually with none so it was only basically myself and this other lieutenant. Now what happened was that I developed this system whereby others would pay my troops. So the province and district would

04:30 look after the physical payment of them. Another group would look after the distribution of the food that came through a non government organisation that looked after the distribution of the food. So I monitored it because I had limited staff and we didn't want to be office bound. If you ended up filling out forms you couldn't get out so we had to drive things. So we then passed these ammunition again came from the regional force

05:00 in the province. The platoon would make a request to district who would forward it to the regional force and they would supply on their weeks supply. So I would piggyback the logistics onto other existing organisations which meant we were light.

Were you distributing medical supplies as well?

No. Initially they looked after themselves. When you got wounded you were a civilian technically under the rules.

05:30 You looked after yourself. No. That was one of my big battles. Training first, medical and uniform were close behind and then re army, re ammunition. Now for the medical it was a problem. We couldn't get them as I'm saying so we then had to operate in the field. So after the battle legs get sawn off at night, candlelight, hanging onto people and so on.

Did you ever operate on anyone?

Yeah. I'd be there. I wasn't even competent to operate. I would

06:00 hold. Sit on them and hold them down as it were. Local traditional medicine people would do this sort of thing - they didn't have doctors.

Would the local traditional medicine people do amputations as well?

Yes. You had to. If you got hit by a mine and shattered you it may be a couple of days before you got to hospital. You had to amputate.

What impact was all this having on you?

Well, I'm not sure.

06:30 I'm probably not the same as I was. But it has impacted. I then - it got to a head. I demanded we be treated in the medical system. Now we ended up after one battle I turned up with a couple of platoons, weapons drawn, drove into the main military hospital and said, "You're going to take them." That created a bit of a crisis and brought things to a head.

07:00 The rules were changed and we were then admitted to hospital. So from then on this was mid '66 or something I managed to get the rule changed. So that made a tremendous difference to morale and the casualties. Statistically I'm not sure that we lost more in the hospital. Because some of the procedures weren't good. Some of the traditional ones you got less

07:30 infections than you did in a hospital.

That's interesting. Why was that?

Because hospitals have more germs. It's the home of germs. Even now we have - the more advanced the hospital you get doesn't mean the less infection you get. And if you're the only man who's had the knife, it was a new knife or you just boiled it as it were not put in some chemical it would work better. And also they're more immune.

08:00 It's like now if I'm going to go to Vietnam I start eating regularly in Cabramatta to build up my immune system and that form of bacteria so when you go there you're on a parallel.

You mean you go to Cabramatta to eat food which might contain some materials?

Yes. Heaps of bacteria and so on. Then you're reinforced. You don't want to go from a

08:30 Western situation in there. That's why Americans always have diarrhoea.

So you acclimatise yourself by eating Asian food especially in an area like Cabramatta and that will help you build up your resistance.

Oh yeah. You don't get - I never get all these dreadful problems that people get. Now it's the same again later one of the hospitals - the catering was contracted out to a group of nuns.

09:00 They were run by the American naval people. They were sent this great team over from America that were going to check on the hospital and check on the catering and I said, "Don't go to the kitchens." "On no, we must." I said, "No. Don't go to the kitchens." "Don't check the hospital." So they went. They were all horrified. They tried to run a sterile environment. It would kill people.

09:30 Cause when they left a sterile environment back into the land of the germs they succumbed to all sorts of things so you had to keep it balanced as it were.

Oh I see, yes of course.

It didn't do them any harm. All right, the food was chopped up on the floor, but they were used to all that. So you had this balance. Now also we tended to treat against shock you put intravenous drips into people. Now in many cases shock is a natural

10:00 reaction - the body's own mechanism reduces the shock so you don't pump the blood out if your artery's cut. Now when you re hydrate them and you don't have a good seal on your artery they can bleed to death. But nonetheless we got them in the hospital. I hadn't time to do scientific analyses of studies. But I just thought sometimes was it a blessing or not.

10:30 But nonetheless got them to hospital. So from then on I used to have a visiting program. I visited everyone of my soldiers in hospital every month and I brought my circus with me. I had three Buddhist bonze [monks] and a couple of priests and I had my dancing girls and [UNCLEAR] social workers and only picked the good looking ones and went around and visited all the PF [Popular Force] and gave them a little present every month. And that used to cause a riot because no one ever visited the poor old regular soldiers.

11:00 All these militia always get this good treatment. Their officers always visit them and look after them. And you had to build this links to your soldiers. You become like the padrone [master] or something. You're there and you have to look after their families.

So once again very much the mafia?

Oh yes. So you became, you had these ...

You were the Godfather.

Yes. And you had

11:30 the resources and the money and the power and so on. Now in return they had to do things for you. So they had to provide intelligence and do their duty and fight. So if you asked them to die they'd die. Simple as that. But you didn't throw them away. Now they knew you wouldn't throw them away. Now also we had a difficult situation is that I was excused

12:00 from dying with them. Inasmuch as you knew, you got intelligence that this outpost was going to be hit. So I would go out to them and boost them up, make sure they were all right and that. Now I wouldn't know exactly the day. But I'd try and ensure I wasn't there on the day. Now they knew that they didn't expect me to stay there because if I stayed there I'd probably die.

And they obviously knew that you were essential to carry on the confirmation of the organisation.

Yes, they wanted me to do it.

12:30 Now also the deal was that I would look after them - I would lead the rescue mission the next day. You went in after morning too to make sure the bad guys had vacated the premises. So you went and you picked up the wounded and you buried the dead. And you looked after the widows. Because normally the district chief stole - they got a couple of months, six months compensation in wages

13:00 when they died and normally the district chief stole it so you'd make sure he didn't, the widow would get it. And also you would get some cement for a headstone and so on. Now everyone was satisfied with that. You had a thousand platoons to look after and you couldn't quite be with them. Now normally what would happen was a platoon would be hit. You'd hear the mortar fire. Midnight. And last for fifteen minutes, gunfire and then half an hour later - silence.

13:30 Next morning - daylight - you would fly over on the chopper, have a look down and while the rescue mission moved tentatively, slowly up the road. And again this happened to one of my training. One time I tried to speed the training up and I got three platoons in this one particular training camp at Tam Ky

to speed up the process. A good example of many lessons.

- 14:00 I get up on a hill and I look at a camp and I see, "What's this wire for?" It was surrounded by like this cattle fence. I said, "That's not going to keep the VC out." They said, "What a fool. That's not to keep the VC out. That's to keep the soldiers in." Cause what happened; when they were in camp they got an allowance for food because they couldn't be fed from home. But their camp commander pocketed that. His wife ran the canteen and you had to buy the food at her canteen. So this was to stop you sneaking out to the local hamburger
- 14:30 joint or equivalent. So that's what the fence was. Not to - you know I said, "What happened? That should be a bunker there." It was a hole. "Oh the Americans didn't give me any - give me cement, give me reinforcing." I got the district to supply it. Come back next month. "Where's it ..." "Oh somebody stole the cement." More cement. So I said, "Look, VC are going to come here, going to attack up the hill,
- 15:00 come here." "Oh no." So three platoons, graduation night comes and again they said, "Oh stay for the ceremony." And luckily there's this old marine major who was a district commander. They said, "You're not staying" he said. "I'm not going to let you stay there. This camp commander doesn't like you. You'll be in danger. Come home." So I said, "All right." So I went down and as I left I noticed they had all stacked their weapons French style.
- 15:30 You build this like a wigwam criss-cross. And I've always regretted it, slipped my mind - it should have triggered. But I just noticed it and went out. Sure enough, midnight mortars come in. Gunfire. All quiet. Next day, I fly over at dawn. Everybody's dead. We lost about sixty men. They'd only this one-foot deep little trench around the side. When the mortars came in they couldn't find their weapons
- 16:00 in the dark because they were all stockpiled and then the VC came up behind the mortars and shot them all. So we had to go in and clean up, hose the blood off and press on.

So to lose so many people, so many good people must have had an impact on you?

Yes. You lose every week. We lost out every week. Forty a week was quiet. Five hundred was tops.

How could you handle this? How were you coping and processing this information?

Well you do.

- 16:30 It's like you cauterise the wound or something. You build a scar tissue around it that doesn't affect you. You become immune to it. Now it's difficult to unfreeze it when the war's over. You have problems being normal again. Because you can't be normal and survive.
- 17:00 **How did the war change you?**

Well it's difficult. You're asking me, I don't know. But others ...

How do you think it might have changed you?

Well you lose fear which is not a good thing. And that's why I used to have problems like in the public service. They don't like senior public servants who are fearless. Politicians don't like that. From Beazley on. I told Beazley to piss off. He didn't appreciate it.

- 17:30 And premiers. They want the fear of God from you. Because the threat can be a tool to control. If your antenna has been burned off so you don't see these signals it's dangerous. Real lives.

Were there any particularly key people that you lost that you would want to remember in this interview?

No. As I'm

- 18:00 saying there was that many. Always. Hundred of Americans I served with. What would happen is I would try to develop a contact between our people and the marines. One to stop the marines shooting them. Cause as I'm saying - again as an example of the problems we had - one of these graduations I had three platoons all ready to go out on the final ambush and a platoon of PATs [People's Action Teams]. PATs were political action team people that again I used to adopt.
- 18:30 Just as we're all ready to go out - I wasn't going to go with them that night - they're all ready to go out when suddenly they jack up. The commander said, "They're not going." I said, "Why not?" They said, "Oh the Americans have moved in over the hill." I said, "Don't worry." They say, "No. Americans there. We're not going unless you come with us." So I said, "Alright I'll come out with you tonight." So it's a little hairy going out on night ambushes with your militia you see so ... Especially
- 19:00 when you haven't prepared. So I said, "All right I'll go." And I brought an American lieutenant out as a hostage. I used to bring Americans as hostages. Any trouble I'd shoot the American first - this was trouble from Americans. So off down the road we go so we've got about a hundred and twenty people strung out down the road and this little Cessna spotter plane flies over and it drops these leaflets on it it says,

- 19:30 "If you hold this leaflet up in one hand and your gun in the other, surrender, you will be treated well." Press on. In the meantime he's still flying round. Then you hear this rumble. These four Phantom jets come and they're circling and they're loaded. The wings are bent down with napalm and ordinance. You can actually see the pilots and they ain't looking friendly. Normally they smile and wave. They look rather grim.
- 20:00 So we come over the hill and this 175 mobile artillery battery with big guns mounted on like tanks they moved up and they formed this big circle. And they used to conduct this H&I fire - harassing and interdiction fire - they'd fire all night anywhere. Not at any targets, just all night hoping to hit something. Most likely they hit good guys. But they just fire. So as we come over the hill you could hear the
- 20:30 loudspeaker saying, "Range one hundred," and then, "Load the canister." Canister is ball bearings, you can hear them ramming. Then he said, "Wait till you see the whites of their eyes." So I'm marching out in front, "Don't shoot, don't shoot. Friends." And I said to the American lieutenant, "Get your hat off, get your hat off." He's blonde and big you see. And then a voice said, "Hold your fire."
- 21:00 "One of these characters seems to speak some sort of English." But that was the problems you had when you confront Americans. They wouldn't know. We lost lots of men. We were always in fire fight. And I used to be the source of - the marines used to say there were Russian advisors with the Viet Cong, but that was me. And we'd have to fight back.

Now I wanted to ask you, who were you

- 21:30 **reporting to?**

Nobody.

Did you have any liaison with Australian troops, any liaison with Americans?

No, I didn't have any liaison with Australians at all. Now I did report to an American colonel.

Right. And who was he attached to?

He was the senior advisor for the regional forces and the militia, so he looked after both. So there was me who looked after militia and he had two other American majors who

- 22:00 looked after the regional forces.

So would you send him any kind of progress report?

Initially, I did report but then I had trouble and I got fronted up to General Walt who is a marine commander and the idea that the marine commander was overall commander of the forces. So I got fronted up which is a rather frightening experience even for me. Some of these marines were rather tough gentlemen and General Walt, three star general and I get fronted and escorted in

- 22:30 to his office.

What were you being fronted over?

My reports. They said, "Son, we don't like your reports." "Yes Sir, what's wrong with them?" "No no, no no, you're just not reporting - you're reporting pessimistically." I said, "Well I'm sorry Sir, if I lose a hundred men in an action I don't think I have a lot to be optimistic about and I report that." He said, "No.

- 23:00 We like things to be optimistic." I said, "What, do you want me to lie?" He said, "Officers don't lie." I said, "Give me an example." He said, "For example, you lose a hundred, why don't you report fifty on Friday this week and put the other fifty on Monday." So on the weekly report it doesn't look as much. And then we can at least put it in with a total rather than highlight it so this

- 23:30 week we don't highlight militia, we put it in with the total so it doesn't quite look - if everyone's had a quiet week it's fifty out of so many and it's not fifty out of fifty." And I said, "Well I don't think I can do that." So he said, "How about you don't actually write the reports. You just submit the figures and then we'll write it." I said, "I'm happy with that. Then it's up to you. I've done my job, I'll tell you the facts. Interpretations you can do." So

- 24:00 we parted and left company. And also, sometimes I could write a report I wasn't allowed to read. This was the American system.

Somebody else would write the report for you?

No. I would write it. Once I'd written it I couldn't read it. It was classified Top Secret but sometimes it would be stamped, "NOFORN [No Foreign Nationals]." Means not for foreign eyes. And suddenly - I didn't have a social security number so I'm an alien. When you came up on the computer and there was no social

- 24:30 security number it used to go, "Buzz Alien." Cause they used to think I was an American. Used to think I came from - most of them came from California and that. They thought I came from Boston or ...

They being ...?

The Americans.

The Americans. Okay. The American hierarchy, the American administration.

Yeah. Cause I worked – I wear American uniforms and ...

So after that point you basically didn't have to report or

25:00 **liaise?**

No. And I only ever did one report and that was by accident. We got a new colonel one day came in. He just arrived and they rang him up and said, "Where's the report, it's supposed to go to Saigon today and off to Washington tomorrow." He said to me, "Could you do this report?" I said, "Sure." He said, "What do I do?" I said, "You sign." And of course it was that late it didn't go to

25:30 Saigon, it went straight to Washington. The next day this ashen-faced colonel came in. No more reports.

Fair enough. Now it sounds like you had an enormous amount of power?

Yes. To enhance that power – within three or four months when I arrived, this is round about April/May '66, we had a rebellion. We had a Buddhist uprising.

26:00 And in Hue and Da Nang they rose up against the Central Government and Ky [Major General Nguyen Cao Ky] – the president in those days – and the Buddhists rose up. My troops and first ARVN division and a co-commander went with the rebels. So we rebelled against Saigon. He was called up – Thieu was called up. What had happened was, I had been to a party with Thieu on a Friday night and Time Magazine had run a –

26:30 he was on the cover.

Air Marshall Ky?

No. General Thieu. Ky was the president. Thieu was a co-commander. He was an old ex-French NCO and ex-military officer. A Buddhist. Ky's a northerner. He summoned them and said, "You're sacked." And Thieu said, "Oh can I go out and pack my toothbrush – go home and pack my bags."

27:00 He said, "All right." So as soon as old Thieu gets up, he's not leaving. And First Division joined him. And militia joined him and regional force joined him. And our headquarters was the main headquarters for the rebels. So I'm sitting there. So I go to the American Embassy and say, "What do I do?" He says, "You've got to be even handed." So I say, "All right." So I thought I'll fight with the government in the morning because they start late. ARVN start late and they finish early. Everyone has siesta

27:30 twelve to two. And my characters like going home early in the afternoon. So I can have a short day and during siesta I can change lines. This is always a difficult when you go through the green line as it were from one side to the other. So my aim was to keep them peaceful, resolve this thing because I wanted them fighting the Viet Cong, not each other. Then the situation deteriorated.

28:00 We had a bit of a crisis. One morning I wake up and it's silent. And Asian cities are never silent. So I leap out of bed and peep out the curtains. And there's these Marines leapfrogging down the road. So I says, "What happened." They say "Oh sorry guy we're pulling out. Cities been abandoned." "Oh shit." Cause you're afraid America's going to bomb you. So I rush round to Australia House where the warrant officers are and I alert them. And we had one officer who

28:30 was missing. He was senior to me. Apparently, the Americans had told him to evacuate, but he had forgotten to tell us. He was a great wine buff and apparently been out on the vin all night with his mistress and he forgot to tell us. And next morning he ran out of gasoline and practiced his French and asked for petroleum or something and he got kerosene and that didn't help his jeep so he was late.

29:00 So in the meantime we almost had a mutiny. We had a great mutiny.

When you say we, you mean the militia?

No. No, the militia. The Australian warrant officers and so on. Because we were abandoned in the town. The Americans were across the river. Town is in the hands of Buddhists. And the Americans considering whether to bomb it or not. I said, "No, we're not leaving without this particular officer." And they said, "Oh we're going to hang him." "No, no, no," I said.

29:30 "NCOs are not allowed to hang officers." I said, "Here's the deal, if anybody gets killed during the withdrawal I will shoot him. If anybody is wounded then I'll arrest him and we'll court martial him." So everyone agreed. I said, "In the meantime we'll wait for him." So eventually the good officer turned up. We managed to get out and across the river. But I didn't particularly it – then I said, "No, no I'm going back in to my job." So I crossed back into the Buddhist occupied city,

30:00 went back to my desk and was the only round eye there. Now eventually we had another crisis that Americans weren't sure who to back.

Before we move onto that could you just fairly concisely tell me what the cause of the Buddhist uprising was?

The Buddhists had risen up under Diem and got rid of Diem. Now they felt that Ky was reinstituting a Catholic majority.

- 30:30 Now again, it was partly this problem again that when you wanted – when you worked on American systems you needed people who were fluent in English or fluent in Western systems to mesh the armies. Western philosophy is a bit different to Buddhist. Buddhists are a bit haphazard. But modern systems require dedication
- 31:00 and a certain Western type knowledge. So you would appoint somebody to fill it not necessarily who was a Catholic – because he was educated. But that meant he was a Catholic because he went through the Catholic system. So the Buddhists felt they were losing again. After they got rid of Diem, here's these Northern Catholics once again doing it – and Ky was a rather brusque individual. He was a charismatic leader but he got everybody's nose off, insulting and bullying and threatening.
- 31:30 And what happened was, you ran your own armies. There were different armies in Vietnam. And they owed loyalty to different people. You didn't owe it to the Queen or the Government. You owed it to this general because he appointed you and when he got promoted you got promoted and when he fell you fell. So they didn't want Ky replacing people because not only the general went, everybody went and all your families went because in the position of power you got your brother a job in the public servant.
- 32:00 **So the Buddhists were basically reacting to this?**

Yes. And when Ky, the President, saw Thieu's picture in Time he said, "The Americans are obviously going to back him." Cause he knew many Americans didn't like him. So he thought "I will arrest Thieu." But Thieu didn't want to be arrested. So Thieu then exploited the Buddhist difference and the Buddhists were happy they

- 32:30 had a military backer – an army, a division.

Now you're saying the Americans didn't know who to back?

Well they waited for Washington because ...

They were trying to make up their minds whether they were going to back ...

In '56 they backed the Buddhists and helped overthrow the government. Now in this case, were they going to back the Buddhists again? So there was this lull while they're waiting.

- 33:00 The corps commander ordered the 2nd Division who were down in Corps 9 to join them in Da Nang and I basically spoke to the American advisors and said, "Look, tell your commander don't join. If it comes to a showdown the Yanks are going to back Saigon's government, so don't join." So he went sick. So whenever the co-commander rang up he'd say, "Oh I've got this flu. Can't get out of bed. Doctor said." So he
- 33:30 kept delaying. Now the question was, what was Ky going to do? Cause Ky controlled the air force. He was air force commander. He also controlled the Vietnamese marines, Vietnamese airborne and Vietnamese rangers. They were the elite units all personally loyal to him. So if he was going to attack – he'd appointed four different commanders and they all resigned or joined the rebels. So he had a different commander every week.
- 34:00 But the old fellow was still sitting there. One almost got shot. He went back the same day as he got off the plane they tried to assassinate him so he got back on the plane. So great turmoil. Nobody fought the VCs. The VCs had two months free rein in the countryside because it was going down hill. I'm trying to stop the battle and manipulate because I was in good with the Buddhists. Or some Buddhists. There was militant
- 34:30 Buddhists who were young politicised and then there was the genuine Buddhist who believed you shouldn't be involved in any of this. So there was the young Buddhists and they were pro VC. The VC had infiltrated them and the VC was urging them on. So I had to work out where's Ky going to attack. And then the airport got sealed off. Americans sealed the airport. And you couldn't get on or off. I thought, "I have to get on to find out what's happening."
- 35:00 So I ring up and say, "What's the situation with the airport?" They said, "Anyone – if you come on the airport not allowed to leave. Sealed. Special security." I said, "Must be some way to get out." "Oh yeah, you can get out if you've a personal letter signed by General Westmoreland or Lyndon Baines Johnson, the President." "Yep, righto. Thank you I'll call you back." So I go back to Australia House and there's a couple of Australians whose time was up, they had to go back to Australia. Couldn't get to the airport. So I said, "I'll take you."
- 35:30 So they get in the jeep, drive out and I go in the side door. They come into the door and say, "Excuse me, Sir, you realise once you're on the airport you can't get off." I said, "Yes, these two are flying back to Australia and I'm off to Okinawa." "Very well, Sir." I said, "By the time I come back it'll be all over." He said, "Yes Sir." So in I go, drive around and I see the planes unloading the marines and airborne. "Mister Ky, it's on for young and old." So I drive out the front door. Come out the front gate. "Stop.

Sorry, Sir,

- 36:00 no one's allowed off the airport." I said, "It's all right, son," to this eighteen year old marine - pull rank, pull age - twenty two, twenty three. "I've a letter signed by President Johnson." "Is that so?" "Yes." He said, "Would you mind showing it?" So I said, "Look out there lad." Fifty metres away the Buddhists, thousands of them are
- 36:30 burning cars and tyres and riots and shouting, "Death to the Americans." So I said to him, "What do you think are my chances of getting through there?" He said, "None at all, Sir." I said, "Do you think I would allow President Johnson's letter to fall into their hands?" "No, Sir." "Of course, lad. Mine's locked back at the safe in the office." "Very well, Sir." Opened the gate, got through. Now my next problem was the Buddhists you see. So I emerged out in the street.
- 37:00 Luckily, when I was in Lismore I was a 41st Royal New South Wales Regiment and you were fully kitted, things like this big Tammy bonnet with a huge badge and red plumes, red and white and tassels. I put this on and stand up in the jeep and drive up and shout, "Vive la France." French! I'm not American you see. So they can see the name, D'Arcy and so on.
- 37:30 French Foreign Legion are here. Open the barricades and let me through so back I go saying, "We're doomed. The end's coming." Sure enough we started to fight so we'd major battles for the next two weeks. Really, they got stuck into each other - never fought the VC this hard, but they fight themselves and I got involved in a number of fire fights. My house was captured. Cause my characters said, "Oh we'll defend you."
- 38:00 We'll put all these troops around your house." I said, "No don't bother, don't worry." So my guards got captured and they took all the weapons from my house. So I get there and the airborne were attacking the radio station across the road. So I leap and crawl up a big battle and I grab the commander's leg. I said, "I want my weapons back and my troops released." So he said, "Oh all right, all right." And the battle stopped.
- 38:30 Handed back all my weapons and released my troops into my convenience and I said I wouldn't allow them. Then the battle commenced. So in the end we got beat. We got defeated because then the marines actually joined with them. So everyone's arrested and some executed. They led all the officers away. As they lead them off in chains one officer said to me, "Have they got you yet?" So I said, "No not yet." So I'm the only man left in headquarters.
- 39:00 No Vietnamese, no nobody. So from then on I had a free hand.

Why didn't they get you?

Well, I'm on both sides. And I'm following orders even then. So this was it. And then I helped alleviate the sentences and negotiated and keep the families informed.

We'll have to change tapes actually at this point.

Tape 7

- 00:31 Now this basically left me as the only officer of any - Vietnamese or anything - in charge of the thing. And it took months to replace and restaff the Da Nang garrison and headquarters. Because nobody wanted the job. It was bad news. You didn't want to be associated with these. Either your troops were likely to bump you off or it wasn't good career wise if you were a regular Vietnamese officer. So
- 01:00 You didn't want anything to do with this mob of militia who were proving themselves to be treacherous as well as incompetent. So I had a free hand, so I ran it. So it gave me all this additional free hand shall we say. And the Americans again left me alone. I could run
- 01:30 things. They didn't want involvement in this because it was too complicated for simple soldiers. As well as this I had gained a reputation of chewing up district chiefs and it was because of the phantoms or ghost soldiers. As I mentioned earlier you could assume that twenty per cent of your forces did not exist. They were just names on the
- 02:00 list. And the district chief augmented his meagre salary by pocketing that money and allowances and you could sell off your ammunition and weapons. Whatever else came to it. If you were honest you had maybe ten per cent. So it was an acceptable limit. If you were dishonest you could have ninety to ninety-five per cent phantoms. Now that made a difference. If you thought on a map you were being defended by this group and they didn't exist ...
- 02:30 You kept wondering - a hundred VC haven't got into it that way. So that was it. Smart ones could really do it professionally. They could die and hire new ones. It would all be on paper. Get money, compensation. It would all look efficient. So you had to be on the ground at camp though. So they'd turn up, line up and then you'd count them. And then they'd try to swap them. If they knew you were coming they'd move twenty men from here to there. So you turn

03:00 up by surprise and bang! And this led to problems.

This led to problems for you?

Yeah. Because the district chiefs didn't want to be caught out as crooks. So I was rather naïve at the beginning and I was used. The Vietnamese are very subtle, clever people. The commander used to use me as an auditor. And I'd go out and I'd catch some district chief with property and I'd come back,

03:30 "Oh look so and so has pinched two million piastres." And they said, "Good grief. What a nerve! I'll get him." So he'd summon up the poor officer and say, "You pinched two million." In the meantime he'd say, "Oh you go and check this and that." So I'd leave the room. He'd say, "I don't want major so and so to lose face by getting bollocked right in front of a foreigner." So I leave the room. Then he would say to the old major, he said, "You

04:00 reported you only stole a million, but you stole two million." Now what happened, they were on a percentage. Everybody paid the higher commander a percentage of what you took. But if you reported less, you only paid your percentage on the million, not two million. So they were using me to keep their fund up, not eliminate it. So he then got fined and had to pay a penalty and in return they would say, "How did you find out?" and they would say, "That shithead D'Arcy, he's the one."

04:30 So the next time I went to visit that district or province I had a problem shall we say. I had the good guys after me waiting to undo me in whatever way they could.

How would they try to undo you?

Well an example – after that attack on that training camp I got that commander relieved. I thought he was gone forever. And then one day I turned up in this little district in Tua Thien Province and good grief here's my old arch enemy Dai Uy Fuki Cha. And

05:00 oh dear you see. So later I got this report – because I'd all this intelligence feeding into me from my troops – and they had captured the female high ranking political cadre. Now in theory they should have immediately turned her over for interrogation at a higher level, but old Fuk attempted to

05:30 compromise my troops. So he passed this lady round to the three or four platoons. And they all raped and tortured her. Which compromised them because they knew that I was particularly hard on anything like rape or anything else like that. So he was attempting to corrupt them so that they were then could no longer report to me. Cause I was after him because he'd been stealing the wages. They hadn't

06:00 been paid for six months and he'd been stealing the money and I was after him. So this then triggered it off. We eventually recovered the young lady but she wasn't quite the same so she was particularly stuffed by the time we got her. She was a mental and physical wreck. So I thought, "I'm going to get this district chief, I'm going to get him." So I then arranged for a flight –

06:30 I was going to fly up and take stat decs [statutory declarations] from all the troops about the part of that, but mainly about the theft or not being paid for some almost twelve months hadn't been paid. I thought I'll nail him between the two things. So I get the chopper and I'm going to fly out but unbeknown to me he got tipped off. As we were flying over we received a mayday call that a badly

07:00 wounded soldier needed evacuation – cause he knows I was a soft hearted character and would respond. So we land and we get there, he said, "Oh sorry, we didn't know you were coming. We didn't think we'd get a chopper so we sent him by road." I said, "All right." He said, "What are you doing here?" "Oh nothing. Quiet morning. Thought I'd fly around and see the countryside." So he said, "Oh come and have some morning tea." I thought, "Oh all right, won't be too rude." So I'm going to get out of the chopper and then I get this tug at the elbow and this little

07:30 soldier had moved around the chopper and he said to my bodyguard sitting next to me, "Tell him not to get off the chopper." So he whispered to me, "Don't get off the chopper." I said, "Oh look oh I forgot I've got another meeting. I'd better go." Now the plan was, I was going to get off the chopper, they would arrange another phoney call somewhere else, chopper was going to go. They were then going to radio into province and say

08:00 that I decided to spend the night there and come and get me next day. And that night they were going to arrange with the Viet Cong to do a bit of a raid and then I was going to be delivered over to the Viet Cong. That's what with district chiefs you would have to always do. To exacerbate the matter I got appointed to the anti corruption commission. This was an American late thing because of the problems of corruption in the military. So they put me on it.

08:30 I didn't know I wasn't supposed to do anything. I was only supposed to go to the monthly meetings and have tea, muffins and talk about strategies, but being young and foolish and energetic I get stuck into this with gusto. Turmoil. I was probably too – it's not simple. You think it is, but corruption in Asia is not simple. It's part of the

09:00 fabric and you just can't root it out simply. You just can't charge and hold people to the wall like I was doing because you bought your position. It takes you a long while to penetrate these layers and find out, but basically you bought your position. So it didn't matter what it was, it depends on the money, you bought your position.

You literally paid ...

Yeah. To become a district chief in a rich district. Or a province chief. Because then you could extort huge

09:30 amounts of money. Whereas poor ones you couldn't raise the taxes or get the money. And obviously you wanted safe areas, not dangerous areas. But that required you to pay money up. Now also the province chief demanded – he'd contact the district chief and say, "I need a hundred thousand plasters by next month," and the poor old district chief couldn't raise it unless he was crook. So your

10:00 easiest way is to put in phoney invoices and do all that. And then the honest ones would only deliver what they were demanded. The crook ones thought, "Well if I'm pinching a hundred why not make it two or three hundred and I keep the rest." Because often they had a wife in Saigon and they were up in the north and couldn't get down there to pay the private school, mortgage, there. They'd pay for accommodation up there and a couple of mistresses – it's expensive.

So given all this - what were you actually

10:30 **able to achieve in your time with the anti corruption commission?**

I got rid of twenty-three district chiefs and a province chief. But it didn't make me popular.

So how long did you remain with the commission?

Right till the end, till I left. Even as a civilian I carried on.

So how many years are we looking at there?

Oh two years or more. Two and a half, nearly three years. Now again I also got this additional job as the political warfare advisor.

Oh to the paramilitary?

No. To everybody.

To everyone.

11:00 **Could you tell me what that involved?**

Yeah. Basically this was an idea that was introduced by the Taiwanese military advisory team which in turn was a straight lift out of the old commissars from mainland China and Russia where the political officer ran everything. So it was to become the focus of power, you were to organise the military, the civilian, the political, economic – all life was to be coordinated to

11:30 winning the war. Theory was good. Now the Americans didn't want anything to do with this because they thought this is a bit suss [suspicious] this idea. So they said, "You know about this." "Yeah." So you're it. So another hat. So this gave me insight on the power structure of Vietnam, where they're rigging the elections for the president. Cause they insisted with these elections and

12:00 you made sure that Ngu or Ky or whoever he was got ninety per cent of the votes and so on.

You made sure?

It was part of my job. This was the thing.

How would you ensure that?

Well you set up these ballot boxes and everyone had to register. So you'd do a yes and no vote and a yes box and a no vote. It would be done and often the police would get your ID [identification], watch what box you put it in and you didn't put it in the right box you were down on the card and you had troubles.

12:30 **But are you talking about your own involvement in what could be construed as - you were saying that you were guaranteeing that certain politicians got a certain vote?**

No. Not me personally. The Vietnamese political system was doing that. Now I had to oversee that.

Were you helping to facilitate it?

No. I was trying to convince them not to do it, but there was a limit to what your power was. Now the Americans

13:00 knew this was happening because at one time there was a struggle between Nhgu and Ky and they forced Ky – Ky was forced down at gunpoint at the meeting to agree to run as vice president and Nhgu as president. It was a joint sharing. Ky still kept his air force and so on. So the Americans wanted stability.

So what you're describing seems to be vote rigging?

13:30 Yeah. I suppose.

So what was your - you were ...

I was an advisor. I had to advise the Vietnamese who were in charge of running the country.

But what were you advising them on?

I was trying to advise them to be more honest and so on, but I knew this was going on.

What a difficult position.

Yeah. So - I mean you can't run things like here. Now

14:00 democracy's marvellous, but you can't impose democracy instantly on third world countries in the middle of a war. What people want is stability first and bread and butter on the table and not to be killed. Now after that you might like a choice of government. Cause all these governments were shitty no matter who they were. I mean you voted one group of villains or the other. And the average person didn't care. He wanted not to be killed and his house not to be bombed

14:30 and his kids to go to school.

So your role as political warfare advisor you were advising everyone?

Well it was all run by the military. There was virtually no civilians. All posts were run by the military. It was just military filled a civilian post. So you still wore your uniform and you ran as Mayor of Da Nang or whatever. So you had to make sure the unions were under control and didn't get into the leftwing. The economy

15:00 is running and ...

Yes, I'm just struggling to understand what you were actually doing in that?

My job is to advise them how to achieve certain ends. And to ameliorate the excesses shall we say. But I knew these abuses were going on. In many cases you couldn't do anything about it. And the Americans didn't want to know. They didn't want to be told. One of the Ky things is, you tell people you don't want

15:30 to be told, therefore you don't know. It's like Mr. Howard [John Howard - Australian Prime Minister] in certain incidents. You let people know you don't want to be told therefore when you're questioned you don't know. So key American decision makers didn't want to know this murky thing was going on, but they knew. They insisted the elections be held, but you had to ensure that the VC didn't win them.

You had to ensure.

Yeah.

So

16:00 **were you ...**

I was ensuring that certain groups certainly didn't win.

Certainly didn't win.

And I didn't really care which of the other groups won because it was only a matter of artifice. The whole thing was staged so you knew the result anyway so just how it was done and the locals, whether they just filled them all out or went through a procedure of having people vote when there was observers there, but the observers

16:30 not having the language or the skills didn't fully realise what was going on.

So who were you quite keen to see in and quite keen not to see?

I didn't like any of them. I hated Ky and Nhgu because again I became great enemies of theirs. This happened when the marine air wing commander who I'd originally had a bit of a tough with - I got invited over because

17:00 I used to mix with all different codes and so on. So I kept in touch and I used to get invited over to the air wing mess and so on. So I'm sitting there and the commander comes in one day and he says, "Oh I hear you're a great expert on training." I said, "Yes." So he says, "What would you suggest for my pilots?" And I said, "You should teach them all to play soccer." He said, "What?

17:30 Soccer? What's soccer?" I said, "Well they're going to have nothing to do in another couple of weeks." He says, "What do you mean?" And at this stage Da Nang was the busiest airport in the world. They'd take off four abreast on the race to the north or the war in the south. And I said, "Oh, we'll stop the bombing soon." "What?" "Going to stop the bombing soon." "What rubbish. What bloody madmen." I said, "Look, when you've got nothing to do teach to play soccer. They can go out and play

18:00 Vietnamese because Vietnamese play soccer and you'll keep the men fit and improve relations with the locals." "Oh, what a madman. Get him out. Don't bring him back to the mess again." So turfed out. Couple of weeks later, silence. No planes taking off. Old Johnson announced, "Bombing pause." So they

ring up. "Oh, you haven't been over for morning tea recently." "Oh, any time, sir."

18:30 He said, "Come on." So he said, "How did you know the bombing pause was going to happen?" I said, "Oh certain influence." He said, "You speak to the president?" I said, "Please sir, I don't like to disclose conversations between me and the president." "Oh of course not." So I'm right from then on.

19:00 So anyway someone wanted a ride up in a Phantom to go and do some bombing or shooting, go and plaster a village or something - practice. Anyway he had a problem with the introduction of - drugs began to emerge. He was a bit concerned. He said to me, "Look you're the expert in this country. Have a look at the drug situation." So I said, "All right." So I began this investigation. It got out of hand because as you work out the chain of command

19:30 it gets quite scary. So in my usual dedicated manner I press on where angels fear to tread and some of the stuff's coming out from Laos on Air America planes which is the CIA. Now I didn't know whether it was air staff augmenting their inadequate superannuation schemes, or whether it's official policy here. It's difficult to discern. And I also find out that President Nhgu's running a major cartel and

20:00 President Ky's running a major drug cartel. And this had been inherited from Diem, Ngo Dien Lu's brother who had inherited it from the French - Deuxieme Bureau [French Intelligence]. The Deuxieme Bureau under a Captain Savanni[?] and a Major Tricoguerel[?] - I just forget his name. They set it up for slush funds. Americans were funding the Indo China

20:30 war but they tried to control the budget and they didn't like the dirty tricks that the French Deuxieme Bureau indulged in. So they needed separate funding. So they did a deal with this Binh Xuyen, the ones who eventually won the contract for police and they set up a drug smuggling from Laos through the Corsican mafia because Captain Savanni was a French Corsican. They then took it to Marseilles and so on. It was

21:00 a bit money spinner. So when the French left and old Diem took over his brother realised here's a good source of funds. So the management changed and the organisation flowed.

So just bringing this back to your story?

I'm investigating this. And I'm percolating up the chain of command to the top. So I eventually get up and Ky's running one ring. And when Ky got ousted he kept his ring up. His sister was in

21:30 Laos. She ran a hotel. It came there. He flew it in. It'd be in VNAF [Republic of Vietnam Air Force] airplanes and then out it went. Chu thought, that's a good business. So he set his up with his generals and customs and police. So I'm investigating this and the Miami Mafia's involved and the Corsican Mafia. I don't know. I said, "I want a bit of a written policy from someone please," for me to pursue.

22:00 Preferably the president or someone signs it and I want a million dollars in my wife's account cause I'm not going to last long in this business. You're in the real heavies. VC have nothing on this one. This of course, you can't quite do this without leaving tracks. Once you investigate you leave footprints. So it was drawing

22:30 attention from various powerful people.

So what happened?

I withdrew. When I couldn't get the guarantees I said, "I'm giving up." At this stage it's only marijuana that's hitting the marine flight people. The heroin didn't come till later. Cause it was all being shipped out then. Later they realised much better to sell to the local market and then when they went back to America you could keep selling it. So the

23:00 great drug war launched. I felt presidents and vice presidents shouldn't be doing that. So I wanted permission to arrest and indict President Chiu, Ky or assassinate them. Permission was denied.

So you were still all this time involved in the militia.

Yes. As well.

So for how long did you remain with the militia?

This was up until August/September '67.

23:30 I had extended. I should have gone home in January but I extended and they let me stay another six seven months. Then I wished to extend again and the army said no. Because they hadn't seen me. I never went to Saigon. When any senior officer came up I was in the fields. Nobody saw me. Nobody knew what I was doing. There was rumours I was a sort of warlord.

Did you ever think you had too much power?

Oh yes.

24:00 I was almost going to run for president in the country but they said you had to be a citizen. And they said if you then became a citizen they would draft me. As a private. So I thought, no I won't become a

citizen so I won't run for president.

You were seriously considering running for the president of Vietnam?

Yes. Because I would have been voted in in my area because Thieu complained that if he issued an order for the northern area where I was he'd only have ten per cent chance of it ever being done and that would be weeks later. If I issued an order I'd a ninety

24:30 per cent chance of it being done in ten minutes. Now a good example was, General Walt during one of the great battles at Khe Sanh, for example, rang up Vietnamese Corps commander and wanted ten trucks to carry ammunition for the battle. The general says, "No." Couldn't spare them. Ten minutes later I rang up and I wanted thirty trucks for my staff and I got them. Now it shows you a sort of

25:00 relative ...

Indeed. The relative priorities that these people were giving you.

In these countries you had to control your bayonets - it goes on the number of bayonets you control. So I control fifty five thousand bayonets and they were all loyal to me. So if I asked them to do something, they'd do it.

Bayonets?

Yeah.

You mean troops carrying bayonets?

Yeah, that's it. Guns. So when - in these countries power is based, as Mao [Zedong] said, grows

25:30 out of the barrel of a gun. So it's a number of guns you command and who will react gives you great power.

But it was expressed in terms of bayonets was it rather than guns?

Yes.

That's interesting. So just lead me on from this wish to become president.

I got - some people felt I was drifting out of the conventional into one of these -

26:00 you know, you had this - I wasn't answerable to anyone which they didn't like.

They being?

Both the Australians and the Americans began to get concerned that they could not control me. So in other words they could issue and order and I felt that orders were - I'd never stand trial in Nuremberg for fanatically following orders. Orders were an insight into the direction the commander was thinking.

26:30 Not necessary for me to leap to obey. If I thought it wasn't any good I didn't do it.

So you were not obeying certain orders?

No they didn't actually give me orders, but there was directions and policies that I didn't necessarily feel were there.

So when did they start to get really concerned?

Well not quite sure when Australia got concerned, but a number of Americans got concerned. Now I had problems -

27:00 we had another job that we used to do was the counter terrorist program. That later became [Operation] Phoenix where we conducted extra judicial removal of enemies - get rid of an infrastructure. VC infrastructure.

Could you qualify that? What did that involve?

Well you killed people. You don't like. You kill them. So you had to eliminate. You had to do what the VC do.

27:30 The VC would come in and eliminate key people in our - you know, district chief, village chief, school teachers, this type of thing. So we would do the same. We would target a Viet Cong key person and go in and assassinate him. Capture him if we could. This was supposed to be done by black teams and all these fancy things. You know, Chuck Norris. If you watch the movies they had these

28:00 CIA teams that used to go in and do it. A lot of crap. You can't get round eyes going into villages and doing this cause you tend to stand out. You forget a village is a stable organisation. Some had been there for a thousand years. Everyone's related and know everyone so it's hard for foreigners to go in and be undetected. The dogs do it. The buffalos hate your smell because you eat too much beef and probably ate their mother. The first year or two I always reacted with buffalos.

28:30 It's not till you eat rice and fish heads that you ...

That the buffalos accept you.

Accept you and the dogs don't trigger off alarms. But even then you can't move like you could in Sydney. And also, you don't have - how do you know who's who? They all look the same. They don't have the numbers on their door. So which hut do you burst into and kill?

So for how long were you involved in this kind of

29:00 **activity before the alarm bells began to ring for the Americans and Australians?**

No it wasn't because I was involved in that. I was good at that. But I mean a lot of that was done by our people. Eight five per cent of the removals were conducted by the old militia. You get us to do it and you get a reward. Per capita basis, you see. So much for a VC dead with a gun and so much for a captured VC with a gun.

Sorry, I expressed that poorly. What I actually meant was, for

29:30 **how long had you been doing that when - as a separate exercise - the Australians and the Americans started to get concerned?**

No, they weren't concerned about it. They were concerned that I decided not to do it. Because we basically went on to a quota system. Robert Komer who became head of CORDS [Civil Operations and Rural Development Support] - this organisation was the umbrella organisation that ran everything - so you had MACV under Westmoreland and you had CORDS under Komer.

30:00 Komer was a CIA officer and he was a personal representative in Vietnam of [US President] Johnson so he had tremendous power. Now he basically set quotas. Cause again you had the Harvard MBA mob - and I don't believe in setting quotas for parking tickets and speeding tickets and not for assassinating people. You assassinate those who need assassinating. Not because someone thinks you should have fifty or a hundred or something right?

Exactly.

And it's a very difficult thing to control.

30:30 I always regard myself as a efficient public servant and I like to honour things. You don't come in and say you've killed ten people and you want the reward. I wanted evidence. And you've got a problem if you're in a tropical country, no refrigeration - what do you do?

So at what point were the quotas brought in?

I'm not sure. Some time during '67. But this time

31:00 the more you learn in a country the more complicated the matter becomes. Originally I used to chop any VC down. Any VC - bang! And I used to be able to smell out VCs. It's difficult to have efficiency and honesty in these countries. Buddhists tended to be maybe honest but inefficient. The top

31:30 crooks were efficient but dishonest. If you were honest and efficient you were either a VC or you were a dedicated Catholic. You could easily very quickly by observing various posts in the public service you suddenly thought, "Okay he did a good job. He's not on the take; chances are he's a dedicated, loyal VC believer.

32:00 I thought, "I'm not going to touch him." One case, for example, we had this particular surgeon in the military hospital and he was the best surgeon in the country. Now I wouldn't let anybody touch him. So he was on my good VC list. So if you were on my good VC list you didn't get touched. The good old CIA's thinking, "Why is he protecting these people?" Cause I wouldn't let anybody touch them. You keep away from these people

32:30 Often they knew. They played these cat and mouse games. This particular surgeon knew I suspected him and he used to try and influence me.

So was this causing great concern for the Americans?

Yes.

It was.

They don't like people exercising judgment and telling the great chief you're not going to follow his orders, you're not going to deliver quotas and you're not going to insist your men do it and do the opposite protect these

33:00 people, not assassinate them.

So did this add to concerns they already had?

Oh yes. Cause I sort of drifted in and out from being a golden boy - I didn't mention earlier, I had graduated from the Armed Forces Industrial College in Washington - I think I'm the only Australian officer then and that probably ever did. So I was regarded as the golden

33:30 boy.

When did you do that course?

I did it while I was still in Holsworthy and that. I did it basically by correspondence. The army wouldn't let me go do a Masters degree and I always intended, but I was already known to the Americans and worked well with them.

This is quite a key thing actually.

Yeah. So I was regarded and most Americans thought the world of me.

34:00 As I'm saying, I was the advisor's advisor. I was there, I knew everything, I knew everybody, people would come to me for advice and I'd tell them how to run things. And I get on well with the Vietnamese. I have this ability to move between cultures. So I got on with the Koreans - cause I had a big Korean marine division earlier and nobody got on with them. And I had teams of Korean instructors teaching martial arts to my men and other people.

34:30 And I get on with the Philippines. So I can move easily within cultures. And I get on with the Vietnamese and most Americans didn't like the Vietnamese - hated them. I ate Vietnamese food and everything. Thought like an Asian. The Chinese and Vietnamese always said I thought like an Asian. I was also the protector of the Chinese cause the Chinese got discriminated against and any Chinese soldier

35:00 in the regular army could come to me if he felt he was being hard done by and I would pull my levers and sort things out. So I was like an ombudsman in many cases.

So when and how did crunch time come for you?

First of all the Australians felt we've got to get this fellow back. So I was supposed to go back to Singleton as a major company commander in the national service. Which

35:30 is rather a boring job after running more troops than [Major General] Peter Cosgrove now. He's the one to get thirty thousand now. Twenty year old and a fifty-five thousand combat. So it's hard going back to one hundred and twenty troops and checking their bootlaces are straight for morning parade.

How many troops had you been running in Vietnam?

Fifty-five thousand. Considerable army. So I said, no.

36:00 Now the Americans offered me a job. The first job they offered me was to be the advisor to the mayor of Da Nang who I had known. And previously there'd been a Marine Corps intelligence job to that but they had nominated me to take over. Then they discovered back in America that I wasn't American. They couldn't have a non-American twenty something year

36:30 old running the second biggest city in Vietnam. And I didn't have a social security number or anything else. So they had to have congressional stamp or some committee stamp so they said - by that time I had put in my resignation. I said to Australia, "If you don't let me stay I'll quit." They said, "Come home." I said, "No. Goodbye." Bang there you go. So I resigned.

37:00 The Americans then came back and said, "Look we don't want to lose you." I could have gone with the CIA contracting, but I didn't want that. You don't want to be on record. So I got offered a job in the aid program. As I'm saying, the ...

The CIA's aid program?

Well they funded, they were a big funder of many of these programs.

37:30 But they were still paying for some of the militia payrolls and programs. Now the militia first up came through this USA Aid type program. It had fallen into chaos and was causing trouble. They wanted me then to run that. That way I'd still keep all my militia contacts and knowledge and sort out a major problem and get everything back because it was a key component of the wages and if the food didn't

38:00 go through you could have these riots also. So I said, "All right I'll do that." So that was a job to which I was appointed. So I flew back, spent a week here processing discharge, straight back out, straight back into the job. All I did was change my shirt. Keep my army boots, army pants, put the gun under the shirt, not over it, and carried on as usual. Still kept my position on the anti corruption

38:30 and I got another job on the government contracting board and on President Thieu's national reconstruction commission. So I had hopes of other Vietnamese government appoint and so on. And had even more money and even more clout and power because I could give away - my budget was as much as I could spend.

Did you have any regrets about leaving the Australian Army?

No. Not at that stage. Because

39:00 this allowed me to stay in Vietnam and do virtually what I was doing. The only thing I didn't have is I

didn't have operational control over the militia. But nonetheless he who pays the piper called the tune. I was never short – issuing orders and giving advice and being the paymaster people had to jump when I said jump.

We'll have to change tapes.

Tape 8

00:33 **So Matt could you describe to us what your role was with US Aid?**

Basically there were two main types of aid program. One was the official government to government program. Now under government to government program the aid took all forms – physical like rice and

01:00 wheat and tractors or anything or you had financial and so on. But whatever it was, under the aid program it became the official property of the recipient government when it hit the wharf. So in other words, it left Washington or New York, when it hit the wharf in Saigon or Da Nang that aid became the property of the Vietnamese government and they were then fully

01:30 responsible and accountable for that aid. Now the aid officials in that program were only advisors so they could not do anything. They'd just advise the Vietnamese how to do it. Whether the Vietnamese did it or not was another matter. So in many cases they didn't do it. I would say eighty per cent of all the official government to government aid was stolen.

02:00 Which was massive amounts, incredible amounts. It was an Aladdin's cave of thieves. It was done officially from government by all officials from the lowest up to the president. Stolen left right and centre. There was another aid program that was called people to people program. I think it was under public law 149 or something. And it went from the American people to the recipient people. In

02:30 this case the Vietnamese people. Now in this program I was responsible and accountable from when it left the wharf in America to a farm where we received it in the end. And the Vietnamese couldn't touch it. Now this then gave me power over it which the normal US Aid official didn't have. One of the key parts of my program was to provide the food supplement for the militia.

03:00 As I mentioned earlier the militia received part of the payment in cash and part of the payment in food supplement. And each soldier had to receive so many kilos of burgher wheat, so many kilos of cooking oil and various other things a month. My job was to distribute this to the fifty-five thousand militia that I originally commanded. And it had fallen into disarray because of the problems of

03:30 logistics and so on. So I had to right away reorganise the program and make sure that the commodities flowed out of America, landed, we unloaded it, stored it and so on. So I then devised a system whereby to stop duplication I worked with a standard USA Aid program so we both decided what we needed for the coming month, we both filled out an invoice and then we sent this joint invoice

04:00 back to Washington and the food would come out on the one ship, hit the wharf, go into the one warehouse. Then I signed for my tonnage. I would distribute that and USA Aid would look after theirs. This again kept my costs down and administration and so on. Cause you needed huge warehouses and you didn't want duplication for the same commodities.

04:30 My job was to ensure my stuff didn't get stolen. I couldn't worry about what the USA Aid did. So anyone going to plunder or pillage went after the USA Aid supplies and left mine alone because I was nasty and I'd come after you. A typical example was, we didn't have great communications then so you never knew when your ship was going to arrive – you knew maybe this week or something. I used to sit in my

05:00 luxurious headquarters which was a great big villa and I had this compound, I had a huge fence around it – eight foot high fence and barbed wire and big compound at the back where all my flunkies – I used to have eight servants, maids and cooks and drivers and bottle washers and body guards. I used to always have

05:30 twenty thirty forty people staying out the back in my servants' quarters because again you had to be the patron so whenever your staffs' relatives came to town you had to quarter them. So you always had these families visiting and staying and coming and going and it was like a mini city. Now in return they all had to watch out and protect you and look after you too.

06:00 So this went two ways. I also had my own bodyguards that I used to hire at this stage. I didn't trust the government run ones because again I had run ins with various government departments so I had my own bodyguards I paid and they owed my loyalty.

When you say they owed you loyalty ...?

Yeah. I paid them and they worked for me and their job was to die for me and not

06:30 doublecross you or sell you out or pass information out. Some of my staff for example – I used to have

on my staff I had a Buddhist and a Catholic and I had a VC. One of the secretaries I worked out she was a Viet Cong – not quite a Viet Cong, but what happened was I happened to ask her – she used

07:00 to work and occasionally give her a weekend off or something. Every month you'd give her a couple of days off. Generous employer – work sixteen hours a day but I give you a day and a half off every month. She would go home and visit the parents and she mentioned the village. I said, "Oh yeah." And it goes into my filing system. And one day I thought where is this village? I go and look it up on the map and it's a Viet Cong

07:30 controlled area. Now I'm not saying she was an active VC but obviously for her to pass through and stay and visit there they would have expected information from her. But she was a good typist and they're hard to get, spoke good English. So all you had to do, if you were discussing anything sensitive you'd send her down the shop to buy a bottle of milk. And a lot of the stuff it didn't matter. I didn't mind if the VC knew

08:00 my program because it was public. So they knew I was giving it to everyone. I didn't discriminate race, religion, political party – if you needed the aid you got it.

She must have been an outstanding typist.

Yeah. Good stuff are hard to find so you didn't bother. Now as I'm saying, you – over the period I'd moved, I'd become more flexible as I matured and

08:30 grew up and understood the complexities of the situation and ...

How old were you at this time?

Oh, twenty-seven or something. People couldn't help – you were partly cast on where you were born, so there was history and geography depended whose side you were on. You

09:00 shouldn't hang people, nail them to the wall, simply because of the politics. In a civilised society you should be able to have political differences. So as long as you kept your gun under the desk I would tolerate. At this stage I even tolerated many VCs so long as they were not armed. The people I used to hate and go after were the Viet Cong Peace and Security Group because they were vicious murdering killers.

09:30 Put babies on stakes and all this type of thing. I couldn't forgive them. But if you were a little old lady and you belonged to the Viet Minh in the old days against the French and you carried the odd letter I wasn't going to nail you to the wall. I kept my eye on you. And sometimes you'd try and turn them. We used to have this little visiting card, I haven't got it here, it said,

10:00 'Rally or die'. There was a big skull and crossbones and an ace of spades. Now we used to play these nice little cruel games. If I suspected somebody's Viet Cong we would slip this card somewhere. So they'd get home at night – under the pillow would be the card. Now, if I turned you over to Phoenix you got eliminated. So I then attempted to control

10:30 and modify some people's conduct. They'd know at any time we could imprison them or remove them from the planet. Sometimes we'd try to get them to join our side and so on. So you played cat and mouse games with them all. But you became much more tolerant and again this was through my subsequent dealings with my

11:00 wife's family and marriage the whole thing becomes complicated because half of her family were senior officials in the north. So you ended up like Vietnamese families – you had complicated and split things so as I'm saying I tolerated this secretary of mine as long as she was efficient and

11:30 I felt she would only pass on minimal information to protect her family and allow her to commute through. And I didn't mind having channels to the VC that I could feed messages or propaganda to. Cause I felt that we were not going to win the war at this stage. And if you fight a war from the perspective you know you're going to lose it's different than if you know you're going to win.

Can I get you to just clarify

12:00 **for the record what Phoenix was?**

Phoenix was the program of eliminating Viet Cong infrastructure. It had two names. In Vietnamese it was Phung Hoang which meant the all seeing bird. There's this subtlety in the language. All seeing bird is different from Phoenix. Phoenix rose up from the ashes and so on. And I was one of the exponents

12:30 of the foundation of Phung Hoang, Phoenix. Inasmuch as that originally and the Vietnamese intention was that this was a co-ordinating body for intelligence. In Vietnam you'd a lot of problems with intelligence. Intelligence is a commodity and various groups traded in this. So you had your own little bit of intelligence and you wouldn't share it. You might trade it with this group.

13:00 So the marine intelligence didn't like the army intelligence and neither of them liked the CIA and they didn't trust the Vietnamese intelligence. So people kept knowledge as power and wouldn't often share it. So there was a whole array of different intelligence organisations and we attempted to bring them all

together. Because it was inefficient and detrimental to winning the war if people had intelligence

- 13:30 and didn't share it. And you had intelligence coming from the States - you know, satellite and intercept. So they all had to come together. So I was a great believer in pushing that we had this and this originally set up and that was the Vietnamese intention. The American intention wanted it to be more proactive and go out and remove the Viet Cong infrastructure. So once having identified
- 14:00 it you attempted to remove them. So we set up Phoenix and it was officially set up in - Komer was in charge and I'm not sure, late '67 maybe early '68, it became official. Before that you had your counter terrorists and other organisations. And
- 14:30 again in theory I supported the elimination of Viet Cong infrastructure. So rather than go and send the B52s in to bomb the village, you're better off going in and picking off the head Viet Cong. That was the theory. You paid a reward for that. You had a scaled reward - dead VC with gun was worth so many piastres [local money], a captured VC with gun was worth some. Now initially -
- 15:00 I read the leaflets recently and initially you used to get more for a dead VC than a captured VC. So I had that changed. So I probably saved a lot of lives because if you're short on your rent payment and you look up the list and think "Oh yeah five thousand for a captured VC and eight thousand for a dead VC - oh bang, sorry. He was going for his gun." But if you gave more for a live one then you reduced
- 15:30 the death toll so as I'm saying you had a number of specialist teams who used to go out and assassinate Viet Cong. A lot of the work was passed over to the militia so we would be given targets to go and arrest or assassinate. Now you had a procedure whereby
- 16:00 you used to - you just didn't in theory willy nilly go and bump people off. You had various committees who were supposed to sign off. That was in theory. But in practice it was difficult. You're rushing late Friday afternoon and somebody comes in and a list of twenty Vietnamese names and says, "Oh, they're all VC." You try to ask questions and the tea and muffins are getting cold so you put your signature on it.
- 16:30 But I always believed in being responsible for my handiwork and I liked to check it out. Again, I am responsible for funds and I don't want you to come and say you've eliminated twenty VC and I hand over the money. I need some evidence. So I wouldn't give anybody money unless I'd go and check up. Now so you'd go and say, "Isn't that your mother in law?" "Oh yeah, but she was a VC." "Isn't this the fellow you owed money to gambling?" "Oh yeah, but he was a VC." So in many cases personal scores
- 17:00 were settled under the guise - especially when you're offering money for it. It makes the incentive doubly well to get rid of all your personal enemies and label them all Viet Cong infrastructure. Officially I think twenty five thousand dead were listed under the Phoenix program. But I don't believe that number. I think it's a load of rubbish inasmuch as you could go round after a battle and
- 17:30 collect bodies and classify them as infrastructure and get money for them whereas if they were just VC soldiers you get nothing for them. I personally think the number was probably down under eight thousand. Which is probably still a lot.

It's still a significant number.

Yes. And as I'm saying the criteria was a bit wobbly which you don't like. You don't like people bumping off ...

- 18:00 Life was cheap. It was thirty dollars reward to bump somebody off. So it's not a lot of money. So you could if you didn't like someone you could spare a few dollars and away you'd go.

That's an interesting comment that you just made, you know that comment that life is cheap. I'm interested to know how - what happened to your morality during this time as opposed to pre-war?

- 18:30 **Did you ever imagine that you would be doing this kind of thing?**

Slaughtering people, no. No. And sometimes you surprised yourself. I can remember one case - going back to the militia days. We had this operation where I used to try and get the militia working with marine and main force units. So we would act as guides

- 19:00 and protect the flank. This big operation with the marines with the ARVN had been my men on the flank and we'd all gone on the operation and we all lined up. It was cancelled. Choppers didn't come. So we didn't have the trucks and we sat and waited and a couple of hours later it was back on again. What had happened, in the meantime the Viet Cong had been told the operation was on and pulled out. Because they had very good intelligence.
- 19:30 But they didn't hear it was back on again. So the Viet Cong began to move back in just as we - suddenly the trucks and planes and we started to move in and we ended up catching them in the sand hills and it's bad news if the Viet Cong get caught in the open and they have the air artillery and in this case naval gunfire really were doing it.
- 20:00 Then at four o'clock in the afternoon my men decided, "Four o'clock, time to go home," and pulled out

of the battle. I couldn't stop them. So when they pulled out the ARVN said, "No, we're pulling out." And the marines said, "We're not going on our own." So I said, "All right, I'll continue on my own." It was a disorganised battle. Nobody was in charge. The marines did theirs and I ended up - my usual mild mannered self - taking over

20:30 and ordering everybody. So when they all pulled out - at this stage it was like Dunkirk. All these fishing boats arrived, picked up the Viet Cong and took them out to sea. So I then called in the air strikes and we started bombing the boats. But they couldn't hit them. The planes couldn't hit these little boats. But we sank a couple of them. I thought, we'll go and get some prisoners. So

21:00 I went out in the chopper and there was a couple of characters there and I tried to pull them out of the water, but I only had this little rope and we couldn't lever them up you see. So they were swimming there and I thought, oh we'll shoot them. So I said, "Right. Shoot them." And there's this silence. And I look round and the door gunner's there and I suddenly thought,

21:30 I said, "Don't you want to shoot them?" He said, "I'd rather not sir." So I said, "All right lad. I'll shoot them myself." This poor character had a little piece of polystyrene he was hanging onto and he was trying to hide under this polystyrene. I was only about eight feet above him, about to drill him and I thought, "Oh poor fellow. He'll probably get eaten by a shark or can't swim so I won't shoot him."

22:00 And you suddenly then realise you had been so matter of fact. It was just a decision. We'll shoot him. No we won't. It was his lucky day. Just at that moment we hadn't noticed this American destroyer that had come up. The pilot had summoned it and suddenly there was this great horn. You look up and there's it towering over you.

22:30 So they picked up the Viet Cong on board and we then landed on the back of the ship and all the crew came out. There was hundreds of them hanging off the mast. It was their first sight of a Viet Cong. Suddenly they were looking at us. We looked strange I suppose. We're all dressed in black and

23:00 you're covered in mud and blood. You get this look about you. So all these - "Good grief." They obviously regarded us as odd, from another planet. So you're there that long and you see death continually - you know hundreds a week you see dead and it definitely

23:30 affects you. You have lost your sensibilities as a suburban café latte drinker. And you don't realise you've gone this way. And as I'm saying, life almost doesn't mean anything. Yours or anyone else's.

That's interesting because you changed so much and people were looking at you. It's probably the first time in a long time

24:00 **you saw yourself.**

You suddenly realise, I must look odd. And you could tell - sometimes I'd go into the village and you'd frighten people. They would suddenly look up and see you because we would come in and we would suddenly appear. And these little old ladies would (gasp). And you would think, "There's no need to be frightened of me."

24:30 But you literally terrify them because you had this look about you and as I'm saying you would shoot and you had to shoot anybody. It's something I didn't particularly - I was always reluctant to shoot women you see. And again just a little incident on that. At one stage some of my men captured these two

25:00 twin girls. And I said, "Let them go." And they said, "Oh no, they're Viet Cong." And I spoke to them and said, "No, no let them go." And they said, "Oh you're making a mistake." "No. Let them go." So let them go and a few weeks later they call me up and take me out. There'd been an ambush - Viet Cong - and among the dead are these two girls. This time they are carrying their arms, but

25:30 I suppose I had a weakness that I used to have this ring of no go areas. So any male that approached my circle of convenience he had to come with intrepidity in case my itchy finger would whip out. But women could come in and I wouldn't register. So they could come in and touch you or stand next to you.

26:00 I wouldn't register, but males I would. So I always had this different treatment from men to women. But occasionally you had to shoot them. Cause often they were armed. There wasn't many but occasionally you would get women who took up arms. Normally they carried messages, supplied intelligence or smuggled ammunition or weapons - seldom did they actually don the fighting gear and come out

26:30 and fight you, but when they did you unfortunately had to shoot them. But I was always reluctant.

Cause it seemed that the capture and rape of that high ranking female that you were talking about before really affected you.

Oh yeah. Cause unfortunately it was quite common. One of the down sides to war is that you unleash the less best side

27:00 of men. And it is difficult to control. So it's hard to keep it in control so many become shall we say beasts or something. Rape in war is quite common. So you had to - we were fighting a psychological

war to win the hearts and minds so we did everything possible to not allow it and to stop and punish severely. To me

- 27:30 it was the worst crime imaginable. In that particular case the girl was totally psychologically and physically ruined and never recovered. She's presumably locked up in a mental home or something the trauma was so horrendous.
- 28:00 So you tried to keep the war to purely male soldier figures but in a guerrilla war that's difficult. We moved through the villages – again it's difficult so I never – I only ever ... I suppose my first week or something I fired on a village. As I'm saying I had lots of experience
- 28:30 on Holsworthy firing range with artillery and Puckapunyal but this particular night one of my platoons came under fire. They requested artillery, the village chief wasn't too happy, and in the end I said, "Yeah. Fire." But again you've got to look at your handiwork so the next day I went out to the village and I thought, oh dear, that's what artillery does in a village.
- 29:00 So from then on I never fired on another village. It's not worth it. If the VC are in it then let them have it. You weren't fighting a territorial war. They'd move out, you'd move in the next day. And if there was no gunfire then the village was untouched because once you destroy it, that's it. You can't rebuild it. But nonetheless you I suppose become brutalised and so on.
- 29:30 My job is to train people and teach them and command them how to fight. And kill. And it must affect you. It affects them. Now unfortunately we don't do sufficient deprogramming. So you have to detrain them. You don't just stop when the war's over and that's it.
- 30:00 Nobody bothers deprogramming you after the war and this leads to lots of psychological problems everywhere.

Because of course like you know during all this violence and this brutality and this you found love in your life and I'm hoping – would you be able to talk about how you

30:30 **got together with Talent?**

Okay. So I'm saying I had a split personality so from Monday to Wednesday night or Thursday morning I'm out in the field burning and looting and chopping and so on. And you come back and hose down the blood and dress up and you're in this civilised society. As I'm saying, you're off to the officers' mess and the regimental balls – because the Vietnamese units may not have been magnificent fighters but they organised fantastic

- 31:00 parties and balls. So off you'd go and spend a night singing and dancing and the war was far away. But anyway Talent was an interpreter. She was a military interpreter. She was working in I Corps headquarters and she was working for an Australian major, Ian McNeil, who was G3 [reserves] training. He was in training and that.
- 31:30 She was – she'd undergone the same course as my interpreter. My interpreter wasn't as good and had to repeat a number of courses so Talent eventually caught up, but they graduated and so she used to pop in occasionally. So that's where I first got to know Talent. And she was a very good interpreter and I can remember one day having to call for her assistance.
- 32:00 Cause she was relied on interpretation. And I got all these reports. And this day I got this amazing report and it said this group of tigers had eaten ten people and mauled twenty others. I thought, good grief, this is remarkable. Normally tigers – and there were a number of tigers in Vietnam then – but they tend to be solitary creatures. I thought, what's this? A group banding together and attacking people. And it was vague as to
- 32:30 who mauled whom. The tigers mauled or they did the mauling and the poor old interpreter got all mixed up and turned out they were black tigers. I thought, good grief, what a – I'm going after these tigers. A zoological find – amazing. We can't have these mobs of tigers uniting and organising mauling. Then I thought, maybe there's something wrong with the translation. So
- 33:00 Talent happened to be passing and I asked her to translate it. Now it turned out that this Vietnamese reaction unit was called the Hoc Bao which meant the black panthers and they had attacked somebody and killed. This poor old interpreter didn't know and ... so that was it. And whenever I went up to I Corps I used to pass her office and make sure I dropped in and said hello to her and so on.
- 33:30 She was very busy. She was the princess of I Corps and she was very popular with the air force officers and they ran much better messes and parties so she was always going there so we didn't meet up a lot socially but as I'm saying we kept bumping into each other and I always thought she was a particularly attractive young lady and I wouldn't mind pursuing things a bit closer. But anyway
- 34:00 I went nice and slowly. A couple of times I had to come to her rescue. She lived actually in the next block to me where my office was in Da Nang Garrison. So even though she was an NCO she was given officer privileges and she was given a quarter in the officers quarters so she was physically in the next block to me. Now Da Nang Garrison was a key trauma point in the city so whenever you had a coup,

- 34:30 or uprising or attack, Da Nang Garrison was a key. Now during some of the great rebellions the Saigon Rangers or airborne would come up and would surround and occupy the garrison. Now young ladies were at risk when these foreign troops from Saigon came up and occupied. So whenever this happened Talent would ring up and I would sally forth heavily armed and
- 35:00 sweep in in my jeep and rescue her and take her out till the situation stabilised. And her flatmate who was another interpreter sergeant. So I did that. Also, I was able to write orders which meant - order was a paper that allowed you to go from A to B. So this was invaluable. So if ever Talent wanted to go to Saigon then I could write her
- 35:30 a plane ticket and she could then get on a military plane and go down and so on. So we began to slowly have more dealings with each other. I then had to - the Americans insisted on working on Saturday morning in the office, but they really did nothing. They sat round and discussed the baseball scores or something which didn't interest me. It was against my religious beliefs to work on Saturday if I could help it.
- 36:00 So I told them Australians couldn't work Saturdays. We had this thing called walkabout and we had to go walkabout. Prohibited you from working. Oh yes. So I never had to work Saturday. But instead I was asked to set up an English class for officers. So these were for Chinese advisory team officers with Vietnamese officers and a couple of interpreters including Talent
- 36:30 who wanted to increase her skills. Cause a number wanted to pass exams and go to courses in America and you had to reach certain standards so Talent joined the English class and we became somewhat much closer from that. And then we used to go on picnics to the - tough war. So on Sundays we used to go to China Beach and have this picnic. I used to go in my jeep and couple of that and we had these picnics. We'd bring lunches.
- 37:00 A very good time. Again, getting back to my ability to mix with different groups, one day we were on the beach on this group of our men - about ten of them - came up the beach. So I said to Talent, "Get in the jeep." And so they drew across and then they formed a sort of circle around. I said, "Start the engine. And pass me my gun." I had
- 37:30 a forty five in the glove box. I tried to get it and stick it down the back of my swimming pants so I wasn't too obviously aggressive and she didn't know how to start the jeep and then these characters come up and they say more or less "Rrrr, rrrr, rrrr." I said, "I'm terribly sorry." He said, "We are Crow. What nation are you?" I said, "Sorry old chap. I'm not one of the Red Indians."
- 38:00 And there was this group of marine Crow Indians you see who thought cause I had a tan and so on I was one of them. They were trying to be friendly, but I was a bit apprehensive with these ten armed marines suddenly surrounding me while I'm guarding a bevy of young ladies. They sat down and had a nice picnic with the Indian nations and made great friends. So that then became a regular Sunday.
- 38:30 We had Saturdays at English classes and Sundays picnicking and so on. Then I went down and met her family and go to know her family and the romance developed and we decided to get engaged and go through the rigmarole of getting the approval of the extended family in the Chinese section.
- 39:00 So I managed to get through and we eventually - and again this was one reason I didn't want to leave Vietnam totally, cause we hadn't - I hadn't quite achieved my aim at that stage of getting her to the altar. And it was going to be too difficult if I was here and she was back there. So again that aided me in my decision to stay in Vietnam.

We'll continue this on the next tape.

Tape 9

- 00:32 **So if you could continue the story.**

So by this stage we'd decided we were going to get married and it's a rather complicated procedure and it had to be done in Saigon. We were both in Da Nang. So I engaged a great local lawyer down there to handle all the necessary paperwork and paid him huge sums of money to do this. He said, "Oh yes, it's all arranged." It was auspicious to get married just before Lunar New Year.

- 01:00 This is '68. And if I can divert just from then - I had predicted that the Viet Cong were going to launch a major offensive in the Lunar New Year. And mainly because of information I had received from Hue. People kept reporting to me at night there were columns of men carrying great sacks entering the city.
- 01:30 So eventually I pieced all these information together and worked out the most likely attack would happen during the Lunar New Year. Historically there had been cases for this. Like the Vietnamese during the uprising against the Chinese a thousand years ago had attacked on the Lunar New Year holiday. And the Chinese garrison had all been drunk and carousing and they were
- 02:00 eliminated and Vietnam won independence momentarily. But I had worked out that - I thought logically

the attack will happen on the last day. It's five days holiday and it was going to be a cease fire. So I thought logically if they attacked on the last day all the government soldiers are well and truly home on leave, got drunk, away from the phones, relaxed and the Viet Cong had time

- 02:30 to leave the mountain fortresses and cross the paddy fields without too much detection. So I said, "Yes. Last day is all." I went round with a great placard saying 'The end is coming' and no one would listen to me and I got thrown out of briefings by advocating the great attack was coming. But I'm supremely confident. And we thought, "We'll go down
- 03:00 to Saigon a couple of days before the New Year, we'll get married on the day before the holiday, celebrate the first day and then return to Da Nang and take up positions ready for the big attack." Now I had realised that Hue was going to be a major attack, but I thought that he'd be able to hold the city and the city would be then under siege. Cause it was a medieval fortress. And I had pre-positioned ten thousand
- 03:30 tons of food and medical supplies anyway to last the siege. So I'd done all my homework, felt confident of going to Saigon. But when we got down there I go to see my good lawyer and say, "Did all the paperwork get signed?" He said, "Oh well, there's a bit of a problem." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Oh the Viet Cong have overrun District 8 headquarters so we can't get the papers signed." I said, "But why didn't you tell me?"
- 04:00 So I got rather excited at this stage you see. I said, "I want my money back." He said, "I can't give your money back." So I carried out my great skills as a negotiator because in my briefcase I always carried a forty five and a couple of grenades. So I pulled this grenade out, pulled out the pin, said, "Right! Money back or I leave this grenade here when I leave." So the logic overwhelmed him and he handed my money back. I said, "I'll handle
- 04:30 it myself." So out we went. We then found out that we needed the approval of the Supreme Court. So then I bolted up to the Supreme Court and Talent's a great negotiator and she managed to talk her way into the Chief Justice's chambers. These little clerks said, "Oh no, the justice is
- 05:00 going on siesta time now. He won't see anybody." We said, "It's urgent, must see him." So we prevailed on them and they went in and saw the judge, the judge said, "All right." So in I go. And the poor old judge didn't know what I wanted. He thought I was wanting the constitution changed. I said, "Oh no. All we want you to do is sign this paper we can get married outside the district. She's registered." He said, "Oh is that all?" So he signed it and we went with a great paper you see. Five
- 05:30 minutes - but it was too late at this stage to do it. But we had planned a great feast anyway the next day to celebrate. So we thought, "Oh well might as well go on with the feast." So we turned up in one of the relatives' house in a place called Binh Dinh which is down the Chinese quarter in Saigon. Saigon you had a big Chinese section where a couple of million Chinese lived. Exclusive Chinese. And
- 06:00 Vietnamese lived in other areas. So we were down there and unbeknown to me the Viet Cong had commenced their assaults. Or the Viet Cong had realised that I was right and they were wrong and tried to change it, but half of them - they couldn't correct it all. So half attacked and half didn't. Then they all joined in. But there's no news. There's no nothing.
- 06:30 And we began the lunch and you could hear gunfire. All the guests turned to me being the great military expert. I said, "Don't worry. Half a million Americans, ring of steel around the city. They're only probably on the outskirts. Serve the first course." So we start eating and gunfire grows louder and again I said, "Carry on." And soon the gun ship's over the house, firing. And I said,
- 07:00 "They're only probing at the river. Don't worry." And then some relatives come in covered in mud and blood. They had escaped. They had a plantation on the other side. They'd managed to escape. They said, "The Viet Cong are everywhere." I said, "Don't worry. Next course." And there's a knock on the door and a little old lady said, "You'd better take a look at that." So I go and look out the window
- 07:30 and there's the 5th NVA regiment, full battle gear, leapfrogging up the street. About a thousand of them. So I said, "Never mind the dessert. I'm off." Now I had my jeep parked in a little alleyway at the back. It was just wide enough for the jeep. So I jumped out the kitchen window and left Talent to conduct a rearguard.
- 08:00 I thought, if she's with me it's only trouble. She'll get away on her own. So I jump in the jeep and I zip off. There's a bridge I have to cross across a river. The Viet Cong were on the bridge. I had to do this - it was one of these Chinese arched bridges - come out my alleyway and get on the bridge. Thousands of refugees are trying to swarm into the city so the Viet Cong push them off the bridge and they leave a gap between
- 08:30 the pylon and the refugees and I can sneak my jeep. They're all young inexperienced soldiers that follow orders. No one had told them to watch out for round eyes fleeing in jeeps. So they either had to leave the crowd and deal with me or keep the crowd and let me go. So in that second they couldn't make the decision. So I'm
- 09:00 on it and in the meantime somebody had told Talent I'd been captured. They'd assumed he couldn't have got across therefore he must be captured. So in the meantime knock on the door because one of

the neighbours had put us in and said there was a great roundeye in the house. So open up and there were Ho Chi Minhs, so Viet Cong came in and haul Talent out and going to shoot her

- 09:30 for assisting the escape of this leading villain. At that moment the American 4th Division gun ships opened up on the Viet Cong and in the turmoil she managed to escape. Luckily we had pre-arranged meeting places at safe house in case you ever get separated.
- 10:00 She was fairly sure that I had got away. I went to a place in Don King Street. Later that day she turned up and about fourteen children. She had been – the gunships had basically set fire to the suburb – artillery fire. So some people gave Talent the kids to look after because their homes were burning
- 10:30 and turmoil. They felt that with me and her the kids could survive until eventually they linked up. So we had this tribe of fourteen kids. At this stage we were surrounded by the Viet Cong. They were on the next building to us. So we couldn't get out. So the Viet Cong couldn't get in. It was a hotel
- 11:00 a Chinese run hotel and they had pulled down all the steel shutters and wouldn't open the doors up so the Viet Cong couldn't get in. Even though they occupied buildings around us. Just opposite us was a big American military police barracks and a hotel. The Viet Cong next building used to snipe at them and Americans would open up but they'd shoot at the wrong building. They didn't know where the snipers were. I could see them cause I'm just behind the snipers.
- 11:30 They were shooting up a hospital. Chinese Chu Chow Hospital. So I ring up, say, "Can I speak to the officer in charge?" "Who are you?" "Doesn't matter, I'll direct your fire." So I directed the fire onto the Viet Cong bunker on top of the next building and took it out and saved the hospital. Eventually next day ARVN
- 12:00 fought up and relieved us so we then got out. Talent then went to an uncle. I then had to drive across the city to get food for the tribe – the fourteen kids. So I had to go to the American PX on the airbase which was still under siege. I eventually got through, got to the airbase. Then the fellow wasn't going to give it to me because he said, "Your commissary card is for Da Nang, not Saigon."
- 12:30 I said, "Excuse me had give me that or I'll" Finger on the gun. So again I persuaded him the logic. So I filled it up with food, back out and I wasn't a hundred per cent sure where this house was. Talent had posted this young girl, her second youngest sister who was five, to keep a look out for me. So I drive up the street. When I had been there before the uncle had a
- 13:00 agency for Lambretta motor bikes. So I was looking for this Lambretta sign. They forgot to tell me he had changed it to Honda. So I'm trying to find this and I drove up and down the street three times. Every time I drove up everyone would shoot at me. Good guys, bad guys would start sniping. I thought, oh dear. Now her little sister was there but she had orders just to observe. No one told her that she had to tell them when I drove past.
- 13:30 So they said, "Have you seen D'Arcy?" and she said, "Oh yes. He's been up and down four times."
- She was five.**
- Yeah.
- Yeah.**
- So after the fifth time it was just getting too many bullet holes in the jeep so I abandoned it and had to go and left the stuff at the office and I then flew back to Da Nang because Da Nang was still under siege too and Hue had fallen. Hue had fallen without a shot being fired. And the only two
- 14:00 spots the NVA and Viet Cong hadn't captured were the First Division Headquarters and the citadel and the advisors' compound. So I arrived and wanted to get back out to my supplies and wait. So I then attempted to join the marine column fighting its way in. But the marines didn't want me. "Who's he?" They didn't know who I was.
- 14:30 They think "We don't want this civilian in the middle of the battle." So they tricked me by saying "We won't be going for an hour, why don't you go and have a cup of tea and a muffin." I thought, "Oh yes." I'm so easily tempted. So I rush off. By the time I have a cup of tea and a muffin and the column had gone. But they got ambushed and didn't get through anyway. So I then attempted to get a chopper in to the city. I was rather unpopular cause nobody
- 15:00 wanted to go so when I went into the pilot ready room they all ran away. Because they weren't going to fly in. So eventually there was a medical evacuation and they decided they were going to fly in so I went on the medivac [medical evacuation], landed in the compound and we then fought a way out and began to recapture part of the city. The Viet Cong had known about my warehouse and they'd
- 15:30 captured it. They were going to use it to feed their troops during the siege. But as they withdrew higher headquarters in the VC ordered the warehouse be burnt. But the local VC – their families were in the way and they knew I would feed them so they decided practicality was better than politics. So they handed it untouched
- 16:00 back to me again so I had the supplies and the medical resources. Now my job was to – eighty-five per

cent of the city had been destroyed – five thousand bodies on the streets. All public servants had been killed or fled. So no hospitals. No government officials. Total chaos. My job was to get the city running while the marines

- 16:30 cleared out the Viet Cong and the ARVN fought from the other end. So I used the Boy Scouts as the only uniformed organised group – and they had adult supervision while their were marines who didn't. So we used the boy scouts to distribute the – we gave them instant courses on injecting. We had plague, cholera
- 17:00 typhoid so they went around and injected everyone. I would give a kilo of rice for every body they got buried. So we cleared the streets. And the doctors had all run away. The nurses came back to work. So we got the hospitals running. The Catholic
- 17:30 church had an organisation which ran. Especially the nuns worked in the hospitals and so on so we got them operating. We then flew in some US nursing teams who were also nuns and got them up to the hospital.
- 18:00 I had taken over a house in Hue that belonged to some US aid officers that had been killed. So we hosed the blood off and set up. The American nuns then came, moved in with me, but they smoked too much and drank too much and played too much cards so I gave them the house and sought quieter quarters. Wonderful individuals but really characters. So we got the town
- 18:30 working. We then ran convoys in with food. The government ran in thirty trucks. I ran in ten. I would go fly back to Da Nang, see that the convoys left, fly out, and meet them. So when I get them in again, being a good auditor I'd count the trucks. I said, "Wait a minute, there was forty left but only thirty
- 19:00 arrived." So I said, "Any incidents?" They say, "No." I check that my men, all my trucks were there. I said, "Anybody stop, break down?" "No." I check with the air force, "No. No incidents." I said, "Where's those ten trucks gone?" Turned out the old province chief's diverted ten trucks to his personal warehouse. So each convoy twice a week he was diverting trucks in. So I thought that was not kosher so I put him on my list of
- 19:30 people to get. So eventually we fought for about twenty-one days in Hue and eventually drove out Viet Cong and NVA and then back to Da Nang. By this time Talent and the kids had all arrived up so we established this household of fourteen kids from the age of three to about sixteen. Didn't know what to do with them, so I got out
- 20:00 my old Kapooka training program and they all went on to day one, week one and all had porridge for breakfast. It was a very interesting learning experience.

And that started from your wedding luncheon?

Yeah. The wedding luncheon that didn't happen – the end of the luncheon. So we then eventually got all the papers signed. We went back to Saigon a number of times for the civil

- 20:30 wedding, the embassy wedding and then we eventually were offered the cathedral in Da Nang. But we thought that was too grandiose so we settled for the Marine Corps chapel. The Bishop of Da Nang who was an old friend of mine, he conducted the ceremony. So we had this great half American marine, half Vietnamese
- 21:00 ceremony. So we eventually got happily married. I'm the only POW [prisoner of war] who has never been released from the war.

Was Talent aware of your lifestyle?

Oh yes. Because she was also a serving soldier and we worked along and she knew officers that knew me and so on. Nonetheless it was still a big step. We had

- 21:30 kept our relationship fairly secret from I Corps and they were all shocked.

From who sorry?

The other officers in I Corps because Talent was very famous in I Corps being the princess of I Corps and they used to run sweepstakes on who would eventually cart her off to the altar. And I was never one of them so many got upset that this foreigner had done it.

- 22:00 She got accused by many of them of deserting.

How were you embraced by Talent's family - being a 'roundeye'?

Well, I got through by a legal technicality. What had happened was, Talent's maternal grandmother had been the old family head and she had been a very rich business lady in the north of Vietnam

- 22:30 and made a huge fortune by being a providore to the French army up there and getting various licences – these exclusive licences. You know, the old six hundred units in Hai Phuong and she'd her own train carriage and fabulously rich. She had basically instructed that none of the daughters were to marry Vietnamese

- 23:00 because Chinese don't always regard Vietnamese highly or vice versa. Or Americans. She was wise enough to foretell that some time in the future the Americans- she died in 1930s or something - but she knew somewhere along the line Americans were coming. But she never heard of Australia so there was no forbidden clause saying she could marry an Australian.
- 23:30 I got on particularly well with Talent's father who was an ex-military type. And I get on well with her family. As I'm saying, I was always able to get on well with Vietnamese and Chinese without any effort. I was accepted as an honorary Vietnamese and honorary Chinese.

Okay well perhaps we should move on because we haven't got that much

- 24:00 **time left?**

Yeah. So the offences were a major disruption throughout the country. Turmoil, thousands dead, hundreds of thousands displaced, so my major work cut out. I then had this problem about this business of clearing the villages - what would happen is, the search and destroy American marines or army would move in and the villagers could be given five minutes to get

- 24:30 out. They'd move out and they'd sweep through and basically destroy the village. The villagers would be left out in the paddy field and the marines would move on. And this is not our problem, we look after military. It was official criteria to be classified as a refugee. These people somehow didn't make it. They were displaced persons, not refugees. The Vietnamese

- 25:00 said the Americans caused this, they can look after it. But they didn't fit the US aid criteria so they were left abandoned. So I had to step in and house and feed them. You'd get up to fifteen thousand at a time suddenly dumped on your lap. So you'd have to build these shanty towns in the sandhills. So I ended up having something like six hundred thousand people to house and feed.

- 25:30 So that occupied me as well as my other program. So besides my militia food program I also ran these civic action programs. Civic action was part of this revolutionary development where units - American, Vietnamese, Korean, performed good works in the village. So they go into the village and build a school and so on. I would provide all the material for these forces.

- 26:00 So this gave me a lot of clout. I then had programs for widows. So for regular army widows and police widows so that gave me great clout with not only the militia but the regular Vietnamese army and regular Vietnamese police. So it all made me somewhat more powerful. I also got the officers' wives of the regular army involved in

- 26:30 - this is an old Australian and British tradition - looking after the welfare of the soldiers' wives and that. So I would provide material for them to distribute to the other things. Which leads me on to an earlier story. This hospital during the offensive that got shot by the Americans, we provided the money to rebuild it.

- 27:00 And when the time came to open it I was invited down from Da Nang to attend because of my Chinese connection. And Madam Thieu was going to open it. So off I go with Madam Thieu and open a hospital and the Chinese then present her with large golden gifts. Being a very rich society. So Madam Thieu gets me to guard them. She doesn't want to give them to one of her flunkies in case he'll steal them. So I guard

- 27:30 it to bring back to the palace. So we don't go in the front door like normal where you get scanned and so on. We go in the family entrance. So when I go and sit down at morning tea and I'm sitting there and I've got my great forty five under my shirt and I'm sitting there. Lo and behold, who waltzes in but old President Thieu and his good wife said, "Oh come sit down and cup of tea." He said, "No I'm busy now I'll not sit down."

- 28:00 He says, "All right." So he sits down and she says, "By the way have you met D'Arcy." He goes ... click cause he hadn't noticed me sitting there. So here I am sitting with my great 45 and I'm looking at him. He knew that I wanted him indicted or assassinated. He's beginning to think, "Has he got permission or is he going to disobey orders?" Almost choked on his muffin and ran off. So I was never invited again. But at the crucial moment I thought, he looks like a poor old sad sorry son

- 28:30 of a bitch, I won't take him out today. I let him go. But this is one of these sort of things. So I was mixing in high society too.

Okay, well perhaps - we are actually coming to the end. I was wondering if you could maybe tell us how it all came to an end.

Yes. Basically there was this growing problem of corruption. Everything was stolen, sold.

- 29:00 It was causing problems for America. Kennedy and a number of other people were asking questions about it. So they sent a team over to investigate and they asked me to speak to these official press that came over with the official party that came over and I said, all right. So they asked me a number of questions. They said, "Don't worry. The tape has to go to Saigon and be cleared by the press office; they'll cut out any pieces they don't like." So I said, "Okay."

- 29:30 They asked me a number of questions. "Is there corruption?" "Yes." "Do the refugees – what are they supposed to get?" "They're supposed to get so many bags of cement, so many corrugated iron, so much food." "How much do they get?" "Nothing." So I then take them out to one of these refugee villages and ask the refugees and they say, no they never get anything from the official refugee program, the only thing they ever got was good old D'Arcy gave it to them.
- 30:00 They then went down to Saigon and interviewed Ambassador Komer unbeknown to me. And they asked him the same questions and he said, "Oh no corruption. Everybody's honest. Gentlemen and scholars to a man. Everyone gets this and gets that." Then they showed us together so it looks as if we're in discussion over the table. And so some senator rings up Johnson
- 30:30 and one time when I was being considered for a position and refused on the others Johnson gave this story that he'd rather have someone like him inside your tent pissing out, than outside pissing. So Johnson brought me in. So the senator then said, "Remember fellow you had inside pissing out?" Johnson said, "Yeah." He said, "Well he's inside pissing in. Look
- 31:00 at the television." So Johnson switches on his sixteen sets and here's me and Ambassador Komer going for it hammer and tongs. So Johnson got a bit angry. He said he didn't mind me interfering in Vietnamese politics, but he didn't want me interfering in American politics. This was during the height of the presidential election so this is October, November '68.
- 31:30 He didn't want any foul ups. So he said, "Where is he?" So at this stage Talent and I had a delayed honeymoon and we had gone to Hong Kong. So he said, "He's in Hong Kong. Right, not to be allowed back in country." We were not staying in the normal hotels. We were staying with relatives. We get back down the back of Tsian Sri Mo Po[?] or something and nobody can find you. So I didn't
- 32:00 know I hadn't to come back. And because I wrote my own orders I could jump on any plane. So I turned up in Saigon. Normally there's a party of flunkies to greet me, but this case nobody. I thought, oh dear. Problem. So I get called in and major problems. Right? I wasn't supposed to be back in country. They didn't know what to do. My boss said if they sack him he'll resign and there'll be more trouble.
- 32:30 So back I go. The elections are over and [President Richard] Nixon's proclaimed winner. So I thought, I'm relatively safe, but Nixon decided I was not particularly acceptable either. So pressure was brought to bear on me to step down. So I resisted it. So they then said, "Well, the aid program's going to be cut because
- 33:00 of your remarks." So at this stage we had major US medical teams coming out, all sorts, and people looking at me and saying "Oh, we've got mortgages to pay. Going to lose our jobs because of you." Now to add to that I get a ring one night from the Bishop of Da Nang and he had ordered the corps commander to despatch
- 33:30 a couple of companies from the special reserve to protect me. Because Komer got sacked, investigated and found out I was right and Komer was wrong so Komer got transferred to Turkey and Bill Colby, his assistant, got promoted. Again, Bill Colby, CIA officer and later head of CIA. So I thought, "Oh Bill will be happy I got him promoted." But Bill apparently wasn't happy.
- 34:00 Felt that I should be contract terminated. So he wanted the – or it was alleged – the Vietnamese CIA which was Catholic dominated still, they tipped off the bishop that some of Colby's contractors were
- 34:30 going to pay me a visit to terminate my contract expeditiously. So the corps commander then deployed troops to protect me from anything untoward. So I felt, "This situation cannot go on. It's too disruptive." Talent was pregnant at this stage and I thought we already had a number of assassination
- 35:00 attempts against us, so I thought no we'll give up. So the deal was, if I left quietly I would get a nice bonus and I'd be allowed to live. And if I went to Australia and did not go to American and join the lecture circuit all would be forgiven. So I said all right, so we then had a leisurely exit from
- 35:30 Saigon and Singapore and back to sunny Sydney and take up a new life.

What was it like to finally for all that time to end?

We didn't want to leave. We very nearly went back. Talent went back a number of times. The kids went back. But I decided

- 36:00 that the war was being lost and it wouldn't be safe for us to go back and establish there. I thought it was only a matter of time before Saigon fell. So we didn't go back. We've been back since. I have a – I watch carefully, I've got to be careful who I associate with there,
- 36:30 and I don't speak out. I'm allowed to speak on technical subjects. Like, I lectured at Hanoi University and Saigon University on building construction techniques, restoration of historical buildings and stuff like that. So they're quite happy with that. But I don't ever speak about the government.
- 37:00 **You mentioned earlier on in the interview this idea of de-programming. I'm wondering how you coped with being – trying to deprogram and settle back into Australian life?**

Well, I probably didn't very well. This is why I went off to Taiwan at one stage. We wanted the children to be educated in Chinese. And there was a number of possibilities. But my friends in Taiwan

- 37:30 said, "If you come to Taiwan we'll guarantee to get them into the top Chinese school." So I said, "All right."" So I went over there and they forgot to tell me part of the deal was that I joined their army. So I lectured at the political warfare academy and was advisor to the Psywar divisional commander. At this stage Chiang Kai Shek had just died.
- 38:00 Mao died while we were there. Madame Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four and the Red Guards were loose in China and it appeared as if China was on the brink of civil war and we were busy planning to retake the mainland. Madame Jiang Qing was arming the militia which she controlled - dreadful militia again. And she was going to give them Howitzers. The People's Liberation Army were going to rebel if
- 38:30 she gave them heavy weapons. She was going to arrest the senior commanders. I devised a scheme where we were trying to make a deal with a particular commander and if she arrested him he was going to secede from China to replay the warlord strategies of the 1920s. So I had a seat on the first landing craft to retake the mainland and I was going to command a division and
- 39:00 sweep up to Beijing and declare myself as Emperor. But luckily it never came to fruition. So I spent a couple of years there. Kids went to school and learnt to read in Chinese. Meantime I had arranged for Talent's family to leave Vietnam and come here. They were first family to come out. They weren't going to come out in a boat. They wanted at least economy class in the airplane.
- 39:30 So it took a lot of organising. And we brought them virtually all out except the father. He went to pick up his visa, got arrested. Then I had to negotiate with Van Van Dam and various other senior opposition members in Vietnam to get him released and he then got re-arrested because he was a Kuomintang agent the second time.

Matt, we might just finish there.

Tape 10

- 00:33 **So Matt could you just clarify for us what it was like for you to settle back into Australian society after your time in Vietnam?**

Well, in some ways it's unreal. You leave this intense situation. You come back to where you can walk down the streets and you don't have to be armed or people aren't trying to kill you or ...

- 01:00 And the same time you had the protest movement was at its height so it wasn't judicious to mention to anyone that you had been in Vietnam. And I suppose we were alienated. I didn't mix with any other servicemen or anything and I didn't join any of the associations. And I sort of vanished off the face of the
- 01:30 earth for a number of years. I found employment almost instantly. I was a senior executive with a major insurance company looking at the southern half of New South Wales. But I ran into problems with -
- 02:00 I felt they weren't running well. I had done a study. I had a friend who worked at a computer centre so I had access to all the data. So I thought I'd do a study and look at the investment policy of the company and the remuneration of salesmen. And I basically wrote this paper and felt that
- 02:30 you'd be better off advising your clients to put it under the bed than let us manage it. We were not providing an adequate return to the shareholders or policy holders. And we could run into problems in the future with the balance of funds.

But what was it like for you to go from this man with incredible

- 03:00 **power to working in superannuation and insurance?**

It's difficult but you could never get anything else with it. At this stage I had a young family and so you get busy with the family and all that. I did join the army reserve but quit because it was -

- 03:30 couldn't stand the senior officers and it wasn't real. And a lot of jealousy. They didn't like people like me who had experience and could influence the soldiers. They'd rather all come and serve under me than others. That wasn't good so I felt I was not going to get on and I didn't want to be disruptive so I left it. So it was difficult that way.
- 04:00 But you had no choice. There was no other wars on offer. So it wasn't easy doing, but as I'm saying just surviving and establishing yourself financially and getting a house and feeding and educating the kids and so on. I suppose were all a great pacifier. So I
- 04:30 put my energy into that. When I got on top of the job then I decided to branch out and go beyond my scope. They kept telling you, "It's none of your business. You stick to running that and don't run anything else." But I insisted what I was doing should be told. So I told the board and they weren't

impressed. So we parted company. I thought, "Oh, I'm doing a good job warning them." It was true within five

05:00 years the company did run into difficulties and had to be taken over by another insurance company.

Do you, or did you, upon your return to Australia and up until recent times, dream about the war?

No, no. The war never leaves you. You constantly think about it. You think what could have happened or – I have to work out why things happened.

05:30 And why people made these decisions and not made that. And make sense of what was going on, because it's terribly confusing. It's a script written by Kafka and illustrated by Goya or something. It's just a nightmare of a situation and you never know what was going on and everyone lied, misled. It's only now

06:00 that some of the reasons for why America did things and made these decisions make sense. So it's always with you and you can never get rid of it. Again, you think back and look at decisions you made and the impact of those decisions on others' lives. You have to balance and

06:30 justify to yourself. You're never normal

Are some of those things hard to justify?

Oh yes. You sit and think, oh if I had done this and not that. Cause every mistake costs a lot of lives. General Abraham said that

07:00 our militia was the most cost effective killing machine in Vietnam. Now that may or may not be a compliment. And you sit and think; well maybe we shouldn't have been so efficient. Or maybe we shouldn't have – because they're a waste. We could have won, but didn't. Tremendous waste happened

07:30 then and the country's still not right and you think, you were a part of this, should you have done this. Should you have been so efficient in pursuing your role of closing within killing the enemy. And your own side, you lose. Could

08:00 you have done it differently or better and have saved lots of those. But they're the hard decisions. You make them and move on and you – but occasionally you revisit it.

Do you ever – I mean you mentioned in the break that there were some people who you know, regard some of the things that you did as war crimes

08:30 **do you ever worry that some of the things that you did or the decisions that you made may come back to haunt you?**

No. They don't come back to haunt me. They might come back and prosecute me one day.

Well, that's what I mean.

No. I'm of the firm belief I never killed anybody who didn't deserve to be killed. I probably should have killed more in some cases. So I always acted with what I thought was correct with the information

09:00 I had at the time. Sometimes later you have other information and you think, oh well I wouldn't have done that. Or I probably wouldn't have pursued the elimination of the infrastructure as rigorously at the start as – later on I did and was much more selective in taking out so ...

09:30 Initially you don't know when you get keyed and excited and it looks logical but later on or something you don't. For example, during one of the great wedding ceremonies we'd have done, these little ladies turned up

10:00 and I said to Talent, "Who are these?" Cause they're all dressed in traditional type country clothes, not city types and Talent said, "I don't know. Must be some relative." Now they apparently came up from a town called Hoi An which is near Da Nang. Hoi An is a very old town originally

10:30 trading. Chinese traded there, Japanese, Portuguese set up going back in history. Hoi An was a major Viet Minh stronghold and anti-government stronghold. Viet Cong stronghold. I used to have a lot of trouble in Hoi An. Then later on I didn't. And I was welcomed

11:00 in Hoi An and did a lot of work in Hoi An. I never worked out what happened. I presumed I'd got smart or something. But later on it turns out that this family in Hoi An had married one of Talent's aunts. This aunt was up in the north and her husband

11:30 had been an old Viet Minh and had moved to the north in '54 during the separation and rose to senior ranks in the north. And the aunt was a senior member in the women's movement in the north. And his family came from Hoi An. When we then married we had this

12:00 VC connection in the family. So at the wedding none of the males could come, but they sent the female

representatives to the wedding. And from then on apparently I was untouchable in Hoi An and large sections of Quam Nam because I'm a family member. So the VC wouldn't assassinate me.

12:30 It would have made my life easier. I could then move through areas. I didn't know that. But nonetheless they all knew. And it wasn't until some years later on a visit I went back and met all these people. Now Talent's father, who knew all this, he wouldn't tell me because he was afraid that this would complicate matters.

13:00 Either I'd put them all into the mincer cause they were VC or I would suffer from conflicts of interest. But this happens that many families were split and divided. Again, I have a brother in law whose father was a colonel in the North Vietnamese army. So the son was in the south and the father was with the North Vietnamese who were operating in the southern area.

13:30 **Very well connected.**

Yeah. But I mean, it shows you that you couldn't pursue this righteous inquisition and slaughter of everyone you believed an enemy. So as long as you weren't armed. In the end I'd note who you were and try to put you into the organisation, but I wouldn't necessarily eliminate you. Because I felt we were going to lose the war.

14:00 I also felt that the north had a strategic plan to eliminate all the southern guerrillas in the Viet Cong. Because they didn't want - they wanted to colonise the south. Therefore get rid of the southern management. You didn't want strong independent southerners to survive the war. So my strategy was to undo that and preserve southern management. So that later they'd cause problems when the north did win.

14:30 This strategy again brought me into conflict with the Americans. They didn't like this.

That's probably a good place to just - if I could get the last question, just to quickly clarify how you did alienate the Americans.

Well, it was basically I fell out with Robert Komer on two grounds. One, I was against the allocation of quotas for assassination.

15:00 Number one. And secondly, I was for the publication of the corruption within the Vietnamese government and systems. And I felt it was rebounding adversely on America. First of all, it was wasting money. America was pouring blood and treasure into the country and it was all going to be wasted. These people were gangsters and they were stealing billions of dollars.

And I gather the fact that you made it public through the...

Yeah. I made it public

15:30 interview. And I was right. If I'd been wrong I'd have been discredited. The fact I was right, I was dangerous because Johnson felt I was interfering with American politics and presidential elections as long as I operated in South East Asia he didn't mind. I could overthrow the Vietnamese government, the Chinese government. That was my job. But I was not to venture across that line and interfere with that. Especially when I was right.

16:00 I had the information, I was vocal, I could argue. It was too dangerous as far as the Americans were concerned.

And the interview that you did that was broadcast on television ...

Yes. On American television. And this was right in the middle of the presidential elections in late October.

And it would have had a wide coverage in America.

Oh yes. And people subsequently wanted follow up. More information and all that.

16:30 So I was too dangerous to let loose. They were afraid I'd go to America and start preaching.

Become President of America.

Whatever.

Thanks for clarifying that because it was good just to pinpoint exactly where it all happened.

That I'm not all friends with America, yeah.

We've actually probably come to the end of the interview now although I can tell

17:00 **there's a lot more we could explore, but unfortunately time is our enemy today. But on behalf of Graham [interviewer] and myself and also the War Archive we'd like to thank you for your honestly and incredible, incredible interview. And the most incredible story and we really thank you for your time.**

Know something, I would like - we're going to fight more and more of these

- 17:30 unconventional wars – like Iraq and Afghanistan, East Timor and soldiers are going to be put in positions where they have not been trained for. You can't. So you have to have access to other stories that they can learn from and say, "I'll do that" or "I'll make sure I never do that." That's what you've got to do.
- 18:00 So that's why I'm pushing it to train the up and coming soldiers in the lessons learned and how to apply it to these other unconventional wars.

I'm sure they'll learn a lot from going to you, as will a lot of other Australians. Thank you.

You're welcome.

INTERVIEW ENDS